



# Complaint and Dispute Handling Guideline

Version 2.0

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## Abbreviations

CB	Certification Body
ME	Managing Entity
ToU	Terms of Use

## 1 Introduction and Scope of Guideline

As a transparent, credible and trustworthy certification system, 4C offers a procedure in which complaints can be filed or submitted to 4C to any aspect of the certification program, operation of the standard, standards-setting procedure relating to certified parties, traders who are registered in the system, cooperating certification bodies or 4C itself. Complaints can be also on any conflict of interest or misconduct affecting the 4C System development and operation. However, this does not include activities not associated with 4C or 4C interventions.

*Complaints and handling procedures*

The guideline entails 4C System Regulations v 4.0, 4C Certification Body Regulations v 4.0 as well as international good practices in managing and solving complaints in 4C System which are reported to 4C. Any complaints that are directly submitted to the Cooperating Certification Body (CB), are under the responsibility of the responsible CB as stated in the 4C Certification Body Regulations, chapter 4.9, version 4.0.

*References of the guideline*

Any disputes against the decision made by 4C System as per the guideline, but under the scope as agreed between any stakeholders/parties and 4C via Terms of Use, Services Agreement, or contracts will follow the relevant requirements of the respective contractual documents. The place of jurisdiction for all disputes or conflicts shall be Cologne, Germany.

*Scope of dispute*

## 2 Terms and Principles

**Complaint:** a formal (written) expression of dissatisfaction or misconduct by any related party (complainant). May relate to any other party intentionally not following specified rules/regulations or breaching agreement within the certification process or standard setting procedure or within 4C System operation.

*Complaint*

**Appeal:** a formal (written) request for a review of any decision made by 4C or the 4C Board.

*Appeal*

**Dispute:** Refers to an unresolved complaint or when complainants are still not satisfied or agree with the mitigation measures.

*Dispute*

**Certification decision:** a decision made by the CB/auditor regarding the issuance or withdrawal of a 4C certificate.

*Certification decision*

**Impartiality and transparency:** All complaints and appeals are handled professionally, impartially and transparently. Person(s), leading the handling and resolving a complaint or appeal, are not directly involved in the certification decision related to the certification, complaint or appeal.

*Impartiality and transparency*

**Fairness:** The 4C certified or to-be-certified party has the right to pursuit the complaint directly to the responsible CB who provides the certification services or toward 4C. The handling procedure will follow requirements as stated by the 4C Certification Body or this guideline. During the investigation of the case,

*Fairness*

related parties can be involved to ensure their right to raise voice, to be heard and for supporting 4C in collecting sufficient information.

**Right to anonymity:** 4C will accept anonymous complaints, however, the anonymity might hinder 4C's ability to fully investigate and understand the case for the proper communication and solving of the case reported.

*Anonymity*

**Confidentiality, Data Protection, Publications of Third-Party Data/Information and Exemption:** 4C ensures that the information collection, management and sharing to third party will be as per agreed by all parties on the respectively Terms of Use, Services Agreement and Contracts between them and 4C.

*Data confidentiality*

### 3 Procedure



Figure 1. Procedure of handling complaint, appeal and dispute

#### 3.1 Step 1. Filing a Complaint/Appeal

##### How?

Formal complaints and appeals must be sent in written form (via email, 4C [web-form](#), by post) to:

*File a complaint or appeal*

[complaints@4C-services.org](mailto:complaints@4C-services.org)

or

4C Services GmbH office at Hohenzollernring 72, 50672 Köln, Germany

The addressee of the complaint or appeal must be 4C.

##### What and when?

*Type of complaints*

A complaint can be filed when:

- A cooperating CB or an approved 4C auditor has a conflict of interest
- A 4C Unit's confidentiality is concerned
- A 4C auditor, the CB or 4C is not competent to perform their respective tasks
- A 4C Unit disagrees with the conclusion on their overall result made by the auditor or CB during and/or after the audit
- A 4C Unit is not satisfied with the performance of an auditor or 4C
- An interested party disagrees with the facts by which a certificate was granted
- Any stakeholders have concerns or disagreement on 4C System Regulations or Standards setting procedures

- Complaints to misconduct in the operation of 4C

An appeal can be filed when:

