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Performance of the Mechanism for the Review of Implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption

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Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The present document contains an overview of the performance of the Mechanism for the Review of Implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption, including updated information on the conduct of country reviews during the first and second review cycles of the Mechanism.

* [CAC/COSP/IRG/2021/1](#).



I. Introduction

1. In its decision 5/1, the Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption decided that the Implementation Review Group should begin promptly to collect, with the support of the Secretariat, and discuss relevant information in order to facilitate the assessment of performance of the Mechanism for the Review of Implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption in accordance with paragraph 48 of the terms of reference for the Mechanism, following the completion of the first cycle. The Conference also decided that the Implementation Review Group should include in its future sessions an agenda item allowing for the discussion of such information and further decided that the Group, in the collection of such information, shall take into account future requirements for follow-up in accordance with paragraphs 40 and 41 of the terms of reference.
2. Moreover, in resolution 8/2, the Conference, *inter alia*, requested the Implementation Review Group to continue to collect, with the support of the secretariat, relevant information, including the views of States parties, pertaining to the performance of the Implementation Review Mechanism, with a view to continuing, at the appropriate time, its assessment of the performance of the Mechanism, as provided for in paragraph 48 of its terms of reference and decision 5/1. In the same resolution, the Conference requested the secretariat to continue to provide to the Implementation Review Group analyses of the time frames associated with the stages of the review process, including statistics on the number of States parties that were behind schedule, with the aim of facilitating a more efficient process.
3. In response to the significant delays incurred during the second cycle of the Mechanism, in its decision 8/1, the Conference decided to extend the duration of the second cycle until June 2024 to allow for the completion of country reviews, and called upon States parties to accelerate the completion of the second cycle.
4. Moreover, there have been additional unanticipated delays due to circumstances arising from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

II. Organization and conduct of country reviews during the first review cycle and the first to fifth years of the second review cycle

A. Time frames established for the implementation review process

5. The first cycle of the Implementation Review Mechanism started in 2010, following the adoption of Conference resolution 3/1, entitled “Review Mechanism”. The second cycle of the Mechanism was launched at the sixth session of the Conference of the States Parties, held in St. Petersburg, Russian Federation, from 2 to 6 November 2015, through the adoption by the Conference of resolution 6/1, on the continuation of the review of implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption.
6. Despite efforts to accelerate the pace of reviews, delays have occurred in the performance and progress of the second review cycle. Information on the specific elements of the process that have led to delays in the second cycle was included in the documentation made available to the Conference at its eighth session (see CAC/COSP/2019/12).
7. According to the guidelines for governmental experts and the secretariat in the conduct of country reviews, the State party under review should submit the self-assessment checklist within two months of being informed of the beginning of the conduct of the country review, and the full review should take no longer

than six months to complete.¹ However, in practice, country reviews have not been completed within the requisite six months. There are a number of reasons for this, including delays in the nomination of focal points and governmental experts and the submission of self-assessment checklists by States parties under review, translation requirements, scheduling difficulties for the country visits and delays in the submission of additional information following the country visit, as well as unanticipated circumstances relating to the COVID-19 pandemic.

B. Statistical overview

8. The data provided below show the progress achieved in the conduct of the country reviews during (a) the first cycle of the Implementation Review Mechanism; and (b) the first to fifth years of the second cycle of the Mechanism.

9. During the first cycle, 185 States parties were to be reviewed.² At the time of writing,³ 183 responses to the self-assessment checklist had been received and 175 direct dialogues had been held (161 country visits and 14 joint meetings).⁴ Furthermore, 173 executive summaries and 161 country review reports had been completed and 87 States parties had made their full country review report available on the website of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

10. During the first year of the second cycle, 29 States parties were to be reviewed. At the time of writing, 28 responses to the self-assessment checklist had been received and 22 country visits and one joint meeting had been held.

11. During the second year of the second cycle, 48 States parties were to be reviewed. At the time of writing, 43 responses to the self-assessment checklist had been received and 29 country visits and three joint meetings had been held.⁵

12. During the third year of the second cycle, 36 States parties were to be reviewed. At the time of writing, 24 responses to the self-assessment checklist had been received and 12 country visits and one joint meeting had been held.

13. During the fourth year of the second cycle, 37 States parties were to be reviewed. At the time of writing, 25 responses to the self-assessment checklist had been received and two country visits had been held.

14. During the fifth year of the second cycle, 35 States parties were to be reviewed. At the time of writing, seven responses to the self-assessment checklist had been received and no country visits had been held.

15. Overall, during the second cycle, a total of 175 focal points were nominated, 127 responses to the self-assessment checklist were received, 70 direct dialogues were held (65 country visits and five joint meetings), and 51 executive summaries and 29 country review reports were completed. In addition, 16 States parties for which the country reviews had been completed made their full country review reports available on the UNODC website.

