


## World Health Organisation (WHO) - UPSC Notes

The World Health Organisation (WHO) is a specialised agency of the United Nations that looks into matters of public health. Established on April 7th, 1948, its headquarters is located in Geneva, Switzerland. WHO is an important topic for the [IAS exam](#).

### World Health Organisation (WHO)

At the 1945 United Nations Conference on International Organization (also known as the San Francisco Conference), Szeming Sze, a delegate from the Republic of China (modern-day Taiwan), proposed the creation of an international health organisation under the auspices of the new [United Nations](#). Alger Hiss, the Secretary-General of the conference, recommended using a declaration to establish such an organisation.

As a result of these proceedings, the World Health Organisation came to be established in 1948. It became the first specialised agency of the United Nations to which every member subscribed.

<p><b>NAME: WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION (WHO)</b> <b>A SPECIALIZED AGENCY OF THE UN</b></p> <p><b>YEAR OF FORMATION: 1948</b></p> <p><b>HQ: GENEVA, SWITZERLAND</b></p> <p><b>SECTOR: HEALTH</b></p> <p><b>IS INDIA A MEMBER: YES</b></p>	<p><b>UPSC PRELIMS</b> <b>FACTS: WHO</b></p> 
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- The WHO is headed by its Director-General and is headquartered in Geneva. Currently, the WHO has 194 member countries. However, the US is withdrawing from the WHO. For more on this, check [CNA dated 9 July 2020](#).
- Full membership of the WHO is only guaranteed with the ratifying of the treaty known as the Constitution of the World Health Organisation.
- To know more about [Important Headquarters of International Organisations](#), visit the linked article.
- The member states of the WHO appoint delegates to the World Health Assembly, which is the supreme decision-making body. The World Health Assembly is attended by delegations from all Member States and determines the policies of the Organisation.
- On May 19 2020, India was elected by the 73rd World Health Assembly to the Executive Board of the World Health Organisation for a period of three years. Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan took

charge as the chairman of the WHO Executive Board on May 22. He succeeds Dr Hiroki Nakatani of Japan.

- The WHO celebrates the World Health Day annually on its formation day (7 April). The theme for 2020 was “Year of the Nurse and Midwife”.

## What is the Overall Focus of the WHO?

The WHO Constitution states that the organisation’s objective “is the attainment by all people of the highest possible level of health”.

The WHO fulfils this objective through the following functions:

1. By playing a role as the directing and coordinating authority on international health work.
2. Maintaining and establishing collaboration with the UN and any other appropriate bodies.
3. Assisting governments, upon request, in strengthening their health services.
4. Giving appropriate technical assistance and in case of emergencies, required aid upon the request or acceptance of governments.

## What is the Health Policy of the WHO?

The WHO addresses government health policy with the following two aims:

1. To address the social and economic determinants of health through policies and programmes “that enhance health equity and integrate pro-poor, gender-responsive, and human rights-based approaches”.
2. To promote a healthier environment, intensify primary prevention and influence public policies in all sectors so as to address the root causes of environmental threats to health”.

## Contribution of WHO

The WHO has been instrumental in eradicating the suffering of millions all over the world through its assistance to various governments. Some of the important milestones include:

- Eradication of smallpox in 1980.
- The organisation is close to eradicating Polio, a disease that affects mainly infants and young children. Due to eradication programmes by the WHO, polio cases have come down by 99% since 1988. As of 2019, there are only three nations suffering from polio - Nigeria, Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- There are about 216 million people suffering from Malaria, mostly in tropical Africa, where 90% of Malaria cases and deaths are recorded. In the African region, the death rate due to malaria has been brought down by 60% as of 2018.
  - In 2008, the WHO initiated the observance of the ‘World Malaria Day’. This day is observed annually on April 25. Read more about this day in [This Day in History dated April 25](#).
- It focuses on infectious diseases like HIV, influenza, malaria, [tuberculosis](#) and Ebola; and also other non-communicable diseases such as heart disease and cancer.
- It also takes efforts in the direction of maternity and infant healthcare, old-age care and hygienic food and water for all.

## Contributions of the WHO in India

India is a member of the WHO and the organisation has its offices in various parts of the country. The WHO Country Office (WCO) is headquartered in New Delhi.

The WHO Country Cooperation Strategy (CCS) – India has been jointly developed by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of the GOI and the WCO.

- Its chief aim is to contribute to improving health and equity in the country.

The [National Strategic Plan for Elimination of Malaria](#) (2017-2022) was launched by the Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare.

- Its chief aim is to totally eliminate Malaria by 2027.
- The National Strategic Plan has formulated year wise elimination targets in various parts of the country.
- It is formulated with the support of the World Health Organization's Global Technical Strategy for Malaria (2016-2030).

What are the current challenges of WHO?

As an international organisation, WHO has its fair share of challenges. Some of them are as follows:

- The WHO is largely dependent on funds from donors - usually from economically well-developed countries and organisations such as Melinda Gates Foundation - rather than a secured channel of funding.
- As a result, most of the WHO's funding for crucial programmes remain on the back burner as some of these programmes also clash with the interests of the donors.
- The effectiveness of the organisation has come under question especially due to its disastrous handling of the [Ebola outbreak in West Africa](#) and the very recent coronavirus outbreak in 2019-20.
- Consequently, the WHO's role as a leader in global health has been supplanted by other intergovernmental bodies such as the World Bank, and increasingly by big foundations.
- The WHO's handling of the [COVID-19](#) pandemic has come under severe criticism amidst what has been described by world leaders and media as the agency's "diplomatic balancing act" between "China and China's critics", including scrutiny of the relationship between the agency and Chinese authorities.
  - Initial concerns included the observation that while the WHO relies upon data provided and filtered by member states, China has had a "historical aversion to transparency and sensitivity to international criticism". US President Donald Trump has been the most vocal of all the critics of the organisation. This has led to the US's withdrawal from the WHO.

