

# VERITEX®

## CERTIFICATION SYSTEM

### CERTIFICATION AND SURVEILLANCE PROGRAMME

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Issued by: SMC Slovensko a.s.s - VERITEX® Scheme Owner

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|------|------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|
| 9    |            |                |               |             |
| 8    |            |                |               |             |
| 7    |            |                |               |             |
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| 5    |            |                |               |             |
| 4    |            |                |               |             |
| 3    |            |                |               |             |
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## 1. Purpose and Relationship to the General Regulation

This document operationalizes, for use by Certification Bodies and applicant/certified organizations, the certification process established in Chapter 4 (Certification Process) and Chapter 5 (Audit Methodology and Sampling) of the VERITEX® General Regulation. Where this document and the General Regulation differ, the General Regulation shall prevail.

## 2. Certification Cycle Overview

VERITEX® certification follows a three-year cycle comprising: Application, Contract Review, Audit Planning, Stage 1 Audit, Stage 2 Audit, Certification Decision, two annual Surveillance Audits, and a Recertification Audit before expiry of the three-year cycle (General Regulation, Section 4.2).

| Phase                  | Target Timing                                     |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Application            | Day 0                                             |
| Contract Review        | Within 15 days                                    |
| Stage 1 Audit          | Within 60 days                                    |
| Stage 2 Audit          | Within 90 days                                    |
| Certification Decision | Within 30 days of audit closure                   |
| Surveillance Audit 1   | Year 1                                            |
| Surveillance Audit 2   | Year 2                                            |
| Recertification Audit  | Year 3 (initiated at least 90 days before expiry) |

## 3. Application Stage

### 3.1 Submission Requirements

Applicants shall submit the official VERITEX® Application Form (document VERITEX-06) together with the information required under Section 4.3.1 of the General Regulation: general organizational information, certification information (scheme, level, scope, products), operational information and management system information.

### 3.2 Accuracy and Scope

The applicant is responsible for the accuracy of all information submitted (General Regulation, Section 4.3.2) and for proposing a scope that clearly defines activities, products, sites and supply chain stages (Section 4.3.3). The Certification Body may revise the proposed scope where technically justified.

#### 4. Contract Review and Audit Planning

The Certification Body shall complete Contract Review within fifteen (15) days of application, evaluating organizational complexity, risk profile, geographic factors and scheme requirements (General Regulation, Section 4.4). Following acceptance, the Certification Body shall prepare an Audit Plan defining objectives, scope, criteria, duration and team composition, in accordance with the audit time calculation criteria in Appendix A of the General Regulation and the competence requirements defined in the VERITEX® Auditor Competence and Qualification chapter.

#### 5. Stage 1 Audit

The Stage 1 Audit assesses the applicant's readiness for the Stage 2 Audit and shall not itself result in certification. The Stage 1 Report shall conclude with one of three outcomes: Ready, Conditionally Ready or Not Ready (General Regulation, Section 4.6), using the Stage 1 Audit Report Template set out in Appendix E of the General Regulation.

#### 6. Stage 2 Audit

The Stage 2 Audit evaluates effective implementation and operational performance against the applicable VERITEX® Technical Standards (document VERITEX-09), using the audit techniques, sampling methodology and, for VERITEX SOCIAL®, the confidential worker interview requirements described in Chapter 5 of the General Regulation.

#### 7. Audit Findings and Corrective Actions

Findings shall be classified as Conformity, Observation, Minor Nonconformity, Major Nonconformity or Critical Violation, using the classification and closure deadlines set out in Appendix C of the General Regulation. The organization shall implement corrective actions based on root cause analysis, and closure shall only be confirmed following objective evidence of effective implementation (General Regulation, Section 4.9).

| Finding             | Closure Deadline | Effect on Certification                    |
|---------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Observation         | None             | No effect – addressed at next audit        |
| Minor Nonconformity | 60 days          | Certification may proceed with action plan |
| Major Nonconformity | 90 days          | Certification withheld until closure       |
| Critical Violation  | Immediate        | Certification denied or withdrawn          |

## 8. Certification Decision and Certificate Issuance

Certification decisions shall be made by personnel independent from the audit team, applying the Certification Recommendation Matrix of Section 4.10 of the General Regulation. Upon a positive decision, the Certification Body shall issue a Certificate of Conformity and Trademark Licence in accordance with document VERITEX-08 (Certificate and Trademark Licence), valid for a period not exceeding three (3) years, subject to satisfactory surveillance.

## 9. Surveillance Programme

Surveillance Audits shall be conducted at least annually and shall cover, at minimum: internal audit activities and findings; management review outputs; achievement of objectives and KPIs; legal compliance status; changes affecting scope; and correct use of the VERITEX® certification marks (General Regulation, Section 4.12; VERITEX-02 Mark Rules). Failure to submit to a scheduled Surveillance Audit within the required timeframe shall result in suspension of the certificate.

## 10. Extraordinary Audits

Extraordinary Audits may be triggered at any time by complaints, integrity concerns, significant organizational changes, regulatory enforcement action, adverse media reports or market surveillance findings (General Regulation, Section 4.13). Such audits may be conducted with short or no notice, and their cost shall be borne by the certified organization where resulting from a justified complaint or integrity concern.

## 11. Recertification

Recertification Audits shall be initiated at least ninety (90) days before certificate expiry and shall evaluate the overall effectiveness of the management system over the certification cycle, achievement of sustainability objectives, long-term performance trends and the effectiveness of corrective actions implemented (General Regulation, Section 4.14). Where recertification is not completed before expiry, the certificate lapses and a new Initial Certification process is required.

## 12. Transfer of Certification

A certified organization may request transfer of its certification to another approved Certification Body. The receiving Certification Body shall conduct a transfer review as described in Section 4.15 of the General Regulation; transfer does not extend or interrupt the current certification cycle.

### **13. Reduction, Suspension and Withdrawal**

The scope of certification may be reduced, or the certificate suspended or withdrawn, under the conditions and timeframes described in Section 4.16 of the General Regulation. During suspension and following withdrawal, the certified organization shall comply with the conditions set out in document VERITEX-02 (Mark Rules) regarding use of the certification marks.

### **14. Appeals and Complaints**

Appeals against certification decisions and complaints regarding certified organizations or certification activities shall be handled in accordance with Section 4.17 of the General Regulation, including the applicable timeframes for acknowledgement, assessment and decision.

### **15. Records and Programme Monitoring**

The Certification Body shall maintain complete records of all certification and surveillance activities for a minimum of ten (10) years (General Regulation, Section 4.18) and shall monitor programme performance using the Key Performance Indicators defined in Section 4.19, reporting results as input to the continual improvement process described in Section 4.20.