C. Drawing of lots

16. In accordance with paragraph 14 of the terms of reference of the Implementation Review Mechanism, the States parties participating in the review process in a given

¹ The commencement of the reviews is the date when, in accordance with paragraph 12 of the guidelines for governmental experts and the secretariat in the conduct of country reviews, the secretariat officially informs the State party under review and the reviewing States parties of the date of the beginning of the conduct of the country review.

² At the start of the first cycle in 2010, there were 144 States parties to the Convention.

³ The statistical data contained in this report are up to date as at 15 March 2021.

⁴ Two States parties had not opted to conduct either a country visit or a joint meeting.

⁵ During the review of one State party under the second cycle, both a country visit and a joint meeting took place.

year of a review cycle are selected by a drawing of lots at the beginning of each cycle. Paragraph 19 of the terms of reference provides that the selection of the reviewing States parties shall be carried out by the drawing of lots at the beginning of each year of the cycle, with the understanding that States parties shall not undertake mutual reviews.

1. First review cycle

17. In accordance with these provisions, the reviewing States parties for the fourth year of the first cycle of the Mechanism were selected through a drawing of lots held at the fourth session of the Implementation Review Group. Sixty-two country reviews began on 1 July 2013, and further drawings of lots were held to select the reviewing States parties for the States parties that had ratified or acceded to the Convention thereafter. Those additional drawings of lots took place at the resumed fourth, fifth, resumed fifth, sixth, resumed sixth, seventh, resumed seventh, eighth, resumed eighth, ninth, first resumed ninth, tenth and eleventh sessions of the Group. Following new accessions to and ratifications of the Convention, 82 States parties were under review in the fourth year.⁶

2. Second review cycle

18. In its resolution 6/1, the Conference requested the Group to proceed, at the beginning of its seventh session, with the selection of reviewed and reviewing States parties for the second review cycle by the drawing of lots in accordance with paragraphs 14 and 19 of the terms of reference of the Mechanism. The Conference also requested the Group to hold intersessional meetings open to all States parties for the purpose of the drawing of lots in accordance with paragraph 19 of the terms of reference of the Mechanism and without prejudice to the right of a State party to request that the drawing of lots be repeated at the Group's subsequent intersessional meeting or regular session.

19. At an intersessional meeting held in Vienna on 17 June 2016, the drawing of lots was conducted for the scheduling of the country reviews in the second cycle. Subsequently some States volunteered to advance their reviews, deferred from a previous year of the second cycle in line with the terms of reference for the Mechanism or became parties to the Convention, which resulted in the following distribution of the country reviews in the second cycle: year one, 29 States; year two, 48 States; year three, 36 States; year four, 37 States; and year five, 35 States.

20. At the same time, the reviewing States parties for the first year of the second cycle of the Mechanism were selected through a drawing of lots at an intersessional meeting of the Implementation Review Group. Accordingly, year one of the second cycle began on 4 July 2016 and redraws were carried out at the request of States parties under review at the resumed seventh session of the Group.

21. Similarly, the reviewing States parties for the second, third, fourth and fifth years of the second cycle were selected through the drawing of lots at intersessional meetings of the Group, resulting in those years starting on 25 July 2017, 29 June 2018, 19 June 2019 and 10 July 2020, respectively. Redraws were carried out at the request of States parties under review at the resumed sessions of the Group.

D. Schedule and conduct of country reviews

22. In its resolution 4/1, the Conference of the States Parties endorsed the guidelines for governmental experts and the secretariat in the conduct of country reviews, which had been finalized by the Implementation Review Group. The guidelines set out indicative timelines for country reviews in order to ensure the consistency and efficiency of the review process. The purpose of the present subsection is to provide

⁶ Other States may have become parties to the Convention by the time of the eleventh session of the Group.

updated information on the schedule of country reviews conducted from the first to the fourth year of the first cycle of the Implementation Review Mechanism and on the country reviews conducted from the first to the fifth year of the second review cycle.

1. Appointment of a focal point to coordinate the participation of a State party under review

23. In accordance with paragraph 17 of the terms of reference and paragraph 13 of the guidelines, a State party under review is to appoint a focal point or focal points to coordinate its participation in the review within three weeks of officially being informed of the beginning of the conduct of the country review, and is to inform the secretariat accordingly. However, late nominations of focal points have caused considerable delays in country reviews in the past. In its resolution 4/1, the Conference urged States parties under review to ensure the timely nomination of their focal points in accordance with the guidelines.

