



# Functioning of the Focus Groups

## Discussion paper

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Article 30 in our Statutes states that the EXCOM may establish Working Groups (WGs) and Focus Groups (FGs).

Furthermore, point 17 of the MAC Rules of Procedures specify that “Working Groups may request the creation of a Focus Group with the aim of preparing a first draft.”

There are no detailed rules, neither in the MAC Statutes nor in the Rules of Procedure, specifying the functioning of FGs. However, by common practice, these are meant to prepare - at a more technical level - input for the Working Group on specific questions or issues.

Dependent on the task, the output of a FG can be a draft advice, but it can also be a simple document with ideas, scenarios or concepts, following in depth discussions and brainstorming sessions and input by, where possible, scientists and other experts. Whatever it is to be has to be clearly determined by the WG or even the Excom. If members of a FG feel that the scope of a FG is not sufficiently clear, the case would need to be brought back to WG or even at Excom level for clarification and / or further discussion and decision.

The members of a FG would ideally participate on the basis of knowledge of the issue to be discussed. Although we would look for a fair representation of the different stakeholders in the MAC, a FG may not always reflect the exact composition of the Excom. This should not be a problem as long as the FG has a technical function. By nature a FG should not be a strategic or decision making group. The WG will decide on the final position to be presented and eventually approved by the Excom.

The maximum number of participants in a MAC FG has been set at ten. This was done because of the restrictive reimbursement rules of the MAC. This however doesn't imply that this is the maximum amount of participants.

The MAC has established a number of FGs. These are listed in the MAC Annual Work Programme.

Some points for reflection building on the experience acquired up to now:

- Have the WGs given the FGs a clear and delimited set of objectives and questions to deal with? Has the scope of the FGs been clear enough?
- Have we missed out in participation of relevant and willing to contribute members or experts because of the reimbursement rules?
- Have we achieved adequate representation and balance from the various stakeholder groups?

The FGs' outcome has in all cases been a draft advice where the wording of the document has been discussed in detail. The minority/ majority rules for the WG's were, where possible and in most cases, also applied at the FG level.

- Should strict rules of procedure apply to the FGs or do we wish to work on a more flexible basis for the sake of quality of work?

Members / Organisations of a FG may – at a certain moment and for different reasons - not always be able to represent the views of all their members or stakeholders. If they are there to prepare, at a technical level, the discussion in the WG and could come up with scenarios or options - not precise wording or positions - that should not be a problem. If however members / Organisations of a FG are always considered to be representing their members or stakeholders, WG may have limited scope to discuss the outcome, because their representatives have already fixed positions in the FG. This then in turn will determine the composition of the FGs. It may also have implications for the possibility to bring in experts from the field.

- Is it clear what we expect from FG members and how we see the outcome of the FG in relation to the discussion in the WG?

In the end what matters is the quality and the timeliness of the advice the MAC can produce. Structures and rules are needed to organise our work, flexibility and willingness to cooperate are needed to progress our work.

The Excom members are invited to put forward any views on these or other related issues. The aim is to secure a shared expectation level on how FGs should function.

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