

Background Guide

SOCHUM

Letter from the Chair

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM) at DUMUNC! We're excited to guide you through discussions on two issues that define our era's greatest challenges to human dignity.

Our topics are deeply connected: climate change is forcing millions from their homes, creating some of the world's most vulnerable populations. At the same time, the internet has become a battleground for hearts and minds, where extremists recruit young people into ideologies of hate. Both issues demand creative, compassionate solutions that balance security with human rights.

SOCHUM is where the UN tackles the human side of global problems. We don't command armies or set trade policy; instead, we establish the norms that define how societies should treat their most vulnerable members. Your resolutions can shape how the world responds to these challenges for decades to come.

Come ready to listen, debate, and find common ground. We look forward to seeing what you accomplish together.

Best regards,

Committee Leadership

SOCHUM



History of the Committee

The Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (commonly called SOCHUM or the Third Committee) is one of the six main committees of the United Nations General Assembly. Founded in 1945, it was created to address the social and humanitarian concerns that world leaders recognized as essential to lasting peace. While other committees focus on security or economics, SOCHUM focuses on human dignity.^[1]

All 193 UN member states have a seat in SOCHUM, making it one of the most democratic bodies in international politics. The committee's work draws heavily from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, which established that all people are entitled to fundamental freedoms regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or circumstances of birth.^[2]

SOCHUM examines human rights questions, coordinates with the Human Rights Council and UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and produces resolutions on issues from children's rights to the treatment of refugees. While these resolutions aren't legally binding, they carry significant moral weight, establishing international standards for how states should treat vulnerable populations and signaling where the global community stands on critical humanitarian questions.^[3]

Topic A: Protecting the Rights of Climate Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons

Statement of the Problem

Climate change is forcing people from their homes at a staggering pace. Floods, droughts, rising seas, and extreme heat are making entire regions uninhabitable. By mid-2024, over 90 million forcibly displaced people were living in countries with high-to-extreme exposure to climate hazards—and that number grows every year.^[4]

The scale is hard to comprehend. Weather-related disasters have caused roughly 250 million internal displacements over the past decade, equivalent to about 70,000 people forced to move every single day. In 2024 alone, the Americas saw a record 14.5 million internal displacements, more than the previous five years combined. Sub-Saharan Africa hosts nearly 39 million internally displaced people, about 46% of the global total.^[5]

Here's the problem: international law doesn't really protect these people. The 1951 Refugee Convention, the foundation of refugee protection, was written for people fleeing persecution, not climate disasters. Someone forced from their home by war can claim refugee status and receive international protection. Someone forced from their home by a flood or drought? They're largely on their own.^[6]

Most climate-displaced people never cross an international border. They're "internally displaced persons" (IDPs) who remain within their own country. While the UN has developed guiding principles for IDPs, these aren't legally binding. Countries can ignore them without consequence. The result? Millions of people in legal limbo, without the protections that refugees receive and often without access to basic services in their new locations.^[7]

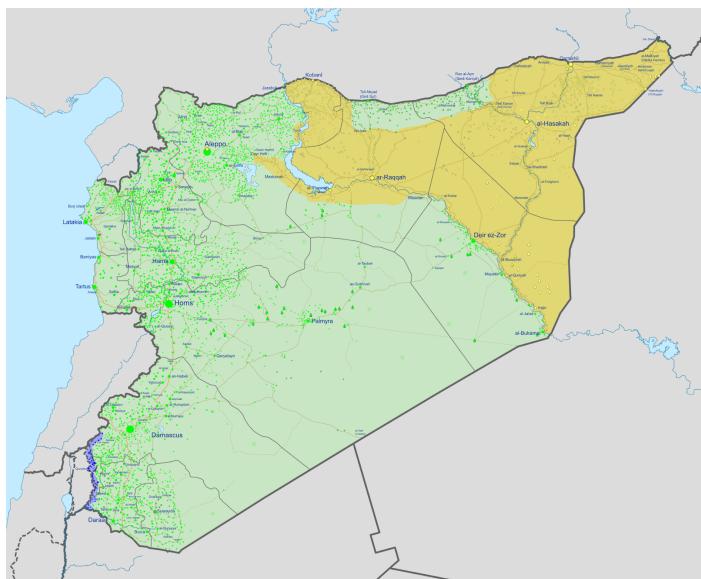
The crisis disproportionately affects those who contributed least to climate change. Small island nations like Tuvalu face existential threats from rising seas. The Sahel region experiences devastating droughts. Bangladesh confronts catastrophic flooding. These countries lack the resources to protect their own citizens, let alone provide the infrastructure needed for mass relocation.^[8]

The question for delegates: how can the international community create meaningful protections for people displaced by climate change?

