

# Corporate Rating Methodology

Fedafin's methodology for rating assignments to public and private non-financial corporates

November 2023

## 1. General Remarks

This rating methodology describes the general principles and criteria for the credit risk assessment of private and public non-financial corporate issuers. This rating methodology does not apply to banks, real estate companies or insurance companies.<sup>1</sup> Corporate ratings can be assigned to legal entities only.<sup>2</sup>

The corporate issuer rating is a long-term credit rating reflecting our opinion of the relative creditworthiness of the issuer. Specifically, the issuer rating reflects an issuer's ability to fully and timely meet senior unsecured debt obligations. According to our monitoring policy for standard annual rating updates, our rating opinion covers a period of one year. However, when analysing the creditworthiness of an issuer, more than one year is taken into consideration by the analysts. The issue of stability in rating assignment is addressed by including forward-looking criteria and stability factors and by using appropriate analytical methods and valuation approaches. We therefore believe that the corporate rating methodology meets the requirements for a through-the-cycle rating as far as possible.

This rating methodology describes a number of risk factors and criteria that may have an impact on the rating assignment. Nevertheless, the risk profiles of individual companies may be very different, and the rating team may classify certain criteria as not relevant or include other criteria not described in this methodology. One example is the distinction between private and public companies. For private companies, the rating assessment is largely driven by financial

ratios and business and corporate risk factors. In contrast, for public companies, guarantees and extraordinary public support may be much more important to the credit rating assessment than financial ratios or business risk factors. The rating team may also deviate from the standard weighting of individual risk drivers if considered appropriate.

## 2. Corporate Rating Architecture

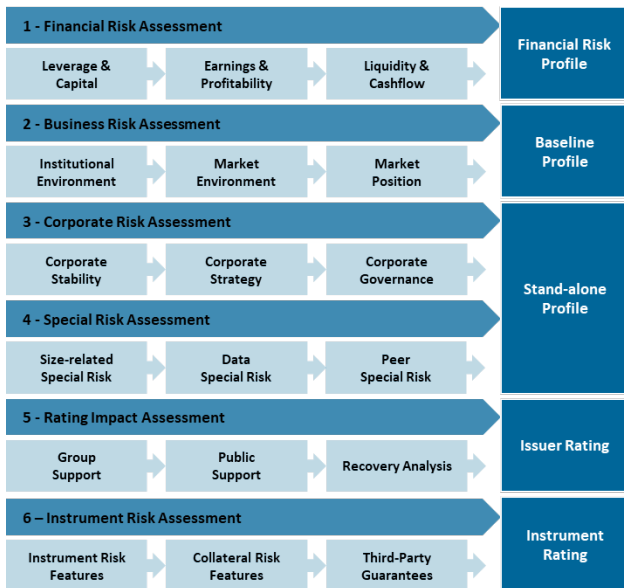
Figure 1 shows the general framework for private and public sector corporate credit ratings. The starting point usually is the financial risk assessment (Section 2.1). This is augmented by an analysis of business risks (Section 2.2), corporate risks (Section 2.3) and other entity-specific risks (Section 2.4), resulting in the stand-alone profile (SAP). The SAP reflects the creditworthiness of a company independent of extraordinary support or guarantees. As a next step, any relevant extraordinary group or public support needs to be assessed in order to arrive at the issuer credit profile (separate Guarantee and Extraordinary Support Methodology). The issuer credit profile reflects a company's overall creditworthiness. If no extraordinary support or guarantees apply, the issuer credit profile coincides with the stand-alone profile. A systematic recovery analysis (Section 2.6) finally leads to the issuer rating and thus to the issuer's ability to meet its senior unsecured debt obligations in full and on time.

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<sup>1</sup> Rating methodologies for other rating segments, such as banks, insurance companies or real estate companies can be found in the downloads section on our [website](#).

<sup>2</sup> Legal entities include, for example, public sector entities, corporations, cooperatives, foundations and associations.

Figure 1: Corporate Rating Methodology



## 2.1. Financial Risk Assessment

In the financial risk assessment, we mainly focus on three areas of analysis: (1) leverage and capital; (2) earnings and profitability; (3) liquidity and cash flows. We apply a logit transformation to a number of key financial ratios<sup>3</sup> and aggregate the resulting scores to the financial risk profile. The financial risk profile is usually averaged over four years to smooth minor annual fluctuations.

