

UNECE Water Convention [UPSC Notes]

The Water Convention is a UN convention that promotes cooperation on transboundary surface and ground waters and strengthens their protection and sustainable management. This topic forms an important part of the Environment Conservation, and International Agreements sections for the [IAS Exam](#).

UNECE Water Convention

The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) was adopted in Helsinki in 1992 and entered into force in 1996. The Water Convention was amended in 2003 to allow accession by countries outside the UNECE region. 2022 marks the 30th anniversary of the Water Convention.

- It is a unique international legal instrument and intergovernmental platform which aims to ensure the sustainable use of transboundary water resources by facilitating cooperation for the pan-European region.
- It was originally negotiated as a regional instrument and was later opened up for accession to all UN Member States from 1st March 2016. Its global opening in 2016 led Chad, Senegal (2018, the first non-UNECE countries), Ghana (2020), Guinea-Bissau (2021), Togo (2021), and Nigeria (2022) to accede. It has 46 Parties worldwide. 98 International Organisations and NGOs are partners to the Water Convention.

The Water Convention in Numbers - Sessions of the meeting of the parties (2003 - 2021), number of countries represented.

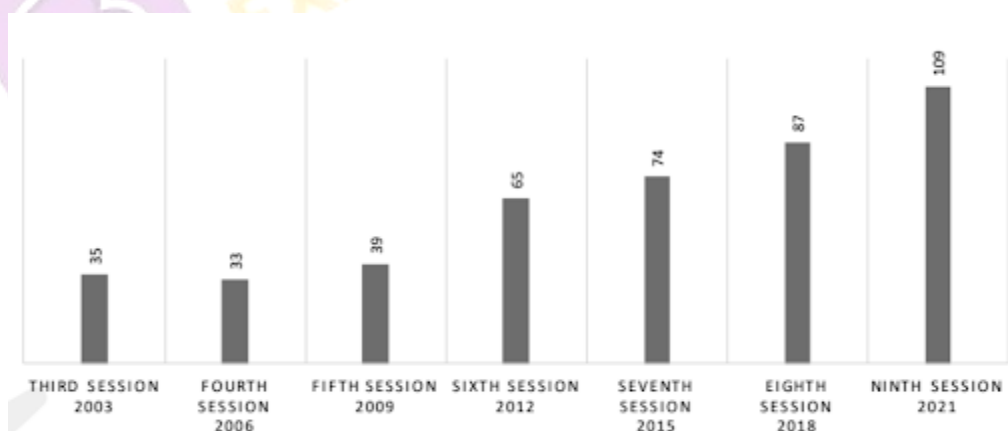


Image source: unece.org

Water Convention Significance

Transboundary river and lake basins account for nearly half of the earth's land surface and generate roughly 60% of the global freshwater flow. 40% of the world's population live in shared basins and over 600 aquifers are shared. Transboundary cooperation is therefore increasingly vital to prevent conflicts and ensure effective and sustainable use and management of shared resources.

- The Water Convention is a widely accepted legal framework. Many important water agreements like the Danube River Protection Convention (1994), the Convention on the Protection of the Rhine (1999), and the Convention for the Prevention of Conflicts Related to the Management of Shared Water Resources in Central Africa (2017) mention the Water Convention as a core reference for the cooperation of their parties.
- The convention requires parties to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impact, use transboundary waters in a reasonable way and ensure their sustainable management.
- The convention does not replace bilateral and multilateral agreements for specific rivers, lakes, groundwater, etc. instead it fosters implementation and further development of such agreements.
- The Water Convention is an important tool to promote and achieve the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#). It plays an important role in accelerating progress towards SDG 6 (Clean Water & Sanitation) and its target 6.5, which calls upon all States to implement integrated water resources management at all levels by 2030, including through transboundary cooperation.
- The convention and its programme of work also contribute to other SDGs like SDG 2 (Zero hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well Being), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnership for the Goals).

Water Convention Framework

Its highest decision-making body is the Meeting of the Parties, which is convened every three years.

- The subsidiary bodies of the Meeting of the Parties include the Bureau, the working group on the integrated water resources management, the working group on monitoring and assessment, the task force on water and climate, the task force on the water, food, energy, ecosystem nexus and the joint expert group on water and industrial accidents.
- The Water Convention also has an Implementation Committee, a Secretariat and an International Water Assessment Centre (IWAC).

UNECE (The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe)

- The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) was set up by ECOSOC ([United Nations Economic and Social Council](#)) in 1947.
- UNECE includes 56 member states in Europe, North America and Asia and facilitates greater economic integration and cooperation among its member countries and promotes sustainable development and economic prosperity.
- UNECE is one of the five regional commissions of the United Nations. The other four are -
 - Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)
 - Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)
 - Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)
 - Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Five Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) have been negotiated by UNECE. These are -

1. Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution.
2. Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context.
3. Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention).
4. Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents.
5. Convention on access to information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.

UPSC Questions related to UNECE Water Convention

1. What is the UNECE Water Convention?

Ans: It is the convention on the protection and use of transboundary watercourses and international lakes. It was adopted in 1992 and enforced in 1996.

2. What is the aim of the Water Convention?

Ans: The Water Convention aims to protect and ensure the quality, quantity and sustainable use of transboundary surface waters and groundwater by strengthening transboundary water cooperation. The convention fosters the implementation of integrated water resources management.

3. Is India a Party to the Water Convention?

Ans: No, India is not a Party to the Water Convention.