



### Overview

Whether it's the United Nations (UN) or the European Union (EU), international organizations are often referenced when discussing foreign policy, but not everyone understands what these organizations do. Some of them are regionally specific while others serve broader communities.

For instance, the UN, with its 193 member states, aims to maintain international peace and security, develop friendly relations among nations, and promote social progress. The EU, on the other hand, is a political and economic union of 27 European countries that aims to ensure the free movement of people, goods, services, and capital within the international market. International law is non-binding in almost every case, with the only exception being the EU in which member countries agree to give up sovereignty to the supranational organization. While by no means exhaustive, this Basic provides an overview of international organizations, as well as their jurisdictions and objectives.

### Glossary

**African Union** - Founded in 2002 and headquartered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the African Union is a group of 55 African states functioning in a similar manner to the European Union. The African Union's primary goal is to promote unity on the African continent as well as to advance Africa's growth and economic development by championing citizen inclusion and increased cooperation and integration of African states. While decisions by the African Union Commission, the Pan-African Parliament and the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights, governing bodies within the African Union are theoretically binding, member states often ignore them.

**Association of Southeast Asian Nations** - Headquartered in Jakarta, Indonesia and chartered in 1967 by the foreign ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, ASEAN has 10 member states throughout Southeast Asia. ASEAN was originally founded to contain the spread of communism in Southeast Asia as well as promote regional cooperation in the social, economic, and political arenas. Currently, the organization focuses on accelerating economic growth, social progress, and cultural development in the region. ASEAN is a strictly intergovernmental organization in which decisions are based on consensus and a principle of , so members are likely to follow decisions handed down, but critics feel this approach limits the organization's responsiveness.

**European Union** - Founded in its current form in 1993 but dating back to 1952 as the European Coal and Steel Community, the

### Center Forward Basics

Center Forward brings together members of Congress, not-for-profits, academic experts, trade associations, corporations and unions to find common ground. Our mission: to give centrist allies the information they need to craft common sense solutions, and provide those allies the support they need to turn those ideas into results.

In order to meet our challenges we need to put aside the partisan bickering that has gridlocked Washington and come together to find common sense solutions.

For more information, please visit [www.center-forward.org](http://www.center-forward.org)

European Union (EU) has a long and rich history. Now an organization that governs most of Europe's economic policy and strives to promote European unity, the EU comprises seven institutions: the European Council (composed of heads of state and government), the Council of the European Union (consisting of ministers from relevant policy areas), the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Court of Justice, the European Court of Auditors, and the European Central Bank. By many definitions, the EU is the only true supranational organization in the world.

**International Criminal Court** - Located in The Hague, Netherlands, the International Criminal Court (ICC) aims to prosecute and imprison international criminals. The ICC has jurisdiction over four main crimes: crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, breaches of the Geneva Convention, and crimes of aggression. States party to the Rome Statute have a legal obligation to cooperate fully with the ICC. The ICC does not have a police force, so it must rely on this cooperation from states to enforce its rulings. The ICC has a detention center, but it is only for individuals on trial, not those who have been found guilty of a crime for which they have been prosecuted. The ICC is intended to complement rather than replace national courts. It can only act when national courts have been found unable or unwilling to try a case. Additionally, it only exercises jurisdiction over crimes that occurred after its statute took effect in 2002.

**International Court of Justice** - Not to be confused with the ICC, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), also located in The Hague, Netherlands, is the UN's main Judicial institution. Unlike the ICC, the ICJ is the only international court adjudicating general disputes between nations and giving advisory opinions on international legal issues. The decisions of the ICJ are binding only on the States Parties to the dispute. The judgments and decisions of the ICJ can establish the facts and the applicable law in each situation and determine whether a State is responsible for acts in violation of its international obligations.

**International Monetary Fund** - A UN organization located in Washington D.C. and founded in 1944 in the aftermath of the Great Depression, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) works to achieve sustainable growth and prosperity for all 190 of its member countries. The IMF is the UN's main financial crisis prevention institution. The IMF is governed by and accountable to its member countries. These policy adjustments are conditions for IMF loans and help ensure the country adopts strong and effective policies.

**North Atlantic Treaty Organization** - The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, colloquially known as NATO, is a group treaty between 32 member states founded in 1949 to act as a Western foil to the Soviet Union. Since then, NATO has worked mainly as a deterrent first for the Soviet Union and now for Russia. NATO's purpose is to guarantee the freedom and security of its members through political and military means and it is one of the strongest regional organizations in the world. NATO is perhaps best known for Article 5 of the treaty, which states that any armed attack on one NATO member is an attack on all of them, requiring a response from all members of NATO. NATO's legal order is part of public international law. It contributes to the most constitutional part of public international law, the UN Charter. A country voluntarily accepts legal obligations under international law by ratifying a treaty.