History of the Problem

For most of human history, people migrated freely in response to environmental changes: following game, seeking better farmland, escaping drought. The modern system of

nation-states and controlled borders is actually quite new. It wasn't until the 20th century that governments began carefully regulating who could cross their borders and live within them.



The current refugee framework emerged from World War II. The 1951 Refugee Convention was designed to protect Europeans displaced by the war, particularly those fleeing Nazi

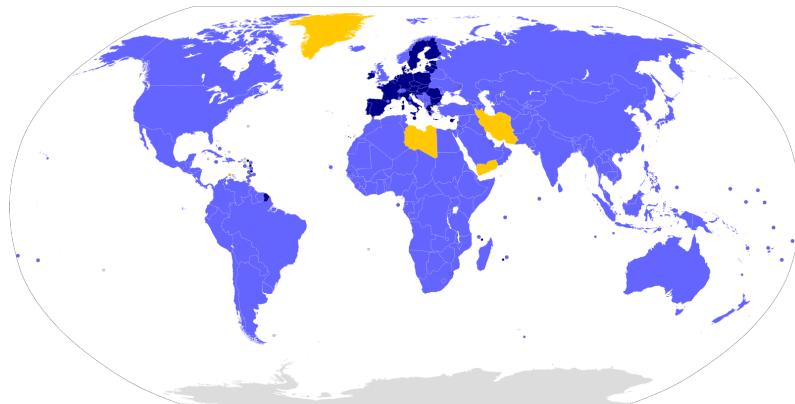
persecution or communist oppression. The definition of "refugee" was deliberately narrow: someone with a "well-founded fear of being persecuted" based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a social group. Environmental factors weren't considered.^[9]

When the 1967 Protocol expanded the Convention's scope beyond Europe, environmental displacement still wasn't addressed. At the time, climate change wasn't recognized as a global threat. People displaced by natural disasters were expected to return home once conditions improved: floods receded, droughts ended, earthquakes were followed by rebuilding.

Climate change has upended these assumptions. When sea levels rise permanently, there's nowhere to return to. When drought transforms fertile land into desert, the displacement is permanent. When extreme weather events become annual occurrences rather than once-in-a-century disasters, "temporary" displacement becomes a way of life.^[10]

The international community began grappling with this reality in the 1990s. The term "environmental refugee" appeared in academic literature and UN reports. But attempts to expand the refugee definition met resistance. Wealthy nations worried about opening the door to millions of new protection claims. Instead, the issue has been addressed through non-binding frameworks and voluntary initiatives.^[11]

Africa took the lead in 2009 with the Kampala Convention, the world's first binding regional treaty protecting internally displaced persons, including those displaced by natural disasters. The convention has been ratified by 34 African Union member states and requires governments to prevent displacement, protect those displaced, and find durable solutions. It's a model for what's possible, though implementation remains uneven.^[12]



The 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change acknowledged, for the first time in a major climate treaty, the need to address displacement. It created a task force on displacement under the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage. But recommendations remain non-binding, and wealthy nations have resisted creating new financial obligations for climate-displaced populations.^[13]

Past Actions

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement: Adopted in 1998, these 30 principles establish that IDPs retain all the rights they would have as citizens, including the right to seek safety, receive humanitarian assistance, and return home or resettle elsewhere. While not legally binding, they've been incorporated into some national laws and serve as the primary normative framework. A Special Rapporteur monitors implementation.^[14]

The Kampala Convention: This 2009 African Union treaty remains the gold standard for IDP protection. It defines displacement broadly to include natural disasters, requires states to prevent arbitrary displacement, and obligates governments to provide protection and assistance. As of 2024, 34 countries have ratified it, and 21 have adopted implementing legislation.^[15]

The Nansen Initiative and Platform on Disaster Displacement: Launched by Norway and Switzerland in 2012, this initiative developed the Protection Agenda, a framework for addressing cross-border disaster displacement. The successor Platform on Disaster Displacement works with governments to implement its recommendations, though progress has been slow.^[16]

The Global Compact on Refugees: Adopted in 2018, this framework acknowledges that climate and environmental degradation "increasingly interact with the drivers of refugee movements." It encourages states to address the root causes of displacement but creates no new legal obligations for climate migrants specifically.^[17]

The Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union Treaty: Signed in 2023, this landmark bilateral agreement creates a "special human mobility pathway" allowing Tuvaluan citizens to live, work, and study in Australia. It's the first treaty explicitly designed to address climate displacement from a sinking nation—a model that could be replicated elsewhere.^[18]

