

TourCert Certification Guideline

July 2022

1 Principles

- 1.1 Objective and definition:** CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) describes the responsibility of companies for the impacts of their business operations on society and environment. In order to assume this responsibility, the company's core business activities must consider social and environmental aspects and contribute to sustainable development. It is not about individual "good deeds" but about an established long-term strategy, about considering and involving stakeholders and about an ethic corporate culture.

The TourCert Certification System supports tourism businesses on their way to sustainable business operations, makes their sustainability performance transparent, systematically integrates social and ecological goals into their core business, empowers and involves employees and fosters a continuous improvement process.

- 1.2 Applicability:** The sector-specific TourCert certification has been designed particularly for tourism businesses; with specific Sets of Criteria and Implementation Rules for each respective type of business.

- 1.3 Integrated management and reporting system with sector-specific Sets of Criteria:** TourCert combines process- and performance-orientated criteria with a continuous management and reporting system. Companies must therefore meet **management, reporting and performance requirements**. The TourCert CSR system aims to consistently integrate and improve environmental and social criteria into daily business operations. To ensure continuous improvement and to develop innovative and sustainable products and services TourCert certified businesses must regularly collect performance indicators and meet the requirements of the TourCert criteria.

A continuous integration of sustainability requires the sensitization and participation of both management and employees. Only when all employees and important stakeholders of a company participate actively, the sustainability system will be lived and implemented effectively. Employees and stakeholders along the supply chain are therefore considered highly relevant; the tour operator certification system uses questionnaires for stakeholders

(customers, business partners, employees, partner agencies, accommodations and tour guides) as an essential part of the performance indicators.

The TourCert CSR system is based on international guidelines and standards: Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC), EMAS (Eco-Management and Audit Scheme), ISO 26000 as well as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI).

2 The Six Management Elements of the TourCert System

The TourCert certification requires the implementation of the following management elements of a sustainability system:

2.1 Mission Statement: The mission statement expresses the long-term strategy with overall objectives and operational principles and is communicated publicly. The mission statement is defined by senior management in dialogue with their employees and it constitutes the basis and framework for the development of a sustainability system. The mission statement includes the commitment to continuous improvement and considers important sustainability aspects in relation with stakeholders and the supply chain.

2.2 Sustainability assessment: Data collection provides an overview of the current situation of the company's relevant sustainability aspects and serves as the starting point for the improvement program and the sustainability report.

Data collection must be performed according to the requirements of the sector-specific Sets of Criteria.

Relevant aspects that have been identified during the data collection will be evaluated and transparent criteria will set priorities for the improvement program.

2.3 Improvement program: The improvement program determines the targets deriving from the long-term overall objectives of the mission statement and from the sustainability assessment. The objectives must be measurable and must improve the ecological, economic and social impacts.

The improvement program defines objectives, measures, priorities, responsibilities, deadlines and the status of implementation.

2.4 Management system / sustainability manager: The management level must provide the necessary resources for the certification and define responsibilities. It appoints a sustainability manager who is responsible for regularly monitoring and developing the sustainability as well as for continuous improvement and communication.

Employees get qualified for the certification, training requirements are regularly determined, and the active participation of employees is systematically encouraged.

Certification relevant standards and procedures are defined and documented in a management handbook for all employees.

2.5 Reporting: The aim of the reporting system is to inform stakeholders and the general public about the environmental, social and economic impacts of the company's operations, services and products and about the continuous improvement of its sustainability performance.

The structure of the sustainability report is according to the sector-specific Sets of Criteria.

The standardized sustainability report must be submitted for auditing and be accessible for the public after certification; exceptions are defined in the Implementation Rules. The improvement program must be updated annually.

Reporting must be truthful, substantial, unequivocally, comparable and verifiable about the sustainability performance.

2.6 Auditing: The company establishes a procedure to regularly monitor the sustainability management, its sustainability-related processes and the achievement of the sustainability goals.

The internal audit is to verify if the certification requirements are met as well as to document for the management level the current state of development and necessary corrective measures.

The external audit (third party) is conducted by an independent TourCert auditor. In the audit report the auditor makes a recommendation on the certifiability of the company which will ultimately be decided by the TourCert Certification Council.

3 Audit Principles

During the external audit an independent and neutral auditor verifies the proper operation of the CSR management (system audit), the reporting (reporting audit) and the sustainability performance (performance audit).

The external audit can only be conducted by auditors approved by the TourCert Certification Council.