The financial analysis is generally based on the company's audited financial statements. Interim statements and forecasts may be considered for plausibility checks, but are not included in the financial analysis as standard. However, significant deviations from past performance due to a material change in corporate policy or the business environment may lead to a review of the current rating or the rating outlook.

Some positions in the financial statements are systematically adjusted to ensure comparability between different accounting standards. The data adjustment is limited to particularly material positions such as operating leases, pension liabilities or goodwill.

<sup>3</sup> More information on definitions and details of key financial ratios are provided on [e-rating](#).

Fedafin acknowledges that hybrid debt instruments may exhibit more or less pronounced equity-like elements. Our analysts assess the equity character of hybrid capital based on a pre-defined set of criteria. The key question is to what extent hybrid capital can reduce the likelihood of a default for example through the possibility of suspending coupon payments or mandatory conversion to equity. An equity ratio of 0%, 50% or 100% can be attributed to specific instruments. A similar criteria-based analysis is performed for shareholder loans.

## 2.2. Business Risk Assessment

The financial risk profile must be interpreted in the context of the specific economic environment in which a company operates. Therefore, in this section, we analyze the extent to which the institutional environment, industry sector and market position of a company influence credit risk. The analysis of these qualitative factors leads to a better comparability of companies' financial profiles across industries and institutional environments.

The business risk assessment includes the three modules (a) institutional environment, (b) market environment, and (c) market position. In the first two modules a "floor" and a "ceiling" are defined, which serve as lower and upper limits applied to the financial risk profile of the company under consideration. For example, if a company operates in an industry environment with particularly high risks, the resulting lower ceiling means that a "Aaa" rating cannot be achieved even with the best financial ratios. At the same time, this compression of the curve of achievable score values affects the entire rating range. Therefore, with moderate or weak financial ratios, a difficult market environment can lead to additional downgrades too, albeit these will be less severe. On the other hand, institutional conditions (e.g. concession obligations, regulatory customer ties, ordinary financing support), particularly in the case of government-related entities (GRE), can mean that the issuer's evaluation does not fall

below a certain threshold (floor) even if the financial risk profile is very poor. Moreover, this upward shift in the curve of achievable score values can also lead to rating upgrades for issuers with a moderate financial profile, although these upgrades will be smaller. Finally, the assessment of the issuer's market position may lead to a direct up- or down-notching.

### 2.2.1. Institutional Environment Profile (Floor)

This module looks at a largely unregulated market as the default case. From this starting point, the analysts assess whether certain regulatory provisions systematically reduce an issuer's credit risk, essentially on the basis of two criteria: (1) intensity of competition; (2) financing system.

Possible criteria to evaluate the intensity of competition are the legal framework determining the scope of business activities (e.g. provision of public goods and infrastructure) or regulatory market entry barriers in terms of administrative authorization requirements. The focus here is really on institutional protection against competition. Economic barriers to market entry leading to lower intensity of competition are assessed within the market position profile in Section 2.2.3.

The central question in the analysis of the financing system is to what extent the company's uncovered costs are financed by regular public subsidies, statutory cost recovery contributions or cost-covering user fees, thereby reducing credit risk.

The institutional environment profile can be categorized as "excellent", "very strong", "strong", "favorable", or "standard". Due to the focus on the regulatory institutional environment, this module is particularly important for government-related entities. For private sector companies the resulting assessment will be "standard" in most cases.

### 2.2.2. Market Environment Profile (Ceiling)

This module focuses on the market environment of a corporate issuer, with the two main criteria being (1) country risks and (2) industry sector risks. When analyzing country risks we ask how supportive economic or political conditions are

in the countries the issuer operates in and sells its products to. To evaluate economic risks, we look at average per capita income in the relevant countries. For the assessment of political conditions, we use country data on the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) from the World Bank.

The assessment of industry sector risks includes the analysis of cyclicity of the sector due to economic fluctuations, interest rate or exchange rates or the assessment of growth prospects in respective business areas and geographical markets (e.g. based on consumer preferences). We also consider potential risks due to changing regulatory framework conditions or the vulnerability of a sector to technological disruption (e.g. digitalization, carbon-free technology).

