

EcoVadis Rating: Sustainability assessment in supplier selection

The EcoVadis rating is a standardised assessment of a company's sustainability performance in the areas of environment, labour and human rights, ethics and sustainable procurement. For technical buyers, it serves as a comparable indicator for systematically evaluating suppliers against ESG criteria. This makes sustainability measurable and enables it to be integrated into procurement decisions, audit processes and supplier development measures.

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Key facts at a glance

- 01 The EcoVadis rating assesses companies across four topic areas: environment, labour and human rights, ethics and sustainable procurement.
- 02 Results are typically presented as a medal (Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum) or a score between 0 and 100.
- 03 The basis is documents such as policies, certificates and metrics, which the assessed company submits itself.
- 04 The assessment follows a 360-degree methodology, incorporating external sources such as regulatory or media data.
- 05 Scores and medals usually remain valid for twelve months and should be updated annually.
- 06 In B2B procurement, the rating often serves as a minimum criterion in supplier portals, qualification processes and tenders.

Definition: EcoVadis Rating

The EcoVadis rating is an external sustainability assessment that evaluates a company's ESG commitment on the basis of documented evidence and external data sources. It delivers a percentage score per topic area as well as an overall assessment, which is communicated as a medal status or a prepared report.

The four topic areas at a glance

The assessment is divided into environment, labour and human rights, ethics and sustainable procurement. The weighting depends on the industry, size and country of the assessed company, so that a mechanical engineering firm is weighted differently from, say, a service provider. In the sustainable procurement area, the assessment also covers how the company itself screens its suppliers against sustainability criteria — making this an aspect doubly relevant to buyers.

Distinction from other ratings

Unlike financial ratings, the EcoVadis rating does not measure creditworthiness but sustainability risks and performance. It also differs from product-related certificates such as the EUR.1 preferential certificate or the Certificate of Conformity, which evidence individual trade or product characteristics. Rather, it is an organisation-wide overall indicator that can cover operational processes from raw material sourcing to packaging management.

Assessment process and methodology

The assessment process follows a standardised procedure that is predictable for suppliers and traceable for buyers. A key prerequisite is a clean set of documents within one's own company.

Document submission and review

The assessed company uploads evidence, including environmental policies, energy and emissions data, health and safety concepts, codes of conduct and supplier agreements. Depending on company size, typically several documents per topic area are required. The documents are reviewed by analysts and assigned to the assessment criteria. A structured filing system — ideally organised via a procurement manual or central master data management — significantly reduces effort and incorrect submissions.

The 360-degree observation methodology

In addition to the self-declaration, external sources are evaluated, such as media reports, NGO-related information and official register data. This so-called 360-degree observation can negatively influence the assessment if violations are publicly documented. Companies should therefore be aware that not only submitted documents but also their public image feed into the assessment.

Score generation and medal logic

From the assessed evidence, scores per topic area and an overall score on a scale of 0 to 100 are generated. Depending on the overall score and minimum values in the individual topics, medal statuses are awarded. The thresholds are adjusted periodically, which is why a once-achieved status can lapse without further development. In practice, Bronze level is often sufficient for simple supplier qualifications, while strongly regulated industries expect Silver or Gold.

Using the EcoVadis rating in procurement

For buyers, the rating only unfolds its value through consistent integration into existing procurement processes — from supplier selection to risk management.

Supplier qualification and procurement strategy

The rating is suitable as an objective criterion in the procurement strategy, for example in supplier selection matrices or when segmenting the supplier portfolio. In tenders, a minimum score can be defined as an award criterion. For strategic suppliers, combining it with operational criteria such as expedite rate or on-time delivery is recommended, so that sustainability is assessed alongside delivery efficiency.

Early risk detection in the supply chain

Scores provide early indications of weaknesses in supply chains before they lead to failures or reputational damage. In conjunction with supply chain visibility tools, sustainability risks can be considered alongside logistics and procurement risks. This applies in particular to multi-supplier structures, purchasing cooperatives and scenarios with high outsourcing, where the sustainability performance of upstream tiers is difficult to verify directly.

Supplier discussions and development

The detailed strengths-and-improvements report provides concrete starting points for supplier discussions. Instead of blanket demands, buyers can agree defined improvement measures and track their implementation in subsequent years using new scores. In this way, the rating evolves from a static inspection feature into a supplier development tool.

Key metrics and assessment dimensions

The result reports contain several measurable variables that buyers can systematically evaluate and compare.

Overall score and topic scores

The overall score summarises performance across all topic areas, while topic scores (0–100) reveal strengths and weaknesses in a differentiated way. In practice, leading companies achieve scores above 70 to 75; a score below 50 indicates significant deficiencies. For comparisons between suppliers, buyers should note that scores are weighted according to industry and company size.

Development over several years

Not only the absolute score but also its trend is informative. A slightly below-average supplier with a clearly rising score can be more attractive in the long term than a stagnating mediocre supplier. Buyers should therefore document historical scores in supplier master data and link them to re-qualification cycles.

Minimum values as internal thresholds

Many medal levels require that no topic area falls below certain minimum values. Internal procurement thresholds should be designed analogously, for example: 'No topic may fall below 30 points, regardless of the overall score.' This prevents serious weaknesses in ethics or human rights from being masked by good environmental values.

Risks, limitations and controls

The rating is a useful tool, but not a substitute for one's own checks. Buyers should be aware of its limitations and provide for supplementary controls.

Self-declaration and data quality

The assessment is based predominantly on documents submitted by the company itself. Despite external cross-checking, residual uncertainty remains, particularly at deeper supply chain tiers. Those with high requirements therefore combine the rating with their own supplier audits, site visits and product-related evidence such as the Certificate of Conformity.

