
Fairtrade International Recognition SOP

Version 1.0

Approved by the Standards Committee on March 20, 2024



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1 Introduction

This document regulates how Fairtrade International will engage with other sustainability schemes, either voluntary or regulatory, in recognition agreements.

The development of this procedure responds to the call from our stakeholders to cooperate and work together with other schemes in order to reduce duplications and be more efficient and effective in the pursuit of our mission.

This procedure belongs to Fairtrade International, but it is made available for public use. Other schemes are encouraged to use it adapting it to their own needs.

2 Scope

Who can be recognized?

Any sustainability scheme can request recognition. Fairtrade senior management shall evaluate this request on a case-by-case basis, assessing costs and benefits of the process and expected outcome, and decide unilaterally if the recognition process shall be initiated or not at a given point in time. This decision can be revised in future.

This policy does not apply in cases when the recognition is part of a new Fairtrade Standard development or part of a Fairtrade Standard review and when there is no Fairtrade Standard requirement in the topic of the recognition.

3 Ownership of this procedure

The Standards Committee, upon recommendation from the Oversight Committee, approves and shall periodically review this procedure.

Change history

Version number	Date of publication	Changes
1.0	July 2024	First version of the procedure approved by the Fairtrade International Standards Committee

4 Normative documents

The following documents contain provisions which, through reference in this text, become part of this Fairtrade International Recognition Procedure:

- [All Fairtrade Standards](#)
- [Fairtrade International Requirements for Assurance Providers](#)
- [Fairtrade International Requirements for Licensing Bodies](#)
- [Fairtrade International Oversight Procedure](#)
- [Fairtrade International Exceptions Policy](#)

- [ISEAL's Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems](#)
- Recognition Work Instruction (available on request)

5 General requirements

Contracts:

Any recognition agreement shall be regulated by a contract between Fairtrade International and the recognized scheme.

The contract regulates the rights and responsibilities of both parties, including but not limited to, external communications, data and information gathering and sharing, support to clients, confidentiality, financial matters and other topics stipulated in this SOP.

The contract shall include reasons for termination, dispute resolution mechanism, and relevant jurisdiction.

The type and scope of recognition granted shall be clearly stated in the contract.

Fairtrade International and the recognized scheme shall in turn sign relevant contracts with the certification bodies they use that will enable the implementation of the recognition agreement, including sharing of confidential and non-confidential data.

Type of recognition:

There are two types of recognition agreements in Fairtrade:

- **Certificate acceptance:** if certificates from the recognized scheme are fully or partly accepted this means that the recognized standard (or part of it) is removed from Fairtrade active scope of certification. Compliance with the recognized standard (and hence with Fairtrade standard or part of it) is evaluated and decided by the recognized scheme.
- **Declaration of equivalency:** if equivalency is declared with other scheme that is either based or not based on certification, the recognized standard (or part of it) remains to be actively audited and assessed for certification purpose. Fairtrade still makes a conformity decision but the outputs of these schemes (certificate, audit reports, verification results, or other) are used as a solid indicator that the applicable Fairtrade standard (or part of it) is complied with. This can reduce audit and review time, as well as efforts to demonstrate compliance.

In both cases Fairtrade International's assurance providers reserves its right to unilaterally cancel or withdraw a Fairtrade certificate that is granted based on a recognized certificate or disregard a declaration of equivalency at any moment should non-conformities be found or should there appear to be a significant breakdown in the assurance process of the recognized scheme.

Scope of recognition:

The scope defines:

- The Fairtrade standard(s) for which recognition is granted
- The recognized scheme standard(s) recognized.
- Whether this recognition is full (all Fairtrade Standard) or partial (only some sections in the Fairtrade Standard).
- Scope of operator(s), product(s) and geographical scope.

- The assurance providers that are included in the recognition (all, all with specific exclusions, or only specific assurance providers).

Use of the Fairtrade Marks and claims:

A recognition agreement shall not transfer the responsibility to approve the use of the Fairtrade Marks or claims related to Fairtrade, which shall remain the responsibility of the National Fairtrade Organizations or Fairtrade International.

Public information:

Fairtrade International shall make public the recognition agreements it has, specifying the type and scope of such agreements.

6 Procedural requirements to reach recognition

Process: The process to reach a recognition decision and implement it shall follow a defined documented process as described in the Recognition Work Instruction.

This process shall include the launch of a specific project for the recognition process, with a project manager and a project team with competent representatives of both organizations who are committed to dedicate the necessary time and resources for the adequate development of the project.

