



Voluntary Implementation Peer Review and Support Mechanism

Report by the Convention Secretariat

Purpose of the document

This report is submitted to the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control pursuant to decision FCTC/COP10(22), which requested the Convention Secretariat to make the necessary arrangements to launch the Voluntary Implementation Peer Review and Support (VIPRS) Mechanism and, among others, to assess its effectiveness and report on progress to the COP.

Action by the Conference of the Parties

The COP is invited to note this report and provide further guidance.

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

Link to Workplan and Budget item: 3.1.2.1.

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

Related document(s): None.

Introduction

1. In decision FCTC/COP10(22), the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) established the Voluntary Implementation Peer Review and Support (VIPRS) Mechanism and adopted its terms of reference, to be reviewed as necessary. The COP requested the Convention Secretariat to make the necessary arrangements to launch the VIPRS Mechanism, to assess its effectiveness, and to report on progress to the Eleventh session of the COP (COP11).
2. In accordance with its mandate, the Convention Secretariat made arrangements to launch the VIPRS Mechanism (see paragraph 21) and to facilitate, under the guidance of the Bureau, its implementation. Despite its efforts, the Secretariat did not receive sufficient expressions of interest from Parties for the VIPRS Mechanism to become operational. The Convention Secretariat has updated the Bureau of the COP in respect of this development, and sought guidance on how to further proceed on this matter. At its second meeting, the Bureau requested the Secretariat to prepare a document on the historical background of the VIPRS Mechanism and recommendations for its improvement, to be discussed at the Third meeting of the Bureau. At its Third meeting, the Bureau discussed the need to outline the differences, added value and limitations of the VIPRS Mechanism, needs assessment exercises and the WHO FCTC reporting system. It also agreed that options such as transitioning the VIPRS Mechanism to a more structured or mandatory mechanism, or discontinuing it altogether, should be considered. The Bureau requested the Convention Secretariat to take note of its comments in preparing the Secretariat's report to COP11.
3. The present document describes the historical background of the VIPRS Mechanism, the launch of the VIPRS Mechanism and the issues under discussion, taking into account the comments of the Bureau, for consideration by the COP.

Historical background

4. In decision FCTC/COP4(16), the COP requested the Convention Secretariat to prepare a report containing, among other things, recommendations to better facilitate regular review of progress in implementation of the WHO FCTC. The report FCTC/COP/5/14 presented an examination of the practices employed by various international treaties to review their parties' implementation reports, including a table with implementation review processes under various United Nations treaties contained in its Annex 3. In decision FCTC/COP5(11), the COP requested the Convention Secretariat to prepare recommendations on the establishment of a mechanism to facilitate review of Parties' reports by the COP.
5. In decision FCTC/COP6(15), the COP established the Expert Group on Reporting Arrangements under the WHO FCTC with a mandate, among other tasks, to examine various reporting mechanisms of other international treaties – including those that use an intergovernmental peer review process – and to make recommendations both on strengthening the reporting arrangements and on development of a reporting and implementation review mechanism under the WHO FCTC.
6. In its report FCTC/COP/7/15, the Expert Group noted that it had heard from the secretariats of some international treaties on the implementation review mechanisms they had adopted, and had reviewed research on mechanisms operated by other international treaties. The Expert Group agreed that an implementation review mechanism (IRM) was needed to promote compliance by

the Parties under the WHO FCTC, and recommended that any mechanism established under the Convention should analyse all reports on implementation by Parties, and should facilitate the highlighting of good practices, opportunities and solutions to challenges faced.

7. The Expert Group recommended establishment of a WHO FCTC Implementation Review Committee as a subsidiary body under Article 23.5(f) of the Convention, consisting of up to 15 independent experts, including 12 representatives nominated by Parties and three from nongovernmental organizations that are observers to the COP. According to the proposed terms of reference (contained in Annex 1 of document FCTC/COP/7/15), the objective of the Committee would be to assist Parties to facilitate, promote, monitor and secure the effective implementation of, and compliance with, obligations under the Convention. The Committee would undertake reviews of approximately 50% of Parties' implementation reports during each intersessional period between COPs, with a focus on both quality and completeness of data.

8. For its initial review the Committee, with the assistance of the Convention Secretariat, would consider any gaps in reporting; any needs identified, or resources sought or provided; non-compliance with any obligations under the WHO FCTC; inconsistencies of responses between different reporting cycles; and inconsistencies in data reported in background documents uploaded with the reports.

9. Following this initial review, the Committee could engage directly in constructive dialogue with any Parties as deemed necessary, and would provide a report to each reviewed Party on its observations and recommendations. These reports would be made available to the COP on completion of engagement with the Party. The Committee would make non-binding recommendations, and would be focused on assisting Parties to implement the provisions of the WHO FCTC effectively.

