

UN Principal Organs - UPSC Notes

The United Nations is an important organisation which plays a significant role in world affairs. Hence, it is imperative to read about its functioning and organisation for the [UPSC exam](#), particularly for its **International Relations** segment. In this article, you can read all about the principal organs of the United Nations.

Principal Organs of the UN

The United Nations is an international organisation that strives to maintain world peace and ensure security for all mankind. It also strives to foster friendly relations among nations.

You can read all about the UN, its formation and functioning [here](#).

The UN functions through its 6 principal organs. They are:

1. General Assembly
2. Security Council
3. Secretariat
4. Economic and Social Council
5. Trusteeship Council
6. International Court of Justice

The details of each of the organs are described below.

General Assembly

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) is the chief policy making and representative body of the UN.

- - It is the only UN body where all the UN members are represented. So, all the 193 member countries are represented here.
 - The GA is headed by a President who is elected for a one-year tenure.
 - The GA is headquartered in New York, USA.
 - The UNGA meets once a year in September.
 - This annual GA session happens in the General Assembly Hall in New York.
 - The Assembly also meets at other times of the year depending on the tasks.
 - The UNGA can make recommendations to countries on matters within its competence.
- **Functions of the UNGA:**
 - Consider and approve the UN budget and establish the financial assessments of member countries;
 - Elect the non-permanent members of the UN Security Council and the members of other UN organs and councils and, on the recommendation of the UNSC, appoint the Secretary-General;
 - Consider and make recommendations on the general principles of cooperation for maintaining international security and peace, including disarmament;
 - Discuss any question relating to international peace and security;
 - Discuss any question within the scope of the UN Charter;

- Conduct studies and make recommendations to encourage global political cooperation, the codification and development of international law, the realisation of human rights & fundamental freedoms, and international collaboration in the social, economic, cultural, humanitarian, health and educational fields;
 - Make recommendations for the peaceful settlement of any situation that might hamper the friendly relations between nations;
 - Consider reports from the various UN organs.
- **Voting in the UNGA:**
 - Every member has one vote in the GA.
 - Most questions are decided by a simple majority, however, budgetary questions, election to the UNSC and ECOSOC require a 2/3rd majority vote.
 - In recent times, the UNGA has been striving to make decisions based on consensus among all member countries.

Security Council

The primary responsibility of maintaining peace and security in the world lies with the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

- The UNSC has 15 member states, five of whom are permanent members.
- The 10 non-permanent members are elected by the General Assembly for a term of two years each, on a regional basis.
 - Out of the 10 temporary members, five are from Asia or Africa, two are from Latin America, one from Eastern Europe, and two from Western Europe or other regions.
 - The five permanent member countries are the USA, the UK, France, Russia and China.
 - Decisions are taken by the Council by vote, that is, if 9 out of the 15 members vote 'yes'. However, if any of the permanent members vote 'no', that is, use their veto power, then the resolution is not passed.
 - Each of the permanent members possesses the Veto Power to any resolution of the UNSC.
 - This is seen as the most undemocratic feature of the UN.
 - But, during the formation of the UN, the USA refused to be a part of the UN unless it was given the power to veto.
 - The League of Nations was an ineffective organisation partly because of the absence of the US. Hence, this condition of the US was accepted.
 - Critics of the permanent members' veto power also opine that it is this feature that prevents many conflicts from being resolved.
- The members of the UNSC must carry out the decisions taken by the Council; they are legally binding.
- The UNSC is headquartered in New York.

Check the table below for more information on the UNSC:

United Nations Security Council - Details	The United Nations Security Council Reforms [UPSC Notes for GS II]
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Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

The ECOSOC is the main body responsible for coordination, policy dialogue, policy review and recommendations on social, economic and environmental issues, and also the implementation of internationally agreed development goals.

- It serves as the central mechanism for activities of the UN system and its specialized agencies in the economic, social and environmental fields, supervising subsidiary and expert bodies.
- It is the UN's pivotal platform for reflection, debate, and innovative thinking on sustainable development.
- The ECOSOC has 54 members that are elected by the General Assembly.
- Voting is by a simple majority and each member has one vote in the ECOSOC.
- The work of the UN's specialised agencies like the FAO, the UNESCO, the UNICEF, the ILO, etc. are coordinated by the ECOSOC.
- The ECOSOC presidency is for one year, and it is headquartered in New York.

Trusteeship Council

The Trusteeship Council was established in 1945 under the UN Charter to administer the 11 Trust Territories after the Second World War.

- These were former colonies or dependent territories.
- Since the Council was created, many territories have become independent and are self-governing.
- The last Trust Territory to become independent was Palau in 1994.
- Hence, the Trusteeship Council suspended operations in 1994 and decided to meet as and when the occasion arises.

International Court of Justice (ICJ)

The ICJ is the chief judicial organ of the United Nations.

- The ICJ's seat is at the Hague, the Netherlands. (It is the only UN principal organ not located in New York, USA.)
- All 193 UN members are automatically party to the ICJ.
- ICJ's functions:
 - To settle in accordance with international law the legal disputes submitted to it by States.
 - To give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by duly authorized international organs and agencies.

Read more on the ICJ and India's relations with it [here](#).

Secretariat

The Secretariat comprises the UN Secretary-General and the thousands of staff who work at the UN HQ at New York.

- The Secretary-General is chief administrative officer of the UN.
 - The Secretary-General is appointed by the GA on recommendation by the UNSC.
 - He/she has a five-year tenure which is renewable.
 - The current and the ninth Secretary-General is Portuguese national António Guterres.
 - The Secretary-General can bring to the attention of the UNSC any issue which can be a threat to international peace and security.
- The staff who work at the Secretariat are hired internationally and also locally depending upon the job.
- They work at stations all over the world.
- Their work ranges from peacekeeping operations, surveying economic and social trends, mediating in international disputes, conducting international conferences to laying the groundwork for international agreements.