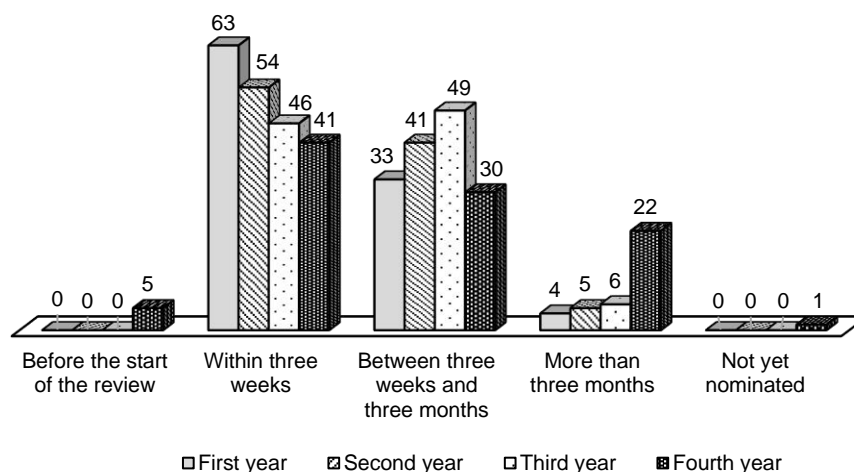
First review cycle

24. At the time of writing, one State under review in the fourth year had not yet officially nominated the focal point (see figure I). Over 20 per cent of the focal points were nominated only after more than three months, and several States parties changed their focal points during the course of the review, which resulted in further delays.

Figure I

First cycle: time taken to nominate focal points

(Percentage)



Second review cycle

25. All States under review in the first and second years and 33 of the 36 States under review in the third year of the second cycle nominated their focal points (see figure II).

26. In the first year of the second cycle, most States nominated their focal points within three months of being officially informed of the start of the review.

27. In the second year of the second cycle, the vast majority of focal points (69 per cent) were nominated prior to the start of the review.

28. In the third year of the second cycle, 28 of the 36 States under review in that year (78 per cent) had already nominated their focal points prior to the start of that year.

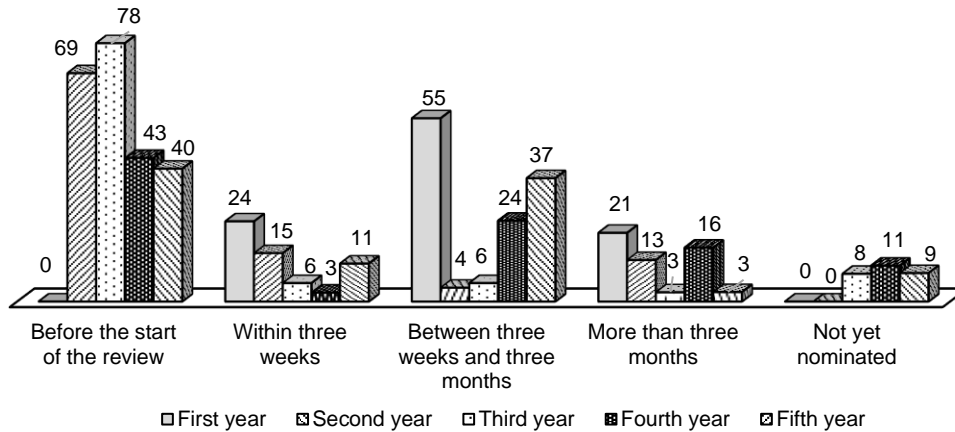
29. In the fourth year of the second cycle, 33 of the 37 States under review nominated their focal points. A total of 32 of the 35 States parties under review in the

fifth year of the second cycle nominated their focal points; 14 States parties (40 per cent) had done so prior to the start of that year.

Figure II

First to fifth years of the second cycle: time taken to nominate focal points

(Percentage)



2. Communication of contact details of governmental experts by reviewing States parties and organization of the initial teleconference

30. Paragraph 16 of the guidelines provides that a telephone conference or videoconference should be held within one month of the State party under review officially being informed of the beginning of the conduct of the country review. The teleconference involves the State party under review, the reviewing States parties and the secretariat staff assigned to the country review. With a view to organizing the initial teleconference, the secretariat requests reviewing States parties to designate contact persons among their governmental experts and to communicate the contact details of those persons to the secretariat.

31. In most reviews, the organization of the initial teleconference continues to be subject to delays as a result of, inter alia, the late communication of the contact details of governmental experts or changes in reviewing experts after the beginning of the review. In some cases, the teleconference was delayed because of redraws of reviewing States parties. Where feasible, the secretariat continued to arrange introductions on the margins of the sessions of the Implementation Review Group and the Conference of the States Parties. Where time differences between the States did not allow for direct contact, teleconferences were replaced by an exchange of emails.

32. At the time of writing, 28 first teleconferences had been held for the 29 reviews in the first year of the second cycle.⁷

33. For the 48 reviews in the second year of the second cycle, at the time of writing, 40 first teleconferences or equivalent contacts had taken place.⁸ For the 36 reviews in the third year, 23 first teleconferences had been held;⁹ for the 37 reviews in the fourth year, 25 first teleconferences had been held;¹⁰ and for the 35 reviews in the fifth year, 13 first teleconferences had been held. However, several reviewing States had not yet designated their reviewing experts, thus delaying the first teleconference.

⁷ One State party under review in the first year of the second cycle waived the organization of a teleconference.

⁸ Two State parties under review in the second year of the second cycle waived the organization of a teleconference.

⁹ One State party under review in the third year of the second cycle waived the organization of a teleconference.

¹⁰ Two States parties under review in the fourth year of the second cycle waived the organization of a teleconference.

