

Consultation Report on the Revision of the SSCT Credibility Criteria

About this document

This document summarises how feedback on the first draft of the revised **SSCT Credibility Criteria** was incorporated into the second draft. The second draft is open for consultation until 25 April 2021. We would like to thank all the respondents who took the time to share their feedback in the first round. We believe that your input and suggestions make a significant contribution to improve SSCT Credibility Criteria and we are looking forward to your feedback on the second draft.



About the consultation process

The SSCT Credibility Criteria were introduced about five years ago and are currently undergoing a revision process to ensure that they reflect new professional, social and political developments. Part of that revision process are a non-public consultation with **International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling Alliance** (ISEAL Alliance) and **Assurance Services International** (ASI) as well as **two consecutive public consultation rounds**. The consultation assesses whether the revised draft now ensures that the criteria are up-to-date, relevant and applicable. The comments, changes and additions made by ISEAL Alliance and Assurance Services International were edited by GIZ to compile a first draft of the revised criteria set.

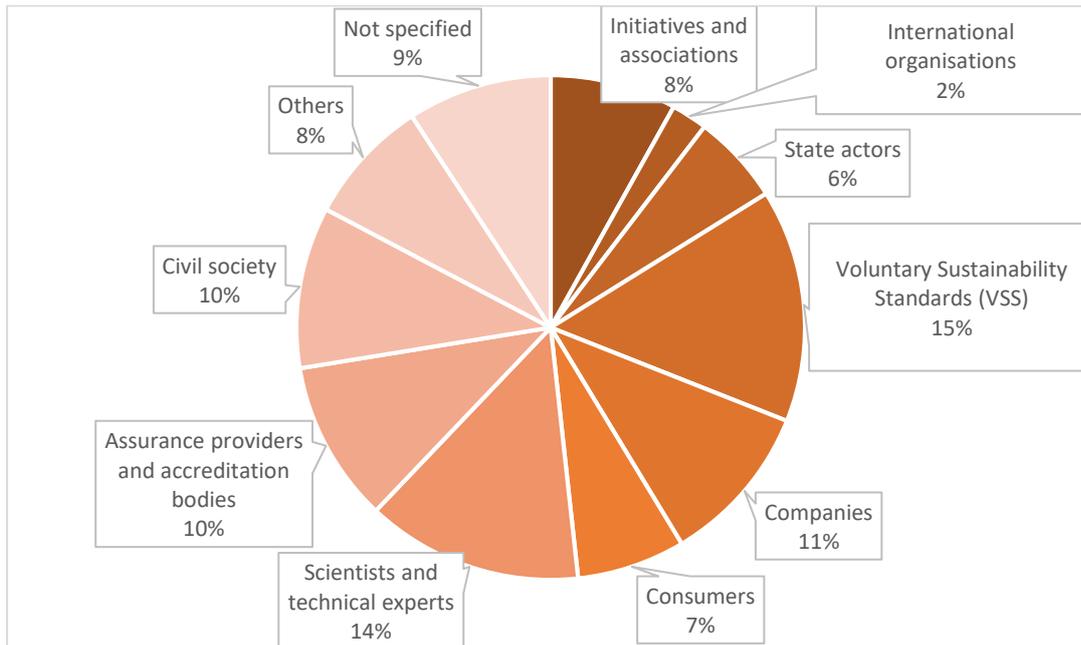
This first draft was then presented to interested stakeholders during the **first consultation round** from 18 January to 28 February 2021. The consultation platform www.ssct-revision.org was used for this purpose. A total of **420 ratings** in form of a “thumbs up” and **187 comments** were submitted. A **second public consultation** is taking place between 29 March and 25 April 2021 on the same website.

About the participants

The public consultation is open for all interested stakeholders. Details about the consultation process and participation possibilities were shared in two information events in English and German on 04 and 05 February 2021 with around 20 participants.

For the first consultation round, participating stakeholder groups were quite diverse, but mainly were voluntary sustainability standard organisations, scientists and technical experts, and companies. In total, 87 interested stakeholders have registered on the consultation website.