Assessment: A recognition decision shall be reached based on an analysis of the assessed scheme. Analysis shall be based on the review of evidence. The review of evidence shall include a desktop review and at least one onsite assessment to corroborate that the presented evidence corresponds to the reality of practices.

There are four aspects of the assessed scheme that shall be analyzed:

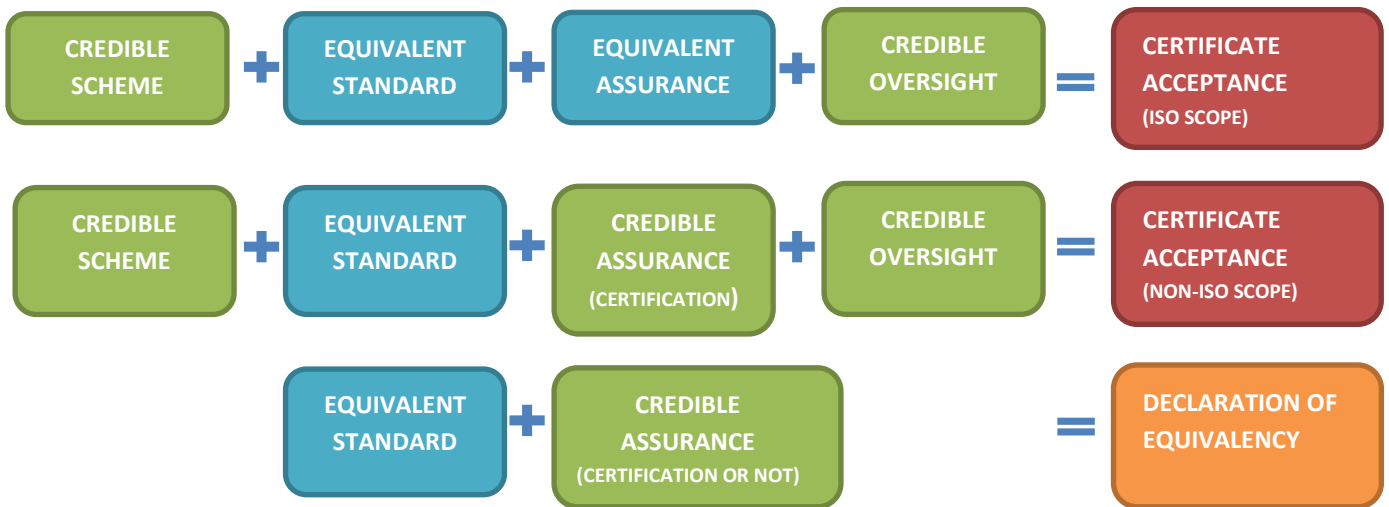
- The **scheme overall credibility**: this means that the assessed scheme as such follows ISEAL credibility principles for voluntary sustainability schemes.
- The **equivalence of the standard** under recognition: this means the intention and content of the assessed standard whilst not be equal to Fairtrade is sufficiently similar as to consider them equivalent.
- The **corresponding assurance model equivalence or credibility**: equivalency here means that the assurance model used whilst not being equal to Fairtrade assurance model described in the Requirements for Assurance Providers is sufficiently similar as to consider them equivalent. Credibility of assurance means that despite the assurance models being different, they are considered robust as they comply with the ISEAL Assurance Code.
- The **credibility of the oversight** used: this means that the oversight used is fully robust and therefore Fairtrade's oversight can rely on their conclusions without having to apply their own oversight. This is demonstrated by using a national or international accreditation body. If this is not the case Fairtrade's own oversight needs to be applied to the recognized scheme to consider it credible.

Link between type of recognition and assessments:

The different types of recognition shall be limited to certain type of assessments:

- Recognition of certificate that is under the scope of FLOCERT ISO 17065 accreditation: the scheme shall be credible, the standard shall be equivalent, the assurance model shall also be equivalent and the oversight shall be credible

- Recognition of certificate for a Fairtrade Standard that is not under the scope of FLOCERT ISO 17065 accreditation: the scheme shall be credible, the standard shall be equivalent, the assurance model shall be credible and the oversight shall also be credible
- Declaration of equivalency: the standard shall be equivalent and the assurance shall be credible.



Recognition of certificates shall be limited to schemes based on certification only. Declaration of equivalency is open to schemes based on certification or other type of assurance.

Assessment methodology:

Sustainability schemes are hardly ever identical and looking for absolute alignment of every requirement in both schemes will render all recognition impossible, defeating the purpose of this procedure. For this reason, Fairtrade International have developed a methodology for assessment that has the purpose of identifying when two schemes are close enough to consider them equivalent, rather than equal.

