

# What exactly happens at a climate summit?

Every year in the late autumn, a UN climate conference takes place somewhere in the world. The official name is COP, short for "Conference of the Parties" - meaning the parties who have signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Thousands of people gather for two weeks to discuss measures against climate change. But what exactly do they do?

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## Spring meetings

Preparation for the COP start with smaller summits many months ahead. In May or June, the kick-off meeting takes place in Bonn, where the United Nations Climate Change Secretariat is headquartered.

## COLOUR LEGEND:

Different colours represent different actors at the COP. Various shades of blue are for those involved in organisation, red to orange is for negotiators, and purple to pink is for observers.

- organisation
- negotiators
- observers

## Preparatory conferences

These take place in various places in the world between spring and autumn, mostly in cities where the UN has offices, such as Geneva or Bangkok, to advance individual topics (we mention the three most important at the moment).

## Arts and culture

Concerts, exhibitions, performances and other events take place on the sidelines of the conference, aiming to draw attention to climate change.

## Hundreds of interpreters and translators

work to translate all official documents and drafts into all six official UN languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish).

## Hundreds, often thousands, of journalists

from all over the world cover the climate conference.

## Demonstrations

Many NGOs (environmental, human rights and others) organise demonstrations during the COP.

## Civil society

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have, according to UN statutes, the right to attend all negotiations as observers - but many also try to influence them.

## Stocktaking plenary

Informal plenary session convened by the COP presidency to determine which countries are having trouble with negotiations, and to build mutual trust.

## Friends of the Chair

Experienced negotiators, recognised by all parties, who are asked by the Chair to suggest compromises on difficult negotiating points.

## COP Presidency

A representative from the host country heads the COP (usually an environment, energy or foreign minister), together with the head of the UN Climate Change Secretariat (in Bonn, Germany). Conference results depend heavily on the skills of the presidency in negotiating and facilitating talks.

Decisions at a COP must be unanimous. A single party can block everything. In the final hours of every COP there is a hectic search for compromises on the remaining points of contention. The "clock" on the two-week conference is symbolically stopped to stretch the negotiating time - until a result is reached.

## Informal consultations

When an issue arises that prevents an agreement, delegates can meet privately to discuss the matter and try to reach a compromise.

## Contact group

A sub-negotiating group with just a few dozen representatives, convened when negotiations stall. These are led jointly by a government minister from an industrial country and one from the Global South.

## Protests

NGOs like Greenpeace use public demonstrations to pressure delegates to consider their particular cause.

## Ratification

Important COP decisions, for example new treaties, only come into force when they are made national law by parliaments of the member states. The German Bundestag has to agree, as does the UK House of Commons or the Russian Duma. Only after 55 percent of all states ratify the agreement, accounting for 55 percent of all emissions, can a climate treaty take effect.

## Abbreviations found at the conference:

**CMP**  
Conference of the signatories of the Kyoto Protocol  
Formal meeting of the UNFCCC treaty parties that ratified the 1997 Kyoto Protocol to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

**CMA**  
Conference of signatories of the Paris Agreement  
Oversees the implementation of the 2015 Paris Agreement and takes decisions to promote its effective implementation.

**SBSTA**  
The Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice meets at least twice a year to advise the COP on matters of science, technology and methodology relevant to negotiations.

**SBI**  
The Subsidiary Body for Implementation assesses and reviews the effective implementation of the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement and advises the COP on budgetary and administrative matters.

**GREEN CLIMATE FUND**  
Supports projects and policies in developing countries with up to 100 billion US dollars (from 2020).

**ADAPTATION FUND**  
Finances concrete adaptation projects and programmes in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

**CDM Executive Board**  
Supervises the Kyoto Protocol's clean development mechanism under the guidance of the CMP Conference (see above).

**Other committees**  
Sub-negotiating groups on specific topics such as REDD+ (forest protection), LULUCF (Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry) and others.

## Country groupings

In order to make the negotiations more efficient, many governments with similar positions or interests form groups. Some of the most important are shown here.

**AOSIS**  
A coalition of more than 40 low-lying and small island countries, which are particularly vulnerable to sea-level rise.

**G77 and China**  
This large group comprises more than 130 developing countries, including China.

**LDC**  
Around 50 Least Developed Countries work together to defend their particular interests, for example with regard to vulnerability and adaptation to climate change.

**EU**  
The 28 member states coordinate their positions and form the biggest bloc of developed countries with ambitious climate goals.

**Umbrella Group**  
This group is a loose coalition of developed countries outside the EU, such as Australia, Canada, Japan, Russia, the United States and others.

**EIG**  
The "Environmental Integrity Group" sees itself as an advocate of rigorous climate protection and includes, for example, Mexico, Switzerland and South Korea.

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## First World Climate Conference

Scientists from more than 50 countries gather in Geneva, Switzerland. They establish a global programme to study climate change and its causes, and to share data internationally.

## Founding of IPCC

Since its founding in Geneva, Switzerland, this expert body regularly assesses research on all aspects of climate change, providing the scientific basis for international negotiations.

## Noordwijk Conference

67 countries meeting in the Netherlands commit to stabilising greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2000.

## "Earth Summit"

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) signed in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, creating a system for future COPs.

## COP 6

In The Hague, Netherlands, a COP fails for the first time, concluding without an agreement.

## COP 11, CMP 1

After the Kyoto Protocol enters into force, the first CMP meeting - an assembly of the Kyoto signatories - is held at a COP.

## COP 13, CMP 3

In Bali, Indonesia, a new negotiating process for a post-Kyoto treaty begins.

## COP 17, CMP 5

In Durban, South Africa, the Kyoto Protocol is extended, and countries commit to reaching a new treaty by 2015.

## COP 23, CMP 13, CMA 1-2

The island of Fiji holds the COP presidency, but for logistical reasons, the summit takes place in Bonn, Germany, where the UNFCCC Secretariat is located. For a second time, the signatories of the Paris Agreement meet at a CMA.

## Villach Conference

Scientists from 29 countries meet in Villach, Austria, to assess the impact of man-made greenhouse gases on the climate. They recommend periodic assessments and the initiation of a global climate convention.

## Second World Climate Conference

In Geneva, Switzerland, the political groundwork is laid for a global climate treaty.

## COP 1

In Berlin, Germany, then-environment minister Angela Merkel chairs the first conference of signatories, who agree to negotiate a worldwide climate treaty by COP 3.

## COP 3

The first concrete climate treaty is agreed in Kyoto, Japan. The "Kyoto Protocol" sets mandatory targets for around 40 developed countries to cut emissions by 2012.

## COP 9

Six years on, the Kyoto Protocol has not been ratified by enough countries to enter into force. As an incentive for developing countries, the "Clean Development Mechanism" (CDM) is established at COP 9 in Milan, Italy, providing financial support for climate friendly growth in the Global South.

## COP 15, CMP 5

The summit in Copenhagen, Denmark, fails spectacularly. No new climate treaty is adopted.

## COP 16, CMP 6

UNFCCC members agree in Cancún, Mexico, to keep the global average temperature rise under 2° Celsius by the end of the century.

## COP 21, CMP 11

195 governments agree in Paris, France, to combat climate change and commit to emission reductions. The Paris Agreement is ratified in less than one year.

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