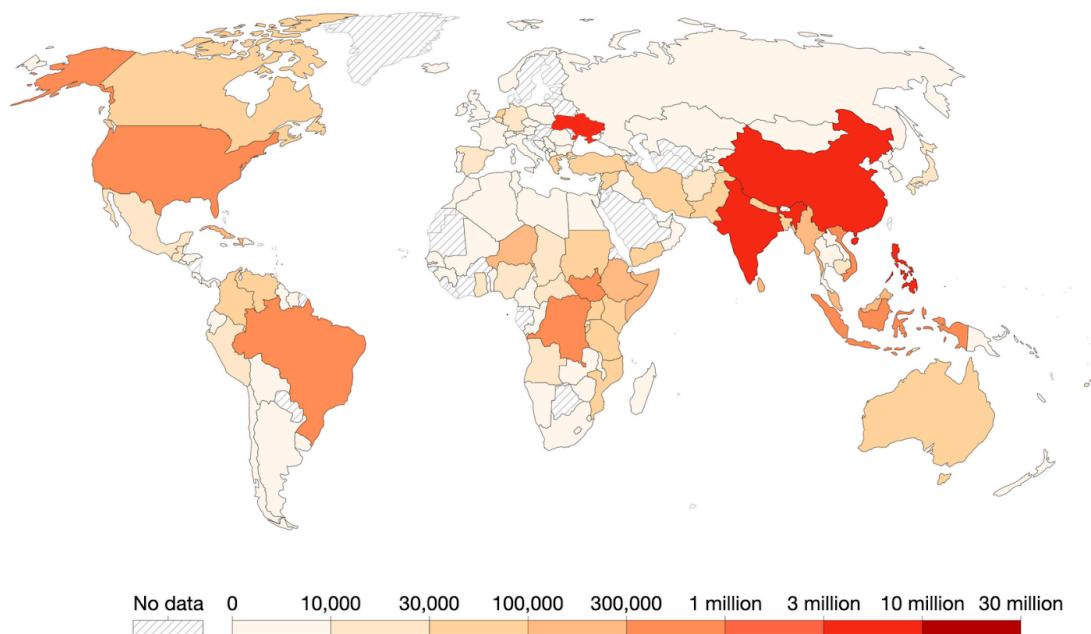
Possible Solutions

Creating Legal Recognition: The core problem is that "climate-displaced person" isn't a legal category with guaranteed protections. A new international protocol could change that by defining who qualifies and what rights they're entitled to. The Kampala Convention shows this is possible at a regional level; the question is whether global consensus can be achieved.

People displaced internally by natural disasters, 2021

Our World
in Data

Internally-displaced persons are defined as people or groups of people who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, as a result of natural or human-made disasters and who have not crossed an international border.



Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (via World Bank)

OurWorldInData.org/natural-disasters • CC BY

Regional Free Movement: Instead of one global solution, regional approaches might work better. Climate-affected regions could negotiate agreements allowing people to relocate as conditions change. West Africa's ECOWAS already permits free movement among member states. Adapting such models for climate displacement could provide practical protection without requiring every country to agree.

A Dedicated Fund: The countries most responsible for climate change could fund assistance for those displaced by it. This could cover relocation costs, infrastructure in receiving communities, and compensation for losses. It's a matter of climate justice: those who caused the problem helping those who bear its consequences.



Topic B: Combating the Global Rise of Online Radicalization and Extremist Recruitment

Statement of the Problem

The internet has revolutionized how extremists find and recruit new members. What once required in-person meetings in basements or back rooms now happens through social media algorithms, encrypted messaging apps, and online communities that operate across borders. Young people are particularly vulnerable: their identities still forming, their social networks increasingly digital, their exposure to extremist content often accidental.^[19]

The threat is real and growing. The 2025 Global Terrorism Index found that terrorist attacks in Western countries jumped 63% in one year, with Europe seeing attacks double to 67. Perhaps most disturbing: in 2024, multiple Western countries reported that one in five terror suspects was under 18 years old. Teenagers now account for most Islamic State-linked arrests in Europe.^[20]

Online radicalization doesn't follow a single pattern. Islamic extremism recruits through slick propaganda videos and promises of purpose. Far-right movements spread through memes, gaming communities, and message boards. Incel ideology festers on forums dedicated to relationship grievances. What they share is a digital ecosystem that can take a lonely, searching young person and gradually expose them to increasingly extreme content.^[21]