3. Self-assessment checklists

34. In accordance with paragraph 15 of the guidelines, the State party under review is to provide the secretariat with its response to the comprehensive self-assessment checklist within two months of being officially informed of the beginning of the conduct of the review. Analysis conducted by the secretariat to date, which has been made available to the Group at its previous sessions, shows that the submission of the checklist has remained an essential cornerstone of the review process and marks the point in time when the country review can start in earnest. As such, any delay in the submission of the checklist inevitably resulted in the delay of the country review as a whole.

35. Figure III below shows an overview of the time frames associated with the country reviews conducted in years one to four of the first review cycle, while figure IV shows an overview of the time frames associated with the country reviews in years one to five of the second review cycle.

Figure III

Overview of time frames for the submission self-assessment checklists by States under review in years one to four of the first review cycle (months)

(Percentage)

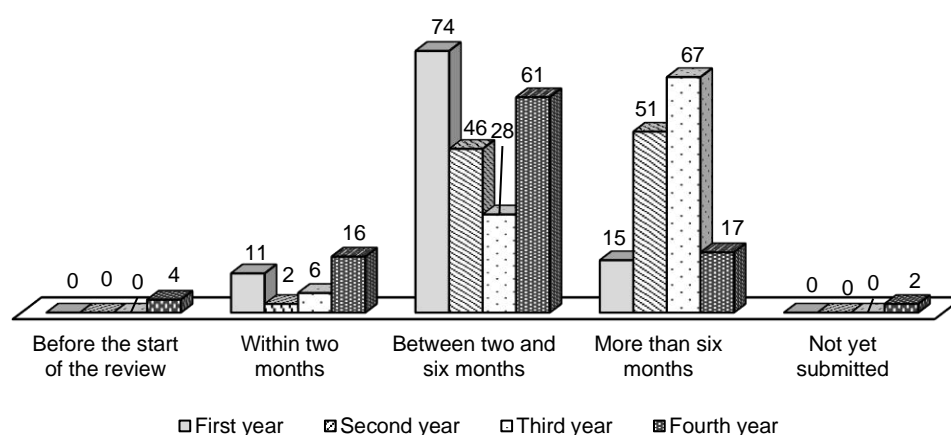
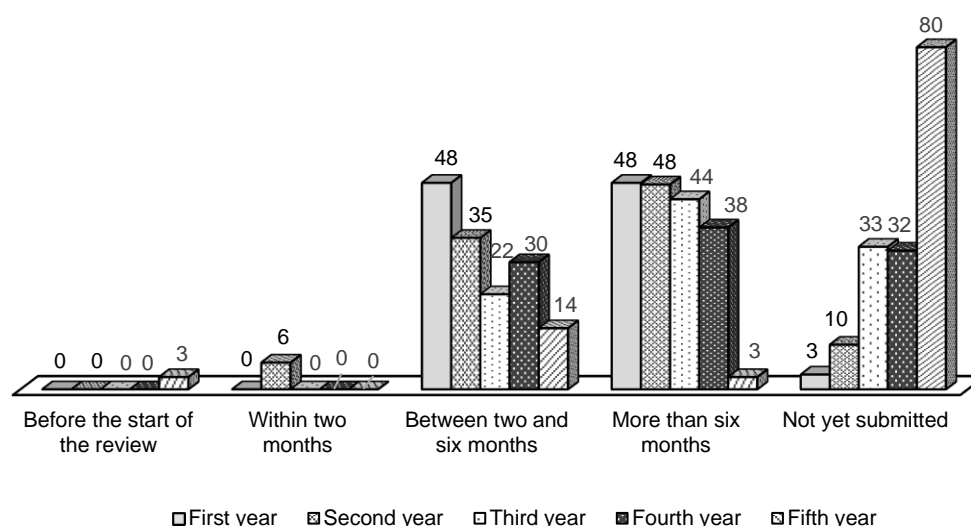


Figure IV

Overview of time frames for the submission self-assessment checklists by States under review in years one to five of the second review cycle (months)

(Percentage)



36. A comparison of the information displayed in figures III and IV shows the continued significant delays in the time required by States for the submission of their

responses to the self-assessment checklists, despite the fact that the States under review were regularly informed by the secretariat about the status of their reviews.

37. A downward trend can be observed in the first three years of the second review cycle: in the first year, nearly half of the States parties under review submitted their checklists within six months of the start of the review; only a quarter did so in the third year. While a slight improvement can be noted for the fourth year, nearly one third of the self-assessment checklists for that year were yet to be submitted at the time of writing. For the fifth year, only one fifth of the self-assessment checklists had been submitted at the time of writing, that is, more than eight months after the starting date of the review, which could be partly attributed to circumstances arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Desk review

38. In accordance with paragraph 21 of the guidelines, governmental experts are to submit to the secretariat the outcome of the desk review within one month after receiving the response to the comprehensive self-assessment checklist and any supplementary information provided by the State party under review.

First review cycle

39. For the fourth year of the first cycle, two desk reviews of the responses to the self-assessment checklist were pending at the time of writing, owing in part to late submissions of information and translation difficulties.

