



MAURITAS

A27

Procedure for remote assessment

Mauritius Accreditation Service

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Foreword

The MAURITIUS ACCREDITATION SERVICE (MAURITAS) is a governmental body established in 1998 to provide a national, unified service for the accreditation of Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs) such as calibration/testing laboratories, certification bodies and inspection bodies. Organizations that comply with the MAURITAS requirements are granted accreditation by MAURITAS.

About MAURITAS publications

MAURITAS publications are categorized as follows:

- R series Publications containing general policy and requirements related to MAURITAS accreditation.
- G series Publications providing guidance on MAURITAS requirements.
- A series Publications related to assessment procedures.
- P series MAURITAS quality system procedures
- F series MAURITAS Forms
- Directories Classified listing of accredited organizations.

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Procedure for remote assessment

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This document provides requirements for performing remote assessments for accredited/applicant laboratories and accredited certification bodies.

2. Scope and Responsibilities

- 2.1 This procedure defines the steps that are followed by MAURITAS for performing assessments remotely. It is the responsibility of all MAURITAS Staff and Assessment Team members to adhere to this procedure.

3. Reference

3.1 IAF MD 4: IAF Mandatory document for the use of information and communication technology (ICT) for Auditing / Assessment Purposes

3.2 IAF ID 3: Informative Document for Management of Extraordinary Events or Circumstances Affecting ABs, CABs and Certified Organizations

3.3 IAF and IAF/ILAC FAQ's

3.4 AFRAC Policy and Procedure for Remote Evaluations

4. Definition

4.1 Extraordinary event or circumstance:

A circumstance beyond the control of MAURITAS or the CAB, commonly referred to as "Force Majeure" or "act of God". Examples are war, strike, riot, political instability, geopolitical tension, terrorism, crime, pandemic, endemic, flooding, earthquake, malicious computer hacking, other natural or man-made disasters.

4.2 Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Use of electronic technology for gathering, storing, retrieving, processing, analysing, and transmitting information. ICT includes software and hardware such as smartphones, handheld devices, laptop computers, desktop computers, drones, video cameras, wearable technology, artificial intelligence, and others.

4.3 Remote assessment:

Assessment of a CAB using information and communication technology (ICT) tools.

Note 1: Remote assessment may apply to any of the following assessment activities:

- review of documented information (e.g. the CAB's management system, policies, procedures, files and records);
- review of competency management (e.g. competency definitions and assessments, training, performance monitoring and reviews, competency approvals, etc.);

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- review of quality controls (e.g. internal audits, corrective actions, management reviews, handling feedback and complaints, quality control charts, proficiency testing results, etc.);
 - interviewing personnel;
 - witnessing CAB activities (e.g. audits, inspections, tests, calibrations, internal meetings, etc.).

4.4 Virtual Site

Refers to an online environment that allows persons to execute processes or perform work irrespective of the physical location.

Note 2: A virtual site cannot be considered where processes must be executed in a physical environment e.g. physical testing laboratories, installation of repairs to physical products, etc.

Note 3: A virtual site (e.g. company intranet) is considered a single site for calculation of assessment time.

5. Introduction

5.1 As information and communication technologies (ICT) supporting on-line meetings, sharing files and devices screens, etc. advances, there is an opportunity to integrate same in the MAURITAS assessment process, either as part of the assessment techniques, or during extraordinary events or circumstances where it may not be possible or feasible for MAURITAS to conduct an on-site assessment.

5.2 The extent to which a remote assessment is conducted may vary depending on various circumstances as provided in this document. It is to be noted that under normal circumstances, performing fully remote assessment are not desirable and that traditional on-site assessments are still the most beneficial, efficient and preferred approach. Remote assessment should complement the preferred on-site assessment approach and must be done in such a way as to achieve the same objective as an on-site assessment.

5.3 Initial assessments should mandatorily be performed on-site for certification bodies and preferably be performed on-site for laboratories. During initial assessments, remote assessment techniques may be used in addition to the on-site witnessing of laboratory activities unlike for witnessing of audits of certification bodies.