Currency and expiry date

Scores lose their validity as they age, as legislation, supply structures and performance change. Buyers should define validity periods — in practice often twelve months — and actively request expired ratings before term decisions, renewals or volume increases. As with notice periods, the rule is: deadlines should be proactively monitored in supplier management, not reactively.

Detecting greenwashing risk

A good score alone does not guarantee substantive sustainability performance if it is based on thin policies rather than verifiable data. Control levers are the depth of submitted metrics, existing measurement systems and consistency with other evidence such as environmental certificates. Reports consisting purely of policies without implementation evidence should be critically scrutinised.

Legal classification

Given increasing requirements to consider supply chain and sustainability obligations, the rating can provide proof fragments but does not replace one's own due diligence. The specific legal obligations depend on legal form, size, registered office and business activity and must be assessed legally on a case-by-case basis. On the company side, clear coordination between procurement, compliance and quality management is recommended.

Current developments in sustainability ratings

Sustainability ratings are evolving dynamically, driven by regulation, capital markets and customer requirements.

Regulatory pressure and the CSRD context

European reporting requirements increase the data pressure along the supply chain: companies must increasingly collect verifiable sustainability data from their suppliers. Ratings such as EcoVadis serve here as a practical lever for capturing thousands of suppliers in a standardised way without individual audits. How strongly the obligations apply in individual cases depends on the regulations in force and should be checked on an ongoing basis.

Linking with operational and process data

In future, sustainability ratings are likely to be linked more closely with operational process data — for example, energy intensity per unit produced or emissions along the logistics chain. Concepts from industry and logistics such as dock-to-stock or cross docking show how process discipline becomes measurable; similar approaches are also gaining importance in ESG metrics. The technological foundation for this is provided by integrative data formats such as ECLASS and EDI interfaces.

Importance for mid-sized suppliers

More and more end customers are demanding sustainability evidence even from small and medium-sized suppliers. For them, the rating represents both effort and opportunity: those who build a robust data foundation early improve their competitive position in tenders and ensure continuity in existing framework agreements. A stepwise approach starting with environmental and labour topics is recommended.

Typical metrics

Metric	Typical value
Average supplier score	> 60 points <i>In practice, a common minimum level for active suppliers; stricter thresholds for A-suppliers</i>
Proportion of suppliers with a valid rating	> 90 % <i>Measured against strategic procurement volume, updated annually</i>
Minimum topic score threshold	> 30 points per topic area <i>Prevents serious weaknesses from being masked by the overall score</i>
Rate of expired ratings	< 5 % <i>Shows how reliably re-certifications are managed</i>

Practical example

A mid-sized mechanical engineering company with around 800 active suppliers introduced the EcoVadis rating as a mandatory criterion for all A-suppliers. Previously, sustainability requirements had been scattered unstructured across several departments. Within one year, a current rating was in place

for around 70 per cent of the procurement volume.

- Including a minimum score (Gold level for strategic suppliers, Bronze for standard parts) in the procurement strategy and supplier matrix
- Requiring annual re-certifications with automatic reminders upon expiry, linked to the purchase order release in the system
- Integrating topic scores into quarterly supplier reviews alongside operational metrics such as expedite rate and on-time delivery
- Deriving concrete improvement measures from the strengths-and-improvements report for suppliers below the threshold

Conclusion

The EcoVadis rating translates sustainability into a comparable figure and makes ESG criteria usable for operational procurement decisions. However, its value only arises through integration into supplier qualification, procurement strategy and risk control — not through merely displaying a medal icon. Buyers should always interpret scores in the context of industry, company size and data quality, and combine them with their own audits. Key elements are a clear internal threshold logic, regular updates and documented follow-up processes. Those who implement this systematically reduce procurement risks and at the same time position themselves better against legal and market-driven sustainability requirements.

Frequently asked questions

? What does an EcoVadis score of 50, 60 or 70 mean?

The score lies on a scale of 0 to 100 and reflects the assessed sustainability performance. In practice, values below 50 are considered significant weaknesses, 50 to 60 as average and above 65 to 70 as advanced. As the weighting depends on industry and company size, comparisons should always be made within similar industries.

? How long is an EcoVadis rating valid?

Scores and medals typically remain valid for twelve months. After that, re-certification should take place, as assessment thresholds and sustainability performance can change. Buyers should ideally monitor expiry dates systematically and request fresh reports ahead of contract renewals or volume increases.

? What documents does a company need for the EcoVadis assessment?

Typically, environmental policies and metrics, health and safety and HR policies, codes of conduct and ethics, and sustainable procurement documents are expected. Depending on the topic area, these may be certificates, audits, training records or supplier agreements. A structured filing system and clear responsibilities considerably speed up the process.

? How does EcoVadis relate to the CSRD?

The EcoVadis rating is not a reporting standard and does not directly fulfil CSRD obligations, but it can serve as a data source and supplier lever for the required reporting. Companies can use ratings to collect ESG data from their suppliers in a standardised way without auditing each one individually. Whether and how this is reportable in individual cases should be clarified with the auditor or a compliance officer.

? Is EcoVadis mandatory for suppliers?

Not by law; its use is based on voluntary participation. In practice, however, more and more large customers require an EcoVadis rating as a condition for admission to or retention in the supplier portfolio. Suppliers serving larger industrial customers therefore often cannot avoid certification.

? What is the difference between EcoVadis and other sustainability standards?

EcoVadis assesses the organisation as a whole across four topic areas and delivers a comparable score, whereas other standards are often product-related, sector-specific or audit-based. For a complete risk assessment, the rating should therefore be combined with product-related evidence, audits and certificates. Buyers select the appropriate mix of overall rating and specific evidence depending on the category.

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