

UNFCCC - United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

UNFCCC is an acronym for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. It came into force on 21st March 1994. It has been ratified by 197 countries and is called to have a near-universal membership. The countries that have ratified the convention are called the UNFCCC conference of parties (COP). The latest, COP26, was scheduled to be held in Glasgow, Scotland in November 2020, but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The rescheduled conference would most likely be held in November 2021 hosted in Glasgow by the UK in partnership with Italy. Learn more relevant facts about UNFCCC for UPSC in this article.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

UNFCCC is the primary multilateral treaty governing actions to combat climate change through adaptation and mitigation efforts directed at control of emission of Green House Gases (GHGs) that cause global warming. Even though climate change is a global concern some of the countries are majorly responsible for greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere. Many island nations are facing the major brunt of this [Climate Change](#) in the form of sea-level rise, cyclones, erratic weather conditions, etc. UNFCCC is a major step in the direction to control the downward spiral of climate change.

It is called the Rio Convention along with its sister conventions:

1. [UN Convention on Biological Diversity](#) and
 2. [UN Convention to Combat Desertification](#).
- The first global conference on climate change was held in 1972 in Stockholm, Sweden.
 - This conference ushered in numerous global negotiations and international agreements on the environment.
 - All of these culminated in the establishment of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, in 1992.
 - The treaty sets limits on GHG emissions on countries, but these are not binding and there are no enforcement mechanisms either.
 - However, there are provisions for updates or protocols that can be used to set legally binding emission limits on countries.
 - The parties to the convention meet annually in the Conference of the Parties or COP to review the progress under the convention.

UPSC Prelims Facts : UNFCCC



Name: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Adopted in the Year: 1992

Entered into Force in the Year: 1994

Headquarters: Bonn, Germany

Sector: Climate Change

Is India a Signatory: Yes, but ratified it in 1993.

The UNFCCC is not legally binding.

It sets a framework for limiting the emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) by individual countries.

Other Prelims Key Facts about UNFCCC for UPSC

How Many Signatory Parties are there of the Agreement?

- As of 2020, the UNFCCC has 197 signatory parties.

When does its supreme decision-making body meets?

- Its supreme decision-making body, the Conference of the Parties (COP), meets annually to assess progress in dealing with climate change.

Categories of Parties (Countries) associated with UNFCCC

The categories of countries that are signatories to UNFCCC are given in the table below:

Category of Parties	Meaning
Annex I	43 parties (countries) come under this category. The countries that come under this category are developed countries.
Annex II	24 countries of Annex I also come under Annex II countries. The countries in this category are expected to provide technical and financial assistance to countries coming under the category of developing countries.
Annex B	The countries in this category are Annex I countries, who have first or second-round Kyoto greenhouse gas emissions target.
Least-developed countries (LDCs)	47 Parties (countries) come under the category of LDCs. These countries are given special status under the treaty taking into consideration their limitations adapting to the effects of climate change.
Non Annex I	Parties (countries) that are not listed in Annex I that come under the category of low-income developing countries.

The **Kyoto Protocol** was adopted at the third session of the UNFCCC. Read more about the [Kyoto Protocol](#) in the linked article. This protocol is based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, keeping in mind the socio-economic development of the concerned countries and the polluter pays principle.

Another important agreement within the UNFCCC is the [Paris Agreement](#) (COP 21) which aims to reduce and mitigate GHG emissions.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and India

- India ratified the UNFCCC in 1993.
- The nodal agency for the UNFCCC in India is the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- Since India is a developing country, it is not required to adhere to GHG mitigation commitments because of its relatively smaller emissions and also because of lesser technical and financial capacities.

- India has been a big champion of the principles of Equity and Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capability (CBDR-RC) at the Convention.
- This is primarily based on the belief that developed countries have largely been responsible for the huge emission levels, owing to their being industrialized decades before the other countries.
 - A scientific study carried on greenhouse gas emissions from the time period 1850 to 2012 estimated that the US, China and the European Union would contribute to 50 per cent of temperature increase by 2100.
 - The total emissions' share in the given time period of the US, [European Union](#), and China is 20%, 17%, 12% respectively.
 - On the other hand, India is responsible for only 5%.
- Another reason is that developing countries and LDCs would have to accord eradicating poverty and other developmental activities more priority as compared to environmental concerns. So, they should be allowed leeway in assessing capabilities in addressing climate change.
- India has played an active role in taking steps to mitigate climate change, as the country is exposed to risks associated with climate change like erratic monsoons and natural calamities like floods, droughts, landslides, etc.
- National Environment Policy, 2006 promotes sustainable development along with respect for ecological constraints and the imperatives of social justice.
- The Government of India launched the [National Action Plan on Climate Change](#) in 2008. Read more about it in the linked article.
- At COP 21 (Paris Agreement), India had made various commitments to be achieved by 2030.
 - One commitment was to create an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by 2030.
 - For more on the commitments made by India, check the article on Paris Agreement.
- India was instrumental in the formation of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure. Read more about it in [PIB dated Nov 14, 2019](#).
- In the UN Climate talks that were held in Poland, India reiterated that the CBDR principle must be adhered to even as there were growing concerns that developed countries were trying to dilute it.

UNFCCC COP

There are a total of 25 COPs to UNFCCC that have met since 1994. The list of UNFCCC Conference of Parties is given below:

UNFCCC Conference of the Parties	
UNFCCC COP1	1985, Berlin
UNFCCC COP2	1996, Geneva

UNFCCC COP3	1997, Kyoto
UNFCCC COP4	1998, Buenos Aires
UNFCCC COP5	1999, Bonn
UNFCCC COP6	2001, The Hague
UNFCCC COP7	2001, Marrakesh
UNFCCC COP8	2002, New Delhi
UNFCCC COP9	2003, Milan
UNFCCC COP10	2004, Buenos Aires
UNFCCC COP11	2005, Montreal
UNFCCC COP12	2006, Nairobi
UNFCCC COP13	2007, Bali
UNFCCC COP14	2008, Poznan
UNFCCC COP15	2009, Copenhagen
UNFCCC COP16	2010, Cancun
UNFCCC COP17	2011, Durban
UNFCCC COP18	2012, Doha
UNFCCC COP19	2013, Warsaw
UNFCCC COP20	2014, Lima
UNFCCC COP21	2015, Paris
UNFCCC COP22	2016, Marrakesh
UNFCCC COP23	2017, Bonn
UNFCCC COP24	2018, Katowice
UNFCCC COP25	2019, Madrid

Frequently Asked Questions Related to the UNFCC

How effective the UNFCC has been?

The UNFCCC process has not been effective enough in catalysing mitigation action compatible with a below-2°C trajectory because its historical focus on emission targets has been too narrow

What are the drawbacks of the UNFCC?

The UNFCCC was born in 1992 with three fatal flaws: a static annex system, interlinked decision-making and no formal rules of procedure.

