

FAQs - Coronavirus-related changes in FLOCERT's operations

Please note, FLOCERT has changed its operations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The following FAQs document aims to offer further information.

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1 Remote audit methodology

1.1 We are a Fairtrade certified organisation and have an upcoming audit scheduled. What should we do?

Nothing. Our certification analysts will get in touch with you to propose remote auditing or to defer the audit. Where we cannot yet conduct onsite audits, we will continue with the remote audit methodology until further notice. We will continue to keep you up to date on any overall developments and our analysts will be in touch on an individual basis for any upcoming audits.

1.2 What does a remote audit look like?

The remote audit consists of four elements: Preparation & Scoping; Document collection; Desktop review; Live interaction.

1. Preparation & Scoping

First, you will have a call with the auditor to test connectivity and agree on the online meeting tool to use for the live interaction. You can discuss any challenges regarding the accessibility of documentation and ask questions about the process during this call. Furthermore, you will agree on dates for the desktop review and for the live interaction.

2. Document Collection

After the scoping call, the auditor will contact you via e-mail and provide you with an audit preparation letter as you would normally receive during a regular onsite audit. This letter contains a list of documents and materials you are asked to prepare for your remote audit and send to the auditor within a defined period of time.

3. Desktop review

On the agreed date of the Desktop review, the auditor will review all documentation you have provided. The audit preparation letter also defines who within your organisation might be contacted by the auditor in order to clarify potential questions on the day. As such, please ensure that the contact persons are all available on the date of the desktop review.

4. Live interaction

On a previously agreed date and time, you will reconnect with the FLOCERT auditor via the online meeting tool. Similar to regular onsite audits, there will be a formal opening meeting where the auditor will share the agenda of the meeting with you. The auditor will then triangulate findings from the desktop review and interviews and check the remaining points from the audit checklist. The auditor will explain the audit findings and ask you to sign the closing report. Please note, the follow-up process after the audit remains unchanged.

How much time should we reserve for this new remote audit procedure? Your time investment for the remote audit will be approximately as follows:

- 1 hour for the preparation and scoping call
- (x hours) To collect documents and send them to the auditor within a defined timeline
- 4 hours for the desktop review (*you only need to be on stand-by if the auditor has questions*);
- 4 hours for the live interaction.

These steps are meant to be completed within a time period of 4 weeks.

Please note that the above are only approximations and the real time efforts may differ from case to case.

1.3 During a remote audit, will FLOCERT audit against the full regular audit checklist?

The remote audit involves a reduced set of criteria and only includes those requirements where compliance of requirement can be assessed through documentary evidence. Requirements that can only be audited physically - e.g. through field visits or members/ worker interviews - are not included in the remote audit.

1.4 Will all Fairtrade audits be converted into remote audits?

For traders, all audits may be converted into a remote audit. For producers, wherever possible FLOCERT will offer remote audits with a limited scope and as approved by Fairtrade International. We will also defer audits where remote auditing is not an option. Our certification analysts will inform producer organisations whether their audit will be postponed or carried out remotely.

1.5 According to the audit preparation letter, we are supposed to send many documents. This is challenging. How can we best organise this?

Before sending the audit preparation letter, the auditor will edit the list of required documents in accordance with the audit scope and to such an extent that you will only need to submit the most vital documents.

Please, consider the following when putting together the documentation:

1. Name the documents clearly (instead of sending "scan1", "scan2").
2. Put all documents related to a sampled transaction into one file (i.e. Fairtrade contract, invoice, proof of payment). The related documents could be scanned in one go, or put into one (zipped) folder.
3. Emails may not exceed the maximum size of 20MB, rather split the documents into several smaller-sized emails.

Please note that the auditor needs to receive the requested documentation, at the latest, one week before the date of the desktop review.

1.6 If our audit is to be postponed, when should we expect to have the next onsite audit? What can we do in the interim?

This is currently unclear, but rest assured that as soon as the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic allows for onsite audits, a FLOCERT auditor will be in touch with you to program your upcoming Fairtrade audit. In the meantime, you should continue assessing and tackling the challenges your organisation might face at the next audit.

1.7 For producer organisations: How will you carry out the interviews? How many participants from our side are required for the remote audit?

The remote audit is based primarily on the review of documents. Your auditor will send you an audit preparation letter in which the auditor will not only let you know which documents you are required to send, but also who the interview partners are that need to be available for a live interaction in order to clarify open questions. The interviews will basically take place with representatives of your organisation. Members and/or workers will only be interviewed on occasion during a remote audit.

1.8 After a remote audit, will the next onsite audit require more effort and time invested from our side?

No, the next onsite audit will not be extended or prolonged, therefore you will not have additional preparation or onsite time for the next onsite audit.

1.9 During the last audit at my producer organisation, the auditor also collected additional information for the CODImpact survey. How will this be done for remote audits?

