

## **Ways to categorize or describe a taxonomy of international organizations.**

One way is to look at their geographic scope.

Some organizations are global in scope. Of course, the United Nations is global in scope.

How many member states do we have in the United Nations today?

If you said 193, you would be correct.

From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, there are presently 193 member states of the United Nations. Of course, other organizations are global in scope.

The specialized agencies like the World Health Organization or the Food and Agriculture Organization, or the World Food Program, or the World Trade Organization. International organizations like International Committee for the Red Cross and the Red Crescent are also global in scope. Other organizations are regional. We think of ASEAN or the European Union or the African Union, for example. There are even subregional international organizations such as ECOWAS, the political subregional organization covering West and parts of Central Africa, or the Mekong Group, or the Southern African Development Community.

The annual yearbook of international organizations lists more than 200 international organizations ranging in size from three, like the North America Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA, to organizations with hundreds of members.

What then do we consider to be a definition of international organization? You may wish to develop a view of your own on what you think is an appropriate view because it's not black and white and there are options for interpretation.

In fact, there are as many definitions of international organizations almost as there are such organizations. The OECD, the Paris-based organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, itself an international organization, puts forth really a very narrow definition of international organization. I quote, international organizations are entities established by formal political agreements between their members that have the status of international treaties. Their existence is recognized by the law in their member countries and they are not treated as resident institutional units of the countries in which they are located, end quote.

Let's look at another definition, one that considers international organizations to be those whose members have at least three states that have activities in several states, and whose members are held together by a formal intergovernmental agreement.

Many commentators consider such an intergovernmental agreement to be an essential quality, an essential characteristic, of an international organization. A sine qua non, if you will, of being in the category of international organizations. Ian Hurd, for example, the international relations scholar who has written a primer on international organizations states quote, international organizations begin as promises that states make to each other, end quote.

International organizations are recognized subjects of international law and have a separate legal standing from their member states or other members.

Why do I say member states or other members? Because over time, international organizations have evolved, and some have become more inclusive. My own organization, for example, UNAIDS has on its governing body, 22 member states, member governments, 11 United Nations agencies like UNICEF, the World Health Organization, UNESCO, UNHCR, the new UN Women, the World Bank, and other UN agencies as part of its board. In addition to five civil society organizations, NGOs, including non-governmental organizations that represent the people we serve, people living with HIV or affected by AIDS. So, the governance of international organizations has evolved over time and we'll look at that in a little bit.

A simple, broader, more inclusive definition of international organization would be something like an organization with an international membership, an international scope or an international presence.

We can think of two main types or categories of international organization. The first, intergovernmental organizations, most closely associated with the term international organizations, and these are those that are made up primarily of sovereign states.

Examples, as I said, include the United Nations, the specialized agencies of the United Nations, the OSCE, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe, the European Union. As I mentioned earlier, the African Union, other regional bodies.

The second major type of international organization is, of course, international non-governmental organizations. Those that are usually nonprofit and examples include so many around the world and here in Geneva, the International Scouting Movement, the International Committee of the Red Cross. Groups like Médecins Sans Frontières, Doctor without Borders, Journalists Without Borders, the World Wildlife Foundation, Green Peace and so many others.

We should note also that intergovernmental organizations are usually considered public in nature, while NGOs fall into the category of private organizations.

We, of course, are not today addressing, or including in our discussion other kinds of entities that have an international presence.

Coca Cola, Toyota, other multinational corporations are certainly present in villages, towns, and cities all around the world in more than what we think of international organizations.

At the same time, we're not talking about private sector commercial entities in our discussion of international organizations today.

Let me also note that a number of governments codified the definition of international organizations, in their own domestic law, in their own domestic statutes.

But let's turn back again to the methodologies for thinking about or classifying international organizations. We spoke already about geographic scope. Another basis for classifying in our taxonomy of international organizations is the purpose of the organization. Is the purpose general like the United Nations or the Organization of American States? Is it specific like specialized agencies of the United Nations? The founders of the UN envisaged that functional agencies would play key roles, and carry out key activities, for example, in economic and social development.

Indeed the charter, Articles 57 and 63, call for affiliations of the UN with various organizations that are established by separate international agreements to deal with particular issues. Such as health, the World Health Organization, or food, the World Food Program, or science, education and culture, UNESCO, or refugees, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Or economic and social development, such as the UN Development Program, or the World Bank, or the International Monetary Fund.

It's very interesting how the purposes of these organizations have evolved over time since their creation. If you look at the World Bank website, and you look at the speeches of the new president, Jim Kim, you see really a further evolution of the purpose of the organization to eliminate what he called extreme poverty, or absolute poverty. And setting ambitious targets to boost prosperity in countries by maximizing income growth, for example, by the poorest of the poor in those countries. Today, there are 16 specialized agencies in the UN that are part of the United Nations but have a certain autonomous status.

Another approach for categorizing international organizations is according to their functions.

What are the functions of international organizations?

Informational, gathering, analyzing, disseminating data.

Providing a forum for exchange of views and discussion-making.

Normative functions, defining standards of conduct or of service. Rule-creating such as drafting legally binding treaties. Operational functions, allocating resources, providing technical assistance and relief, deploying forces, and dispute resolution, settling criminal or civil claims.

Of course, some organizations can have many or all of these functions. Let's take for example the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, which carries out virtually all of the functions that I've just mentioned. It creates international rules. It has drafted and had its member states agree to its 1951 Convention on the status of refugees and subsequent protocol. A central element of its mandate is to monitor the application of these treaties concerning the standards that governments must abide by in protecting refugees. At the same time, UNHCR has an informational role. It provides a forum for discussions on international refugee law and protection. It uses its forum to develop new rules and standards, so it has a normative role. And it perhaps is one of the most operational of all UN agencies, sending its staff to capital cities and remote locations in close to 100 countries around the world. Working with NGOs, host country governments of asylum, and others in civil society to provide life-saving refugee protection and relief in the form of food rations, pots and pans, cooking sets, medical supplies. Textbooks for refugee children, and plastic sheeting to sleep under for people who are without their homes, to guard them against the elements.

These are just some examples to make the functions of these organizations real.

In terms of the Security Council's mandate to preserve the peace and security globally, it does not get much more operational than the UN peacekeeping operations. The well-known Blue Helmets who help maintain cease-fire agreements and stabilize conflict situations around the world with more than 60 operations since their inception in 1948, the majority of these operations in the past 20 years. The Blue Helmets are, of course, perhaps one of the most visible faces of the UN around the world.

If we look at dispute resolution functions, we look at the International Criminal Court in the Hague, who's mandate is quote, to put an end to impunity for the perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Or the World Trade Organization, which itself has a tribunal, if you will, a dispute settlement mechanism to referee legal differences between states in the area of trade. A rich scholarship has grown up alongside public sector international organizations and if you're interested in an introduction to the common methodological approaches that scholars use today, the literature is rich. You could start with an article by Ian Hurd called *Theorizing International Organizations, Choices and Methods in the Study of International Organizations*, which you can find in the *International Journal Of International Organizational Studies*.