



Global progress in implementation of the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products

Report by the Convention Secretariat

Purpose of the document

This report describes the status of implementation of the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products based on implementation reports submitted by Parties to the Protocol in the 2025 reporting cycle.

The extended version of the 2025 Global Progress Report on Implementation of the Protocol will be made available before the Fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol at <https://fctc.who.int/protocol/progress/global-progress-reports>. Individual reports from the Parties will be available at <https://extranet.who.int/fctcapps/fctcapps/protocol/implementation-database>.

Action by the Meeting of the Parties

The Meeting of the Parties (MOP) is invited to note the present report.

Contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): All SDGs; in particular SDG 3 and Target 3.a, as well as SDG 16.

Link to Workplan and Budget item: None.

Additional financial implications if not included in the Workplan and Budget: None.

Related document(s): None.

Background

1. The Convention Secretariat conducted the 2025 reporting cycle for the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products in accordance with decision FCTC/MOP1(10), in conjunction with the reporting cycle of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC). Of the 69 Parties to the Protocol required to report in the 2025 cycle, 46 (67%) officially submitted their implementation reports.¹
2. In this reporting cycle, both the reporting questionnaire and the reporting platform used by the Parties have undergone changes. In decision FCTC/MOP3(17), the Meeting of the Parties (MOP) welcomed a revised reporting instrument (as contained in Annex 2 of document FCTC/MOP/3/7). Subsequently, as mandated by the MOP, the Convention Secretariat developed a new online reporting platform, incorporating the revised reporting instrument. Due to the revision of the reporting instrument, most of the indicators have changed and are not comparable with those from previous reporting cycles.
3. An extended version of this report will form the basis of the *2025 Global Progress Report on Implementation of the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products*, to be made available on the WHO FCTC website later this year.²

Overall progress in the implementation of the Protocol since the last reporting cycle

4. Several Parties reported significant advances in implementing the Protocol. Benin, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire had strengthened tracking systems and regulatory oversight through new contracts and frameworks. Gambia had introduced tax stamps on tobacco products, while Serbia had implemented a comprehensive tracking and tracing system. Several European Union (EU) Member States – including Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and Slovakia – reported that they had extended the EU tobacco traceability system to cover all tobacco products as of May 2024. India had proposed legislative amendments to introduce a tracking and tracing system, supported by international collaboration. Brazil had enacted new regulations to curb smuggling and suspend entities involved in illicit trade. Iraq had updated its mutual legal assistance framework. Jordan continues to implement the Protocol progressively, while Kenya had intensified enforcement through multi-agency teams and upheld a ban on shisha. Uruguay had enhanced transparency through mandatory declarations and regional information exchange.

Progress, including significant changes, reported by the Parties, by selected provisions

Part III – Supply chain control

5. In relation to **Article 6 (Licence, equivalent approval or control system)**, on the topic of requiring a licence for manufacturing cigarettes, 80% of reporting Parties responded that a licence

¹ The following Parties formally submitted reports: Austria, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Ecuador, European Union, Fiji, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Greece, Hungary, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Latvia, Lithuania, Madagascar, Mauritius, Montenegro, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Seychelles, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Togo, Türkiye, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Uruguay.

² [Global progress reports](#) (accessed 8 July 2025)

was required, 7% responded that one was not required, 11% responded that it was not applicable and 2% did not respond. Fewer Parties reported requiring licensing for manufacturing of other tobacco products. On licences for manufacturing heated tobacco products (HTPs), 63% of reporting Parties responded that a licence was required, 9% responded that one was not required, 26% responded that it was not applicable and 2% did not respond. On licences for manufacturing smokeless tobacco products, 50% of reporting Parties responded that a licence was required, 20% responded that it was not required, 26% responded that it was not applicable and 4% did not respond. Asked about the competent authority's ability to suspend, revoke or cancel licences to manufacture tobacco products in cases of non-compliance, 76% of reporting Parties responded that the competent authority had this ability, 2% responded that it did not and 22% did not respond. On requiring a licence fee for manufacturing tobacco products, 50% of reporting Parties responded that a licence fee was required, 28% responded that it was not required and 22% did not respond.

6. In terms of licences for importing cigarettes, 89% of reporting Parties responded that a licence was required, 7% responded that it was not required and 4% did not respond. For the importation of HTPs, 67% of reporting Parties responded that a licence was required, 13% responded that it was not required, 13% responded that it was not applicable and 7% did not respond. Regarding the importation of smokeless tobacco products, 63% of reporting Parties responded that a licence was required, 15% responded that it was not required, 15% responded that it was not applicable and 7% did not respond. On the ability of the competent authority to suspend, revoke or cancel licences to import tobacco products in cases of non-compliance, 83% of reporting Parties responded that the competent authority had this ability, 4% responded that it did not and 13% did not respond. Regarding the requirement for a licence fee for the importation of tobacco products, 61% of reporting Parties responded that a licence fee was required, 26% responded that it was not and 13% did not respond.