Second review cycle

40. At the time of writing, several desk reviews of the responses to the self-assessment checklist for years one to five of the second cycle were still under way, owing to, inter alia, the late submission of the responses to the self-assessment checklist, the time required for the translation of checklists in reviews where more than one language was used, and the time taken to review the checklists. For the fourth year of the second cycle, 14 desk reviews of the 25 responses to the self-assessment checklist were completed and 11 desk reviews were pending at the time of writing. For the fifth year of the second cycle, all desk reviews of the seven responses to the self-assessment checklist submitted were pending.

5. Further means of direct dialogue

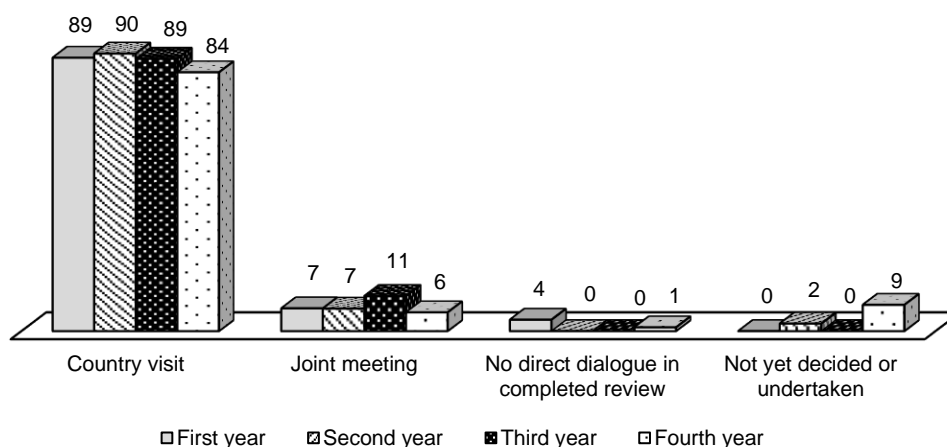
41. In accordance with paragraph 24 of the guidelines and paragraph 29 of the terms of reference, if requested by the State party under review, the desk review is to be complemented by any further means of direct dialogue, such as a country visit or a joint meeting at the United Nations Office at Vienna.

First review cycle

42. At the time of writing, of the 185 countries under review, 175 had already availed themselves of further means of direct dialogue in the form of either a country visit or a joint meeting. For the 27 States parties under review in the first year, 24 country visits and two joint meetings had taken place. For the 41 States parties under review in the second year, 37 country visits and three joint meetings had taken place. For the 35 States parties under review in the third year, 31 country visits and four joint meetings had taken place. For the 82 States parties under review in the fourth year, 69 country visits and five joint meetings had taken place (see figure V). A number of States parties had agreed to further means of direct dialogue, and such dialogues were in various stages of planning. In other reviews, no decision had been taken yet. Only two States parties had not opted for either a country visit or a joint meeting.

Figure V
First review cycle: further means of direct dialogue between countries undertaken as part of a country review

(Percentage)

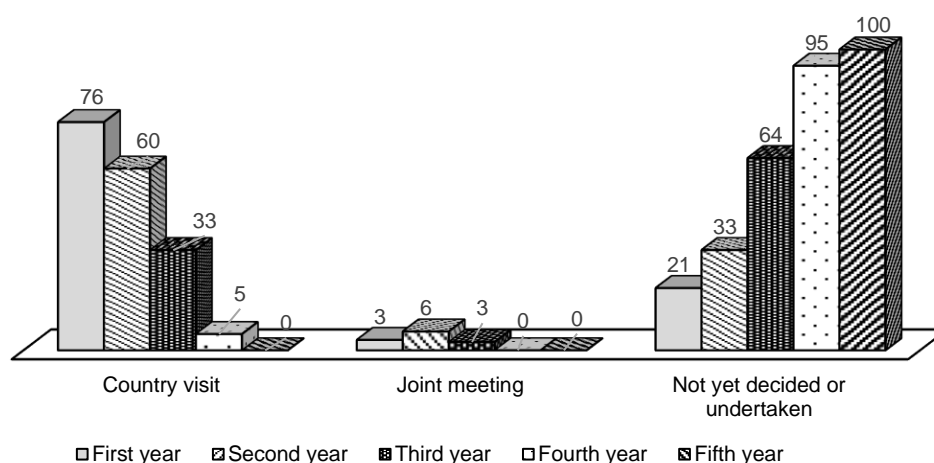


Second review cycle

43. At the time of writing, of the 29 States parties under review in the first year of the second cycle, 22 had hosted a country visit as a further means of direct dialogue, and one had opted for a joint meeting in Vienna. Of the 48 States parties under review in the second year of the second cycle, 29 had hosted a country visit and three had held joint meetings. Of the 36 States parties under review in the third year of the second cycle, 12 had hosted a country visit and one had held a joint meeting. Of the 37 States parties under review in the fourth year of the second cycle, two had hosted a country visit in an online format owing to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. No country visits have taken place for reviews in the fifth year of the second cycle. At the time of writing, several other country visits for years one to five of the second cycle had been postponed as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic or were in the process of being tentatively scheduled for the second half of 2021 (see figure VI).¹¹

Figure VI
Second review cycle: further means of direct dialogue between countries undertaken as part of a country review

(Percentage)



¹¹ In the second year of the second cycle, both a country visit and a joint meeting took place for the review of one State party; the joint meeting has not been reflected in the graph.

