



Strategy for mechanisms of assistance and mobilization of financial resources to support the implementation of the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products

Report by the Convention Secretariat

Purpose of the document

This report describes the activities undertaken by the Convention Secretariat to support the review of the Strategy for mechanisms of assistance and mobilization of financial resources to support the implementation of the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products, the related findings and recommendations, pursuant to decision FCTC/MOP2(11).

Action by the Meeting of the Parties

The Meeting of the Parties (MOP) is invited to note the present report and provide further guidance.

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 Strategy for mechanisms of assistance and mobilization of financial resources to support the implementation of the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products included in document FCTC/MOP/2/8 was adopted by the Meeting of the Parties (MOP) to the Protocol in decision FCTC/MOP2(11). The purpose of the Strategy is to strengthen the ability of Parties to implement the Protocol fully by providing support to Parties to address their implementation needs. The objective of the Strategy is to provide a framework within which the Convention Secretariat can support Parties to implement the Protocol through: (a) mechanisms of assistance and (b) mobilization of financial resources.

2. In decision FCTC/MOP2(11), the MOP also decided to review the Strategy, as necessary or at the latest at the Fourth session of the MOP, based on recommendations that would be presented by the Convention Secretariat following consultations with Parties. Under the guidance of the Bureau, the Secretariat has undertaken activities to support the review of the Strategy, including consultations with Parties. This report describes the activities undertaken to support the review of the Strategy and the related findings, and presents recommendations to the MOP.

Activities undertaken by the Convention Secretariat to support the review of the Strategy

3. The Strategy provides a mandate to the Convention Secretariat to offer mechanisms of assistance and mobilize financial resources to support the implementation of the Protocol. The Strategy was not intended to act as an overall strategy for the Protocol, being different in purpose from the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) Global Strategy to Accelerate Tobacco Control.¹ The WHO FCTC Global Strategy has a wider reach than just the Convention Secretariat; it includes guidance to Parties in setting national priorities and developing programmes/plans for the implementation of the WHO FCTC, as well as in monitoring action using indicators developed for and included in the WHO FCTC Global Strategy itself.

4. Separately, the Convention Secretariat and other partners, including WHO, continue to offer support to Parties to the WHO FCTC to become a Party to the Protocol. Activities relating to attracting new Parties to the Protocol are provided for in the workplans and budgets adopted by the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the WHO FCTC and the MOP.

5. To support the review of the Strategy by the MOP, the Convention Secretariat has undertaken the following activities:

- (a) a mapping of activities undertaken to date by the Secretariat to meet the objective of the Strategy and in its key areas;

¹ In decision FCTC/COP8(16), the COP adopted the medium-term strategic framework, also known as the Global Strategy to Accelerate Tobacco Control: Advancing Sustainable Development through the Implementation of the WHO FCTC 2019–2025, as a living document. The Global Strategy is intended to guide the Parties in the implementation of the WHO FCTC, as well the Convention Secretariat and other stakeholders that are in a position to support Parties with implementation of the treaty. It also serves as basis for planning and budgeting, thus informing the agenda and the work of the COP. The Global Strategy was developed by a working group tasked by the COP to prepare a medium-term strategic framework to guide the development of biennial workplans, budgets and implementation support for consideration by the COP. In decision FCTC/COP10(15), the COP extended the Global Strategy until 2030 to ensure coherence and alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

- (b) a review of the current levels of implementation of the Protocol;
- (c) consideration of whether the Strategy requires any adjustment, including in light of decisions taken by the MOP since its adoption;
- (d) an information collection exercise with Parties regarding implementation support that has been received and the main barriers to implementation being experienced (information collected through interviews with a sample of 10 Parties that had received assistance from the Convention Secretariat and a review of information submitted during the reporting cycle);
- (e) engagement with stakeholders, including interviews with 10 international intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) accredited as observers to the MOP, experts and other stakeholders that have been working in areas related to the implementation of the Protocol since the Strategy was adopted; and
- (f) consideration of whether any additional mechanisms of assistance employed to support the implementation of the WHO FCTC could also be employed for the Protocol.

