

Remote Audit

Standard Operating Procedure

Valid from: 01/04/2021

Distribution: Public

Certifier for



FAIRTRADE
INTERNATIONAL



Table of contents

1	Purpose.....	3
2	Area of Application.....	3
3	Definition.....	3
4	Remote Audit Scope	3
5	Remote Audit Structure	3
6	Local facilitator	4
7	Remote interviews.....	5
8	Remote site tour	6
9	Remote Additional Entity audit.....	6
10	Certification	7
11	Technical Requirements	7

Certifier for



FAIRTRADE
INTERNATIONAL

1 Purpose

This Standard Operating Procedure describes the procedure of remote audits. Where not stated differently, the procedures for onsite audits as defined in the CERT Audit SOP applies.

2 Area of Application

The process outlined in this document applies to customers applying or being certified for Fairtrade certification, covering all producer and trader set-ups (including additional entities) and all Fairtrade Standards except the Fairtrade Standards for Textile, Climate and Gold and Associated Precious Metals for Artisanal and Small-scale mining.

3 Definition

A remote audit is the method of conducting an audit remotely, using documentary evidence and electronic methods such as video conferencing, email and telephone to obtain audit evidence. The overall aim is to evaluate this evidence objectively to determine the extent to which the Standard requirements have been fulfilled.

A remote audit typically involves document sharing and review in combination with some virtual interaction with the audit site(s) through remote interviews and/or remote site tours.

While Fairtrade certification is reliant upon physical audits as an indispensable tool, remote audits are considered a complementary assurance tool to ensure business continuity in situations where circumstances prohibit on-site presence of auditors. Such circumstances may be regional conflicts, natural disasters or outbreaks of disease (e.g. COVID-19).

4 Remote Audit Scope

All audit types can be conducted as remote audits. The complete compliance criteria checklist can be verified during the remote audit. For producer remote audits, COD Impact is also being included through a self-assessment questionnaire. For all audits except initial producer audits, the follow-up process after the remote audit will remain unchanged (see chapter Certification).

5 Remote Audit Structure

The remote audit consists of four elements:

(1) Preparation & Scoping

First, the auditor will have a scoping call with the customer. During that call they will test connectivity and agree on the online meeting tool to use for the live interaction. Any challenges regarding the accessibility and transfer of documentation as well as the sharing of pictures and (live) videos should be discussed. Any questions about the process can be clarified during this call. Both customer and auditor agree on who is assigned as facilitator to ensure that the remote interviews and site tours can be conducted smoothly during the live interaction. Furthermore, the date for the live interaction is fixed.

(2) Document Collection

Advanced documentation from the client forms an essential first part of the remote audit. After the scoping call, the auditor will contact the customer via e-mail attaching an audit preparation letter. This letter contains a detailed list of documents and materials the customer is asked to prepare for the remote audit and send to the auditor within a defined period.

The non-submission of the required documents can lead to a certification sanction such as suspension due to a major non-compliance with regards to granting access to all relevant information.

(3) Desktop review

Once the documentation is completed, the auditor will review all documents the customer has provided. The auditor might reach out to the customer asking for additional or outstanding information or to clarify any questions.

(4) Live interaction

On the previously agreed date and time for the live interaction, the customer will reconnect with the auditor via the online meeting tool. Like regular onsite audits, there will be a formal opening meeting where the auditor shares the agenda of the meeting. The auditor will triangulate findings from the desktop review through remote interviews and remote site tours, if applicable, and check the remaining points from the audit checklist. The auditor will explain the audit findings in a closing meeting. Once the closing meeting is concluded, the auditor sends an email to the customer attaching the closing report to be signed and or at least acknowledged by email and returned by the customer immediately.

6 Local facilitator

Local facilitators are crucial for remote audits. The role of the facilitator is to assist the auditor by ensuring a smooth workflow during the live interaction with regards to remote site tours and interviews. The facilitator may not interfere with the audit itself. For example, he / she may not lead interviews but act on the direction of the auditor. If the auditor identifies a risk of interference, an alternative facilitator must be available.

The following rules apply for appointing and preparing the facilitator:

Function within the organization / company

Hired Labour: The facilitator needs to be a worker representative.

Small-scale Producer Organisations, Contract Production or Traders: The facilitator can be anyone within the organization/company, e.g. the official contact person for FLOCERT (unless in the case of a SPO this function is carried out by a representative of the buyer). For a SPO with more than 10 workers, a worker representative should support the worker interviews.

Skills

Facilitators should speak the audit language and ideally also the local language and be aware of local customs. They should ideally have some experience with being audited and be familiar or have experience with the technology to be used. In case of a language barrier between the auditor and the interview partners the facilitator may act as the translator as long as the requirements for translators are fulfilled (see Chapter 4.3 in the CERT Audit SOP).

Certifier for



Otherwise, the customer must arrange an alternative local translator being available during the live interaction (workers/members or an independent 3rd party translator/interpreter).

Equipment

The customer is responsible for providing the facilitator with all relevant tools (video camera, power bank, phone credit, internet credit etc.) which enable him/her to walk the auditor through the audit sites to check traceability requirements and conduct interviews (see below). If necessary, facilitators should be prepared in advance of the audit by receiving training on the new ways of working in remote settings.

7 Remote interviews

As with onsite audits, conducting interviews is also an integral part of the remote audit routine. Remote interviews are conducted during the live interaction.

Please refer to the CERT Audit SOP for an overview of the main interview partners during a producer and trader audit. The auditor selects the interview partners based on the information provided during the document selection (such as list of members and/or workers). Facilitators play a crucial role in remote interviews as they handle the technical tool for the remote interviews and ensure that a confidential location is prepared for the interviews, if needed. The auditor shares the list of interviewees with the facilitator during the opening meeting. The facilitator must not be present in the interviews but be available during that time for any queries or technical problems. In general, the facilitator must ensure the smooth sequence of the interviews.

