

# Complaints

## Standard Operating Procedure

Valid from: 01/03/2021

Distribution: External – Public

Certifier for



**FAIRTRADE**  
INTERNATIONAL



## Table of contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Purpose</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Application</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Definitions</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Confidentiality</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Process</b> .....	<b>3</b>
	<b>5.1 Submission</b> .....	<b>3</b>
	<b>5.2 Confirmation</b> .....	<b>4</b>
	<b>5.3 Investigation</b> .....	<b>4</b>
	<b>5.4 Response</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>References</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Change History</b> .....	<b>5</b>

## 1 Purpose

This Standard Operating Procedure outlines the principles and responsibilities with regards to complaints. Furthermore, it describes the process for handling complaints.

## 2 Application

This Standard Operating Procedure applies to all parties that are involved in the process, including the party raising the concern, the concerned FLOCERT customer, FLOCERT Credibility Assurance Unit and any other concerned FLOCERT staff member. Fairtrade International, National Fairtrade Organizations, Producer Networks, Audit Bodies, customers or any interested party may make a complaint under this procedure.

## 3 Definitions

A complaint is considered as a formal expression of dissatisfaction with the quality of services delivered by FLOCERT.

The following topics, but not limited to, are considered to fall under the scope of this SOP:

- failure to respond to certification relevant correspondence within a reasonable amount of time,
- unprofessional behavior by a FLOCERT staff or auditor.
- fee related topics (including decertification due to non-payment).

When a customer submits an **AuditServiceEvaluationbyCustomer FO** to the Competence Management Unit where three or more statements have been rated with “disagree” or “strongly disagree”, this will automatically be forwarded to Credibility Assurance and considered as a complaint.

## 4 Confidentiality

In general, all submitted complaints will be treated strictly confidential by the responsible staff in order to ensure that identities of involved parties are protected.

Where confidential information from the complainant such as workers, suppliers, buyers or other stakeholders would reveal the information provider’s identity, FLOCERT will:

- Not disclose that confidential information to any other party except the responsible staff within FLOCERT on a need to know basis.
- Not use that confidential information in any way that may allow identification of the individual(s) or organisation(s) that provided the information.
- Use the confidential information to identify which aspects should be investigated.

## 5 Process

### 5.1 Submission

A complaint can be submitted to FLOCERT via various channels:

- via e-mail to [credibility@flocert.net](mailto:credibility@flocert.net) either in writing
- via FLOCERT website <https://www.flocert.net/submit-an-allegation-appeal-or-complaint/> or
- by phone, skype or any other communication means

Where writing communication is not possible, the oral one will take place in order to ensure that the opportunity to express the dissatisfaction with the quality of services is given to everyone. In this case, the details obtained during this communication are documented in writing by FLOCERT.

Complaints will be documented and managed centrally by the Credibility Assurance Unit of FLOCERT, is an independent Unit intended to assure impartiality within the system and safeguard the applicability of the procedures on both parties.

Complaints should contain enough information to make investigation possible including, wherever possible, details of:

- the individuals involved
- the events giving rise to the complaint
- date, time and location
- relevant communication regarding the complaint should be attached

## 5.2 Confirmation

FLOCERT's Credibility Assurance Unit will conduct an initial evaluation of the complaint and within 7 calendar days confirm receipt and inform the submitting party whether or not the submission contains an actionable complaint, or if the request should be dealt with according to a different procedure such as the Review or Appeal SOP.

Credibility Assurance maintains a log of all Complaints.

## 5.3 Investigation

The CA Unit is responsible for the investigation of all complaints.

When necessary, the CA Unit will request responsible staff member to assist in the managing of a complaint. Furthermore, a summary of the feedback from our clients, including all submitted complaints, is presented by the Credibility Assurance Manager in the Management Review Submission Report to the attention of the FLOCERT Leadership Team.

When a complaint concerns Credibility Assurance Officer, the Business & IT Services Director is responsible for managing the complaint. In case a complaint concerns the Credibility Assurance Manager, the FLOCERT CEO is responsible for handling it.

## 5.4 Response

The CA Unit is responsible for the investigation of all complaints and for replying within 35 calendar days from the day of acceptance of the complaint.

## 6 References

- CA AppealReview SOP
- CA Allegation SOP
- CM AuditServiceEvaluationbyCustomer FO



## 7 Change History

Version	Author / Reviser	Date approved	Changes
13	I. Markova	02.03.2010	References to CERT Appeal&Review SOP and CERT Allegation SOP; Complaints have to be submitted to <a href="mailto:QualityManagement@flo-cert.net">QualityManagement@flo-cert.net</a> ; complaints against QM Officers are handled by the Business&IT Services Director; Received complaints - input for Management Reviews.
14	I. Markova	02.07.2010	Confidential treatment of all submitted complaints
15	V. Wachong	18.11.2015	Terminology updated: NFOs, Leadership Team, Quality Manager, FLOCERT CEO // no documentation in Quality Improvement System (Mantis) anymore // QM Appeal&Review SOP is now called EXE AppealReview SOP
16	AS. Boizard	09.10.2017	Changed "operator" to "customer" Replaced QM by Credibility Assurance Added the auditor evaluation with more than 3C as complaint.
17	J. Goss	01.05.2019	Timelines amended to harmonize for all complaints processes; structure aligned with other CA SOPs. Added website link as an option to submit complaints
18	A: Roman	01.05.2019	AuditorFieldEvaluation FO replaced with AuditServiceEvaluationbyCustomer FO. The "C" rates replaced with "Disagree" rate
19	J Goss A. Roman	01.03.2020	Option of oral communication added Wording amended for clarity. /Fee topics added/ CA role added/