

General Rules for the Certification of Management Systems

1. GENERAL

Management system certification is the process through which a third party (certification body) evaluates the conformity of a management system with given requirements and if the conclusions of the evaluation are positive issues a certification document (usually a certificate) for the organization.

The general purpose of certification is to provide trust in the fact that a certain management system fulfils specified requirements. The value of certification is the degree of public confidence and trust that is established by an impartial and competent evaluation.

This document contains general rules for obtaining, maintaining and renewal of management system certification. Depending on the different management system certification schemes, supplementary rules may apply.

The responsibility for the conformity of the management system belongs exclusively to the organization. RIGCERT has the responsibility to assess objective evidence to base its certification decision.

2. CERTIFICATION PROCESS

2.1. APPLICATION AND CONTRACT

The MS (management system) certification process starts with the application for certification sent by any interested organization.

This document can be transmitted electronically or on paper format, directly to RIGCERT or through RIGCERT partners. The application provides information about the organization wishing to obtain certification and is needed for RIGCERT to make a suitable offer. Supplementary to the information provided in the application, RIGCERT may require other documents (usually documents needed to confirm the legality of the organization, its organizational structure and the activities it performs). Management system certification can be obtained only for activities that are performed by the organization and for which the organization is authorized to perform according to applicable legislation.

The information has to be provided by an authorized representative of the organization.

RIGCERT reviews the information from the application in order to define an audit programme for the certification of each client.

A certification offer is submitted to the client and if accepted, a certification contract is concluded.

2.2. INITIAL CERTIFICATION

Initial certification of the management system involves an audit performed in 2 stages – stage 1 audit and stage 2 audit.

The audit is performed by an audit team nominated by RIGCERT and communicated to the client before the audit. The client is entitled to challenge the composition of the audit team with justification and RIGCERT will replace the members of the audit team.

2.2.1. STAGE 1 AUDIT

Stage 1 audit is carried out in order to review the management system documentation and obtain necessary information about the client: location(s); processes and equipment; controls; legal and regulatory requirements, client's understanding certification requirements and preparedness for stage 2 audit.

Stage 1 is usually done at the location of the client and following its completion the audit team communicates to the client the aspects that might be classified as non-conformities in stage 2 audit if not addressed by the client.

The interval between stage 1 and stage 2 is agreed depending on the findings of stage 1. Results of stage 1 audit may lead to postponement or cancellation of stage 2.

2.2.2. STAGE 2 AUDIT

The purpose of stage 2 audit is to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the MS (management system).

The stage 2 audit is performed at the client's location(s).

The audit is done according to the stage 2 audit plan elaborated by the audit team and agreed with the client before the audit.

The audit includes an opening meeting at the start and a closing meeting at the end to present audit conclusions.

The audit team obtains information through various methods including interviews, observation of activities and analysis of documented information. Audit team is committed to preserve confidentiality of all information obtained during the audit. Client organizations are required to provide all needed information and support so that the audit process to be effective.

Nonconformities identified are classified into two categories: major and minor. Definition of nonconformities are included in the stage 2 audit plan.

The stage 2 audit report is elaborated after completion of the stage 2 audit activities and includes the proposal of the audit team regarding certification.

2.2.3 AUDIT TIME

Audit time is calculated in auditor days and includes time for planning, performing and reporting the audit.

The number of auditor days is calculated by RIGCERT depending on a series of factors (number of personnel, locations, activities, certification scheme) according to its procedures and the provisions of international standards and guides.

2.2.4. MULTI-SITE ORGANIZATIONS

In case of organisations with multiple locations, RIGCERT may apply sampling methods to the extent permitted by the applicable certification scheme. Not all organisations having multiple locations are eligible for sampling; a series of criteria apply. RIGCERT informs in advance the client organization about the possibility of using sampling.

2.2.5. CERTIFICATION DECISION

The certification is granted following an independent evaluation of the audit reports performed by RIGCERT according to its procedures.

In case major nonconformities are identified, the client is required to apply corrections and corrective actions in a time interval that shall not exceed 6 months from the completion of stage 2 audit. Only after the corrections and corrective actions have been evaluated and accepted by the audit team, the certification can be granted. Otherwise another stage 2 audit has to be performed. For minor nonconformities the organization has to propose corrections and corrective actions that will be evaluated during the next planned audit (surveillance audit).