There are various factors which determine whether group interviews or individual interviews will be conducted, such as internet connectivity and quality at the audited site (video transmission needed for group interviews), feasibility of in-person meetings (workers/members available in person) or the existence of appropriate locations for group interviews (confidentiality, accessibility, distance and hygiene).

Remote interviews should take place during normal working hours.

Remote group interviews

- Group interviews should last approx. 30 minutes.
- A recommended group size is up to a maximum of 5-7 interviewees, depending on the size of the location where the interviews take place. Groups should be set up with workers of similar profiles.
- For remote group interviews, video transmission is a basic requirement. The customer must have a web camera (or built in laptop camera) in place to allow for a video conference, enabling the auditor to have a face-to-face conversation with the interviewees, i.e. laptop placed on a table and workers/members in front.
- The location for the group interviews must ensure confidentiality so that interviewees may speak openly and freely, without being put at risk of being monitored. It must be a separate, clearly structured space so the auditor can ensure remotely that there are no hidden cameras or microphones installed. While office premises can be critical due to physical proximity to management, an open site might be more appropriate. The location should be located centrally so it is easily accessible to the interview partners.

- During the Covid-19 pandemic, local restrictions regarding social distance and health safety measures must be complied with in order to protect the interviewees health.

Remote individual interviews

- Should last at approx. 10-20 minutes.
- Should ideally be conducted via the video conference tool provided by the management.
- If the interviewees are not available physically, the auditor can opt for calling the interviewees on their personal mobile phone. The facilitator is expected to provide the respective telephone numbers. If needed, they shall obtain the interviewees' consent to share the telephone number with the auditor.

8 Remote site tour

For topics that require a site tour, the facilitator shows the auditor around using a webcam or video call from a mobile. Site tours should take place where relevant activities are ongoing (harvest, processing, reception, packaging, etc.) and focus on critical areas like traceability (such as storage, processing) or health and safety (such as emergency exits, PPE)

Remote site tours are based on the site map provided by the customer in the audit preparation. During the time slot, as defined in the audit agenda, the auditor guides the facilitator and instructs them where to go on a fixed, previously discussed path or where to conduct the farm visits in the case of a SPO. Extent and duration can vary depending on the auditors' evaluation of the situation.

Remote site tours can take place virtually and semi-virtually.

Virtual site tour

The virtual site tour is the preferred methodology but depends on reliable internet connection as it is a live tour with the facilitator via video transmission. This enables the auditor to react quickly and focus on risk areas. For the virtual site tour, the facilitator must be provided with a smartphone/laptop/tablet with a working camera with high enough resolution to allow for clear visibility of small details. There must be a stable and reliable Wi-Fi network or the technical device is connected to internet via a mobile network having video calling ability.

Semi-virtual site tour

If there is no stable internet connection, the auditor guides the facilitator through audio transmission (preferably web-based). Facilitators are provided with a digital camera to take photos/videos and are required to tell the auditor where exactly they are and what they see. The auditor instructs the facilitator where to take photos/videos. Immediately after the site tour the facilitator must send the photos/videos to the auditor. Ideally, the smartphone used is capable of integrating GPS data or even a GPS tracker in order to track the route and share a screenshot of the GPS tracker with the prescribed route.

9 Remote Additional Entity audit

The remote audit of an additional entity will be completely integrated in the remote audit workflow of the certificate holder. The remote additional entity audit consists of a remote site tour at the additional entity premises and the revision of the respective documentation. The

Certifier for



remote site tour takes place in the course of the live interaction of the certificate holder. For this to happen, the customer must ensure that the additional entity becomes familiarised with the remote audit procedure and has a local facilitator available who is provided with the necessary technical tools. Furthermore, the customer needs to ensure all documents related to the additional entity audit are provided to the auditor as requested in the audit preparation letter.

If logistically possible, e.g. if the additional entity is located close to the customer's premises, the customer's facilitator can support facilitating the remote site tour at the additional entity site.

10 Certification

For all audits except initial producer audits, the follow-up process after the remote audit will remain unchanged.

After remote initial producer audits, the customers receive a Permission to Trade if no major non-conformities were identified or once these have been corrected, which allows them to trade under Fairtrade terms. This Permission to Trade will remain valid until a full onsite audit has been conducted at their premises. Only then the Fairtrade certificate will be issued. In case major non-conformities are identified during the remote initial producer audit which cannot be credibly resolved in the corrective measure process, no permission to trade would be issued pending the onsite audit. A follow-up onsite audit is to be scheduled as soon as it is possible.

In case it was not possible to conduct the remote audit entirely as planned (e.g. due to technical constraints affecting the live interaction), FLOCERT will carefully assess whether any follow-up activity (e.g. onsite audit) is needed before a certificate may be issued, confirmed or renewed.

11 Technical Requirements

In order to fully benefit from the advantages of remote audits, certain technical conditions must be ensured by the customer. Communication devices – like laptop, desktop computer or tablet, mobile phone equipped with microphone, camera, loudspeaker and stable internet connection - must be available to ensure both video and audio communication of adequate quality.

In general, the customer being audited should suggest the conference tool, organize the digital video conference and the respective internet connection.

The conferencing tool used for the remote audit must comply with the following minimum requirements:

- It must allow the possibility to share screens and files during the remote audit.
- It must allow all people involved in the remote audit to join when necessary (can be multiple people on the customer's side at the same time) without the auditor having to purchase extra licenses.

If needed, e.g. where internet connection is a challenge, a combination of different tools can be used simultaneously - such as image transmission via conferencing tool and audio transmission via phone.