Note 4: Refer to section on ‘Determining Eligibility’.

5.4 However, during certain circumstances, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, fully remote assessments may be unavoidable in the short term. Any deviations from the traditional on-site process shall be duly justified and documented. Where a fully remote assessment is undertaken, an on-site assessment shall be performed within 2 years. Conformity Assessment Bodies (CAB’s) shall not be subject to two consecutive fully remote assessments without proper justification and a risk assessment being performed and approved.

5.5 In the case of re-assessments for Level 3 scopes for which the CAB is already accredited, remote assessment techniques may be used entirely for the assessment as long as the assessment process confirms the demonstrated conformity of MAURITAS requirements (including ISO/IEC 17021-1 conformity) at the same, or greater, level of confidence as the traditional on-site assessment process.

5.6 Any assessments planned as a remote assessment and scheduled to start at least 3 months after a normalization date (e.g. travel restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have ended) should be conducted using the normal on-site approach.

5.7 This document provides requirements and guidance to MAURITAS assessors on how to plan, manage and facilitate remote assessments of CABs using ICT as a complement to traditional assessment techniques.

5.8 The use of ICT during assessments may include but are not limited to:

- a) teleconference meetings using audio, video and data sharing facilities;
- b) assessment of documents and records, using remote access, either in real-time or at another time offline;

- c) recording of information and evidence, using pictures, video or audio recordings; and
- d) providing visual/audio access to remote or potentially hazardous locations;
- e) observing the use of remote assessment techniques in use by the CAB; and
- f) use of augmented reality or other technologies that allows for remote live visual witnessing of activities being performed.

5.9 The objectives of this procedure in using ICT in assessment activities are to:

- a) provide a consistent methodology for the use of ICT that is sufficiently flexible and non-prescriptive to complement or substitute traditional assessment techniques when needed;
- b) allow for the confirmation of CAB conformance and competence while maintaining confidence in the assessment process;
- c) ensure that adequate controls are in place to avoid any mishandling that could compromise the integrity of the assessment process, especially where on-site assessments are not practically feasible;
- d) facilitate additional assessment activities (e.g. observation of CAB technical meetings (e.g. impartiality committee, decision-making committee, CAB staff meetings, management reviews, etc.) that typically would not be available during the traditional on-site assessment; and
- e) support the principles of safety and sustainability.

5.10 Regulatory requirements, stakeholder schemes and programmes, conformity assessment standards and other normative documents, may prescribe limitations on the use of ICT for assessment purposes and may take precedence over this document.

6. Proposal for remote assessments

6.1 Remote assessment may be proposed by MAURITAS or the CAB to be assessed. MAURITAS, in collaboration with the appointed Team Leader and the CAB, will determine the viability of the use of remote assessment on a case-to-case basis, using **F1.29**.

6.2 MAURITAS is required to identify and document the risks and opportunities of carrying out remote assessment dependent on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) available.

6.3 MAURITAS must evaluate and be able to illustrate that the assessment objectives can be achieved via remote assessment activities where there is neither prohibition of remote assessment by the normative standard nor scheme requirements.

6.4 The Director, MAURITAS, based on the review of information provided in the **F1.29** reserves the right to make the ultimate decision on how and when a remote assessment can be applied, and the extent of the remote assessment.

7. Risks to assessments

7.1 MAURITAS in collaboration with the CAB undergoing the assessment and the Assessment Team shall identify and document the risks that may impact assessment effectiveness for each use of ICT, including the selection of the technologies, and how they are managed.

Note 5: The risk assessment is to be recorded using **F1. 29**.

When ICT is proposed for the assessment activities, MAURITAS should check that the CAB and the Assessment Team have the necessary infrastructure to support the use of the ICT proposed.