The certification cycle lasts for 3 years and includes: initial certification audit, first surveillance audit - one year after initial certification, second surveillance audit - two years after initial certification and recertification audit in the third year.

2.2.6. FEES

Fees for certification include the following elements:

- fees for application review and audit planning (1);
- auditor day fees (2);
- fees for report review and certification (3);

The level of fees depends on a number of factors like: certification scheme(s) involved; geographic location(s) of the client; language and particularities of the audit.

2.2.6. CONFORMITY CERTIFICATE

RIGCERT issues a conformity certificate for each standard that the MS has been evaluated and found conform to. Along with the conformity certificate the client receives a certification program that specifies the planning of the surveillance audits and the recertification audit for the certification cycle.

2.2.7. REGISTRY OF CERTIFIED CLIENTS

All certifications are recorded in the registry of certified clients that is published on www.rigcert.org section Certification check. The status of any certification (valid, suspended, withdrawn, expired) can be verified online in this evidence.

3. SURVEILLANCE

During the whole certification cycle RIGCERT monitors the conformity of the certified management system according to the planning in the certification program.

Surveillance activities include audits in every calendar year, except in recertification years. The purpose of the audits is to assess whether the certified management system continues to fulfil requirements.

Surveillance activities may include apart from audits: requests to provide information to the certified client; review of public statements by the client regarding certification and other means of monitoring the certified client's performance.

Major nonconformities found during surveillance audits may lead to a suspension of certification if corrective actions are not implemented by the organization in time.

The first surveillance audit after initial certification has to be performed in maximum 12 months from the certification decision while the other surveillance audits must be performed yearly. Delays may be accepted from the planning in the certification program but only as exceptions and with reasonable justification and they shall not exceed 6 months from the planning in the certification program.

4. SHORT-NOTICE AUDITS

In certain circumstances (e.g. investigation of complaints, follow-up on suspended clients, in response to changes) RIGCERT may perform short-notice audits. These audits are notified to the client shortly before the audit. Depending on their objective, they can be full system audits or they can be focused on certain areas or processes. Details on carrying out unscheduled audits are determined by the audit team and communicated to the certified client via the audit plan.

5. EXTENSION TO THE CERTIFICATION SCOPE

Extensions to certification scope (by adding new activities and/or locations) may be obtained following an audit (performed together with surveillance or by a scope extension audit).

The activities are done based on an addendum to the certification contract.

A revised certificate is issued following extension that has the same validity as the existing one.

6. SUSPENDING CERTIFICATION

The certification may be suspended if:

- the client's certified management system has persistently or seriously failed to meet certification requirements;
- the certified client does not allow surveillance or recertification audits to be conducted at the required frequencies according to the certification program;
- the certified client voluntarily requests the suspension;
- the certified client uses incorrectly the certificate(s) or the certification mark and does not implement corrective actions in time;
- the certified client does not inform RIGCERT on changes occurred that may affect the MS capability (those changes may refer to legal status, organizational aspects; ownership, management and key personnel, sites, activities, facilities).
- the certified client refuses to apply the changes operated by RIGCERT in its certification requirements at requested deadlines.
- the certified client delays payments beyond contractual agreements.

RIGCERT informs the client about its decision and the suspension period (that cannot exceed 6 months). During suspension the certification is temporarily invalid.

The certification may be restored if the problems are resolved in a period that does not exceed the duration of suspension. Failure to resolve the issues that resulted in the suspension will conduct to the withdrawal of certification or reduction to the certification scope.

7. WITHDRAWAL OF CERTIFICATION

The MS certification can be withdrawn if:

- the certified client fails to resolve the issues that lead to the suspension of certification in due time;
- the certified client suspends its activity, is dissolved, is declared bankrupt or is found in another situation that does not allow him to operate;
- the certified client voluntarily requests the withdrawal of the certification.

After withdrawal the use of the certificate(s) and reference to certification are not permitted.

The withdrawal of certification does not cancel the outstanding financial obligations the client has towards RIGCERT, if any.

8. REDUCING THE CERTIFICATION SCOPE

The certification scope can be reduced by excluding the parts (activities or locations) that do not meet the requirements for certification.

The scope reduction can be requested by the client or decided by RIGCERT.