The evaluation of the relevant criteria in this module results in an assessment of "favorable", "moderate", "limited", "weak", or "very weak". If the assessment is "favorable", the rating is not changed compared to the financial risk profile. However, if the assessment is less than "favorable", the rating ceiling may be lowered, reflecting that certain risks in the market environment cannot fully be offset by a strong financial profile.

### 2.2.3. Market Position Profile

In this module we analyze the relative competitive position of an issuer and its resilience to negative shocks compared to its main competitors in the same industry. A particularly strong competitive position can lead to more stability of the company in the business cycle, whereas a weak competitive position can make a company especially vulnerable in a downturn. We evaluate a company's competitive position based on, for example, the exclusivity of corporate marketing or brands, its technology and innovation leadership, or its product and service quality. We also examine factors that increase (or decrease) an issuer's resilience towards certain shocks, e.g. due to financial crises, energy crises or pandemics. Positive or negative resilience factors may be the issuer's market share or its efficiency and cost structure. The particular resilience or vulnerability to specific risks such as climate change risks, resource scarcity or reputational risks are also considered in this module.

The evaluation of the relevant criteria in this module results in an assessment of “excellent”, “strong”, “fair”, “limited”, or “weak”, which in turn is reflected in an up- or downgrade of the rating of up to two notches. At this stage in the rating process, the financial risk profile incl. floor and ceiling serves as an anchor. Figure 2 describes how an asymmetric notching approach is applied, based on the level of the anchor. The possible range for down-notching is somewhat higher for investment-grade issuers since we expect strong financial metrics to be reflected to some extent in a corporate’s qualitative risk profile. Analogously, the possible range for up-notching is higher for speculative-grade issuers, since we expect weak financial metrics to be reflected in a corporate’s qualitative risk profile.

Figure 2: Example of a notching approach depending on the respective anchor rating

		MARKET POSITION PROFILE				
		excellent	strong	fair	limited	weak
ANCHOR RATING	Aaa – Aa-	1	0	0	-1	-2
	A+ – Baa-	1	1	0	-1	-1
	Sub-investment	2	1	0	0	-1

The resulting stage in the rating process after the financial risk assessment and the business risk assessment is called the baseline profile 1. This serves in turn as the input for the corporate risk assessment.

### 2.3. Corporate Risk Assessment

The previous qualitative analysis emphasizes the issuer’s business environment. In the corporate risk assessment, on the other hand, we focus more directly on the issuer and assess company-specific factors that affect credit risk. The three main risk profiles considered are (1) the corporate stability profile, (2) the corporate strategy profile, and (3) the corporate governance profile.

#### 2.3.1. Corporate Stability Profile

In this module, we assess the entrepreneurial and financial stability of an issuer. We focus on diversification of business activities and the quality of the issuer’s assets and liabilities. Possible criteria to evaluate corporate stability include diversification regarding markets, business lines, products, customers, and suppliers. We also look at concentration in off balance-sheet positions (e.g. granted guarantees) or in specific tangible or intangible balance-sheet assets. Finally, we account for diversification of the financing structure, or a lack thereof.

Figure 2 shows how the resulting assessment as “excellent”, “strong”, “fair”, “limited”, or “weak” translates into a maximum of two upward or downward notches, based on the baseline profile 1 as the anchor rating.

#### 2.3.2. Corporate Strategy Profile

In the corporate strategy profile, we evaluate the impact of a company’s strategic focus in various dimensions on credit risk. Possible criteria include the corporate growth strategy including M&A activities, the corporate remuneration policy in terms of bonus incentive structures, or the corporate dividend distribution policy including share buyback programs and funding thereof. We also assess corporate risk management including the use of derivative instruments and the corporate funding policy in terms of complexity and lending covenants.

Based on the resulting assessment of “excellent”, “strong”, “fair”, “limited”, or “weak”, an asymmetric notching approach as specified in Figure 2 is applied, based on the baseline profile 1 as the anchor rating.