The platforms themselves often accelerate this process. Algorithms designed to maximize engagement tend to promote emotionally charged content, including extremist material that generates strong reactions. A curious teenager who watches one provocative video

may be served increasingly radical content as the algorithm learns what keeps them watching. By the time parents or authorities notice, the radicalization may be far advanced.^[22]

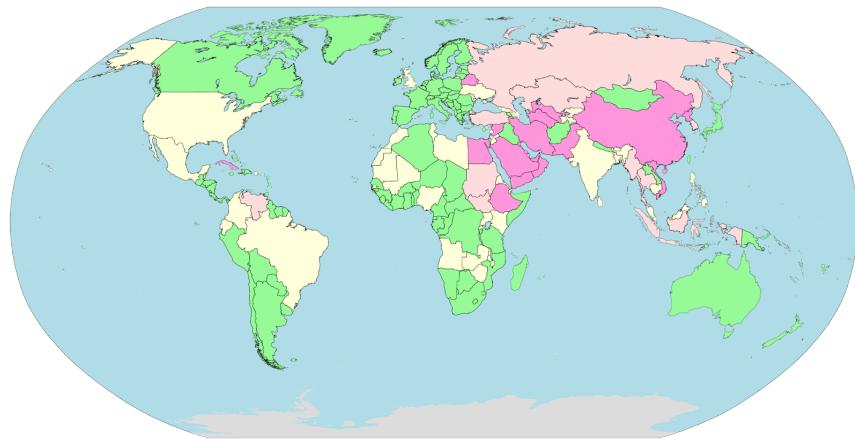
This creates an impossible dilemma. Free expression is a fundamental human right, protected by international law. But so is the right to life, threatened by terrorist violence. Governments want platforms to remove dangerous content, but defining "dangerous" is deeply contested. What one country calls terrorism another calls legitimate resistance. Heavy-handed content moderation can silence legitimate dissent alongside genuine threats.^[23]

The question for delegates: how can we combat online radicalization while protecting free expression and respecting different nations' values?

History of the Problem

Radicalization itself is nothing new. Extremist movements have always recruited vulnerable individuals through promises of belonging, purpose, and power. What's changed is the speed, scale, and reach that digital technology enables.

The first wave of online extremism emerged with the internet itself in the 1990s. White supremacist groups created websites to spread propaganda and connect isolated believers across geography. These early efforts were limited by the internet's small user base and the technical skills required to find extremist content.^[24]



September 11, 2001, and its aftermath marked a turning point. Al-Qaeda demonstrated the power of video propaganda distributed online. Recruitment videos featuring charismatic preachers, footage of Western military actions in Muslim countries, and calls to jihad spread through early social networks and file-sharing sites. Governments struggled to keep up with content that could be uploaded, shared, and mirrored faster than it could be removed.^[25]

The rise of social media in the late 2000s transformed the landscape again. Platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter made content creation and distribution accessible to anyone. Islamic State exploited these tools masterfully during its 2014-2019 territorial campaign, producing professional-quality propaganda and recruiting thousands of foreign fighters through social media. Their slick videos and active Twitter presence attracted global attention and recruits.^[26]

Platforms responded with increasingly aggressive content moderation. Major companies developed policies against terrorist content and invested in automated detection systems. By 2019, most Islamic State content was being removed within minutes of posting. But this pushed extremists to smaller platforms, encrypted messaging apps, and the "dark web" where moderation is minimal or absent.^[27]

Meanwhile, far-right extremism surged online. The 2019 Christchurch mosque shootings, livestreamed on Facebook and spread across platforms, demonstrated how extremist attacks could be weaponized for online propaganda. The shooter had been radicalized in online communities and designed the attack for maximum viral spread. Within 24 hours, the video had been re-uploaded 1.5 million times.^[28]

This attack prompted the Christchurch Call to Action, a voluntary commitment by governments and tech companies to eliminate terrorist and violent extremist content online. As of 2025, over 60 countries and major platforms have signed on. A foundation

launched in 2024 coordinates ongoing work, including crisis response protocols for mass attacks.^[29]

Past Actions

UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Adopted in 2006 and reviewed every two years, this framework's fourth pillar emphasizes human rights in counterterrorism. The 2024 review specifically addressed the challenge of terrorist exploitation of new technologies and requested the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism to support member states in responding.^[30]

UN Security Council Resolution 2354: Adopted in 2017, this resolution calls on member states to develop comprehensive counter-narrative strategies and work with civil society, religious leaders, and the private sector to prevent extremist messaging from taking hold. It emphasizes the importance of credible voices in countering terrorist narratives.^[31]