In order to draw conclusions on the following methodologies for benchmarking shall be used:

- **Option 1:** The Standard or assurance models are translated into principles. Principles are the essence of a group of requirements that share the same distinctive objective and cover the same topic. Principles are developed considering that each one of them shall be met in the assessed scheme.

Principles are compared side by side with the assessed scheme requirements and the equivalency status is given one of the following scores:

- 1- Not at all equivalent – the principle does not exist in the assessed scheme or contradicts the Fairtrade principle.
- 2- Not sufficiently equivalent – there are fundamental differences between the requirement in the assessed scheme and the Fairtrade principle.
- 3- Sufficiently equivalent – there are differences but only procedural (how the principle is achieved)
- 4- Fully equivalent – there are no differences or these are superficial (how they are expressed)
- 5- More than equivalent – the assessed scheme requirement goes beyond the Fairtrade principle.

In order to be considered equivalent each one of the principles shall score 3 or above or be excluded from the recognition agreement.

Only in very particular situations, where mission and purpose of objective is given priority, average scores can be used to guide judgement calls about compensation of some principles with others.

- **Option 2:** The Fairtrade standard and/or assurance model requirements are grouped in subsections. Depending on the case each subsection will have one or several requirements, depending on what Fairtrade considers essential, where no averages are possible.

Each Fairtrade requirement is compared side by side with the requirement in the assessed scheme and the equivalency status is given one of the following scores:

- 1- Not at all equivalent – the requirement does not exist in the assessed scheme or contradicts the Fairtrade requirement.
- 2- Not sufficiently equivalent – there are fundamental differences between the requirement in the assessed scheme and in the Fairtrade scheme.
- 3- Sufficiently equivalent – there are differences but only procedural (how the requirement is achieved)
- 4- Fully equivalent – there are no differences or these are superficial (how they are expressed)
- 5- More than equivalent – the assessed scheme requirement goes beyond the Fairtrade requirement.

The scores of all requirements in a subsection are averaged to obtain an average score. In order to be considered equivalent the calculated average score of each subsection shall be 3 or above or be excluded from the recognition agreement.

Cases when assessment is unnecessary:

If the assessed scheme is a full ISEAL member and therefore needs to comply with the same membership rules as Fairtrade, the scheme shall be automatically considered to be a “credible scheme” and to have an “equivalent assurance” without further assessment. Standard and oversight aspects of recognition still need to be evaluated.

If the assessed scheme is accredited by a national (operating under IAF agreements) or international accreditation body, its oversight shall be considered credible without further assessment.

Fairtrade International shall still maintain the right to exclude from recognition specific assurance providers of the assessed scheme based on evidence regarding their reliability.

Judgement calls:

The results of the methodologies used for the conclusions shall guide the recommendations for decision but shall not be used as the only parameter. Fairtrade International may qualify these conclusions and make positive or negative judgement calls based on the on equivalency of objectives of the Fairtrade standard and of the assessed standard. Any judgement call shall be properly justified and recorded.

Decision making:

In order to enable a final decision, four recommendations are made:

- The **S&P Director**: shall make a recommendation on the credibility of **scheme**
- The **OC**: shall make recommendations on equivalency or credibility of both **assurance** and **oversight**
- The **SC**: shall make a recommendation on equivalency of **standard**.

The SC shall make an overall and final decision based on the four recommendations. The SC shall justify this decision which shall be minuted.

Decision outcomes:

The SC shall take one of the following decisions:

- Assessed scheme is fully recognized.
- Assessed scheme is partly recognized, listing the sections that are included and excluded from the recognition.
- Assessed scheme is not recognized.

In all decisions the type of recognition and its scope shall be made explicit.

7 Recognition maintenance process

Recognized schemes shall provide reports, data and requested information as defined by Fairtrade International.

Recognized schemes shall communicate without delay changes in their respective schemes and define if this affects the recognition agreement and take corresponding actions.

The effectiveness of the recognition agreement shall periodically reviewed by Fairtrade and amendments shall be made as necessary.

Fairtrade reserves the right to cancel the recognition agreement shall it be proven ineffective or shall it be considered damaging to Fairtrade's mission or credibility.

8 Allegations and complaints

Fairtrade International and their assurance providers shall extend their allegation and complaints mechanisms to include the possibility to log complaints and allegations against a recognition agreement and against a client under recognition.

Allegations and complaints against a recognition agreement are investigated and followed up by Fairtrade International.

Allegations and complaints presented against a client under recognition are transferred to the recognized scheme allegations and complaints mechanism are followed up by the recognized scheme which shall maintain Fairtrade International informed on the follow up of said allegation.