The data collected through the CODImpact survey on a voluntary basis provides important information for the Fairtrade system to understand its impact and serves to develop marketing information to increase Fairtrade sales. During onsite audits, it would be the auditor collecting this information. For remote audits, we kindly ask producer organisations to fill in the CODImpact questionnaire. When your auditor sends you the audit preparation letter, he or she will also include the CODImpact questionnaire and a consent to release form as Microsoft Word documents. Please complete this questionnaire and form and send them back to your auditor. If you have any questions during this process the auditor will be happy to give you guidance.

2 Impact on our Fairtrade certification

2.1 Will this change in operations affect the validity of my Fairtrade certificate?

The validity of your Fairtrade certificate will not be affected. Should your certificate warrant a renewal audit, and in your case this can't take place remotely, your FLOCERT certification analyst will contact you to ensure that your certificate remains valid while the renewal process is ongoing.

2.2 Our country is on lockdown, and we may not go to our office buildings to prepare for the audit. What should we do?

Should this be the case, please inform the auditor accordingly during the preparation and scoping call. If you don't have access to the documents required for the remote audit, the remote audit obviously cannot take place. Your audit will then be postponed until you have access to the documents, or until an onsite audit can be conducted.

2.3 What happens if we don't manage to send all required documents to the auditor on time?

We highly recommend being as transparent as possible regarding the reasons why the requested documents were not submitted. If the COVID-19 situation makes it impossible for you to provide information for an audit, please raise that as soon as possible in the remote auditing process and provide evidence as to why it is not possible. It will then be decided whether the deadline be extended, or whether the remote audit be postponed or cancelled completely. If there is no clear evidence and/or collaborative attitude from your side, with no reason provided for the delays, this may be considered a major non-compliance regarding "You accept announced and unannounced audits at your premises, including subcontracted premises, and provide all requested information needed to demonstrate compliance with the Fairtrade standards."

2.4 Our Fairtrade certification is currently suspended. A follow-up audit is supposed to happen during the suspension period. What happens now?

If you are suspended due to non-conformities and the verification is supposed to happen with a Follow-up audit, and as we are unable to go on site, FLOCERT will allow you to demonstrate compliance by means of specific documentary evidence. The onus is on you to provide as much evidence as possible to clear all pending non-conformities. Upon the successful evaluation thereof, FLOCERT will then lift the suspension. If documentary compliance cannot be verified properly, further extensions to the suspension period may be decided upon and a follow-up audit might be scheduled at a later date (where compliance with the pending non-conformities will be double-checked and verified).

2.5 For producer organisations: Due to the pandemic we cannot hold our General Assembly. Will this be a non-compliance in the next audit?

No non-compliance will be issued if you provide all relevant evidence to the auditor to demonstrate the reasons for the cancellation and rescheduling of the General Assembly.

2.6 For producer organisations: Do we have more flexibility in terms of decision making on Premium use?

There is indeed more flexibility given with regards to the decision making on premium use, as the pandemic is considered an unexpected event. If the organization identifies Premium investments to minimize the spread of the disease and/or to mitigate any potential negative effects on farmers, workers and their communities, it is possible to make these Premium investments without prior GA approval. Changes in the Fairtrade Development Plan need to be documented. Once a General Assembly of members is possible, the management of the organization needs to explain the changes and ratify the Premium use retroactively.

2.7 For producer organisations: After remote initial audits, will we receive a normal Fairtrade certificate?

If you are a new customer and have had a remote initial audit, you will first receive a Permission to Trade letter which allows you to trade under Fairtrade terms. This Permission to Trade will remain valid until a full onsite audit has been conducted at your premises, and all elements of the Fairtrade Standards have been assessed. Only then will the Fairtrade Certificate be issued.

If major non-conformities are identified during the initial remote audit which cannot be credibly resolved in the remote corrective measure process, no Permission to Trade letter will be issued. A follow-up onsite audit is then scheduled as soon as it is once again possible.

3 Technical challenges

3.1 What should we do if we cannot hold the audit remotely due to technical problems such as bad internet connection and/or missing technology?

Of course, technology, and especially a stable internet connection that allows for a transfer of documents and information, is key for the remote audit to take place. In the preparation and scoping call with the auditor, please raise and discuss all challenges you might face in this regard. Generally, different options to perform



the remote audit are possible: The live interaction with the auditor is ideally done via a web-based audio or video tool. In case teleconferencing is not possible due to a poor internet connection, a live interaction via telephone is an option or even via an instant e-mail exchange on an agreed date. The auditor will always try to accommodate your preferred option. If the auditor realises that none of the above options is realistic, we may need to postpone the remote audit. This decision will then be conveyed to you.

3.2 What happens if we have connectivity, or other issues on the date of the audit or during the audit that prevent us from completing the process? Will this be a non-conformity? Will we be suspended?

No, you will not be suspended or even sanctioned if you have valid reasons why the audit couldn't be realised or finalised. Depending on the situation, you might need to repeat the exercise. Our process allows for this flexibility and our auditors are aware of this requirement.