7.2 Considering the risks and opportunities identified in 7.1, the assessment programme should identify how ICT will be utilized, the impacts that the technology may have on the validity and objectivity of the information

gathered and the extent to which ICT will be used for assessment purposes to optimize assessment effectiveness and efficiency while maintaining the integrity of the assessment process.

7.3 When using ICT, assessors and other personnel involved (e.g. CAB's employees) should have the competency and ability to understand and utilize the ICT employed in order to achieve the desired results of the assessment. The assessor should be aware of the risks involved in the use of the ICT and the impacts that they may have on the validity and objectivity of the information gathered.

8. Security and confidentiality

8.1 The security and confidentiality of electronic or electronically transmitted information are particularly important when using ICT for assessment purposes. This includes data in storage, data in transit, and data in use. MAURITAS shall use secure SharePoint platforms such as googledrive, dropbox and onedrive.

8.2 The use of ICT for assessment purposes should be mutually agreed upon by the CAB and Assessment Team/MAURITAS as per information security and data protection measures and the respective regulations before ICT is used for assessment purposes.

8.3 Any conflicting issue should be resolved before the start of the remote assessment process.

8.4 In the case of non-fulfillment of these measures or lack of agreement on information security and data protection measures, the Director, MAURITAS may be consulted.

9. Remote assessment considerations

9.1 Remote assessments shall follow as closely as possible the normal assessment process as defined in relevant MAURITAS procedures. Remote activities are also to be in accordance with IAF MD4.

9.2 Justification for the approval of remote assessments may be considered under the following situations, and where the risk level of the assessment is deemed low:

- a) travel to a CAB or specific assessment location is not possible or reasonable due to an extraordinary event or circumstance, or due to resulting security, health or safety measures (i.e. travel restrictions, etc.);
- b) the number of sites to be assessed is difficult for the CAB to organise within the assessment timeframe;
- c) an activity or activities planned for the on-site assessment could not be completed and extending the on-site assessment is not the best resolution;
- d) a follow-up assessment is necessary, but another on-site visit cannot be conducted in a reasonable timeframe; or
- e) a particular component of the CAB operations is considered worthy of increased observation/sampling.

9.3 Remote assessments may be undertaken in circumstances other than those detailed in 9.2 above. In all cases MAURITAS in collaboration with the CAB being assessed shall present the rationale for the remote assessment (or the remote assessment of specific activities) for approval by the Director, MAURITAS.

10. Determining eligibility

10.1 MAURITAS in collaboration with the CAB being assessed determines whether remote assessment techniques are feasible and completes **F1.29**.

10.2 The MAURITAS Case Officer submits the completed **F1.29** to the Director, MAURITAS for review and approval to use remote assessment techniques. The Case Officer communicates the decision to the MAURITAS assessment team and the CAB.

11. Planning and scheduling

11.1 Remote assessments will require additional preparation by both the assessment team and the CAB and are longer in duration.

11.2 Before initiating remote assessment techniques, the Case Officer in collaboration with the Team Leader shall develop and send to the CAB an assessment plan, in which it is important to specify how the remote assessment will be undertaken in order to ensure effectiveness and efficiency of the assessment, specifically:

- a) the scope of accreditation activities to be subject to the remote assessment techniques, including the list of conformity assessment activities, areas, etc;
- b) the number of witnessings to be conducted, if applicable (refer to section 12)
- c) clear expectations for pre-defined documented information that is to be made available during the remote assessment; (e.g. records etc.) and any specific confidentiality requirements regarding their access and destruction;
- d) the availability of necessary CAB personnel;
- e) the agreed timing of the remote assessment activities; and
- f) the timeframe for conducting the remote assessment (e.g. 4 hours a day for 3 consecutive days).

Note 6: Timing should:

- reflect a similar amount of overall time as would be allocated during traditional assessment techniques;
 - be segmented into periods of connectivity that is optimal to avoid fatigue;
 - include time for breaks; and
 - allow for individual review and reflection of provided information by the Assessor.
- g) a plan on how to review information that cannot be shared remotely (e.g. due to confidentiality or access issues). The assessor should express how this will be dealt with (e.g. follow-up assessment, issuance of a non-conformity, etc.).

