



World Heritage Glaciers under Threat: UNESCO

For Prelims: UNESCO World Heritage, Climate Change, Global Warming.

For Mains: World Heritage Glaciers under Threat, UNESCO.

Why in News?

Recently, a study conducted by [UNESCO \(United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization\)](#) has found that a third of the [glaciers on the UNESCO World Heritage list is under threat](#), regardless of efforts to limit temperature increases.

- A glacier is a large, **perennial accumulation of crystalline ice**, snow, rock, sediment, and water that originates on land and moves down slope under the influence of its own weight and gravity. They are sensitive indicators of changing climate.

What are the Findings?

- **Threat to Glaciers:**
 - 50 UNESCO World Heritage sites are **home to glaciers, representing almost 10% of the Earth's total glacierized area.**
 - They include the highest (next to Mt Everest), the longest (in Alaska), and the last remaining glaciers in Africa.
 - These glaciers have been retreating at an accelerated rate **since 2000 due to CO₂ emissions**, which are [warming temperatures](#).
 - They are currently losing **58 billion tons of ice every year** – equivalent to the combined annual water use of France and Spain – and are responsible for nearly 5% of observed global sea-level rise.
 - The glaciers under threat are in **Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America and Oceania.**
 - **Africa:** All World Heritage sites in Africa will very likely be **gone by 2050, including** Kilimanjaro National Park and Mount Kenya.
 - **Asia:** Glaciers in Three Parallel Rivers of **Yunnan Protected Areas (China)** – highest mass loss relative to 2000 (57.2%) and also the fastest melting glacier on the List.
 - **Europe:** Glaciers in **Pyrenees Mont Perdu (France, Spain)** – very likely to disappear by 2050.
- **Significance of Glaciers:**
 - Half of humanity depends directly or indirectly on glaciers as their water source for domestic use, agriculture, and power.
 - Glaciers are also pillars of biodiversity, feeding many ecosystems.
 - When glaciers melt rapidly, millions of people **face water scarcity and the increased risk of natural disasters** such as flooding, and millions more may be displaced by the resulting rise in sea levels.
- **Suggestions:**

- It is still possible to save the other two-thirds, if the rise in global temperatures did not exceed **1.5 degrees Celsius compared to the pre-industrial era**.
- In addition to drastically reduced carbon emissions there is a need for the creation of a **new international fund for glacier monitoring and preservation**.
 - Such a fund would **support comprehensive research, promote exchange networks between all stakeholders** and implement early warning and disaster risk reduction measures.
- There is an urgent need to **cut greenhouse gas emissions and invest in nature-based solutions**, which can help mitigate [climate change](#) and allow people to better adapt to its impacts.

What are UNESCO's World Heritage Sites?

▪ About:

- A [World Heritage Site](#) is a place that is listed by UNESCO for its **special cultural or physical significance**.
- The list of World Heritage Sites is maintained by the international '**World Heritage Programme**', administered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.
- This is embodied in an international treaty called the Convention concerning the Protection of the **World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by UNESCO in 1972**.

▪ Sites:

- There are around 1,100 UNESCO listed sites across its 167 member countries.
- In 2021, 'Liverpool — Maritime Mercantile City' in the United Kingdom was deleted from the World Heritage List due to "the irreversible loss of attributes conveying the outstanding universal value of the property".
 - In 2007, the UNESCO panel delisted the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary in Oman after concerns over poaching and habitat degradation, and the Elbe Valley in Dresden, Germany, in 2009 after the construction of the Waldschloesschen road bridge across the Elbe River.

▪ Sites in India:

- India is home to a total of 3691 monuments and sites. Of these 40 are designated as UNESCO World Heritage Sites.
- Including places like the Taj Mahal, [Ajanta Caves and Ellora Caves](#). **World Heritage Sites also include natural sites like the [Kaziranga National Park in Assam](#).**
 - Harappan city of [Dholavira in Gujarat](#) as **India's 40th world heritage site**.
 - [Ramappa Temple \(Telangana\)](#) was **India's 39th World Heritage Site**.
 - [Khangchendzonga National Park](#), Sikkim has been inscribed as India's first and the only "Mixed World Heritage Site".
- In 2022, the Union Ministry of Culture nominated [Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysalas temples](#) for consideration as a World Heritage site for the year 2022-2023.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. What are the aims and objectives of the McBride Commission of the UNESCO? What is India's position on these? **(2016)**

[Source: TH](#)

