

01 / THE IDEA & THE TURNING POINT

What is the Commonwealth?

An empire's history. A voluntary association's present.

The Commonwealth of Nations brings together **56 independent, equal countries**. They choose to cooperate on democracy, development and shared challenges. Each country keeps control of its own government and policies.

56

member countries

2.7bn

people

33

small states

How an imperial link changed

- **1926** **Equality recognised**
The Balfour Declaration recognised Britain and the self-governing Dominions as equal in status.
- **1931** **Autonomy gains legal force**
The Statute of Westminster strengthened the legislative independence of the Dominions.
- **1949** **India changes the terms**
The London Declaration allowed India to remain a member when it became a republic.

Most members share a British imperial past. Mozambique, Rwanda, Gabon and Togo joined without that historical connection.

THE INDIAN TURNING POINT

India wanted a republic without allegiance to the Crown. The 1949 settlement accepted the King as a symbol of the members' free association. India became a republic on **26 January 1950** and stayed in the Commonwealth.

Membership did not make the British monarch India's head of state.

02 / THE PEOPLE, THE PURPOSE & THE GAMES

A crown, but no common ruler



Elizabeth II signs the Commonwealth Charter, 2013. Head of the Commonwealth: 1952–2022.



Charles III with Commonwealth leaders, 2023. Head of the Commonwealth since 2022.

George VI was its first Head (1949–1952). The role is symbolic and **not automatically hereditary**: Commonwealth leaders agreed in 2018 that Charles would succeed Elizabeth II. It carries no authority to govern member countries.

Three numbers. Three different things.

56

COMMONWEALTH

Independent member countries. India is a republic within this association.

15

COMMONWEALTH REALMS

Countries where Charles III is head of state, including the UK, Canada and Australia.

74

SPORTS ASSOCIATIONS

Nations and territories in Commonwealth Sport. The UK's four home nations compete separately.

What does it actually do?

Talk and coordinate. The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) normally meets every two years. Decisions seek consensus. A London-based Secretariat supports members.

Support members. Work includes election observation, technical assistance, youth programmes and support for small states.

Shared values, uneven results. The 2013 Charter upholds democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Serious breaches can lead to suspension; influence depends on members' political willingness.

India's interest. Partnerships across Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

THE GAMES CONNECTION • First held in Hamilton in 1930; Delhi hosted in 2010. Glasgow 2026 ran from **23 July–2 August**. The sporting movement has its own governing body, Commonwealth Sport.