9. RECERTIFICATION

The purpose of the recertification audit is to confirm the continued conformity and effectiveness of the management system as a whole. RIGCERT contacts the certified client in time so that the recertification audit will be planned and conducted in due time to enable for timely renewal before the certificate expiry date.

10. TRANSFER OF CERTIFICATION

RIGCERT may accept the transfer of certifications issued under the accreditation of a body signatory of the Multilateral Recognition Arrangement IAF MLA.

Transfer of certification can be done at any time during the certification cycle. Suspended or withdrawn certification cannot be subject to transfer.

The decision to accept or refuse a transfer is taken following a review.

11. APPEALS

Appeals may refer to: decisions regarding certification taken by RIGCERT or solutions formulated following the investigation of complaints.

After receiving an appeal, RIGCERT validates and investigates the appeal taking the necessary actions depending on the case. Those actions may be: contacting parties involved, performing an audit, gathering information from different sources, etc.

The investigation of the appeal is performed by personnel not involved in the activity that is referred to by the appeal. The composition of the panel that investigates the appeal is communicated to the appellant.

During the investigation process, the appellant is kept informed on the progress.

The submission, investigation and decision regarding appeals do not lead to discriminatory actions against the appellant.

The decision on the appeal is communicated to the appellant.

12. COMPLAINTS

Complaints may relate to: activities of the RIGCERT personnel in the relation with clients or other stakeholders; activities of certified organisations certified by RIGCERT, activities of other parties having links with RIGCERT.

Submission, investigation and decision on complaints will not result in discriminatory actions against the complainant.

After receiving a complaint, RIGCERT acknowledges receipt of it, confirms whether it refers to certification activities that it is responsible for and informs the complainant about the validity of the complaint.

If the complaint refers to a certified client, RIGCERT informs the client in appropriate time about the complaint and requests for a position.

The complaint investigation process may include different actions depending on the case: special audits, requesting information, etc.

The decision after investigation is communicated to the complainant and is made by, or reviewed and approved by individual(s) not involved in the subject of the complaint.

Complaint handling process is confidential and RIGCERT determines together with the complainant and other parties involved if the subject of the complaint is made public.

13. REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

At the request of any party, RIGCERT provides information on issues such as the status of a certain certification, name, reference document, scope of certification and geographical location (city and country) for a particular certified client.

If and only required by the law RIGCERT provides information about specific audit and certification activity and results performed for a certain client. Clients (and/ or persons) involved are notified about the disclosure.

14. CONFIDENTIALITY

All information obtained or created during audit and certification activities is confidential. All persons carrying out certification activities for or on behalf of RIGCERT are committed to preserving confidentiality. RIGCERT does not disclose without request information on the certification of a certain client without its consent.

Information from sources other than the certified client (for example, complaints or authorities) is considered confidential and not disclosed to third parties.

15. IMPARTIALITY

To continue to provide confidence through certification is vital for our organization to be perceived as impartial. The entire personnel that work for and on behalf of RIGCERT is aware of this need for impartiality.

RIGCERT decisions are based exclusively on objective evidence collected in the evaluation process and are not influenced by interests or third parties.

RIGCERT conducts a continuous process of identification and assessment of risks designed to identify and treat by elimination or reduction to an acceptable level all threats that may compromise the impartiality of the certification processes.

Our commitment to impartiality is publicly available.

16. EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION

RIGCERT provides information on certification requirements and specifics of the certification processes through this document, its website and through advertising and information materials.

RIGCERT may decide to disseminate information specific for the certification process for a particular geographic area through local partners.

In the case of changes to certification requirements (e.g. revisions to international standards, requirements from accreditation bodies), RIGCERT publishes on its website information for obtaining and maintaining certifications. RIGCERT informs directly or via its partners, each certified client in case of changes to certification requirements. The manner of communication depends on the magnitude and specificity of changes.

Certified clients are required to inform RIGCERT without delay on internal changes that may affect the capability of the certified management system. These include, for example, changes to legal, commercial, organisational or ownership status; organisation and management (key personnel); locations; activities; major changes to processes.

17. REFERENCE TO CERTIFICATION AND USE OF THE MARKS

Certified clients are required to comply with requirements relating to the use of the certification mark and reference to certification. These requirements are included in the Regulation on the use of certification mark, available on RIGCERT website and also transmitted along with the mark.