



The big picture: how do the UNFCCC sessions work?

The COP/CMP/CMA currently convenes annually for two weeks, usually in late November or early to mid-December, along with meetings of the subsidiary bodies, ad hoc negotiating bodies, and additional preparation meetings and technical workshops. The first week of the sessions typically focuses on technical sessions of the subsidiary bodies and any ad hoc working groups.

The second week includes a 'high-level segment', with statements from ministers and often with their active engagement in the negotiations on a political outcome for the conference. The high-level segment is included to facilitate agreement on the major political issues (rather than negotiate details) and demonstrate priority for the UN climate change process and ensure momentum.

At the opening of each conference, a President (often a senior official or minister from the State hosting the sessions) is elected by the Parties to preside over the COP, CMP and CMA. Consideration of agenda items begins in the formal plenary meetings of the COP, CMP and CMA, the decision-making bodies for the Convention, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement, respectively, with the adoption of the agenda and the organization of work of each body.

The COP, CMP and CMA then refer many of their agenda items to the subsidiary bodies (the [SBSTA](#) and the [SBI](#), or possibly an existing ad hoc working group such as the [APA](#)) to move the issue forwards, resolve differences and reach agreement. – Some agenda items are not referred, but are considered further by Parties within the COP, CMP or CMA itself. – The aim is to forge agreement on draft decisions or conclusions that reflect the consensus among Parties, with a view to presenting the draft texts to a plenary meeting (of COP, CMP or CMA) for adoption at the ends of session.

While under consideration by the subsidiary bodies (or sometimes the COP, CMP or CMA), the issue is often referred to smaller more informal groups, such as 'contact groups' and 'informal consultations', which are more suited to working on detailed text. During the meetings, national delegates try to achieve convergence, and ultimately consensus, on draft decisions that reflect the views of all Parties.

Once a draft decision is agreed in an informal group, it is normally forwarded for approval to the body that launched the informal group (e.g. one of the subsidiary bodies or an ad hoc negotiating group), which then forwards it – after brief consideration or further negotiation, as needed – to the plenary of the COP, CMP or CMA for final adoption. If Parties cannot reach agreement in the smaller negotiating groups, the draft text is forwarded to the COP, CMP or CMA for further debate. For some politically sensitive issues the President may hold further consultations to reach a final agreement.

During the final meetings of the COP, CMP and CMA, the President will present the results of the negotiations—texts containing draft decisions and/or conclusions—in the plenary for approval and adoption by Parties. Successive decisions taken by the COP, CMP and CMA make up a detailed set of rules for practical and effective implementation of the Convention, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement.

For more detailed information on United Nations Climate Change Conferences, see [the Bare essentials: a toolkit for new delegates](#).