- A 4C Unit disagrees with the certificate decision, including (non-) certificate issuance, certificate withdrawal and suspension of the Managing Entity (ME) and/or 4C Unit
- An interested party disagrees with the certification decision of any 4C Unit
- A CB or a 4C Unit disagrees with the decision of the auditor's sample selection process
- A CB disagrees with the decision of termination of the cooperation between 4C and the CB
- A CB disagrees with the decision of (dis-)approval of their company and/or auditors
- A complainant disagrees with the decision of 4C on the case reported

*Type  
of appeals*

A complaint or appeal must include the following parameters:

- Basic information about complainant such as name and organization. In case the complainant intends to maintain anonymous throughout the further process, then he/she must declare this at the time of submission and provide a reasonable explanation for the request
- A clear description of the nature of the complaint or appeal and supporting evidence
- Grounds for complaints and appeals should be reasonable. Note that complaints and appeals lacking clear justification and supporting evidence will be considered irrelevant and will not be processed

*Eligible  
complain and  
appeal*

### 3.2 Step 2. Receipt of a Complaint/Appeal

The complainant will be informed immediately about the receipt of their complaint or appeal, the acceptance or rejection for further investigation of the complaint or appeal and what further actions will be taken.

*Receipt  
notification*

### 3.3 Step 3. Review/Analysis of the Case

Cases will be assigned to a relevant responsible person(s) of 4C for analysis and are solved on a case-by-case basis.

*Responsible  
person*

While investigating the conflict or reason for the complaint or appeal, 4C is entitled to contact the parties and stakeholders affected to ask for supporting evidence, documentation, or statements in order to obtain a sufficient understanding of the situation.

*Involvement of  
parties and  
stakeholders*

4C may schedule an independent assessment in the framework of the 4C Integrity Program if required. If necessary, the 4C Board will be involved in the

*Integrity program  
and 4C Board*

process in order to conclude it. In critical cases, the consultation of an independent expert may be applied.

### 3.4 Step 4. Decision Making and Communication

4C aims to resolve conflicts in a timely manner, within 3 months at the latest. Any result and decision will be communicated to the complainant by 4C without delay.

*Resolution and decision*

## 4 Responsibilities of Parties in Handling Complaint and Dispute

The graphs below differentiate two situations in which different parties are involved in solving respective complaints.