7. In relation to **Article 7 (Due diligence)**, responses from Parties showed varying levels of implementation across key areas. For the requirement that all individuals and corporate entities in the tobacco supply chain conduct due diligence before and during business relationships, 44% of reporting Parties responded that this was a requirement, 41% responded that it was not a requirement and 15% did not respond. Similarly, for the requirement to monitor sales to ensure that quantities align with market demand, 41% of reporting Parties responded that this was a requirement, 44% responded that it was not a requirement and 15% did not respond. Regarding the requirement to report evidence of customers engaging in contravention of the Protocol, only 35% of reporting Parties responded that this was a requirement, while 50% responded that it was not a requirement and 15% did not respond.

8. In relation to **Article 8 (Tracking and tracing)**, 70% of reporting Parties indicated that they applied markings – such as tax stamps, fiscal marks, banderols or other types of identifiers – on cigarette packaging units, while the remaining 30% reported that they did not. Among those that applied markings, 91% stated that the markings include a unique identifier for each unit pack of cigarettes, making each item distinct and distinguishable. Additionally, among the Parties applying markings, 69% applied them to packaging of cigarettes manufactured within their territories, 81% to packaging of imported cigarettes, and 56% to packaging of cigarettes intended for export.

9. Among the Parties that reported applying markings to cigarette packaging units, the majority reported applying the same markings to other tobacco products. Specifically, 72% of those Parties that applied markings on cigarettes indicated that they applied the exact same requirements to rolling tobacco, 66% to waterpipe tobacco, 59% to HTPs, 72% to cigars and cigarillos, and 56% to smokeless tobacco products.

10. In relation to **Article 9 (Record-keeping)**, 74% of reporting Parties responded that all individuals and corporate entities engaged in the supply chain of tobacco, tobacco products and tobacco manufacturing equipment were required to maintain complete and accurate records of all relevant transactions. Meanwhile, 20% responded that this was not a requirement and 6% did not respond. Similarly, 72% of reporting Parties responded that entities subject to a licensing system were required to provide, upon request, information to authorities on market volumes, trends, forecasts and other relevant data; 19% responded that this was not a requirement and 9% did not respond.

11. Concerning **Article 10 (Security and preventive measures)**, there was variation in the proportions of Parties applying various measures: 54% of reporting Parties indicated that persons subject to licensing were required to report cross-border transfers of cash or payments in kind, as stipulated by national law, while 33% responded that this was not a requirement and 13% did not respond. Regarding the requirement to report suspicious transactions, 46% of reporting Parties responded that this was a requirement, 35% responded that it was not and 19% did not respond. Finally, 33% of reporting Parties indicated that licensed entities were required to supply tobacco products or manufacturing equipment only in amounts commensurate with the demand in the intended market of retail sale or use, while 43% responded that this was not a requirement and 24% did not respond.

12. Regarding **Article 11 (Sale by Internet, telecommunication or any other evolving technology)**, 74% of reporting Parties responded that all tobacco sales by Internet, telecommunication or any other evolving technology-based modes of sales had to comply with all relevant obligations covered by the Protocol; 13% responded that this was not the case and 13% did not respond.

13. With regard to **Article 12 (Free zones and international transit)**, 70% of reporting Parties responded that they had a free zone within their territory, while 26% responded that they did not and 4% did not respond. Of those that reported having a free zone, 50% indicated that they allowed manufacturing of, and transactions in, tobacco and tobacco products within these zones; 38% responded that they did not. In free zones, record-keeping was the most commonly reported supply chain control, followed by licensing and due diligence.

14. Concerning **Article 13 (Duty free sales)**, 63% of reporting Parties responded that they allowed the sale of duty-free tobacco products, while 33% responded that they did not and 4% did not respond. Among those that allowed such sales, 62% indicated that duty free tobacco products were subject to all relevant measures of the Protocol, and 59% reported that markings – such as stamps or codes with unique identifiers – were applied to units of tobacco packaging for cigarettes sold duty free.

Part IV – Offences

15. In relation to **Article 14 (Unlawful conduct including criminal offences)**, 82% of reporting Parties responded that the non-payment of applicable duties, taxes and other levies at any stage in the supply chain was considered unlawful conduct that constitutes a crime under their legal framework. Meanwhile, 9% indicated that it was considered unlawful conduct but did not constitute a crime, and another 9% did not respond.

