



Public System Report



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1. Introduction

Fairtrade International is a non-profit, multi-stakeholder association responsible for setting Fairtrade Standards and owning the FAIRTRADE Marks. The Fairtrade system brings together three regional producer networks, over 25 national Fairtrade organisations, and Fairtrade International itself, governed by a General Assembly and Board of Directors. Producers hold 50% of the vote at the General Assembly — the highest decision-making body — and are represented on the Board of Directors and Standards Committee. Approximately 2 million small farmers and workers in 68 countries benefit from over 37,000 Fairtrade-certified products sold globally.

Two complementary systems underpin Fairtrade's Theory of Change:

- **Assurance & Oversight** — ensures all supply chain actors meet Fairtrade Standards; provides the credibility and accountability of the certification and licensing system.
- **Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL)** — tracks the external impacts of Fairtrade's interventions on farmers, workers, and markets.

This report covers both systems. Sections 2–4 address Assurance and Oversight; Sections 5–6 address the MEL system.

2. Oversight System

Fairtrade International, as scheme owner, is responsible for the Fairtrade Assurance and Licensing Programme. Oversight is managed through a multi-stakeholder Oversight Committee (OC), whose responsibilities are defined in its [Terms of Reference](#). The OC is a subcommittee of, and accountable to, the [Fairtrade Standards Committee](#). It decides on the regulations governing the Assurance and Licensing programme and evaluates its effectiveness on a regular basis.

2.1 How oversight works

Assurance Providers must comply with the Requirements for Assurance Providers (RAPs); Licensing Bodies must comply with the Requirements for Licensing Bodies (RLBs). Compliance is verified through a combination of desktop reviews of sampled certification outputs and audits conducted by independent auditors. Assessment cycles are three years for Assurance Providers and four years for Licensing Bodies.

Based on the OC's declaration of conformity, Assurance Providers and Licensing Bodies are (re-)approved by Fairtrade International's Executive Management Team. Unresolved non-conformities or unwillingness to follow the Oversight Procedure can result in withdrawal of the right to provide certification or licensing services.



The OC is committed to continuous improvement and regularly reviews the programme to ensure it remains fit for purpose. It monitors specific assurance and licensing issues for effectiveness and consistency and undertakes structured learning activities to drive improvement.

Fairtrade International acts as its own scheme oversight body — not a third-party accreditation body. However, the RAPs are closely aligned with both the ISEAL Assurance Code and ISO/IEC 17065. FLOCERT, Fairtrade's largest assurance provider, holds accreditation against ISO/IEC 17065 from the German Accreditation Body [DAkkS](#).

2.2 Stakeholder Participation

Stakeholders can engage with the Oversight mechanism in four ways:

- Through their nominated representative on the Oversight Committee
- By providing input during consultations
- Through the allegation and complaints system
- Via general feedback to the dedicated email channel (see Contacts section)

The OC handles second-instance complaints. Complaints and allegations are first submitted to the relevant Assurance Provider or Licensing Body (whose procedures are publicly available). If the outcome is unsatisfactory, the matter can be escalated to Fairtrade International as second instance.

3. Assurance Programme

The Fairtrade assurance programme covers all Fairtrade Standards. Fairtrade operates with a limited number of approved assurance providers — a strategic decision to ensure mission alignment, reduce risk, and maintain accessibility for users.

Current approved assurance providers:

- **Producer certification and traders in producing countries:** FLOCERT (globally)
- **Trader certification in consuming countries:** FLOCERT (globally, except Japan) and Fairtrade Label Japan (Japan only).

3.1 Audit Methodology

Fairtrade uses third-party audits and certification as the basis for its assessment methodology. Initial, renewal, and unannounced audits are generally on-site. Remote audits may be used for surveillance and follow-up of non-conformities, or under special circumstances where auditor safety cannot be guaranteed.



