



Summary of the Convention

The [Convention](#) (UNFCCC), adopted on 5 June 1992, recognized that there was a serious problem, which was remarkable for its time. In 1994, when the Convention entered into force, there was less scientific evidence than there is now. The UNFCCC borrowed an important concept from one of the most successful multilateral environmental treaties in history (the [Montreal Protocol](#), 1987): it required Member States to act in the interests of human safety, even in the face of scientific uncertainty.

The ultimate objective of the Convention is to stabilize GHG concentrations “at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic (human-induced) interference with the climate system”. It also states that “such a level should be achieved within a time frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened, and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner”.

The Convention puts the onus on developed countries to lead the way. As they are the source of most past and current GHG emissions, industrialized countries are expected to do the most to reduce emissions, that is, to implement measures to mitigate climate change. In the UNFCCC, they are referred to as [Parties included in Annex I to the Convention](#) (Annex I Parties). They encompass all of the 1994 members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and include 12 countries with economies in transition from Central and Eastern Europe.

The Convention also charts the beginnings of a path to strike a delicate balance. Economic development is particularly vital to the world's poorer countries. Such progress is difficult to achieve, even without the complications added by climate change. The Convention takes this into consideration by accepting that the share of GHG emissions produced by developing nations will grow in the coming years. Nonetheless, in the interests of fulfilling its ultimate goal, the Convention seeks to help such countries limit emissions in ways that will not hinder their economic progress.

Recognizing that even with efficient mitigation efforts, the need to adapt to the impacts of climate change is unavoidable, the Convention catalyses adaptation to climate change and provides overall guidance on its assessment, planning and implementation. It acknowledges the vulnerability of all countries to the effects of climate change and calls for special efforts to ease the consequences, especially in developing countries that lack financial resources.

In the early years of the Convention, adaptation received less attention than mitigation, partly because Parties wanted more certainty on the impacts of and vulnerability to climate change, partly because mitigation was perceived as the more urgent collective task. When the [IPCC Third Assessment Report](#) was released, adaptation gained traction, and Parties agreed on a process to address adverse effects and to establish funding arrangements for adaptation. Currently, work on adaptation takes place under different Convention bodies. The [Adaptation Committee](#) (AC), established under the [Cancun Adaptation Framework](#) (CAF), is a major step towards coherence in addressing adaptation.

The Convention also establishes a [financial mechanism](#) to provide financial resources to developing country Parties to assist them in their climate change actions. Further support structures have been established by decisions of the Conference of the Parties (COP), such as a [technology mechanism](#) and the [Paris Committee on Capacity Building](#).

Furthermore, the Convention requires Parties to develop a national inventory of GHG emissions and to report on their mitigation policies and measures, again placing the lead on developed countries.