#### 2.3.3. Corporate Governance Profile

The core question of the corporate governance profile is whether the issuer’s corporate governance is adequate or whether certain negative aspects may increase the credit risk of an issuer. Possible criteria are board diversity and independence, transparency and reporting standards

(financial disclosure and ESG disclosure), or the company's reputation in terms of compliance flaws.

The evaluation of the relevant criteria in this module results in an assessment of "fair", "limited", or "weak". In contrast to the previous modules, we believe that issuers with different rating classes are affected by the risks of weak corporate governance in a uniform manner. Therefore, the down-notching is independent of the anchor rating (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Example of a notching approach independent of the respective anchor rating

		CORPORATE GOVERNANCE PROFILE		
		fair	limited	weak
ANCHOR RATING	Aaa – Aa-	0	- 1	- 2
	A+ - Baa-	0	- 1	- 2
	Sub-investment	0	-1	- 2

## 2.4. Corporate Special Risk Assessment

The combined assessment of the issuer's financial risk profile, its business environment and company-specific characteristics is referred to as the baseline profile 2. In rare cases, it may be necessary to add some special modules to the risk assessment. Specific examples are (a) size-related special risks, (b) data and peer special risks, and (c) benchmarking and adjustment.

### 2.4.1. Size-related Special Risk Profile

While the corporate rating methodology has been developed predominantly for medium-sized and large companies<sup>4</sup>, it generally also applies to small and medium-sized

<sup>4</sup> In this context, medium-sized and large companies are companies that meet one or more of the following characteristics:

- Headcount > 100 employees
- Turnover > 50 million CHF
- Balance sheet total > 50 million CHF

<sup>5</sup> Rating assignments to micro-enterprises are entirely excluded.

enterprises (SME) since business activities and risk profiles frequently exhibit a high degree of similarity.<sup>5</sup>

Some specific risk factors for smaller companies can already be captured by the financial risk, business risk and corporate risk modules mentioned above. Examples include a smaller market share or less diversification. In this module, it is possible to consider additional risk factors due to limited size and/or track record. One possible risk factor is the risk that the company's success depends on a few key persons. Further limitations may arise if a company is particularly small compared to relevant competitors or does not have sufficient know-how in relevant areas. Another aspect to consider may be the company's position in supply chains, including contractual arrangements with key clients.

The evaluation of the relevant criteria in this module leads to an assessment of "fair", "limited", or "weak". Using the baseline profile 2 as a starting point, the resulting down-notching normally is minus one notch if the resulting assessment is "limited" and minus two notches if the resulting assessment is "weak" (Figure 3).

### 2.4.2. Data and Peer Special Risk Profile

This special risk module summarizes potential risks from poor data quality and other special risks. Possible indicators include a limited track record due to newly established or restructured companies, distorted or incorrectly disclosed corporate data and information, or exceptional data fluctuations due to trend breaks or imbalances. In addition, this module may capture increased credit risk due to violations of national laws and regulations or the occurrence of a risk event (e.g. accidents, reputational damage, called guarantees, lost lawsuits) that was not sufficiently captured by the other modules above.

The assessment of the relevant criteria in this module may be "fair", "limited", or "weak". Starting from the baseline profile 2, the resulting down-notching normally is minus one

notch if the resulting assessment is “limited” and minus two notches if the resulting assessment is “weak” (Figure 3).

#### 2.4.3. Benchmarking and Adjustment

In a final step, analysts compare the resulting stand-alone profile with market benchmarks or the credit risk assessment for relevant peers. Although this only applies in exceptional cases, analysts have the option in this module to raise or lower the stand-alone profile by one notch if necessary.

### 2.5. Stand-Alone Profile and Issuer Credit Profile

Figure 1 shows that the modules described so far lead to the issuer’s stand-alone profile (SAP). The SAP reflects the creditworthiness of a company independent of extraordinary support or guarantees. For issuers for which extraordinary group or public support or guarantees may be relevant, a separate analysis of the respective features is required. The general principles and guidelines for this analysis can be found in our separate “Guarantee and Extraordinary Support Methodology”. After this step, or if this step is not required, the resulting issuer credit profile reflects the overall creditworthiness of a company. To arrive at the issuer rating, and thereby the issuer’s ability to meet its senior unsecured debt obligations in full and on time, analysts perform a systematic recovery analysis as described in the next section.

