

IPCC Factsheet: What is the IPCC?

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the international body for assessing the science related to climate change. The IPCC was set up in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to provide policymakers with regular assessments of the scientific basis of climate change, its impacts and future risks, and options for adaptation and mitigation.

IPCC assessments provide a scientific basis for governments at all levels to develop climate-related policies, and they underlie negotiations at the UN Climate Conference – the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The assessments are policy-relevant but not policy-prescriptive: they may present projections of future climate change based on different scenarios and the risks that climate change poses and discuss the implications of response options, but they do not tell policymakers what actions to take.

The IPCC embodies a unique opportunity to provide rigorous and balanced scientific information to decision-makers because of its scientific and intergovernmental nature. Participation in the IPCC is open to all member countries of the WMO and United Nations. It currently has 195 members. The Panel, made up of representatives of the member states, meets in Plenary Sessions to take major decisions. The IPCC Bureau, elected by member governments, provides guidance to the Panel on the scientific and technical aspects of the Panel's work and advises the Panel on related management and strategic issues¹.

IPCC assessments are written by hundreds of leading scientists who volunteer their time and expertise as Coordinating Lead Authors and Lead Authors of the reports. They enlist hundreds of other experts as Contributing Authors to provide complementary expertise in specific areas.

IPCC reports undergo multiple rounds of drafting and review to ensure they are comprehensive and objective and produced in an open and transparent way. Thousands of other experts contribute to the reports by acting as reviewers, ensuring the reports reflect the full range of views in the scientific community. Teams of Review Editors provide a thorough monitoring mechanism for making sure that review comments are addressed. (For more details see IPCC Factsheet – *How does the IPCC select its authors?* and IPCC Factsheet – *How does the IPCC review process work?*).

¹ http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/tor/TOR_Bureau.pdf

The IPCC works by assessing published literature (see IPCC Factsheet – *What literature does the IPCC assess?*). It does not conduct its own scientific research. For all findings, author teams use defined language to characterize their degree of certainty in assessment conclusions². IPCC assessments point to areas of well-established knowledge and of evolving understanding, as well as where multiple perspectives exist in the literature.

The authors producing the reports are currently grouped in three working groups – Working Group I: the Physical Science Basis; Working Group II: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability; and Working Group III: Mitigation of Climate Change – and the Task Force on National Greenhouse Gas Inventories (TFI). As part of the IPCC, a Task Group on Data and Scenario Support for Impact and Climate Analysis (TGICA) facilitates the distribution and application of climate change-related data and scenarios.

IPCC Assessment Reports cover the full scientific, technical and socio-economic assessment of climate change, generally in four parts – one for each of the Working Groups plus a Synthesis Report. Special Reports are assessments of a specific issue. Methodology Reports provide practical guidelines for the preparation of greenhouse gas inventories under the UNFCCC.

² See *Guidance Note for Lead Authors of the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report on Consistent Treatment of Uncertainties*:
<http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/supporting-material/uncertainty-guidance-note.pdf>

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