Note 7: Personnel facilitating remote assessment may not be permitted to share certain confidential information or there may be an existing corporate policy on how certain mediums cannot be used to provide such information.

11.3 The Case Officer shall also specify the sequence of activities for the remote assessment in the Assessment Plan which should be sent to the CAB;

11.4 The CAB shall provide to the Case Officer for transmission to the Assessment Team prior to the conducting of remote assessment:

- a) all the normal information required for the assessment;

Note 8: Some information, such as project reports and client files, may need to be sent or otherwise shared with the Assessment Team for review before the remote assessment.

Note 9: Remote access to documented information (procedures, policies, records etc.) can be facilitated through temporary password-protected online access with 'view-only permissions' for the Assessment Team members. This can be set up through arranging a temporary profile for the assessor to access the CABs intranet or internal file directories, or through on-line or cloud-based document management systems (e.g. SharePoint, DropBox, Microsoft Teams, GoogleDocs, etc.).

- b) contact details of designated individual(s) that will facilitate, manage, and coordinate the arrangements of the remote assessment on behalf of the CAB;
- c) applicable documentation, records, files, projects, reports, etc.;
- d) summary of key changes (i.e. personnel, organization, equipment, accredited methods) in the CAB since last on-site assessment; and
- e) any other evidence deemed essential and necessary.

11.5 Planning shall include selection and confirmation of the specific ICT technologies to be used to ensure the integrity and confidence in the assessment process is not adversely affected, taking into account the following considerations:

- a) the nature of the assessment activity being undertaken, and the number of simultaneous ICT connections required for the relevant CAB personnel and assessors. It may be necessary to only conduct a single remote activity at a time;
- b) the ICT platform (e.g., Go-To-Meeting, WebEx, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc.) and hardware for hosting the assessment, to be agreed upon between MAURITAS/Assessment Team and CAB;

Note 10: Identifying several ICT platforms is recommended in case one ICT platform fails to perform.

Note 11: If the assessed CAB is providing the ICT platform, it may be necessary for the assessment team meetings to be held using a different platform and account. If this is the case, the platforms should be confirmed and tested by the team prior to the assessment.

Note 12: The Assessment Team members and CAB must ensure access to a fast, reliable internet connection, suitable video conferencing or communication

software, and associated computer network to enable clear and effective communication, including opening and closing meetings.

- c) the ICT security measures that must be undertaken to protect confidential information. This includes ensuring secure physical locations from which to join remote assessment activities for all the parties involved;
- d) enabling any security and/or profile access to the Assessment Team members and others involved in the assessment;
- e) testing ICT compatibility between the assessor(s) and the CAB before the assessment by performing a trial run;
- f) encouraging and considering the use of webcams, cameras, etc. when physical assessment of an event is desired or necessary; and
- g) any recording of remote activities, including discussions that take place, should be agreed upon by both parties before the assessment. This includes arrangements for storage and disposal of recordings; and
- h) how to respond to connection difficulties and failures, power outages, etc.

12. Performing an effective remote assessment

12.1 The assessment should be facilitated in quiet and secure environments whenever possible to avoid interference and background noise (i.e. speakerphones) and ensure information security.

12.2 The most effective types of ICT should be chosen. Multiple types of ICT may be considered during the same assessment.

12.3 The use of headphones or advanced microphones should be considered to assure clear communication.

12.4 Facilitation of the assessment should follow normal assessment plans and processes.

12.5 The CAB should scan the room and perform a walk-through of the organization for assessors to gain a 'lay of the land' and to determine who is in the room.

12.6 Participants should always introduce themselves when speaking if multiple people are involved. Both parties should make their best effort to confirm what was heard, stated, and read throughout the assessment.

12.7 If demonstration of conformity with a requirement is not able to be reviewed, or a complete determination is not able to be made, this failure or limitation shall be recorded as a nonconformity.