### 2.6. Recovery Analysis

The objective of the recovery analysis is to systematically analyze the expected loss for each seniority class in the liability structure in the event of a default. Important components for this analysis are the expected general recovery rate of a company with the corresponding probability distribution and the expected seniority structure of the debt capital in the event of a default (waterfall). The result of this analysis serves as an important input for analysts to determine the issuer rating and the rating of the corresponding financial instruments.

#### 2.6.1. Necessity of a Detailed Recovery Analysis

A detailed recovery analysis will not be necessary for every issuer. Especially for companies with a strong issuer credit profile (“far from default”) and a standard debt structure (e.g. no subordinated or secured debt), the rating for senior unsecured debt instruments usually corresponds to the issuer credit profile. In these cases, we typically refrain from performing a detailed analysis.

#### 2.6.2. Expected Average Company Recovery Rate

Since the recovery rate of a company at the time of its default is uncertain from today’s perspective, it is not modeled as a fixed value but as a probability distribution. For standard cases we assume a beta distribution with an expected mean recovery rate of 50%. For groups of issuers with extraordinarily high or extraordinarily low expected recovery rates, it is generally possible for analysts to choose a different parameterization (expected firm-wide recovery rates of 60% or 35%). The selected beta distribution forms the basis for calculating the expected loss rate in the default event for each seniority class.

#### 2.6.3. Seniority Structure of Debt

As a second element, the seniority structure of the debt capital at the time of the default must be determined (waterfall). The starting point is the current debt structure according to the annual financial statements. In addition, legal provisions in national resolution law for companies need to be considered.

The analysts are not strictly bound to this current debt structure, however. Deviations are reasonable for example if the issuer is in the process of a major merger or is planning a major increase in debt due to investments. Furthermore, in very cyclical industries it may be reasonable to use average values. If a company has a somewhat more complex structure, structural subordination must also be considered: If a company conducts its business through one or more legally separate subsidiaries, but issues debt at the level of the parent company (i.e. the holding company), the creditors of the subsidiaries have first claim on the assets of the subsidiaries

in the event of bankruptcy of the entire group. The creditors of the parent company have only a subordinated claim based on the residual value of the assets of the subsidiaries after liquidation. A very broad overview on how the seniority structure might look like is depicted in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Seniority structure (Waterfall)

Senior secured	Secured loans and bonds: assets and real estate
Secured	Secured claims: e.g. salaries in arrears
Senior unsecured	Loans and bonds
Senior subordinated	Subordinated debt (no interest deferability)
Subordinated	Subordinated debt (with cumulative interest deferability)
Junior subordinated	Perpetual debt (with non-cumulative interest deferability)

#### 2.6.4. Recovery Analysis Calculations

Based on the selected beta distribution (parameterization according to the company-wide expected recovery rate) and the defined waterfall, the expected loss rate in the default event (loss given default, LGD) is calculated for each individual seniority class. The expected loss rate (EL) is then obtained by multiplying the loss given default by the probability of a default event (LGD x PD). The probability of a default event (PD) is based on the issuer credit profile, which implies a certain probability of default.

As an example, in Table 1 we assume a company with an average firm-wide recovery rate of 50% and an issuer credit profile of Ba. The fedafin Idealized Benchmark Tables imply that a Ba rating corresponds to an average probability of default of 6.05% over a term of five years. Given the recovery rate of 50%, this corresponds to an average expected loss of 3.03% (EL = PD x LGD = PD x (1-RR)). Assuming a seniority structure with 70% senior unsecured debt and about

26% subordinated debt from a hybrid bond, the expected loss rate in the default event per seniority class is calculated using the beta distribution. Multiplied by the implied probability of default of 6.05%, the expected loss rate for each seniority class is obtained. Based on the Idealized Benchmark Tables this can be represented as a rating letter (Proposed Issue Rating). The result of the analysis: The assessment of senior unsecured debt and thus the issuer rating are one notch above the issuer credit profile with the Ba+ rating, as the analysis considers that a substantial portion of debt is subordinated. The recovery analysis further proposes a rating of Ba- for the subordinated debt components.