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General feedback and changes for the second draft

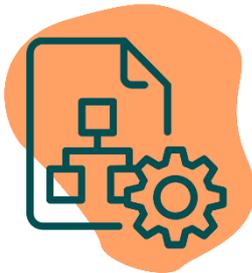
- Overall, the efforts to revise and improve the SSCT Credibility Criteria as a benchmarking tool were appreciated.
- Participants highlighted the importance of several minimum criteria and suggested other criteria to become prerequisites.
- Some overlaps between criteria were identified and therefore, amended by merging them.
- In some cases, more explicit guidance (e.g. by giving examples) was requested. For the second draft, the requirements and guidance was adapted in some cases to provide further interpretation guidance.
- The use of language that supports the application of the credibility criteria by a wider range of schemes was adopted. For instance, instead of using the term 'conformity assessment bodies', unless specification is needed, the term 'assurance provider' was used for the second draft. The same changes were made for 'accreditation body', now falling under the term 'oversight provider'.
- The need to revise the glossary was highlighted by participants and is noted to be revised in the coming months.

Other, more specific changes are illustrated in the following sections on the four areas of the SSCT Credibility Criteria pertaining scheme management, standard setting, assurance and claims & traceability.

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Specific feedback and changes for the second draft

A – Scheme Management



The consultation on the section scheme management was rated 110 times and commented on 37 times. Feedback from stakeholder varied between highlighting important criteria, suggestions for amendments and requests to remove specific criteria. The section on scheme management in its first draft included 15 criteria. Based on the feedback of participants in the first consultation, the number was reduced to 13 criteria in the second draft.

Significant changes included:

- As stakeholders considered the criterion on the **sustainability goals and objectives of a scheme** (A.09) a prerequisite, it was now added to the selection of minimum criteria in the second draft.
- Based on the feedback on the criterion on **complaints mechanism** concerning standard setting processes, there was a more general criterion on a complaint mechanism (A.15) created and added to the section scheme management.
- As some stakeholders suggested to remove the criterion on **mutual recognition agreements** (A.10) as it was not related to the credibility of a scheme itself, this criterion was rephrased and moved to the assurance section. In its new version, the criterion addresses not mutual recognition agreements itself but equivalence requirements (C.1.18) in case mutual recognition agreements exist.

B – Standard Setting



For the section standard setting, there were 53 ratings and 12 comments. The section on standard setting included 12 criteria in the first draft and was now reduced to 11 in the second draft. Changes in this section mainly included revised guidance and references. However, there were two criteria on **key sustainability issues** and **consultation with directly affected stakeholders** (B.02, B.05) added to the selection of minimum criteria, increasing the total number of minimum criteria in this section to 8.

C – Assurance



This section received the most stakeholder input with 130 comments and 212 ratings. Feedback mainly included suggestions for amendments, highlighting relevant criteria and clarification requests. Generally, adaptations in the second draft were mainly focused on revising the requirements and guidance to ensure better understanding of the criteria.

Feedback included that several criteria would be redundant if **ISO compliance for certification / verification** (C.2.01) would be set as a

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prerequisite. However, the SSCT minimum criteria are a precondition for VSS to be fully assessed on Siegelklarheit, so ISO compliance as a minimum criterion would exclude some schemes from being evaluated at all. In order to be applicable to a variety of schemes, ISO compliance will therefore remain as an additional criterion and not will not be a prerequisite in the second draft of the revised SSCT credibility criteria.

Significant changes include:

- Some criteria addressing Chain of Custody and / or laboratory testing specifically are now merged in overarching criteria to reduce total number of criteria in this section. This applies to requirements concerning the **level of conformity assessment** (C.2.02, C.2.18), **ISO compliance for certification / verification** (C.2.01, C.2.17, C.2.22) as well as **audit activities** (C.2.07, C.2.19). Two other additional criteria were merged concerning **complaints and appeals mechanism for assurance providers** and its **accessibility** (C.1.05, C.1.15)
- Based on stakeholder feedback, a new criterion on **auditor and assessor impartiality** was added to the assurance section (C.3.08).
- Furthermore, there were several changes concerning the minimum criteria in this section. Two minimum criteria addressing **personnel competencies** and **auditor standard training** (C.3.01, C.3.02) were merged while three other additional criteria were added to the selection of **minimum criteria** (C.1.02, C.1.04, C.1.06). The total number of minimum criteria for the second draft in the assurance section now adds up to 13.

D – Claims & Traceability



In the section claims & traceability, participation was the lowest with 45 ratings and 8 comments. The total number of 15 criteria in the first draft was reduced to 12 criteria in the second draft.

Significant changes include:

- Stakeholder feedback concerning **accuracy of claims** led to the addition of a new criterion (D.2.11).
- Furthermore, the two minimum criteria on **claims policy** and **clarity of claims** were merged (D.2.01, D.2.02).
- Several criteria were **removed** as stakeholders perceived them not to be directly related to the credibility of a scheme or to sector specific such as **stepwise claims**, **minimum % input** and **minimum % composite product claims** (D.2.06, D.2.07, D.2.08)