Findings of the activities undertaken to support the review of the Strategy

6. Findings from the mapping of activities conducted under the Protocol by the Convention Secretariat show that support has been successfully mobilized to date in accordance with the Strategy. Noteworthy activities have included provision of direct technical assistance to Parties on request, Protocol needs assessments (including post-needs assessment support), and building of partnerships with IGOs and NGOs to provide support to Parties in implementing the Protocol. Based on this mapping, the Secretariat does not recommend that any adjustment to the Strategy is necessary at this stage. The activities of the Secretariat have been developed within the framework of the Strategy.

7. The review of the current levels of implementation of the Protocol was based on the 2023 Global Progress Report on Implementation of the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products.² The Global Progress Report found that the reported levels of implementation varied greatly, both by article and among the Parties to Protocol. For Article 8 (Tracking and tracing), an article with time-bound provisions, 35 Parties reported that they had established a tracking and tracing system. Parties reported the most progress on implementing Article 16 (Prosecutions and sanctions), Article 10 (Security and preventive measures), Article 15 (Liability of legal persons), Article 14 (Unlawful conduct including criminal offences) and Article 17 (Seizure payments). Lower levels of implementation were reported for measures related to articles under Part V of the Protocol (International cooperation). Overall, it could be concluded that more progress on implementation was needed, and that the Convention Secretariat would need to continue to offer implementation assistance to Parties. Based on the review of current levels of implementation by Parties, the Secretariat notes that the Strategy remains relevant and recommends that it continue to be implemented without adjustment at this stage. Party needs can continue to be addressed within the framework of the Strategy.

² [2023 Global Progress Report on Implementation of the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products](#). Geneva: Secretariat of the WHO FCTC; 2023 (accessed 17 June 2025).

8. Decisions taken by the MOP since the adoption of the Strategy were reviewed. This review included extracting the operative paragraphs from decisions adopted at the Second and the Third sessions of the MOP to ensure that the implementation of the decisions can be supported by the Convention Secretariat through the Strategy. Based on the review of MOP decisions since the adoption of the Strategy, the Secretariat notes that the Strategy remains relevant and recommends that it continue to be implemented without adjustment at this stage. The Strategy as adopted is able to support the implementation of MOP decisions.

9. Interviews with Parties conducted by the Convention Secretariat as part of the review were undertaken either in person or virtually. All Parties interviewed had received implementation assistance through the FCTC 2030 project or a Protocol needs assessment. Key findings of these interviews are described below.

(a) Overall, Parties said that the assistance they received was useful and appreciated, but that they would benefit from further follow-up assistance. Areas where Parties emphasized further need for technical assistance included tracking and tracing, licensing, destruction of seized tobacco products, strengthening of the existing penal code, and governance aspects such as the development of implementation strategies.

(b) Some Parties emphasized the need for capacity-building and training on the Protocol for national authorities to build their competencies, and to raise general awareness of the Protocol among national stakeholders. The need to raise awareness of the Protocol among civil society and in international fora was also mentioned. Challenges that some Parties mentioned included difficulties coordinating activities at the national level, limited expertise on the Protocol in ministries of health, and staff turnover. Some Parties that had not yet had a needs assessment said that they would benefit from one to help with implementation. Not many Parties reported making use of resources available from various stakeholders (including the Convention Secretariat) such as toolkits, reports or technical webinars.

10. Based on the consultations with Parties, the Convention Secretariat notes that the Strategy remains relevant and recommends that it continue to be implemented without adjustment at this stage. The assistance needed by Parties can be provided within the framework of the Strategy.