16. Concerning acts of smuggling or attempted smuggling of tobacco, tobacco products or manufacturing equipment, 80% of reporting Parties responded that such acts were considered unlawful conduct constituting a crime, 7% considered them unlawful but not constituting a crime, 2% stated that they were not considered unlawful conduct and 11% did not respond.
17. Regarding the illicit manufacture of tobacco, tobacco products or manufacturing equipment – or tobacco packaging bearing false fiscal stamps, unique identification markings or other required labels – 76% of Parties responded that such acts were considered unlawful conduct constituting a crime, 9% considered them unlawful but not constituting a crime and 15% did not respond.
18. In relation to **Article 17 (Seizure payments)**, 59% of reporting Parties responded that they had adopted measures allowing authorities to levy an amount proportionate to lost taxes and duties from the producer, manufacturer, distributor, importer or exporter of seized tobacco, tobacco products or tobacco manufacturing equipment. Meanwhile, 26% responded that they had not adopted such measures and 15% did not respond.
19. Concerning **Article 18 (Disposal or destruction)**, almost all reporting Parties (94%) indicated that they destroyed or disposed of all confiscated tobacco, tobacco products and manufacturing equipment, while 2% responded that they had not and 4% did not respond.
20. With regard to **Article 19 (Special investigative techniques)**, 68% of reporting Parties indicated that their national legislation allowed special investigative techniques, such as controlled delivery or undercover operations, to be used for the purposes of combating illicit trade in tobacco products. Meanwhile 17% responded that their national legislation did not allow use of such techniques and 15% did not respond.
21. Commonly cited techniques included controlled deliveries, surveillance (including electronic and camera-based), telephone interceptions and use of informants. Countries including Belgium, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland reported using advanced tools like technical surveillance devices and trackers. Others, such as Ecuador and Panama, highlighted the use of undercover operations and simulated purchases. Some Parties, including Slovakia and Sweden, emphasized the use of data analysis and traceability systems to detect irregularities. Nigeria reported conducting a comprehensive investigation into British American Tobacco Nigeria and its affiliates, uncovering evidence of illicit trade activities, unlawful competition and obstruction of justice, which led to a significant financial penalty.

Part V – International cooperation

22. In relation to **Article 20 (General information sharing)**, Parties reported a wide range of methods and trends related to the illicit trade of tobacco, tobacco products and manufacturing equipment. Common concealment techniques included hiding products in vehicles (for example, under seats, in spare tyres or within legal cargo), using postal and courier services, and misdeclaring goods at customs. Several countries, including Austria, Belgium and Slovakia, noted the use of false documentation and concealment within legitimate shipments. Others, such as Hungary and Latvia, highlighted the role of organized crime groups operating covert production facilities and using sophisticated logistics to avoid detection. Some Parties, including Norway and the United Kingdom, observed increased smuggling via air passengers and freight. A few countries, such as Lithuania and Türkiye, reported novel methods like the use of drones, hot air balloons or re-export fraud. Significant seizures were reported by countries including India, Latvia and Türkiye, involving millions of cigarettes and large quantities of raw tobacco. While many Parties indicated

no major changes in smuggling methods, others – including Belgium, Cyprus and Panama – reported evolving tactics and increased use of digital platforms or new transport routes.

23. Concerning **Article 21 (Enforcement information sharing)**, 41% of reporting Parties responded that they had shared enforcement information necessary for the detection or investigation of illicit trade in tobacco, tobacco products or manufacturing equipment with other Parties to the WHO FCTC. Meanwhile, 46% responded that they had not shared such information and 13% did not respond.

24. With regard to **Article 22 (Information sharing: confidentiality and protection of information)**, 52% of reporting Parties responded that they had laws in place to protect any confidential information exchanged with other Parties to the WHO FCTC. Meanwhile, 17% responded that they did not have such laws in place and 31% did not respond.

25. In relation to **Article 23 (Assistance and cooperation: training, technical assistance and cooperation in scientific technical and technological matters)**, 33% of reporting Parties indicated that they had received technical assistance to support implementation of the Protocol. Meanwhile, 56% responded that they had not received such support and 11% did not respond.

26. Regarding **Article 24 (Assistance and cooperation: investigation and prosecution of offences)**, one in three reporting Parties (33%) responded that they had engaged with other Parties to the WHO FCTC to investigate criminal offences related to the illicit trade of tobacco. Meanwhile, 50% responded that they had not engaged with other Parties on such investigations and 17% did not respond.