Assurance providers must develop a risk management system to determine audit frequency. The following factors increase an operator's risk profile:

- High Fairtrade Premium amounts received or paid
- High traded volumes
- Complex structures or ongoing structural changes
- A high number of non-conformities, including major non-compliances and allegations
- New products or complex trade chains

Minimum audit requirements are: an initial audit before certification; renewal audits every three years; and one surveillance audit within each certification cycle (three years for producers; five years for traders). The Trader audit programme also includes remote and digital checks. Full details on audit frequency and type are set out in the Fairtrade Risk Based Assurance Policy (part of the RAPs).

Audits are normally conducted by one qualified auditor matched to the client's scope. Audit teams with a designated team leader may be used at the assurance provider's discretion for higher-risk or complex audits.

3.2 Compliance Criteria and Standards

The Fairtrade Standards and Fairtrade Compliance Criteria provide the basis for consistent compliance assessment. Assurance providers must apply a consistent set of Compliance Criteria to ensure requirements are checked as intended. Non-conformity with a compliance criterion is treated as non-conformity with the corresponding standard requirement.

Major	Linked to a core Fairtrade Principle. Non-conformity may lead to suspension of certification.
Core	Required for certification. All operators must meet core criteria to be certified.
Development	Addresses continuous improvement. Compliance is assessed against a minimum average score, requiring operators to demonstrate ongoing progress.

Compliance with Fairtrade Standards is defined as: producers meeting all Core requirements and a minimum score for Development criteria; traders meeting all Core requirements. Compliance criteria use a five-rank scale to support consistent interpretation by auditors, and the [list is publicly available](#) and updated regularly.

Where non-conformities are identified, operators must take corrective action within a set timeframe. Failure to do so, or major non-conformities, may result in suspension or withdrawal of certification, as set out in Fairtrade International's Sanctions Policy (Annex D of the RAPs).



Note: The Fairtrade Small Producer Standard applies to a producer group as an organisation — not to individual members — so group assessment is not applicable.

3.3 Personnel Competence

All personnel involved in certification — including auditors — must meet the qualification, competency, and personal attribute criteria defined in the RAPs. Assurance providers must verify qualifications before engagement and periodically assess whether competency criteria continue to be met, including through on-the-job evaluation. Periodic training and calibration programmes are in place for auditors and other assurance personnel.

Personnel involved in authorising use of the FAIRTRADE Certification Mark must meet equivalent criteria set out in the RLBs, including relevant work experience, language and communication skills, and knowledge of the Fairtrade system. Competency requirements for Oversight Committee members and assurance personnel at Fairtrade International are described in the OC Terms of Reference and the Oversight Procedure.

4. License and Mark Use

The FAIRTRADE Certification Mark signals that a product has been produced and traded in compliance with Fairtrade's social, economic, and environmental standards. Licensing governs which organisations may use the Mark on finished products and promotional materials, and on what terms.

To use the Certification Mark, an operator must be either a Fairtrade Certified Operator or a Fairtrade Verified Operator and must have entered into a royalty-bearing agreement with Fairtrade International or a National Fairtrade Organisation. Fairtrade Verified Operators must obtain prior written approval confirming that the product composition meets Trader Standard requirements and that the artwork complies with Mark use guidelines.

Inadequate or inappropriate use of the FAIRTRADE Marks may result in a non-conformity, suspension, or withdrawal of certification, depending on severity. It can also lead to cancellation of the licensing agreement and, where necessary, legal action.

5. Theory of Change

Fairtrade's Theory of Change (ToC) is the conceptual foundation of the MEL system. It articulates how Fairtrade's interventions — across producer support, market engagement, standards, and programmes — lead to outputs, outcomes, and long-term impacts for producers, workers, and supply chain actors.



The ToC serves four critical functions within the MEL system:

- **Strategic alignment:** Ensures that the strategy, projects, and programmes are organised around a shared logic of change.
- **Indicator selection:** Strategy KPIs are aligned with the ToC to focus monitoring on meaningful changes along the impact pathway.
- **Learning and assumption testing:** Monitoring and evaluation findings are interpreted through the ToC, enabling GI to validate or challenge underlying assumptions.
- **Communication and transparency:** The digital ToC translates complex impact pathways into accessible narratives for internal and external audiences.

The digital Theory of Change is available at [fairtrade.net](https://www.fairtrade.net).

6. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning System

The Global Impact (GI) team designs, governs, and maintains the MEL system: a comprehensive, organisation-wide framework that supports strategy delivery, accountability, and continuous learning. The system integrates five interconnected components.

6.1 Monitoring

The monitoring system provides continuous, structured data on performance across the strategy. It comprises:

- **A Strategy KPI and Metric Framework** tracking outcomes across system alignment, health, impact, and strategy achievement, in line with the ToC.
- **Programme and project-level MEL frameworks** enabling aggregation from project to programme to strategy level.
- **Monitoring platforms** including TolaData, Power BI dashboards, and the Global Indicator Library, ensuring standardisation, comparability, and accessibility of data.

Together, these elements provide the quantitative backbone for tracking progress and enabling consistent reporting across the system.

6.2 Evaluation and Research

GI defines and stewards the evaluation agenda in consultation with stakeholders and strategic initiative leads. Evaluations generate deeper qualitative and quantitative evidence on what works, for whom, and under what conditions — including analysis of attribution and contribution to strategic outcomes. They complement monitoring data and test key assumptions in the ToC.



Academic and external partnerships extend the organisation’s analytical capacity, providing access to cutting-edge methodologies, shared data collection, and broader evidence bases. GI ensures that all evaluations – including those led by external partners – align with the strategy, use consistent methodologies, and are structured around expected pathways of change. This maintains quality, comparability, and coherence of findings to support informed decision-making.

6.3 Learning and Adaptation

Structured learning processes translate monitoring and evaluation evidence into strategic decisions and organisational adaptation. These include biannual leadership sessions, deep-dive briefs, and workshops that synthesise findings into key recommendations and strategic implications. GI designs and facilitates these processes to support reflection, adaptive management, and continuous improvement.

6.4 Programme and Project MEL

GI develops MEL frameworks and Theories of Change for system-wide programmes, including the Global Sustainable Product Programmes and the Living Income Programme. Through the Global Indicator Library and TolaData, GI ensures that project-level data is standardised, comparable, and can be aggregated to programme and strategy level, enabling a coherent view of Fairtrade’s collective impact.

6.5 Standards-related Evidence

GI contributes to the Standards development, implementation, and review cycle by providing evidence interpretation, synthesis, and learning. This ensures that Standards decisions are grounded in well-interpreted, systematically documented evidence rather than selective or inconsistent use of data, strengthening the link between evidence and the continuous improvement of Fairtrade Standards.

6.6 Digital Evidence Platforms

The MEL system is supported by five digital platforms managed by GI, spanning public-facing tools and internal systems:

Platform		
Impact Platform	Public	Interactive dashboards with global, regional, product-specific and country-level data; map of Fairtrade projects and studies. Used for communications, advocacy, commercial partnerships and education.



<u>Digital Theory of Change</u>	Public	Visual, interactive platform for exploring Fairtrade's Theory of Change, impact pathways and programme logic. Supports education, communications and impact research.
Research Hub	Internal	Repository of evaluations and studies on Fairtrade's impact. Used for commercial engagement, impact research, communications and advocacy.
FairLearn	Internal	E-learning platform enabling capacity building for impact across the Fairtrade system.
TolaData	Internal	Project monitoring and management tool. Supports project cycle management and aggregation of monitoring data to understand the collective impact of Fairtrade projects.

Together, these platforms ensure that Fairtrade's evidence is accessible, transparent, and used consistently across the system.

7. Contacts and Further Resources

MEL and Impact

Published monitoring reports, evaluation reports, and the evidence map are available on the [Impact](#) and [Research](#) pages of the Fairtrade website as well as [Fairtrade's Theory of Change](#) and the [evidence map study 2.0](#) that informed the updates and evaluation of Fairtrade's outcomes against our theory of change. For queries about the MEL system, contact impact@fairtrade.net.

Assurance and Oversight

Key assurance documents are available on the [Assurance webpage](#), including the [Oversight Procedure](#), [Requirements for Assurance Providers](#), [Requirements for Licensing Bodies](#), and the [Oversight Committee Terms of Reference](#). For further inquiries, contact assurance@fairtrade.net.