Fairtrade International and their assurance providers shall also log complaints and/or allegations to the recognized scheme allegations and complaints mechanism should they encounter a potential violation of the recognized scheme rules by any client under recognition.

The recognized scheme shall communicate to Fairtrade international any allegation presented on the compliance of any of their clients under recognition and keep Fairtrade International informed on the follow up of said allegation.

Depending upon the nature of the complaint, or the way it is dealt with, Fairtrade may decide to take action which would change or amend the agreement on recognition if it appeared that there was a significant breakdown in the assurance process. Fairtrade International's assurance provider reserve their right to unilaterally cancel or withdraw a Fairtrade certificate based on a recognized certificate or disregard a declaration of equivalency at any moment.

9 Exceptions and variations

Recognized schemes shall refer to and follow Fairtrade International Exceptions procedure to grant exceptions against the standards (or part of them) under recognition. All exceptions granted shall be reported to Fairtrade International.

Fairtrade International may approve variations to this procedure in writing if it can be demonstrated that the variation meets the intent in an equivalent way and this variation better serves Fairtrade's mission.

Annex 1: Specific procedure for mutual recognition of certificates within Fairtrade

Fairtrade International Requirements for Assurance Providers require that all Fairtrade’s approved assurance providers need to accept each other’s certificates and they have to recognise other schemes that have been accepted by Fairtrade International in line with the Recognition SOP.

Requirements for Assurance Providers V2.1

‘2.1.4 The assurance provider recognizes certificates issued by other Fairtrade International approved assurance providers, as applicable and if possible, under the regulations set by the respective accreditation body.

2.1.5 The assurance provider recognizes other schemes that have been accepted by Fairtrade International, in accordance to Fairtrade International Recognition SOP and listed in Annex A, as applicable and if possible under the regulations set by the respective accreditation body.’

The justification for this requirement is aligned with the rationale in the Recognition SOP where four levels of assessment are described for certificate acceptance. For mutual recognition of Fairtrade certificates this assessment shall be done in the following way:

Credible scheme: all current Fairtrade assurance providers, despite being different and independent organizations, belong to the same voluntary standard system, with a common mission, vision and theory of change. Fairtrade International membership with ISEAL implies all Fairtrade members adhering to and complying with applicable Codes of ISEAL. Therefore, this level of equivalency is considered to be met without further assessment.

Equivalent standard: all Fairtrade assurance providers use the same Fairtrade International Standards, therefore the equivalency is automatic without further assessment.

Equivalent assurance: all Fairtrade assurance providers need to comply with the same scheme rules which are the Requirements for Assurance Providers that include compliance with ISO17065. Therefore, the equivalency is automatic without further assessment.

Credible oversight: all Fairtrade assurance providers are under the oversight as described in the Oversight Procedure. Therefore, the level and credibility of oversight that is required by Fairtrade by all assurance providers is the same and doesn't need further assessment.

Section 5 of the Recognition SOP shall be applied to the internal recognition of certificates within Fairtrade International in the following way:

5 General requirements
Contracts:
Fairtrade International shall sign relevant contracts with the assurance providers under the scheme that will enable the implementation of the recognition agreement, including sharing of data.

Section 8 of the Recognition SOP shall be applied to the internal recognition of certificates within Fairtrade International in the following way:

8 Allegations and complaints

Fairtrade assurance providers shall extend their allegation and complaints mechanisms to include the possibility to log complaints against other assurance providers and against the client of other assurance provider.

Allegations and complaints against another assurance provider shall be transferred to Fairtrade International that will manage them according to the Oversight procedure.

Allegations presented against the client of other assurance provider are transferred to the other assurance provider allegations and complaints mechanism to be followed up by the other assurance provider. The assurance provider that originally received the allegation shall be maintained informed of the process so they can in turn report back to the party that presented the allegation.

All assurance providers shall also log allegations into other assurance provider allegations mechanism should they encounter a potential violation of the Fairtrade Standard by any client of the other assurance provider.

If the assurance provider that receives the allegation does not respond appropriately in form or time, the assurance provider that presented the allegation can decide not to accept the certificate in question. The Oversight Committee needs to be informed so it can act to enforce compliance with the Requirements for Assurance Providers to the assurance provider that is not responding adequately.

All assurance providers reserve their right to unilaterally cancel or withdraw a recognized certificate at any moment should there be sustained evidence that the client does not comply with the Fairtrade standard and/or that there has been significant breakdown in the assurance process.

In the event of disputes between assurance providers Fairtrade International is brought into the matter to determine the correct interpretation of the Standard or rules that creates the controversy.