*Handling procedure*

*Certification*

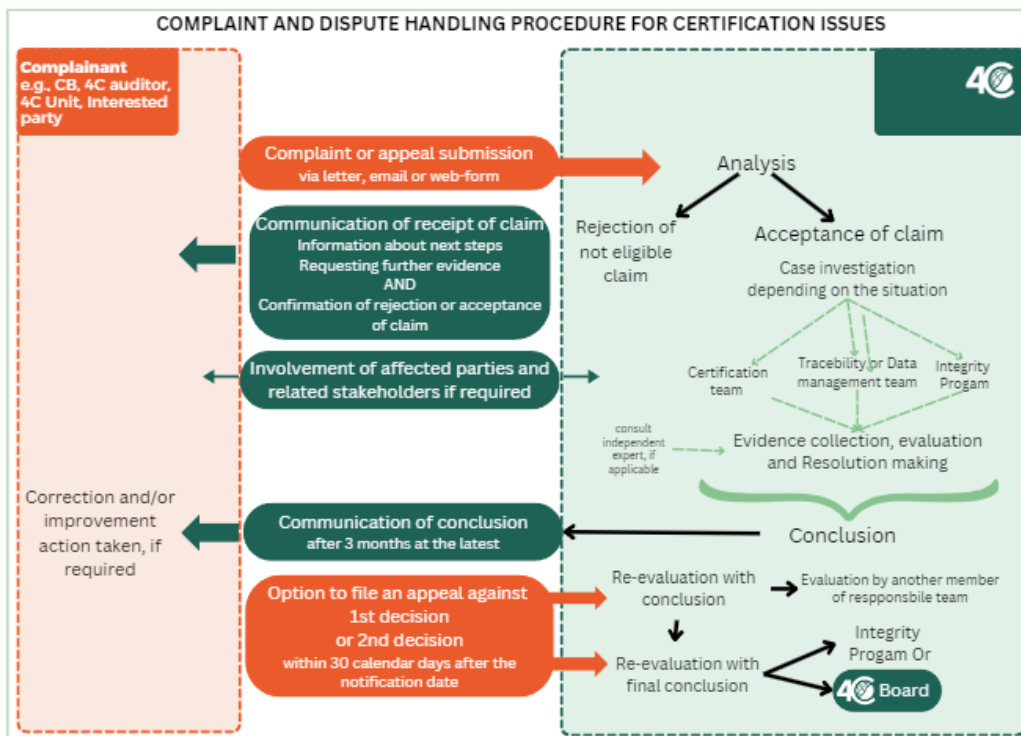


Figure 2. Procedure for handling complaint and dispute of certification



System  
operation and  
setting

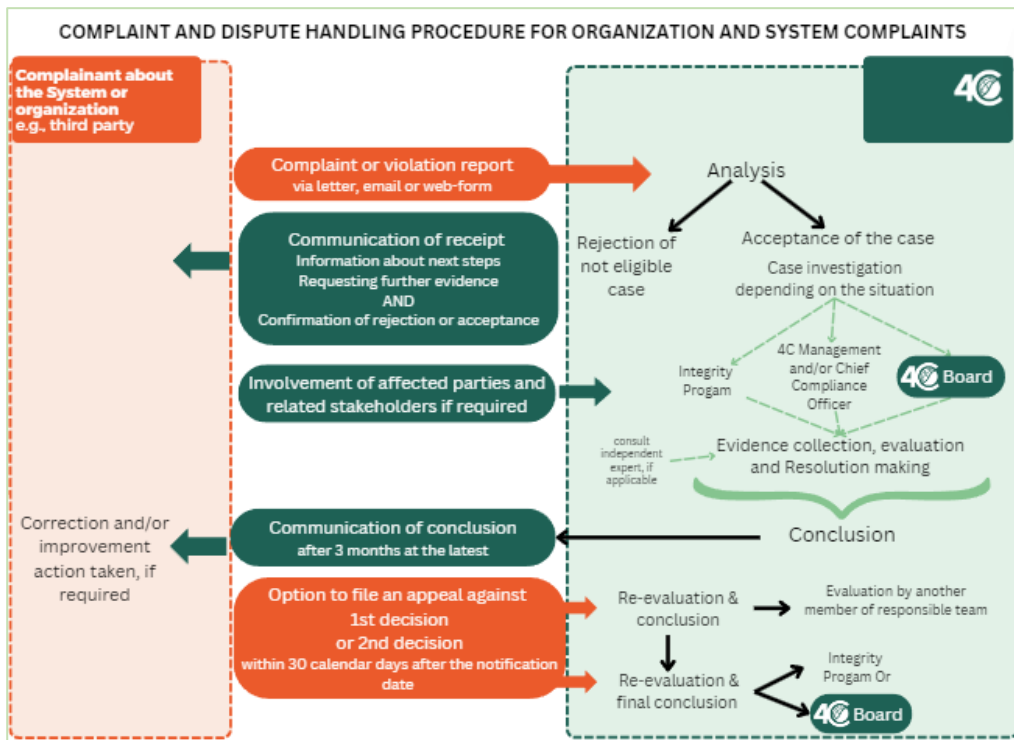


Figure 3. Procedure for handling complaint and dispute of the system operation and setting

## 5 Complaint Management

4C has person(s) responsible for managing the email account [complaints@4C-services.org](mailto:complaints@4C-services.org) in order to ensure the confidentiality of the information and complainants.

Person in charge  
in 4C

The result and decision of the complaints will be communicated in written form to the complainant. In case of anonymous complaints, the procedure remains applicable, however communication with the complainant will not be possible.

Communication  
of decisions

Complainants can file an appeal against the decision made by 4C within 30 calendar days from the notification date. In this case, 4C will re-evaluate the complaint and involve the Integrity Program or the 4C Board to further conduct the procedure.

Right to appeal

Management of information regarding complaints received, solved and communicated by 4C will follow the current valid clause on Confidentiality, Data Protection, Publications of Third-Party Data/Information, Exemption as laid down in the Terms of Use or any other contracts between parties and 4C.

Information  
management