11. The review of the information submitted through the 2023 Protocol reporting cycle found that Parties have diverse needs and are at different stages of Protocol implementation. The main areas where Parties reported receiving assistance included tracking and tracing, information gathering, and law enforcement, while the main areas where Parties reported providing assistance to others were information gathering and law enforcement. Particular challenges and areas of assistance that Parties reported include coordination at the national level across institutions and ministries, capacity-building and training, mobilization of financial resources, support for the establishment of tracking and tracing systems, technical assistance in various other areas of the Protocol, addressing tobacco industry interference (including in the establishment and operation of tracking and tracing systems), and challenges involving overall coordination among a large number of stakeholders and actors involved in addressing illicit trade. Based on the review of the data submitted during the 2023 reporting cycle, the Convention Secretariat notes that the Strategy remains relevant and recommends that it continue to be implemented without adjustment at this stage. The assistance needed by Parties can be provided within the framework of the Strategy.

12. Interviews with IGO, NGO and expert stakeholders conducted by the Convention Secretariat as part of the review of the Strategy were also undertaken either in person or virtually. Key findings of these interviews are described below.³

Assistance offered

(a) Stakeholders reported offering countries direct assistance, training and capacity-building through courses and webinars, linking countries to provide peer-to-peer support, and producing resources such as publications. Assistance was offered in key areas including understanding the problem of illicit trade in tobacco products, strengthening tobacco tax administration, and the implementation of tracking and tracing systems. Some stakeholders noted that providing support for the implementation of the Protocol can require in-depth and longer-term engagement.

Most effective types of assistance and unmet needs

(b) Tailored direct assistance and peer-to-peer assistance were suggested by stakeholders as the most effective types of support because they could help address the unique situation in each country. Some stakeholders stressed that many countries still needed help to understand the problem of illicit trade in tobacco products and the tobacco supply chain in their jurisdiction. Once the problem is understood, a strategy can be developed and implemented. Several stakeholders stressed that many countries are still at a very early stage in addressing illicit trade in tobacco products, and need help with understanding the Protocol and how to implement its measures fully.

Challenges in implementing the Protocol

(c) One key challenge discussed by some stakeholders was the need at the national level to take a multisectoral approach to implementation, as sometimes only the country's ministry of health is involved. Some stakeholders stressed that the Protocol needs more Parties, and some were concerned that the Protocol is not seen as a priority by governments. Some stakeholders also discussed the shortage of experts to support implementation, as well as the time and the costs of providing the technical assistance that countries may need. Tobacco industry interference was also mentioned by some stakeholders, along with the persistent misconception that raising taxes is the main determinant of illicit trade in tobacco products. Helping countries to understand the importance of collecting and sharing data related to illicit trade in tobacco products was also described as a challenge by some stakeholders.

13. Based on the consultations with Parties, the Convention Secretariat notes that the Strategy remains relevant and recommends that it continue to be implemented without adjustment at this stage. The assistance needed by Parties can be provided within the framework of the Strategy. Nevertheless, the concerns expressed by some stakeholders about the shortage of suitable experts on the Protocol and the funds required for providing the in-depth direct assistance needed by countries are highlighted.

³ The stakeholders interviewed provided assistance to Parties to the Protocol and to countries not yet Party to the Protocol; therefore, the section relating to stakeholder interviews refers to countries rather than Parties.

14. The review found that there were no new specific mechanisms of support employed by the WHO FCTC that are not already in use by the Protocol. The Protocol is already using needs assessments – similar to those undertaken by the WHO FCTC – and a methodology for conducting investment cases for Protocol implementation is planned for development.

Recommendations to the MOP to support the review of the Strategy

15. Overall, the Strategy is fulfilling the MOP's objective to provide a framework within which the Convention Secretariat can support Parties to implement the Protocol through: (a) mechanisms of assistance and (b) mobilization of financial resources. In light of the activities undertaken to review the Strategy, the Convention Secretariat notes that the Strategy remains relevant and recommends that it continue to be implemented without adjustment at this stage. The assistance needed by Parties can be provided within the framework of the Strategy.

Action by the Meeting of the Parties

16. The MOP is invited to note the present report and provide further guidance.