**Pacific Island Forum** - Founded in 1971, the Pacific Island Forum is a group of 18 Island Nations in the South Pacific. Similar to the EU, the Pacific Island Forum exists to promote welfare and prosperity throughout Oceania. The Pacific Islands Forum brings the region together to address pressing issues and challenges and foster collaboration and cooperation in pursuing shared goals. Decisions made by Leaders are reached by consensus and are outlined in a Forum Communique, which guides the development and implementation of policies. Each participating country voluntarily accepts to abide by these decisions.

**United Nations** - The United Nations (UN) is a diplomatic and political international organization whose stated purposes are to maintain international peace and security, develop friendly relations among nations, and achieve international cooperation. The UN had 51 member states when it was first established, and now the organization has 193. The UN has a several branches, many of which are covered in this Basic, concerned with upholding and promoting its goals. The UN convenes as a General Assembly where every member state is represented. This General Assembly meets annually in regular session, from September to December, and resumes in January until all issues on the agenda are addressed. The General

Assembly also elects a president every year to lead the Assembly in its agenda and topics of discussion. Besides the General Assembly, the other central bodies of the UN (known collectively as the organs of the UN) are the Security Council, Economic and Social Council, Trusteeship Council, International Court of Justice, and the Secretariat. Since the United Nations has immunity from local jurisdiction and cannot be sued in a national court, the Organization has set up an internal justice system to resolve staff-management disputes, including those that involve disciplinary action.

**United Nations Security Council** - Primarily concerned with international peace and security, the UN Security Council functions as the UN's facilitator making decisions about where to send peacekeeping missions. There are 15 member nations on the United Nations Security Council, with 5 of them being permanent members (China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US) and 10 of them being non-permanent members who are voted onto the council for two-year terms. They decide when and where peacekeeping operations will be deployed. They respond to crises worldwide on a case-by-case basis and deliberate as a group on whether or not UN intervention is required. The Council has broad powers to maintain international peace and security, most notably under Chapter VII of the UN Charter; and its decisions are binding on UN members. In such situations, the council is not limited to recommendations but may act, including using armed force "to maintain or restore international peace and security.

**UNESCO** - Another specialized UN agency, UNESCO, which stands for the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, focuses on promoting cooperation between nations in education, the sciences, the arts, and culture. The UNESCO conventions only bind member states when they consent to them through ratification, acceptance, approval, or accession.

**UNICEF** - The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund is a UN agency primarily focused on funding education and healthcare for children in developing countries. Signing the instrument does not create a binding legal obligation, but does demonstrate the State's intent to examine the treaty domestically and consider ratifying it. While signing does not commit a State to ratification, it does oblige the State to refrain from acts that would defeat or undermine the treaty's objective and purpose.

**Union of South American Nations** - Founded in 2008 and abbreviated as UNASUR in Spanish and UNASUL in Portuguese, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) is a primarily defunct organization of South American nations created to oppose the influence of the United States in South America. UNASUR's founder was Hugo Chávez, a former president of Venezuela and a controversial figure. Currently, UNASUR is paralyzed and inactive as an organization because of its lack of active members. However, because the 2008 treaty that led to UNASUR is still active for the members that haven't denounced it, the organization will continue to have juridical status internationally. UNASUR's treaty will continue to be in effect as long as at least two states remain members, so there is absolutely nothing stopping UNASUR from officially relaunching. The legislative measures of the UNASUR will be binding on the accepting Member States once incorporated into each Member State's domestic law.

**World Bank** - The World Bank is a UN organization founded in 1944 and headquartered in Washington D.C. The World Bank provides several products to low and middle-income nations, including financial support, policy advice, research, and analysis, as well as technical assistance. The Tribunal is the independent judicial forum of last resort for the resolution of cases submitted by members of the staff of the Bank Group alleging non-observance of their contracts of employment or terms of appointment. The Tribunal's decisions are final and binding to its accepting members.

**World Economic Forum** - The World Economic Forum is the international organization for Public-Private Cooperation. It provides a global, impartial, and not-for-profit platform for meaningful connections between stakeholders to establish trust and build initiatives for cooperation and progress. It is headquartered in Cologny, Switzerland, and holds a yearly meeting in Davos, Switzerland. The forum at Davos includes most major international organizations and around 100 different nations. The World Economic Forum has no power to make decisions, but it may have considerable ability to influence political and business policy decisions.

**World Health Organization** - Founded in 1948 and headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, the World Health Organization

(WHO) is the United Nations agency focusing on healthcare globally. WHO leads global efforts to expand access to essential services and products and directs and coordinates the world's response to health emergencies, such as the global COVID-19 pandemic. While the WHO doesn't directly have jurisdiction, they are all members of the International Health Regulation and are required to follow the expectations set for member states.

**World Trade Organization** - Founded in 1995 and headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, the World Trade Organization's primary goals are to reduce tariffs and other barriers to trade for their 164 members. Its member governments run the World Trade Organization (WTO), and every major decision made by the WTO is decided by the whole of the membership, usually by its ministers who meet every two years. The WTO describes itself as "a rules-based, member-driven organization" since the member governments make all decisions, and the rules are the outcome of negotiations among members.

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