The audit includes a review of documents and an on-site visit to verify the sustainability system's conformity by interviews, inspections and verification of proofs; telephone interviews and mystery checks can be done additionally.

The on-site visit can be omitted for micro enterprises with less than 10 employees (full time equivalents), provided that the sustainability impact does not primarily arise from on-site operations and that available audit methods allow proper auditing of the company.

3.1 Main focus of the audit: The audit particularly assesses the following dimensions of the CSR system:

- a. Implementation of the sustainability management system
- b. Compliance with sector-specific requirements about the scope of data collection
- c. Sustainability performance based on sustainability indicators and performance requirements
- d. Plausibility of information
- e. Truth, clarity, verifiability and comprehensibility of provided information
- f. Coherence and adequate setting of priorities in the improvement program

3.2 Audit report and core indicators: The auditor compiles an audit report including a summarizing assessment with recommendations and benchmark core indicators of similar businesses. The assessment is to enable the company to gain a better understanding of their strengths, weaknesses and improvement potentials.

3.3 Conditions: In case of non-compliance with relevant requirements the auditor may allow the possibility to meet the requirements within a defined period.

4 Certification

4.1 Award of the TourCert label: When approved by the Certification Council the company receives the TourCert label for a period of two years and after every re-certification for three years. Destinations receive the label for three years also after first certification. Companies with more than 250 full time equivalents receive the label for one year.

In specific cases and if approved by the Certification Council the label's validity may be reduced.

4.2 Use of the label: The label must be displayed prominently on the company's website and linked to www.tourcert.org.

The label should be presented in the company's publications and be explained at an appropriate place.

In the event of non-compliance or infringement of the requirements of the Certification Guideline, the Implementation Rules, the contract or the general terms and conditions, TourCert may revoke the certification label.

4.3 Annually updated improvement program: Certified companies send an updated improvement program without being asked to the TourCert Certification Office every year as of the date of certification.

The updated improvement program should indicate the state of implementation and new measures should be added.

4.4 Complaints about certification: Certified businesses or those being in the certification process always have the right to raise objections or complaints and address them to the Certification Council, to individual members of the Council or to the Certification Office. This relates in particular to:

- Independence of the auditor
- Recommendation of the auditor
- Decision of the Certification Council

The objections are decided by the Certification Council with a 2/3 majority.

5 Recertification

5.1 Updated reporting with improvement program: For recertification, the company must provide updated data and an updated sustainability report with all sector-specific indicators. During recertification it is possible to focus on key issues.

The improvement program is a key element also for recertification. An updated improvement program must be submitted, showing the progress of implementation of the previously set measures as well as the newly added targets and measures.

5.2 Deadlines: The updated sustainability report for recertifications must be submitted to the Certification Office unsolicited before the end of the certification period (monthly time limit).

If the deadline cannot be met for understandable reasons, the certification body can allow an extension of up to three months.

If the updated sustainability report is not submitted, even after request, the label must be immediately removed from all media and publications.

5.3 Main focus of the audit: While the first audit focuses on the implementation of the TourCert CSR system and the first evaluation, the recertification audit is more profound with a more focused data collection and examines how CSR is sustainably anchored in the company, in cooperation with suppliers and in external communication. In addition to the general evaluation of the development of the CSR system, the audit and audit report concentrate on the focus aspects:

- development of core indicators
- development of the improvement program
- product responsibility in the supply chain
- the sustainability communication

The internal audit report with signature of the management must be presented for the audit.

6 Complaints About Certified Businesses

The Certification Office is also a complaints body for the stakeholders of the certified businesses and actively communicates this in the public register (TourCert website).

The Certification Office assures anonymity to those who report and processes the complaints in dialogue with the company concerned.

Serious and investigated complaints can lead to the withdrawal of the label.

7 Reference Standards

The TourCert certification system is based on the international standards of the ISEAL Alliance for Sustainability Standards and the ISO Standards for Certification Bodies of Management Systems and Products:

- ISEAL: Credibility Principles / Code of Good Practice
- ISO 17021: Certification Bodies of Management Systems
- ISO 17065: Certification Bodies of Products, Processes and Services
- ISO 19011: Guidelines for Auditing Management Systems

Annex: TourCert Bodies

a) Partners and Management Board

The partners and the management decide on the matters assigned to them by law or by the partnership agreement, in particular on the business strategy and the general orientation of the non-profit company.

