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The State of Play: Sustainability Disclosure and Assurance 2019-2022, Trends and Analysis, highlights the need for companies worldwide to move toward a global system of sustainability disclosure requirements.

Isaac M. O'Bannon • Feb. 22, 2024



The largest global companies are providing more detail and breadth in their sustainability reporting, and also are obtaining a greater scope of assurance on those disclosures, according to an updated report from the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) and AICPA & CIMA.

The study, an annual benchmark that now includes 2022 data, also found the use of varying sustainability standards and frameworks continues to make it difficult for

investors, lenders, and other stakeholders to find consistent and comparable

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year.

“While we’re moving toward commonly accepted global standards, some 87% of companies continued to use a mix of standards and frameworks for reporting,” said David Madon, IFAC’s director of sustainability, policy and regulatory affairs. “That leaves investors and lenders in a bind when it comes to having consistent, comparable and high-quality sustainability information at hand.”

Among the highlights of the updated study:

- **Almost all companies (98%) report some information on sustainability.** That’s an increase from 91% in 2019, when IFAC and AICPA & CIMA first began conducting research in this area.
- **Use of standalone sustainability reports has declined by 27 percentage points in the past three years.** Only 30% of companies used a standalone sustainability report in 2022, reflecting the growing inclusion of that information in companies’ annual or integrated reports.
- **69% of companies obtained assurance on at least some of their sustainability disclosures,** up five percentage points from last year and 18 percentage points from 2019. The scope of assurance areas also expanded, yet still remains limited in general.
- **Accountancy firms (as opposed to consultants or other service providers) handled 58% of the assurance engagements related to sustainability in 2022,** a percentage point better than the previous year. Some markets, notably the United States, fall well below 50%.

“When companies use accounting firms for sustainability assurance, they’re more likely to choose the same firm they use to audit their financial statements,” said Susan Coffey, CPA, CGMA, AICPA & CIMA’s CEO of public accounting. “Because the level of confidence with and reliability on sustainability disclosure should be the

same as financial information, we expect more companies will recognize that

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