27. In respect of **Article 27 (Law enforcement cooperation)**, 72% of reporting Parties responded that they had established mechanisms to ensure effective cooperation with customs, police or other law enforcement agencies from Parties to the WHO FCTC. Meanwhile, 19% responded that they had not established such mechanisms and 9% did not respond.

28. In relation to **Article 28 (Mutual administrative assistance)**, 37% of reporting Parties responded that they had provided or made available mutual administrative assistance to Parties to the WHO FCTC to ensure the proper application of customs and other relevant laws in the prevention, detection, investigation, prosecution and combating of illicit trade in tobacco products. Meanwhile, 48% responded that they had not provided or made available such assistance and 15% did not respond.

29. Concerning **Article 29 (Mutual legal assistance)**, 22% of reporting Parties responded that they had provided or made available mutual legal assistance to other Parties to the WHO FCTC for the purpose of investigations, prosecutions or judicial proceedings in relation to criminal offences established under Article 14 of the Protocol. Meanwhile, 52% responded that they had not provided or made available such assistance and 26% did not respond.

30. In respect of **Article 30 (Extradition)**, 50% of reporting Parties responded that they had established measures to ensure extradition for criminal offences under Article 14 of the Protocol or as part of efforts to eliminate illicit trade in tobacco products. Meanwhile, 33% responded that they had not established such measures and 17% did not respond.

Technical support needs and implementation barriers

31. Reporting Parties expressed a range of technical assistance needs, primarily focused on developing and operationalizing tracking and tracing systems, strengthening institutional capacity through training, and enhancing legal and regulatory frameworks. Several Parties – including India, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Panama – had sought support in designing robust tracking mechanisms and improving interregional enforcement coordination. Others, including Benin, Mauritius and Togo, had focused on capacity-building for customs, police, health and legal personnel. Legal harmonization and alignment with international standards were key priorities for countries such as Kenya, Montenegro and Paraguay. Additionally, financial assistance, technology transfer and regional cooperation were frequently cited by Parties as critical areas of support.

32. Parties encountered a wide range of barriers to implementing the Protocol, often reflecting their unique institutional, legal and economic contexts. Common challenges reported by Parties – such as Mauritius, Nigeria and Togo – included technical and financial limitations, such as the lack of operational tracking and tracing systems; insufficient funding; and inadequate equipment or infrastructure. Legal and regulatory gaps – including the absence of harmonized legislation or delays in adopting relevant directives – were reported by countries such as Burkina Faso, India and Norway. Political and institutional constraints – such as low prioritization, weak leadership or limited inter-agency coordination – were highlighted by Benin, Costa Rica and Uruguay. Several Parties, including Ecuador, Gabon and Kenya, cited interference from the tobacco industry as a significant barrier. Additionally, enforcement challenges, porous borders and limited international cooperation were noted by countries including Gambia, Iraq and Paraguay.

33. Several Parties had taken proactive steps to overcome barriers to implementing the Protocol, often through a combination of institutional coordination, international collaboration and targeted capacity-building. Benin and Côte d'Ivoire emphasized advocacy efforts – both for mobilizing financial resources and for enforcing key provisions of the WHO FCTC, such as Article 5.3. Brazil had created a dedicated subcommission within its national tobacco control body to coordinate implementation of the Protocol, and had incorporated recommendations from a needs assessment into its national workplan. India had established a regular coordination mechanism with the Ministry of Finance and facilitated an exposure visit to the United Kingdom to study international good practices. Kenya had adopted a multi-pronged strategy, including awareness-raising among policy-makers, training for enforcement and public health officials, and inter-ministerial data sharing.

Conclusions

34. The 2025 reporting cycle demonstrates that while Parties have made notable progress in implementing the Protocol, significant challenges remain. Many Parties have taken commendable steps to strengthen supply chain controls, enhance enforcement mechanisms and improve interagency coordination. The expansion of tracking and tracing systems, the introduction of new licensing frameworks, and the adoption of special investigative techniques reflect a growing commitment to addressing illicit trade.

35. However, the persistence of legal, technical, financial and political barriers – often compounded by interference from the tobacco industry and limited international cooperation – continues to hinder full implementation. The need for sustained technical assistance, capacity-building and resource mobilization remains critical – particularly for Parties eligible to receive official development assistance.

36. Encouragingly, several Parties have demonstrated innovative and collaborative approaches to overcoming these barriers, including the establishment of national coordination mechanisms and regional partnerships, and exposure to international good practices. These efforts underscore the importance of continued support to ensure that all Parties can meet their obligations under the Protocol.

Action by the Meeting of the Parties

37. The MOP is invited to note the present report.
