

## Commonwealth of Nations - UPSC International Relations Notes for GS2

The Commonwealth of Nations is an association of independent sovereign states, most of which are former colonies once governed by the United Kingdom as part of the British Empire. This article talks about the Commonwealth of Nations and its importance for the [IAS Exam](#).

International organisations and groupings are an important part of the **International Relations** section of the General Studies paper-2 in the [UPSC Syllabus](#). International relations is a very dynamic part and is crucial for multiple papers in Prelims and Mains. Students preparing for UPSC 2020 and other [Government Exams](#) must be aware of the topic.

### What is the Commonwealth of Nations?



The Commonwealth of Nations is an association of independent sovereign states, most of which are former colonies of the United Kingdom. The British Monarch remains the head of the Commonwealth. Hence, the Queen of the United Kingdom, Elizabeth II is given the title of Head of the Commonwealth. This title doesn't hold any political power over its member countries.

### History of Commonwealth of Nations

On his visit to South Australia, Lord Rosebery discovered the change in the dynamic of the British Empire when the former colonies became more independent. He described it as the Commonwealth of Nations. Hence, it is also known as the Successor of the British Empire. The timeline of the Commonwealth is listed below:

- 1887 - Lord Rosebery describes the British Empire as the Commonwealth of Nations.
- 1926 - Balfour Declaration at the Imperial Conference.
- 1931 - Statute of Westminster.
- Post World War II - British Empire is dismantled.
- 1947 - India gains independence. (One of the most important colonies)
- 1949 - Ireland becomes a Republic (Republic of Ireland) and leaves the Commonwealth.
- 1950 - London Declaration, where members accepted that the head of the Commonwealth will be the British Monarch and the Commonwealth of Nations is officially established.
- 1965 - Commonwealth Secretariat is established. It is the main intergovernmental agency and its central institution.

Now, with 54 member states, the Commonwealth of Nations encompasses up to 30% of the total population in the world. In terms of area, the Commonwealth holds about one-fourth of the world's land area.

## Structure of Commonwealth of Nations

The Commonwealth is primarily an organization in which countries with diverse economic backgrounds have an opportunity for close and equal interaction.

- The primary activities of the Commonwealth are designed to create an atmosphere of economic cooperation between member nations, as well as the promotion of democracy and good governance in them.
- The Commonwealth is not a political union of any sort, and does not allow the United Kingdom to exercise any power over the affairs of the organization's other members.
- While some nations of the Commonwealth, known as Commonwealth Realms, recognize the British Monarch as their head of state (and thus in theory still have some limited political ties to London), the majority do not.

## Members of Commonwealth

Membership is normally open to countries which accept the association's basic aims. Members are required to have a present or past constitutional link to the United Kingdom or to another Commonwealth member.

- There are 54 countries in the Commonwealth, in Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe and the Pacific. Commonwealth countries are diverse – they are amongst the world's biggest, smallest, richest and poorest countries.
- 32 of the members are classified as small states. Small states are especially vulnerable to things like climate change or developmental challenges.
- Every 2 years, the member countries meet to discuss issues affecting the Commonwealth and the wider world at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM).
- All members have an equal say regardless of size or wealth. This makes sure even the smallest countries have a voice in shaping the Commonwealth.

### Members of the Commonwealth of Nations

Antigua and Barbuda	Jamaica	Saint Lucia
Australia	Kenya	Samoa
The Bahamas	Kingdom of Eswatini	Seychelles
Bangladesh	Kiribati	Sierra Leone
Barbados	Lesotho	Singapore
Belize	Malawi	Solomon Islands
Botswana	Malaysia	South Africa
Brunei Darussalam	Maldives	Sri Lanka
Cameroon	Malta	St Kitts And Nevis
Canada	Mauritius	St Vincent And The Grenadines
Cyprus	Mozambique	Tonga
Dominica	Namibia	Trinidad And Tobago
Fiji	Nauru	Tuvalu
The Gambia	New Zealand	Uganda
Ghana	Nigeria	United Kingdom
Grenada	Pakistan	United Republic of Tanzania

Guyana	Papua New Guinea	Vanuatu
India	Rwanda	Zambia

The last country to join the Commonwealth was Rwanda in 2009.

## Commonwealth of Nations: Latest developments

The Maldives re-joined the Commonwealth, more than three years after the Indian Ocean island nation quit amid mounting criticism of its human rights. In 2016, the Maldives pulled out of the Commonwealth. Maldives has been formally reinstated into the Commonwealth as its 54th member state.

## India and Commonwealth

India has been involved in every major part of the Commonwealth network of institutions, and it is one of its top sources of funds, experts, and training. It also accounts for a large share of trade among the member states. In the 2015–2016 fiscal year, India was the fourth-largest contributor to the Commonwealth's budget and the third-largest funder of its joint office at the United Nations in New York.

### UPSC Questions related to Commonwealth

#### Is India a member of the Commonwealth?

Yes, India is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations.

#### What is the main purpose of the Commonwealth of Nations?

- The purpose of the voluntary Commonwealth of Nations is for international cooperation and to advance economics, social development, and human rights in member countries.
- **Decisions of the various Commonwealth councils are non-binding.**

#### What was the last country to join the Commonwealth?

Rwanda was the last country to join the Commonwealth in 2009.

