Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Members, Headquarters, UPSC Notes

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Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a regional political, economic, and security organisation established in 1981 to promote cooperation among Gulf countries. It aims to strengthen regional stability, economic integration, and collective security.

The **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** promotes trade, investment, energy cooperation, and a customs union, while facing challenges such as political differences, dependence on oil revenues, regional security tensions, and slow progress in deeper economic and political integration.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) About

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a regional intergovernmental organisation established in 1981 to promote cooperation among the Arab Gulf states in political, economic, defence, security, social, and cultural fields. The GCC seeks to create a common regional framework that enhances prosperity, stability, and integration among its members.

Gulf Cooperation Council Headquarters

The headquarters of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is located in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and serves as the organisation's administrative and coordinating centre. It is headed by the Secretary-General, who oversees the implementation of GCC decisions, coordinates meetings, and facilitates cooperation.

- The GCC does not have a single permanent president. Its leadership consists of the rotating President of the Supreme Council (held by the head of state of the presiding member country).

Gulf Cooperation Council History

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has evolved from a regional security alliance into a platform for economic integration and political coordination. Over the years, GCC has introduced major initiatives to strengthen cooperation while addressing regional geopolitical challenges.

- **Establishment (1981):** The GCC was established on 25 May 1981 in Abu Dhabi, UAE, through the GCC Charter to promote regional cooperation in political, economic, and security affairs.
- **Unified Economic Agreement (1983):** GCC adopted the Unified Economic Agreement, providing the framework for economic integration and trade cooperation.
- **GCC Customs Union (2003):** The Gulf Cooperation Council launched a Customs Union with a common external tariff to facilitate intra-regional trade.
- **GCC Common Market (2008):** It established the Common Market, enabling freer movement of citizens, goods, services, and capital across member states.

Qatar Diplomatic Crisis (2017 - 2021)

The **Qatar Diplomatic Crisis (2017–2021)** began when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt cut diplomatic ties with Qatar, accusing it of supporting terrorism and maintaining close relations with Iran. The resulting blockade disrupted GCC unity. The crisis ended with the **Al Ula Declaration (2021)**, restoring diplomatic relations and reopening borders among the member states.

Gulf Cooperation Council Objectives

Its objectives are outlined in the GCC Charter and focus on ensuring sustainable development, regional stability, and enhancing cooperation among its member states.

- **Promote Regional Unity:** Strengthen coordination, integration, and interconnection among member states across all sectors to achieve greater regional unity.
- **Enhance Cooperation Among Peoples:** Deepen relations and expand cooperation among the peoples of member states in social, cultural, and developmental fields.
- **Harmonise Policies & Regulations:** Develop common regulations and policies in key areas such as economic and financial affairs, commerce, customs, communications, education, and culture.
- **Promote Scientific & Economic Development:** Encourage scientific research, technological advancement, joint ventures, and private sector cooperation in industry, mining, agriculture, water, and

animal resources to support sustainable development.

Gulf Cooperation Council Members

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is composed of six Arab monarchies in the Gulf region: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). All are located in the Arabian Peninsula and are important producers or exporters of hydrocarbons.

Gulf Cooperation Council Map

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) map highlights the six member countries, strategically located around the Persian Gulf, connecting Asia, Africa, and Europe.


GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL
KUWAIT
Kuwait
PERSIAN GULF
BAHRAIN
Manama
QATAR
Doha
OMAN
Riyadh
Abu Dhabi
U.A.E.
Muscat
SAUDI ARABIA
RED SE
OMAN

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Structure

Gulf Cooperation Council Structure comprises the Supreme Council, Ministerial Council, and Secretariat General, enabling member states to coordinate political, economic, security, and social policies while ensuring effective regional governance.

- **Supreme Council:** It is the highest decision-making body, comprising the Heads of State of all member countries. It meets annually to set the GCC's strategic direction and major policies.
- **Ministerial Council:** It consists of the Foreign Ministers (or other designated ministers) of member states and meets periodically to implement the decisions of the Supreme Council and coordinate policies.
- **Secretariat General:** Headquartered in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, it is led by the Secretary-General and is responsible for implementing GCC decisions, coordinating activities, and managing the organisation's day-to-day administration.

India and Gulf Cooperation Council

India and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) share a vital partnership anchored by bilateral trade, energy security, and the **Indian diaspora**.

