

Assurance Services for Sustainability Reports: Standards and empirical evidence

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The paper contributes to growing scholarship on the topic of assurance services for sustainability reports. These are supplied by assurance providers with the purpose of bridging the credibility gap that characterizes non-financial performance reporting.

I first synthetically illustrate the main international standards for the implementation of assurance services regarding subject documents. The second part of the paper carries out an empirical analysis of reports drawn up on the basis of the current GRI 2006 guidelines (G3), in order to study how these standards have been effectively implemented and analyze different typologies of assurance statement.

Among key conclusions, I highlight the limitations of the approaches now followed presently, and I set out possible operational solutions.

In brief, this paper addresses the following questions and material:

What is the trend in assurance services' demand for non-financial reporting, with particular reference to social-environmental and sustainability criteria;

What is the role of international accounting practice (IFAC-IAASB) and other private organizations' initiatives regarding the issue of standards for the assurance of social-environmental reporting;

What is the ISAE 3000 standard, and is there a procedural gap linked to the combination of quantitative and qualitative elements in the subject matter;

Empirical evidence on the content of assurance statements issued by assurance providers as the final result of the audit process on the subject documents;

Limitations of the present frame of reference and illustrations of possible future scenarios and significant case studies for sustainability reporting and assurance.