6. Preparation of the agenda for further means of direct dialogue

44. In accordance with paragraph 24 of the guidelines, a country visit is to be planned and organized by the State party under review. Focal points draft the agenda and submit it to the reviewers and the secretariat prior to the visit.

7. Engagement with other stakeholders during country visits

First review cycle

45. Of the country visits conducted during the first cycle, 89 per cent included meetings with other stakeholders (see figure VII), in accordance with paragraph 30 of the terms of reference. In some cases, those meetings took the form of panels that included representatives of civil society, the private sector, academia, trade associations and other national stakeholders. In other cases, States included national stakeholders such as representatives of academia, civil society and the private sector in the committees set up to coordinate and oversee the review process.

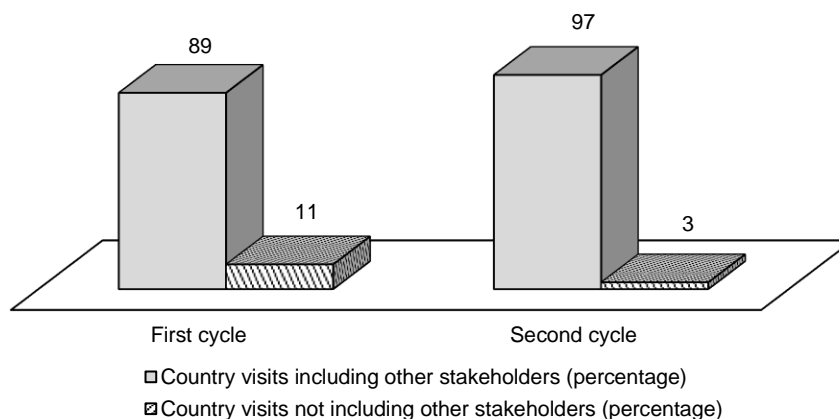
Second review cycle

46. At the time of writing, almost all the country visits (96.9 per cent) conducted in the first to fourth years of the second cycle had included meetings with other stakeholders, in accordance with paragraph 30 of the terms of reference (see figure VII).

Figure VII

Engagement with stakeholders during country visits, by review cycle

(Percentage)



8. Outcome of the country review process, publication of the country review report and review languages

47. In accordance with paragraph 33 of the terms of reference and paragraph 30 of the guidelines, the reviewing governmental experts are to prepare a country review report and an executive summary of that report, in close cooperation and coordination with the State party under review and assisted by the secretariat. Successes, good practices and challenges should be identified in the report, and the report should contain observations on the implementation of the Convention. Where appropriate, technical assistance needs for the purpose of improving the implementation of the Convention should also be identified in the report.

First review cycle

48. To date, 161 country reviews for the first cycle have been completed, with the remaining 24 country reviews being in various stages of finalization. It should be noted that, although the full reviews have not yet been completed, 12 executive summaries relating to those 24 country reviews have nonetheless been completed (meaning that a total of 173 executive summaries have been completed for the first

cycle). Twenty-seven executive summaries had been completed and made available to the Implementation Review Group for the reviews in the first year. For the second year, 40 executive summaries had been completed and made available to the Group. For the third year, 35 executive summaries had been completed and made available to the Group. For the fourth year, 71 executive summaries had been completed and made available and several more were being finalized.

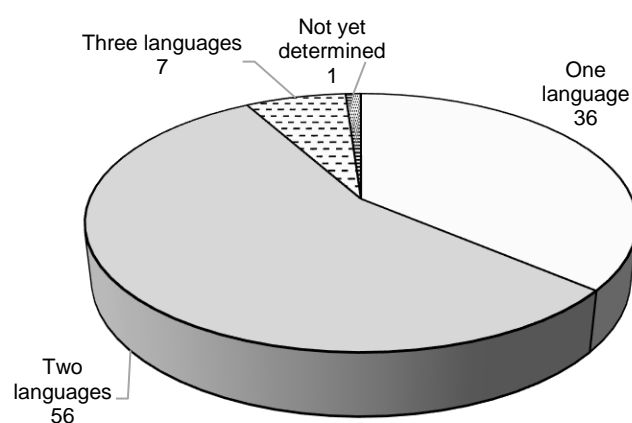
49. The executive summaries of the country review reports have been posted online on the page containing documentation of the Implementation Review Group and on the country profile page (www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CAC/country-profile/index.html). At the time of writing, 87 country review reports for the first cycle had been published on the UNODC website at the request of the States parties. Depending on the language and the number of annexes, the length of the reports ranged from approximately 100 pages to over 500 pages.¹²

50. While in some cases governmental experts agreed to conduct the review in a language other than their preferred one, most reviews were conducted in more than one official language of the United Nations. Of the 185 reviews, 67 were carried out in one official language, 103 were carried out in two official languages and 13 were carried out in three official languages. In two cases, the decision on which language or languages were to be used had not yet been taken (see figure VIII).