Table 1: Recovery Analysis Example

Expected company-wide recovery rate	50%
Issuer credit profile	Ba
Implied PD (see Idealized Benchmark Table)	6.05%
Implied EL (= implied PD * (1 – recovery rate))	3.03%
Implied EL rating (see Idealized Benchmark Table)	Ba

Seniority Structure	% of total Liabilities	Expected LGD Rate	EL Rate (LGD*PD)	Proposed Issue Rating
Senior Secured	3.4%	0.3%	0.0%	Aaa
Secured	0.4%	0.9%	0.1%	Aa+
Senior Unsecured	70.0%	38.1%	2.3%	<b>Ba+</b>
Subordinated	26.2%	89.0%	5.4%	Ba-

In cases with a very high share of senior secured debt, for example due to a high proportion of mortgage debt, the recovery analysis could have the reverse effect, whereby the issuer rating would fall below the issuer credit profile.

## 2.7. Instrument Risk Assessment

The specific assessment of individual financial instruments is generally based on the results of the recovery analysis. The analysts may however deviate from the proposed issue ratings based on specific characteristics of the respective financial instruments. The following sections provide more detail on the factors to be considered when assessing specific financial instruments.

### 2.7.1. Instrument Risk Features

One element to be considered for the assessment of financial instruments are special covenants. In general, we already consider potentially positive effects of creditor-friendly debt covenants when assigning the issuer credit profile. This applies in particular to standard covenants that relate either to the entire outstanding corporate debt or to all debt instruments of the same seniority class. In this context, we do not normally consider the prevailing standard clauses, such as cross default, pari-passu, change-of-control, or negative pledge, to be directly relevant to the rating of a financial instrument. Nevertheless, general contract clauses may be particularly relevant in specific segments. An example is the hospital sector. Often, corresponding issue prospectuses are structured in such a way that a bond becomes due if the issuer is no longer listed on the hospital list of the respective canton. Although the listing on the hospital list is already included in the analysis of the issuer credit profile, the removal from the hospital list and the associated immediate maturity of the bond favour the creditors of the bond, which may be reflected positively in the issue rating.

In a credit risk assessment of a hybrid debt instrument, the specific characteristics of the instrument are evaluated and may lead to further down-notching from the issue rating proposed in the recovery analysis for this seniority level. Important aspects to be considered in this context are the maturity of the instrument (short-term maturity vs. perpetual bond) or whether and under which circumstances interest payments may be suspended and whether or not outstanding coupon payments have to be made cumulatively upon resumption of payments. Furthermore, the conversion provisions (optional vs. mandatory, conversion into shares vs. partial or full write-down) and the corresponding thresholds are assessed. Based on this evaluation, the proposed issue rating from the recovery analysis may be reduced by up to four notches.

### 2.7.2. Collateral Risk Features

To assess a collateralized financial instrument, the assets underlying the collateralization must be evaluated for each individual case. Based on the nature of the underlying assets, a haircut percentage may be applied to the value of the assets. Using these values, adjusted by the corresponding haircut, the overcollateralization is then calculated, which is an important information for the assessment of the specific financial instrument.

### 2.7.3. Third-Party Guarantees

If direct explicit guarantees are applied to a financial instrument, it is not always necessary to determine an issuer rating and perform a recovery analysis. Instead, the first step in this case would be to determine the anchor rating, where we use the credit ratings of the guarantors as a starting point.<sup>6</sup> If several guarantors are present or per quota guarantees are issued, we typically calculate the weighted average of the individual credit ratings. However, it is also possible that we consider the credit rating of only one guarantor as the relevant measure. It is further possible to adjust the anchor rating calculated by several notches. For instance, if an expected guarantee payment is so high as to become detrimental to the guarantor's own creditworthiness, we can make a deduction of one or more notches. Similarly, if we view changes in the pool of guarantors or of their credit ratings as probable in the near future, we might incorporate a corresponding adjustment in the anchor as well.

The evaluation of guarantees is based on two criteria: (1) the extent of the risk transfer between the issuer and the guarantor and (2) their timeliness and enforceability.