12.8 All remote assessments should be concluded with a summary, review of the events each day, clarification of issues, apparent nonconformities, and expectations.

12.9 All parties shall take appropriate measures to safeguard the confidentiality of data in any format.

12.10 There should be an allowance for the assessor to terminate the assessment activity due to an inability to maintain satisfactory connections or conditions during the scheduled time. This should be recorded in the assessment report. An on-site assessment will then need to be arranged for assessment as soon as feasible to evaluate those functions that could not be done remotely.

12.11 The Assessment Team and the CAB should review the effectiveness of the remote component. Where possible, "gaps" should be addressed prior to concluding the assessment. Actions taken in

response to limitations identified during a remote assessment should be detailed in the assessment report.

13. Witnessing

13.1 Effective witnessing can be one of the most difficult parts of the remote assessment process. Pre-planning and preparation for each area to be witnessed should be performed.

13.2 Where fully remote assessments are unavoidable, witnessing can be minimized unless there are facts from the previous assessments of the CAB favouring a different approach.

Reducing the level of witnessing activities does not mean collecting less information nor reducing the time dedicated to the assessment. It means that some witnessing will be replaced by other assessment techniques, such as increasing the files reviewed or spending more time for interviews and including related parties as needed.

13.3 The amount of witnessing for each assessment shall be determined according to the following:

- a) Where a level 3 standard has been witnessed for two successive assessments of a CAB and there were no significant findings that require further witnessing e.g. to follow up corrective actions, witnessing can be exempt where fully remote assessments are unavoidable;
- b) Assessments must take into consideration how a CAB is applying remote audits, inspections, including processes, procedures, training of personnel etc.
- c) Witnessing of on-site conformity assessment activities can be replaced with remote witnessing of remote or on-site conformity assessment activities.

13.4 Access to high-speed internet and/or cell signals is critical to assure clear and effective audio and video.

13.5 Pre-planning and testing of the chosen ICT should be performed for each witnessing activity at the location of witnessing. Dead spots or weak connectivity should be identified.

13.6 Video presentation skills of the CAB during witnessing are critical. This should be discussed in the planning phase. The CAB may need to set up a fixed camera location or consider a dedicated personnel member to take the video and photos. CAB video/camera skills often improve over time and may result in increased assessment effectiveness and efficiency.

13.7 Portability, connectivity, and battery life of the video device should be considered.

13.8 Live video streaming is preferred. This provides real-time and interactive assessment and reduces risks to integrity that may be associated with pre-recorded video.

13.9 Pre-recorded CAB video demonstration may be considered but is cautioned against. The MAURITAS Assessment Team should consider any risks associated with the integrity of a pre-recorded video and implement measures to mitigate this risk and confirm how pre-recorded material is to be stored or deleted once the assessment activities are completed.

13.10 Assessors should be able to direct the video imaging of the witnessed activity by the CAB to ensure the effectiveness of the demonstration. Assessor ability to perform this activity should be considered.

14. Post assessment activities

14.1 Assessment reports, findings and follow-up of corrective actions are to be undertaken in accordance with relevant MAURITAS procedures.

14.2 Assessment reports must indicate the extent to which ICT has been used in carrying out assessment and the effectiveness of ICT in achieving the assessment objectives.

14.3 If virtual sites are included within the scope, the assessment documentation should note that virtual sites are included, and the activities performed at the virtual sites should be identified.

14.4 On completion of the post assessment activities, including decision-making, the Assessment Team shall confirm deletion of any confidential documents, images, recordings, etc. from personal computers where used.

15. Training

15.1 MAURITAS Assessors shall be trained in remote assessment processes and in the implementation of this document prior to implementing any remote assessment activities.

15.2 CAB's are encouraged to train their employees involved in the assessment in the use of ICT to be used for the assessment.

16 Related Forms

16.1 Risk Analysis Checklist for remote assessment, **F1.29**

Appendix A: Amendment Table

SN	Section	Amendment