10. In response to the Expert Group's proposal, some Parties welcomed the suggested establishment of an Implementation Review Committee as a subsidiary body of the COP, while many others expressed concern. Issues raised included legality, given that it would not be an intergovernmental body; the number of implementation reports to be reviewed; and how these would be selected.¹

11. After some discussion, the COP adopted decision FCTC/COP7(13), establishing a Working Group to develop a medium-term strategic framework (MTSF) to guide the development of biennial workplans, budgets and implementation support for consideration of the COP. The Working Group was also requested, among other actions, to review the recommendations of the Expert Group on Reporting Arrangements under the WHO FCTC and the proposed terms of reference to establish an Implementation Review Committee in order to make recommendations on an ongoing mechanism for the systematic review of Parties' support and assistance needs for consideration of the COP.

12. In its report FCTC/COP/8/11, the Working Group noted that its members agreed that an IRM for the WHO FCTC was highly desirable, and felt that the specifics of such a mechanism – including the terms of reference for an Implementation Review Committee – needed to be resubmitted for consideration by the Parties. Accordingly, the draft MTSF anticipated the establishment of an IRM within two years (by 2020). In the interim, a pilot demonstration of the mechanism would be undertaken to validate the approach and allow refinements to the proposed terms of reference.

¹ [Report of the Seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control](#) (accessed 23 June 2025).

The draft decision proposed by the Working Group included a request by the COP for the Convention Secretariat to conduct – through the voluntary participation of five to 10 Parties – a pilot exercise on implementation of an IRM using the terms of reference proposed by the Expert Group in document FCTC/COP/7/15.

13. When considering the recommendations made by the Working Group, a large majority of Parties welcomed the proposed IRM, while others expressed concern. After a lengthy debate, new language was added to the draft decision to emphasize more clearly that participation in the review should be voluntary, and its results non-binding.²

14. In decision FCTC/COP8(16), the COP adopted the MTSF, referred to as the Global Strategy to Accelerate Tobacco Control: Advancing Sustainable Development through the Implementation of the WHO FCTC 2019–2025, as a living document. Strategic Objective 3.1.2 of the Global Strategy called for creation of a peer-led IRM. Further, the COP requested the Convention Secretariat to conduct – through the voluntary participation of up to 12 Parties – a pilot exercise for the IRM; to develop its terms of reference, as appropriate; to report to the Ninth session of the COP (COP9) on the outcome of the pilot project; and to present a costed strategy, and related terms of reference, for its further consideration.

15. During the intersessional period between the Eighth session of the COP and COP9, as reported in document FCTC/COP/10/14, the Convention Secretariat conducted the pilot exercise for the IRM as requested. Formal expressions of interest to participate were received from 25 Parties, and 12 Parties were chosen using selection criteria including regional representation, income category, population size, language, availability of implementation data and whether the Party had received other support through a needs assessment of the FCTC 2030 project.

16. The Convention Secretariat also identified and invited nine experts to advise on the process and review the volunteer Parties. Reviewers undertook assessments of the Parties assigned to them on the basis of data and documents collected. The reviewers engaged directly with the designated country focal points, with the support of the Secretariat, to receive additional input, details and clarifications.

17. Based on the lessons learned and recommendations from the pilot exercise, and taking into consideration both that decision FCTC/COP8(16) established that the review should be voluntary and that the Global Strategy called for creation of a peer-led IRM, the Secretariat prepared terms of reference and a costed strategy for a WHO FCTC Implementation Review and Support Mechanism (IRSM); as indicated in document FCTC/COP/10/14, at the recommendation of the experts, the proposed mechanism was renamed to include the dimension of assistance and support to Parties.

18. According to the proposed terms of reference (contained in Annex 1 of document FCTC/COP/10/14), the Convention Secretariat would call on Parties to express interest in participating as volunteers for the IRSM. Interested Parties would commit to appoint a focal point and an expert to the group of reviewers. Focal points would be responsible for sourcing and gathering all the necessary documents for the review, translating them (if necessary and appropriate), and providing them to the assigned reviewers. Expert reviewers would review all the documents provided and produce the Party report.

² [Report of the Eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control](#) (accessed 23 June 2025).

19. Once the list of volunteers was complete, the Convention Secretariat would pair Parties, taking into account regional affiliation and language criteria. The expert reviewers would share the draft reports with the respective focal points for feedback and agreement. On receipt of comments, the reports would be finalized and sent to the Secretariat to be submitted to the respective volunteer Party for their information and for final agreement.

20. When considering the report FCTC/COP/10/14 prepared by the Convention Secretariat during the Tenth session of the COP (COP10), some Parties expressed support for the proposed IRSM. Other Parties, while acknowledging the value of such a mechanism for identifying Parties' implementation challenges and support needs, were of the view that the proposed mechanism did not constitute a true IRM like those used by other multilateral treaties. The Parties pointed out that such mechanisms were transparent in nature, and that the review results were generally made public, noting that the mechanism proposed in document FCTC/COP/10/14 appeared to be a voluntary peer review procedure rather than an IRM.

21. Several amendments were proposed to the draft decision contained in Annex 3 of document FCTC/COP/10/14, reflecting views expressed and suggestions made during the debate. After extensive discussion, it was agreed to change the name of the mechanism to "Voluntary Implementation Peer Review and Support Mechanism"; to add wording providing for the mechanism to be reviewed as necessary; and to propose any necessary revisions to the process for consideration by COP11.³ In decision FCTC/COP10(22) the COP established the VIPRS Mechanism.