The extent of the risk transfer can be judged integral, strong, or limited. If guarantees cover the entire obligations arising from the financial instrument, the corresponding risk transfer is normally considered integral. In the case of limited guarantees with a binding cap, analysts would likely judge the resulting risk transfer as weaker.

<sup>6</sup> If fedafin does not assign its own credit rating for a guarantor or support provider, the credit ratings of other recognized credit

rating agencies can also be used. Such use will be disclosed on the respective credit rating documentation.



The timeliness and enforceability of a guarantee is categorized as integral, strong, or limited, depending on how well the following criteria are met: whether the guarantee is direct or subsidiary; if legal enforceability is unproblematic or limited; if payments are timely or delayed; and how easily the guarantee can be terminated or substantially altered.

Figure 5 shows how the two criteria are combined to determine the guarantee risk profile. This can take one of five assessments: excellent, strong, fair, limited, or weak.

Figure 5: Guarantee assessment

GUARANTEE RISK MITIGATION ASSESSMENT			
	integral risk transfer	strong risk transfer	limited risk transfer
integral enforceability	excellent	strong	fair
strong enforceability	strong	fair	limited
limited enforceability	fair	limited	weak

The qualification of the guarantee risk profile then translates into a specified number of negative notches that are applied to the anchor rating (see Figure 6). If the guarantee risk profile is considered excellent, the issuer credit profile is aligned with the anchor rating. For qualifications ranging from strong to weak, between one and four notches can be deducted from the anchor rating.

Figure 6: Notching framework for explicit guarantees

GUARANTEE RISK PROFILE					
	excellent	strong	fair	limited	weak
Notches subtracted from anchor	0	-1	-2	-3	-4

### 3. Corporate Rating Outlook

For capital market issuers in particular, an outlook can be assigned to the rating. The outlook (positive, stable, negative) reflects fedafin's assessment of the medium-term rating development.

The rating outlook does not represent a specific probability of rating change, but provides an indication on the likely direction of a potential rating change. The outlook covers a period of 12 to 18 months following the rating outlook assignment.

### 4. ESG Factors Material to Credit Rating

Fedafin acknowledges the fundamental importance of ESG criteria for corporate business performance. ESG related variations in consumer behavior, technologies and regulatory environments as well as considerations regarding good corporate governance already materialize in corporate rating assignments and have done so in the past. The credit rating model outlined above contains several criteria related to ESG. While the characteristics of corporate governance are evaluated in a separate module, environmental and social factors can affect the credit rating in a number of different modules. For instance, for a company with very large carbon dioxide emissions, public pressure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions could lead to a change in the relevant political or regulatory environment. If policymakers then pass laws that levy taxes on specific emissions or that even prohibit certain technologies, the company might face technological disruption and potentially higher production costs in the future. Both these lines of influence would be reflected in a deterioration of the company's market environment profile if they were considered sufficiently likely to materially affect the company's credit metrics in the medium term.

Similarly, changes in customer preferences like a shift from traditional cars with combustion engines to electric cars could already now reduce demand for an automotive supplier specialized on traditional cars, while stimulating demand for a company catering mainly to e-car producers. In both instances, current revenues and profits would be

affected, which influences the financial risk profile. As future demand will diverge even more strongly as the shift intensifies, we would evaluate the market environment quite differently for the two types of companies. These examples emphasize that ESG factors can impact a credit rating in various ways.

As an independent credit rating agency operating at the nexus of investors and capital seekers, we feel an obligation to be transparent about our approach to credit relevant ESG factors, which is why we signed [PRI's "Statement on ESG in credit risk and ratings"](#) in August 2018. PRI is an investor initiative in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative and the United Nations Global Compact, dedicated to highlight the investment implications of ESG factors and to help investors integrate these factors into their investment decisions. By signing the statement, we share a common vision to improve the systematic and transparent consideration of ESG factors in credit ratings.

Any material influence of ESG factors on the credit risk of an issuer is therefore disclosed in our credit rating reports. In longer reports we include a separate block that lists the relevant ESG factors and states whether their respective impact on the credit rating is positive or negative. However, it is important to understand that in making this influence transparent, we do not issue a moral statement or an ideological endorsement of a specific activity. We merely show how the probability of default of an issuer or the associated expected loss of a financial instrument are affected by ESG factors.

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