

# Complaint and Appeal Handling Procedures

**Version: 2**

**Revision Date: 17.07.2025**

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## 1. Purpose

To establish a transparent and effective process for managing **complaints** and **appeals** related to **STEP UP Certification** activities, ensuring impartiality, fairness, and continual improvement.

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## 2. Definitions

### **Complaint:**

A **formal expression of dissatisfaction** by a stakeholder, client, applicant, or interested party regarding the organization's activities, decisions, or procedures, seeking resolution or redress. Complaints may concern delays, perceived unfair treatment, or procedural errors.

### **Appeal:**

A request made by a client, applicant, or stakeholder to **challenge a certification or recertification decision** made by STEP UP Certification. An appeal addresses **disagreements with the certification outcome** or with the certification process and seeks a review of that decision.

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## 3. Complaint and Appeal Registration

All complaints and appeals are **registered in a dedicated record document** maintained by the organization. This register captures key details such as dates, parties involved, summary of issues, and status. All entries are kept confidential and retained for a minimum of **10 years**.

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## 4. General Principles

- Complaints and appeals are handled **promptly, fairly, and impartially**.
- The process shall ensure **confidentiality** and **impartiality**.



- The review of **complaints and appeals** shall be conducted **by personnel or committees that are independent** from assessment and certification processes, to ensure impartiality and objectivity.
  - The organization commits to provide **a response to the complainant or appellant within 20 working days** from receipt of the complaint or appeal.
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## **5. Process**

### **5.1. Receipt of Complaint or Appeal**

- Complaints and appeals must be submitted in writing, clearly stating the issue, basis, and supporting evidence if applicable.
- A record (register) of complaints and appeals is maintained, capturing the date, stakeholder details, issue summary, and response status.

### **5.2. Acknowledgment**

- The recipient acknowledges receipt within **5 working days**.
- The acknowledgment explains the process, including that a response will be provided within **20 working days**.

### **5.3. Investigation / Review**

- The **Board Member** or a **designated independent body** reviews the complaint or appeal.
- The investigation includes examining all relevant evidence, records, and documentation.
- The review is **carried out by personnel or committees that are independent** from assessment and certification processes, to ensure impartiality and objectivity.
- The **review team** documents their findings in the complaint/appeal register and prepares a report.

### **5.4. Decision & Resolution**

- The **Board Member** reviews the **reviewer recommendations** and assessment report, and **makes the final decision**.
- The decision can be:



- Accept (corrective actions, apologies, or other resolutions).
- Reject (no basis or unfounded).
- Re-open or escalate if justified.
- The organization commits to **respond in writing within 20 working days** of receipt of complaint/appeal, informing about the decision and any corrective actions.

#### **5.5. Follow-up**

- Corrective actions or improvements resulting from the review are implemented.
- Further assessments or reviews are scheduled if needed.

#### **5.6. Recordkeeping**

- All complaint and appeal documentation, decisions, and correspondence are recorded in the register and retained for at least **10 years**.
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### **6. Response Time & Handling of Unfounded Complaints/Appeals**

- The organization aims to respond within **20 working days** from receipt.
  - Complaints or appeals deemed **frivolous or unfounded** after review may be rejected, with reasons provided to the complainant/applicant.
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### **7. Confidentiality & Impartiality**

- All activities are conducted with confidentiality.
  - The process ensures impartiality, conducted by personnel or committees that are independent of the assessment and certification activities.
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### **8. Scheme-specific Clauses**

#### **PEFC FM Ukraine**

All requirements set forth in clause 9.7 of ISO/IEC 17021-1 shall apply.

9.8.1 The certification body shall notify the Association NVFCS within 30 days of any appeals filed by the client.

## **PEFC FM Latvia**

Complaints and appeals related to the application of the Latvian National PEFC Forest Management Standard which cannot be resolved between the auditee and the certification body, or which are beyond the responsibility and competence of the certification body, are forwarded for examination to the association “PEFC Latvija”.

## **PEFC COC**

All the requirements given in clause 7.13 of ISO/IEC 17065:2012(E) apply.

The certification body shall notify the PEFC Council, within 30 days, of any substantiated claims of noncompliance with certification requirements by client organisations, or complaints against client organisations it receives or about which it becomes aware.

The certification body shall provide the PEFC Council and the corresponding PEFC National Governing Body with summary reports for resolved complaints and appeals against the PEFC certified client organisations received by the certification body, including at minimum:

- a) identification of the appellant/complainant (subject to disclosure)
- b) identification of the client organisation
- c) subject of the complaint
- d) summary of the complaint handling process
- e) outcome/resolution of the complaint

## **PEFC MDS**

STEP UP shall inform "PEFC Latvia" about all complaints and appeals related to the PEFC certification accreditation process submitted by the Certification organization to the accreditation body.

Disputes related to this Standard, its requirements, and application shall be resolved between the certification applicant or certificate holder and the certification organization, in accordance with the LVS EN 17021 standard — Conformity assessment. Requirements for bodies providing management system audits and certification, or LVS EN ISO/IEC 17065 —

Conformity assessment. Requirements for bodies certifying products, processes, and services.

If disputes concerning this Standard, its requirements, and application are not resolved between the certification applicant or certificate holder and the certification organization, they shall be submitted, along with all related information, to the "PEFC Latvia" association. The chairman of the "PEFC Latvia" board appoints a dispute resolution committee consisting of three members, which makes an appropriate decision that is binding on all parties involved in the dispute.