Launch of the VIPRS Mechanism

22. In September 2024, the Convention Secretariat sent an email communication to all Parties (including WHO FCTC focal points and permanent missions) to call for expressions of interest in volunteering in the VIPRS Mechanism. This provided information about the VIPRS Mechanism, a link to decision FCTC/COP10(22) and details about the peer review process agreed as part of the decision. WHO regional tobacco control advisors were also informed of the call, and were requested to promote the mechanism and encourage Parties to consider volunteering.

23. The Convention Secretariat received expressions of interest from four Parties. Of these:

(a) one Party misunderstood the call, believing it to relate to participation in the FCTC 2030 project, and therefore withdrew the expression of interest;

(b) two Parties requested additional consultations with the Convention Secretariat to discuss the VIPRS Mechanism in detail, but both withdrew after these consultations (these Parties expressed concerns about the process owing to the very limited number of Parties involved; and, as countries from the same region, they would already have been in contact about the matters covered by the VIPRS Mechanism, which they felt would provide little benefit); and

(c) one Party remained interested in participating in the VIPRS Mechanism, but at least two Parties would be needed for the mechanism to operate in accordance with the COP10 decision.

³ [Report of the Tenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control](#) (accessed date 23 June 2025).

24. In this context, the Convention Secretariat was not able to implement the VIPRS Mechanism as adopted in decision FCTC/COP10(22).

Discussion

25. As discussed at the Third meeting of the Bureau, while the VIPRS Mechanism may have some overlapping aspects with the needs assessments for the implementation of the WHO FCTC and with Party reporting under the WHO FCTC, the latter activities are different in scope, depth and impact.

26. **The needs assessment for the implementation of the WHO FCTC**, established in line with decision FCTC/COP1(13), is a voluntary exercise designed to support Parties in evaluating their needs in light of their obligations under the Convention, with the aim of ensuring its full implementation. Needs assessments are in-depth, in-country evaluations jointly carried out by the requesting Party and the Secretariat, involving multisectoral engagement, detailed reporting and targeted support. In contrast, the VIPRS Mechanism is a peer-led, remote review process focused primarily on reviewing existing reports and publicly available information,⁴ with no country visit, no financial support from the Convention Secretariat, and outcomes shared only with the participating Party. Both exercises are voluntary and include elements of support to the Parties. At the same time, while needs assessments could drive significant political engagement and action, VIPRS outcomes would depend on how the participating Party chose to engage with the findings. The needs assessment reports are publicly available on the WHO FCTC website;⁵ findings from Party reviews, however, may be shared solely within each of the VIPRS Mechanism group of volunteer Parties, and top-level information may be used for reporting purpose.

27. **Party reporting under the WHO FCTC** is governed by Article 21 of the WHO FCTC and subsequent COP decisions. Each Party is required to submit periodic reports to the COP on its implementation of the Convention. In decision FCTC/COP10(19), the COP decided to improve the reporting system of the WHO FCTC, including through the adoption of a revised reporting instrument of the WHO FCTC;⁶ the outcomes of the first application of the improved reporting system are outlined in document FCTC/COP/11/4. While the COP has taken many decisions on reporting arrangements, the COP has not yet established a formal mechanism for reviewing the mandatory Party reports that would apply uniformly to all Parties. As indicated in the “Historical background” section of the present report, the concept of an IRM was first raised in relation to the reporting arrangements under the WHO FCTC, and it has evolved significantly. Following deliberations at several sessions, COP10 adopted the VIPRS Mechanism as a voluntary, peer-led approach, aimed at fostering supportive review among Parties rather than oversight of Party non-compliance with treaty obligations. As evidenced by the low interest in participation in the VIPRS Mechanism, that approach had not gained significant traction with the Parties.

⁴ These include the last two official WHO FCTC implementation reports, the WHO FCTC needs and/or impact assessment reports, any national/regional or local legislation, decree, strategy, action plan, etc. (Annex 1 FCTC/COP10(22)).

⁵ See [Needs assessments](#) (accessed 23 June 2025).

⁶ The improvement related to decreasing the reporting burden on the Parties, improving the quality of data collected and tailoring the collection of data to the needs of the COP, building on synergies with other relevant official public data sources, and increasing the focus on monitoring the indicators of the Global Strategy (document FCTC/COP/10/13).

28. In light of the above, the COP may wish to reconsider the potential added value of an IRM that:

(a) is not voluntary; and

(b) would apply to all Parties, thereby aligning more closely with review mechanisms used in other multilateral treaties.

29. Alternatively, the COP may wish to discontinue the VIPRS Mechanism until such time as it may consider it appropriate (for example, if Parties are willing to engage in a mandatory review process, which entails oversight of their non-compliance with obligations of the treaty). The Convention Secretariat would continue to support Parties with implementation of their reporting obligations under the WHO FCTC, and with needs assessment, on Party request, until such future time.

Action by the Conference of the Parties

30. The COP is invited to note this report and provide further guidance.