Figure VIII

First review cycle: number of official languages of the United Nations used in the country review

(Percentage)



Second review cycle

51. During the second cycle, a total of 51 executive summaries and 29 country review reports were completed. For the first year of the second cycle, 21 executive summaries and 15 country review reports had been completed; for the second year of the second cycle, 26 executive summaries and 12 country review reports had been completed; for the third year of the second cycle, three executive summaries and one country review report had been completed; and for the fourth year of the second cycle, one executive summary and one country report had been completed. Delays in the completion of executive summaries and country review reports in years one to four resulted in part from the delays incurred in the submission of the responses to the self-assessment checklist and the organization of the country visits. No review reports and no executive summaries had been completed for the fifth year of the second cycle.

52. In the first year of the second review cycle, 11 reviews were carried out in one official language of the United Nations, 15 in two official languages and 3 in three official languages.

¹² For more details of the translation costs, see [CAC/COSP/IRG/2020/4](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CAC/COSP/IRG/2020/4).

53. In the second year of the second review cycle, 16 reviews were carried out in one official language of the United Nations, 25 in two official languages and 4 in three official languages. For three reviews, the decision on the language of the review had not yet been taken at the time of writing.

54. In the third year of the second review cycle, 16 reviews were carried out in one official language of the United Nations and 16 in two official languages. For four reviews, the decision on the language of the review had not yet been taken at the time of writing.

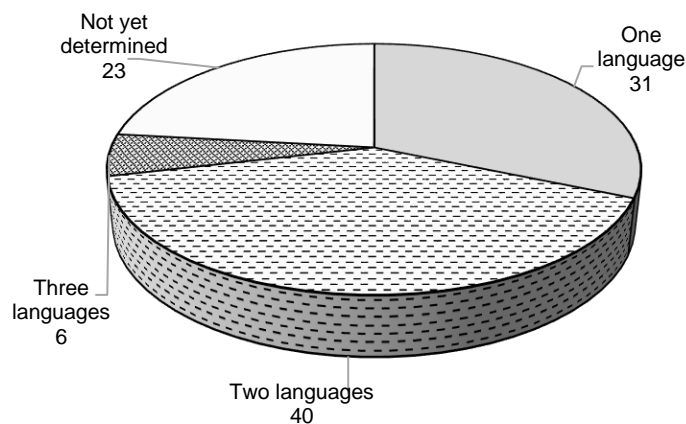
55. In the fourth year of the second cycle, 9 reviews were being carried out in one official language of the United Nations, 12 in two official languages and 2 in three official languages. For 14 reviews, decisions on the language of the review had not yet been taken at the time of writing.

56. In the fifth year of the second cycle, six reviews were being carried out in one official language of the United Nations, six in two official languages and one in three official languages. For 22 reviews, decisions on the languages of the review had not yet been taken at the time of writing (see figure IX).

Figure IX

First to fifth years of the second review cycle: number of official languages of the United Nations used in the country review

(Percentage)



E. Training courses for focal points and governmental experts participating in the Implementation Review Mechanism

57. In accordance with paragraph 32 of the terms of reference of the Mechanism, and paragraph 11 of the guidelines for governmental experts and the secretariat in the conduct of country reviews, the secretariat organizes periodic training courses for focal points and governmental experts participating in the reviews. These training courses familiarize the focal points and experts with the guidelines in order to increase their capacity to participate in the review process.

First review cycle

58. To date, more than 1,800 experts have been trained in the framework of the first review cycle, thus contributing to the creation of a global community of anti-corruption experts. National training courses and ad hoc assistance were provided to more than 40 States, and since June 2013, seven regional training courses have been organized.

Second review cycle

59. As of March 2021, nine regional training sessions and 13 global training sessions had been organized for the second review cycle. In particular, training

sessions were being organized back-to-back with sessions of the Implementation Review Group to save costs for both the States parties under review and the secretariat. In addition, targeted assistance was available to States parties under review in support of their reviews, in particular assistance provided by UNODC to States as regards the completion of their responses to the self-assessment checklists.

60. At the time of writing, more than 1,300 focal points and governmental experts had received specific training on the Implementation Review Mechanism, including more than 900 focal points and governmental experts who had participated in the regional and global training sessions for the second review cycle. Overall, additional technical assistance was provided to support Governments in completing their responses to the self-assessment checklist, thus bringing the total number of individuals trained to more than 1,600.