The Management Board is furthermore responsible for the financial direction and profitability, pricing and contract design, the organizational structure and operative business, competitive positioning, the development and structure of business and certification units, as well as for agreements of strategic partnerships and cooperation.

b) Certification Council

Objective and mandate: The Certification Council is an independent and honorary expert and decision-making body for the TourCert criteria and for the certification of companies and destinations. The Certification Council actively strengthens the TourCert Community and secures the high standard of the TourCert criteria system with the long-term goal of a sustainable transformation of the tourism industry.

Together with the certified companies and destinations and the TourCert work areas, the Certification Council promotes the expert exchange of experience for the continuous development of the certification system and the international dissemination of corporate social responsibility in tourism.

Appointment of members and decision-making: After consultation with the officiating chairperson of the Certification Council, the TourCert partners appoint the members of the Certification Council for a period of 3 years; reappointments are possible.

The members of the newly constituted Certification Council elect two chairpersons from among their members. The chairpersons represent the Certification Council externally and towards the Management Board and Certification Office; they moderate the meetings of the Certification Council and, if necessary, are available as contact persons between the meetings of the Council.

The Certification Council shall be equally composed of representatives from science (universities, research institutions), non-governmental organisations / trade unions, the tourism industry or business associations and environmental and social organizations. Representatives from the tourism

industry (associations or companies) are extraordinary members. As such, they are not involved in certification decisions and discussions about individual companies and destinations and they do not receive any audit reports.

Representatives of the TourCert Certification Office have an advisory status.

The Certification Council has a quorum if at least half of its members are present. Members of the Certification Council may transfer their voting right to another member of the Council.

The Council strives to make decisions by consensus, both among its members and with the management board. If this is not possible, the Certification Council decides by simple majority of the members present.

Tasks and competencies of the Certification Council

- a. Appointment of two chairpersons for a period of 3 years
- b. Decision of the TourCert Certification Guideline and the sector- and region-specific Sets of Criteria in the German-speaking area (Germany, Austria, Switzerland) and in regions in which no independent Certification Council has been established
- c. Decision on the award of the TourCert label to companies and destinations in German-speaking countries
- d. Approval of the TourCert auditors
- e. Establishment of technical working groups and certification teams with delegation of decision-making authority
- f. Arbitration body for disputes between auditors and tourism companies

Further rights and supporting functions of the Certification Council:

- a. External representation of TourCert and promotion of the exchange of experience, in particular regarding the topics of the respective institutions of individual Certification Council members.
- b. Scientific monitoring and innovation development, in particular through common project initiatives.
- c. Initiatives to promote networking and build strategic alliances.
- d. Political dialogue and political initiatives to disseminate and strengthen corporate social responsibility in tourism and the TourCert system.

Decisions with financial consequences for TourCert gGmbH: Decisions of the Certification Council which, in the opinion of the management, could have a negative financial impact on TourCert

gGmbH or which include work orders involving an excessive economic burden can be vetoed by the management board. A veto must be justified in detail.

Internationalisation through regional Certification Councils: In countries outside the German-speaking area, regional Certification Councils are appointed. These Certification Councils are independent of the German-speaking Certification Council and work along the same guidelines mentioned above, the Certification Guideline and the Sets of Criteria. They can make regional adaptations to individual certification criteria and decide on the certification of companies and destinations in their respective regions.

If a regional Certification Council cannot be constituted or is not able to work, another regional Certification Council or the Certification Council of the German-speaking countries will decide on the certification, depending on suitability (knowledge of the country and language).

c) Certification Office

TourCert runs a Certification Office that works as a coordination unit between companies, auditors and the Certification Council, keeps the register of certified companies and destinations and assigns the auditors. After the decision by the independent Certification Council the Certification Office awards the TourCert label and the TourCert certificate.

Always following the Certification Guideline, the Certification Office decides on sector- and region-specific Implementation Rules (scope of data collection, deadlines for recertification, etc.) which are not specified in the Guideline.

d) TourCert Auditors

The auditors qualify themselves through reliability, independence, dialogue competence, sufficient technical knowledge and at least five years of professional activity in the area of CSR and tourism.

The Certification Office establishes a formal approval procedure with basic training according to the requirements of ISO 19011, the participation in an audit as co-auditor and a final examination.

The Certification Council is the accreditation authority for TourCert auditors. The accreditation has a duration of three years.

If the Certification Council does not object, the accreditation will be extended automatically if within three years the auditors have taken part in further training and have performed an audit.