- **Important Trading Partner:** With bilateral trade exceeding US$178.56 billion (2023–2024), accounting for 15.42% of India’s global trade, the GCC is India's largest regional trading bloc and a major destination for Indian imports and exports.
- **Energy Security:** The GCC countries contribute almost 35% of India’s oil imports and 70% of gas imports. GCC is essential to India's energy needs.
- **Indian Diaspora:** Approximately 10 million Indians reside and work in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations, making substantial remittance contributions and acting as a conduit between India and the Gulf.
- **Investment and Economic Cooperation:** Through sovereign wealth funds, GCC nations have made significant investments in India, backing projects related to real estate, infrastructure, renewable energy, logistics, and the digital economy.
- **India-GCC Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**: Following the completion of the Terms of Reference (ToR) in February 2026, India and the GCC formally began discussions for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA).
- **India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC):** GCC countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, are key partners in the IMEC initiative, enhancing India's connectivity with Europe.
- **Strategic Balance in West Asia:** India's growing engagement with the GCC strengthens its strategic presence in West Asia and provides an alternative to China's expanding economic and infrastructure footprint, including the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), while preserving India's strategic autonomy.

Gulf Cooperation Council Functions

The GCC functions as a platform for political coordination, economic integration, and collective security, fostering cooperation among member states to promote regional stability and sustainable development.

- **Economic Integration:** Through programmes like the GCC Customs Union (2003) and Common Market (2008), the GCC encourages regional investment and commerce, allowing for more unrestricted movement of capital, people, products, and services.

- **Collective Security:** The Peninsula Shield Force, intelligence sharing, counterterrorism initiatives, and maritime security coordination all contribute to the strengthening of joint defence cooperation.
- **Policy Coordination:** To promote regional policy harmonisation, common laws are created in fields including trade, finance, customs, energy, transportation, education, and health.
- **Political Cooperation:** As seen by the 2021 Al-Ula Declaration, which restored unity following the diplomatic crisis in Qatar, the GCC offers a forum for coordinated diplomatic action on regional concerns.
- **Science and Technology Cooperation:** In order to boost economic modernisation, cooperative projects foster research, innovation, and technological improvement in fields including digital transformation, water management, and renewable energy.
- **Sustainable Development:** By lowering reliance on oil and promoting private sector expansion, national efforts like Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the UAE's green economy strategy promote economic diversification.

Gulf Cooperation Council Challenges

The GCC faces several geopolitical, economic, and institutional challenges that hinder deeper regional integration and collective action despite strong economic ties among its members.

- **Intra-GCC Strategic Rivalry:** Conflicts between Saudi-backed Yemeni government forces and UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC) forces in southern Yemen (2025–2026) have revealed growing rivalry between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.
- **Oil Dependency:** Despite continuous efforts to diversify, GCC economies are vulnerable to fluctuations in global energy prices due to their heavy reliance on oil and gas earnings.
- **Regional Security Threats:** It includes the conflict in Yemen, tensions with Iran, threats to maritime security in the Strait of Hormuz, and attacks by drones and missiles.
- **Slow Economic Integration:** Deeper economic integration has been hampered by the implementation of projects like the GCC Monetary Union and a single currency.
- **External Geopolitical Competition:** The GCC's strategic balancing is made more difficult by the escalating rivalry between major countries, especially the US and China.
- **Labour Market Dependence:** High dependence on expatriate workers and the need to increase employment opportunities for nationals remain key socio-economic challenges.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Way Forward

Gulf Cooperation Council can strengthen its role as a leading regional organization by deepening integration and adapting to emerging geopolitical and climate challenges.

- **Deeper Economic Integration:** To establish a more cohesive regional economy, expedite the implementation of the GCC Customs Union, Common Market, and Monetary Union.
- **Stronger Regional Unity:** Promote institutional tools and political discourse to amicably settle disputes within the GCC, including member state strategic rivalry.

- **Economic Diversification:** To lessen reliance on hydrocarbons, increase collaboration in the fields of sophisticated manufacturing, **digital economy**, **green hydrogen**, renewable energy, and tourism.
- **Enhanced Collective Security:** To counter regional threats and maintain stability, bolster cooperative defence capabilities, **cybersecurity**, marine security, and intelligence sharing.
- **Climate Resilience & Sustainability:** Building on programs like the Middle East Green Initiative, encourage regional collaboration on food security, water security, carbon neutrality, and climate adaptation.

Gulf Cooperation Council PYQs

Question1: Which of the following is not a member of the 'Gulf Cooperation Council'? **(UPSC Prelims 2016)**

a. Iran
b. Saudi Arabia
c. Oman
d. Kuwait

Ans: (a)
