Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

FAQ 5.1 | What can every person do to limit warming to 1.5°C?

People can be educated through knowledge transfer so they can act in different roles, and in each role everyone can contribute to limit global warming to 1.5°C. Citizens with enough knowledge can organise and put political pressure on the system. Role models can set examples to others. Professionals (e.g., engineers, urban planners, teachers, researchers) can change professional standards in consistency with decarbonisation; for example urban planners and architects can design physical infrastructures to facilitate low-carbon mobility and energy use by making walking and cycling safe for children. Rich investors can make strategic plans to divest from fossils and invest in carbon-neutral technologies. Consumers, especially those in the top 10% of the world population in terms of income, can limit consumption, especially in mobility, and explore the good life consistent with sustainable consumption.

Policymakers support individual actions in certain contexts, not only by economic incentives, such as carbon pricing, but also by interventions that understand complex decision-making processes, habits, and routines. Examples of such interventions include, but are not limited to, choice architectures and nudges that set green options as default, shift away from cheap petrol or gasoline, increasing taxes on carbon-intensive products, or substantially tightening regulations and standards to support shifts in social norms, and thus can be effective beyond the direct economic incentive.

FAQ 5.2 | How does society perceive transformative change?

Humaninduced global warming, together with other global trends and events, such as digitalisation and automation, and the COVID-19 pandemic, induce changes in labour markets, and bring large uncertainty and ambiguity. History and psychology reveal that societies can thrive in these circumstances if they openly embrace uncertainty on the future and try out ways to improve life. Tolerating ambiguity can be learned, for example by interacting with history, poetry and the arts. Sometimes religion and philosophy also help.

As a key enabler, novel narratives created in a variety of ways, such as by advertising, images and the entertainment industry, help to break away from the established meanings, values and discourses and the status quo. For example, discourses that frame comfortable public transport services to avoid stress from driving cars on busy, congested roads help avoid car driving as a status symbol and create a new social norm to shift to public transport. Discourses that portray plant-based protein as healthy and natural promote and stabilise particular diets. Novel narratives and inclusive processes help strategies to overcome multiple barriers. Case studies demonstrate that citizens support transformative changes if participatory processes enable a design that meets local interests and culture. Promising narratives specify that even as speed and capabilities differ, humanity embarks on a joint journey towards well-being for all and a healthy planet.

FAQ 5.3 | Is demand reduction compatible with growth of human well-being?

There is a growing realisation that mere monetary value of income growth is insufficient to measure national welfare and individual well-being. Hence, any action towards climate change mitigation is best evaluated against a set of indicators that represent a broader variety of needs to define individual well-being, macroeconomic stability, and planetary health. Many solutions that reduce primary material and fossil energy demand, and thus reduce GHG emissions, provide better services to help achieve well-being for all.

Economic growth measured by total or individual income growth is a main driver of GHG emissions. Only a few countries with low economic growth rates have reduced both territorial and consumption-based GHG emissions, typically by switching from fossil fuels to renewable energy and by reduction in energy use and switching to low/zero carbon fuels, but until now at insufficient rates and levels for stabilising global warming at 1.5°C. High deployment of low/zero carbon fuels and associated rapid reduction in demand for and use of coal, gas, and oil can further reduce the interdependence between economic growth and GHG emissions.