61. Owing to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, global and regional in-person training sessions could not be organized after February 2020. In order to supplement in-person training on the Implementation Review Mechanism, pre-training videos are progressively being made available through an online e-learning platform.¹³

III. Analysis of the functioning of the Mechanism and the way forward

Continued delays in the finalization of country reviews

62. As early as at the fifth session of the Conference of the States Parties, the secretariat highlighted how the review of implementation of chapter II of the Convention, in being very far-reaching, was also likely to require national consultations among many departments and agencies.¹⁴ It was anticipated that such consultations could lead to delays, in particular as regards the collection of sufficient information to ensure a meaningful analysis for the reviews. A comparison of the time required by States parties to submit their self-assessment checklists during the first and second cycles shows further delays in the submission by States of the self-assessment checklists in the second cycle, despite the fact that the second cycle should have benefited from the experience and insights gained during the first cycle.

63. The secretariat has continued to make efforts to alert States parties about anticipated delays even before the commencement of the reviews. The States parties under review in the second cycle have frequently cited chapter II of the Convention, on preventive measures, as the cause of delays in the submission of the self-assessment checklists. The need for consultations with a considerable number of stakeholders, in particular in federal or multijurisdictional States, has further complicated matters, as information and inputs have frequently been sought at both the state and federal levels.

64. The secretariat has also observed that a number of States that were acting as reviewing States parties in the earlier years had since come under review themselves in the later years, or vice versa, creating an increased workload for all involved. The spillover of these delays into subsequent years of the second cycle has already started to have a negative impact on the capacity of States, as well as the secretariat, in carrying out both the delayed reviews and the subsequent year's reviews at the same time. In order to address the delays, in its decision 8/1, the Conference: (a) decided to extend the duration of the second cycle of the Mechanism by three years, that is, until June 2024, to allow for the completion of country reviews under that cycle; and (b) called upon States parties to accelerate the completion of the second cycle.

65. During the year under review, the unprecedented measures taken by States parties to manage the current health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have

¹³ <https://golearn.unodc.org/lms/login/index.php>.

¹⁴ See CAC/COSP/2013/14.

had a twofold effect on the completion of country reviews under the Implementation Review Mechanism. In some instances, they have expedited the completion of executive summaries and country review reports, whereas in others, they have had a negative impact on the conduct of reviews, in particular, country visits. Among the most immediate consequences have been delays in the preparation of self-assessment checklists, desk reviews and country reports as well as the postponement of country visits that had already been scheduled.

66. The secretariat has been exploring new approaches in order to advance country reviews, including the creation of online training sessions on the Mechanism for focal points and governmental experts, to be made available shortly. Moreover, in response to requests from States parties, the secretariat conducted two country visits in an online format via telephone and video conferences, which are explicitly mentioned in the terms of reference for the Mechanism as some of the means of constructive dialogue, in addition to direct dialogue such as country visits and joint meetings.

67. Although many aspects of in-person country visits were preserved in country visits held in an online format, a number of challenges were identified, such as technical limitations, the scope of participation of relevant representatives of the State party under review and the reviewing States parties and the overall quality of the discussion. Some organizational challenges emerged in the context of virtual country visits, such as time management where significant time differences existed between the State party under review and the reviewing States parties, as well as the management of interpretation services for country visits held in more than one language. Moreover, although the option of holding country visits in a virtual format was offered to several States parties under review, many decided to postpone them owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is expected to result in a higher than average number of country visits over the next few years, which will, in turn, cause further delays.

68. Although the online dialogues allowed the experts to deepen their understanding of the implementation of the Convention by the State party under review, such dialogues did not fully succeed in strengthening cooperation and information exchange, peer learning, capacity-building and constructive collaboration among the parties involved.

69. In order to increase its understanding of the experiences gained and lessons learned in relation to virtual country visits within the framework of other review mechanisms, the secretariat undertook consultations with the Working Group on Bribery of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Group of States against Corruption of the Council of Europe and the Mechanism for Follow-up on the Implementation of the Inter-American Convention against Corruption of the Organization of American States.

The way forward

70. Significant efforts will need to be undertaken by States parties and the secretariat to reverse the observed slowdown process and complete the second cycle within this extended time frame. Given the delays experienced in the submission of the self-assessment checklists and other steps of the review process, as well as the continuing delays caused by circumstances relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is reason for continued serious concern with regard to the duration of the individual country reviews in the second cycle and the resulting overall duration of the cycle.

71. The secretariat will continue to carefully monitor the overall progress in submissions of the self-assessment checklists, other steps of the review process as well as the overall rate of completion of the reviews and will keep the Group informed of the progress made and the overall performance of the Mechanism in its second cycle. In order to track progress made in the different steps of the individual reviews, the secretariat is exploring a number of tools and measures, including the use of information technology that could enable it to address delays in a more proactive manner; it will keep the Group informed about this work. Furthermore, the secretariat

will continue to be proactive in proposing and responding to requests for country visits to be held in an online format. The possibility of holding country visits in a “hybrid” format, where one of the reviewing States parties participates remotely, will also be explored, with the agreement of the State party under review. In summary, the secretariat will endeavour to facilitate as many country visits as possible, using all available formats, as soon as feasible.

72. The Group may wish to consider additional ways of encouraging all States parties to redouble their efforts to prevent any further delays, which put at risk the good performance of the Mechanism and its completion in due time.
