

Designing Science-Policy Interfaces across Challenges and Fields

Caroline Dunton | UNU-CPR

Science-policy interfaces (SPIs) are one of many types of scientific institutions within the United Nations system. While they vary in their design and processes, they generate, assess, synthesize and mobilize knowledge for policymakers. In 2025, the United Nations created new SPIs in areas as diverse as artificial intelligence and chemicals, waste and pollution. The Independent Panel on Evidence for Action against AMR (IPEA) is expected to be launched later in 2026. Evidently, SPIs are a type of institution in demand among experts and United Nations Member States. Moreover, they are an institutional form that inspires optimism within the multilateral system. However, the question of how to design them remains open-ended.

To respond to this question, policymakers and Member States are faced with multiple design considerations. First, they must consider the lessons learned from existing interfaces, both positive and negative. Second, they must consider how interfaces can be flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances. Third, they must consider impact. Policy uptake of knowledge is rarely linear and SPIs are rarely mandated to be policy prescriptive. Fourth, they must consider how experts and policymakers will work together constructively across knowledge systems, fields of science and political positions.

In October 2025, the Global Governance Innovation (GGI) Platform hosted a workshop to discuss these issues. The GGI Platform gathered experts from across academia, civil society, multilateral organizations and Member States. Following a rich discussion, four scholarly experts on SPIs have written short articles based on their research on different aspects of designing new SPIs. Together, they provide useful analysis of key design considerations and demonstrate the value of SPIs within the broader global governance of scientific knowledge.

Mathieu J.P. Poirier examines the design process for IPEA, articulating the governance gap that IPEA would fill and reviewing the key choices that policymakers face. Henrik Selin examines the new Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution (ISP-CWP). He analyses the challenges that the ISP-CWP and its Member States face, highlighting key areas where cooperation will be needed. Hannah Hughes looks beyond institutional structure to analyse the people that make up institutions. She draws on lessons from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to demonstrate how participants themselves are important for institutional design. Kari de Pryck assesses the question of knowledge uptake, evaluating how the policy impact of SPIs can be considered in the institutional design stage.

As the United Nations undergoes significant reform in the context of pressing crises, scientific knowledge is more important than ever. Across, for instance, climate change, anti-microbial resistance and emerging technologies there are urgent demands for new governance mechanisms, institutions and processes. SPIs are likely to remain a key tool for generating, mobilizing and applying science across the United Nations system.¹ This is a positive sign for global governance, as it demonstrates how cooperation is possible. What comes next is ensuring that each successive interface is fit for purpose and builds constructively on lessons learned from those that came before it.

¹ Adam Day and others. *Governing with Evidence: How the UN System Generates, Mobilizes and Uses Science* (New York, United Nations University, 2026). Available at <https://unu.edu/cpr/report/governing-evidence-how-un-system-generates-mobilizes-and-uses-science>.