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International law

International law is a body of rules recognised by states or nations as binding upon their mutual relations, including their relations with international organisations. International law is usually incorporated in agreements between sovereign states, and/or derived from such agreements.

Areas

The term "international law" can refer to two legal disciplines:

- Public international law: it governs the relationship between states and international organisations, dealing with areas such as human rights, treaty law, the law of sea, international criminal law and international humanitarian law.
- Private international law - or conflict of laws - a set of rules of procedural law which determines which legal system governs and the law of which jurisdiction apply to a given legal dispute. These rules apply when a legal dispute has a crossborder element such as a contract agreed by parties located in different States or when the crossborder element exists in a multi-jurisdictional country.

Relation to European Union (EU) law

Although [EU law](#) may be regarded as a specific form of international law, the main body of EU law has some particular features which usually do not appear in international law: in particular, citizens can invoke rights guaranteed by EU law before courts in the EU Member States, whereas international law usually needs to be transposed into national law before citizens can plead it. Also, EU law often prevails over the law of the EU Member States. This is why this Portal has separate pages for EU law and international law.

Sources and databases

International law can mainly be found in international agreements or conventions, in addition to a set of commonly recognized values, standards and principles, which do not necessarily have to be explicitly referred to in an agreement. International agreements can be bilateral (i.e. between two sovereign states) or multilateral (i.e. between more than two states). Very often, they are prepared and negotiated within an international organisation such as the [United Nations](#) (UN), the [Council of Europe](#) and many others. An important source of international law is also the case law of international courts.

There are various publicly available information sources on international law. Here is a non-exhaustive list:

- [UN Treaty Collection](#),
- [UN - Human Rights Law](#),
- Council of Europe - [Conventions](#): human rights, democracy, judicial cooperation,
- [International Maritime Organisation \(IMO\)](#): law of the sea
- The [International Commission on Civil Status \(ICCS\)](#),
- [World Trade Organization \(WTO\)](#): international trade law,
- [European Free Trade Association \(EFTA\)](#) and [European Economic Area \(EEA\)](#),
- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) - [Anti-Bribery Convention](#),

- [Electronic information system for international law \(EISIL\)](#) by the American Law Society,
- [Hague Conference](#) on Private International Law (HCCH): you can find conventions and agreements in this area and also specialised information sections regarding the legalisation of documents for international use ("[apostille](#)"), service of documents, child abduction and adoption.

The United Nations has also created the [International Law Commission](#). Its task is to promote the progressive development of international law and its codification. To this end, it publishes studies and surveys, gathers precedents and elaborates proposals for new treaties. The International Law Commission's work has led to a number of important treaties and other key works of international law.

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