The Christchurch Call: This voluntary framework commits signatory governments and platforms to combat online extremism while respecting free expression. Achievements include improved crisis response protocols, algorithmic auditing initiatives, and information sharing between platforms. The 2024 launch of the Christchurch Call Foundation institutionalized these efforts.^[32]

EU Digital Services Act: Implemented in 2024, this regulation requires large platforms to assess and mitigate systemic risks including the spread of illegal content. It mandates transparency in content moderation and gives regulators power to demand changes to recommendation algorithms. It's the most comprehensive regulatory approach to online harms.^[33]

UNESCO Prevention of Violent Extremism Through Education: UNESCO has developed frameworks for teaching critical thinking, media literacy, and global citizenship—skills that

help young people resist extremist narratives. Programs operate in dozens of countries, training teachers and developing curricula that address radicalization without stigmatizing particular communities.^[34]

Possible Solutions

Harmonized Content Standards: Every platform currently sets its own rules, and extremists exploit the gaps. An international framework could set minimum standards: what terrorist content must be removed, how quickly, and with what protections for legitimate speech. An independent appeals mechanism could handle disputes about what crosses the line.

Prevention Over Enforcement: Most counterterrorism money goes to security services and taking down content. But addressing radicalization before it leads to violence (through education, mental health support, and community programs) might be more effective. Delegates could push for targets requiring a percentage of counterterrorism funding go to prevention.

Algorithmic Transparency: Recommendation algorithms shape what billions see, yet how they work is secret. Requiring platforms to explain their systems and letting independent researchers audit for extremist amplification could create accountability without governments directly controlling speech.

Potential Blocs

Understanding the major groupings in SOCHUM will help delegates find allies and anticipate debates on both topics.

Small Island Developing States (SIDS): For nations like Tuvalu, Kiribati, and the Maldives, climate displacement isn't hypothetical. It's existential. These states push hardest for



binding protections and financial support for climate migrants. On online radicalization, they're generally supportive of international action but have less direct stake.

African Union States: Africa hosts the largest number of internally displaced persons and has the most developed regional framework (the Kampala Convention). These states advocate for stronger international support and technology transfer. On radicalization, they face significant threats from groups like Boko Haram and al-Shabaab and support robust counterterrorism cooperation.

European Union States: EU members have experienced both significant climate-related migration pressure and multiple terrorist attacks linked to online radicalization. They tend to support comprehensive regulation (like the Digital Services Act) and burden-sharing arrangements. They're generally willing to accept binding frameworks but want them to apply globally.

United States and Allies: These states often emphasize voluntary approaches over binding obligations, particularly on climate displacement where new legal categories could create liability. On online content, they prioritize free expression and are wary of government-mandated content removal, though they support platform self-regulation.

China and Like-Minded States: These countries support state sovereignty in both areas, opposing new international obligations on climate displacement and defending the right of governments to regulate online content within their borders. They're skeptical of Western-led initiatives on online extremism that might be used to criticize their own content controls.

Middle Eastern States: Many face both climate stress (water scarcity, extreme heat) and online radicalization challenges. Their positions vary significantly based on whether they're primarily origin countries for displacement, host countries, or both. On radicalization, they often support aggressive content removal but may define "extremism" differently than Western states.



Glossary

Climate Migrant — A person who moves, either within their country or across borders, due to the effects of climate change such as rising sea levels, drought, or extreme weather events.

Christchurch Call — A voluntary commitment by governments and tech companies, launched in 2019, to eliminate terrorist and violent extremist content online while respecting free expression.

Counter-Narrative — Communications designed to challenge and undermine extremist messaging by offering alternative perspectives and stories.

Deradicalization — Programs designed to help individuals who have adopted extremist ideologies abandon those beliefs and reintegrate into society.

Digital Services Act — A 2024 European Union regulation requiring large online platforms to address illegal content and assess systemic risks from their services.

Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement — A 1998 UN framework establishing the rights of internally displaced persons and the responsibilities of states toward them. Non-binding but influential.

Internally Displaced Person (IDP) — Someone forced to flee their home but who remains within their country's borders, unlike refugees who cross international boundaries.

Kampala Convention — The 2009 African Union treaty providing binding protections for internally displaced persons, including those displaced by natural disasters.



Loss and Damage — In climate negotiations, the concept that wealthy nations should compensate developing countries for climate impacts that cannot be adapted to, including displacement.

Media Literacy — The ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media. Considered essential for helping young people resist online manipulation and extremist content.

Non-Refoulement — The principle that no person should be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom. A cornerstone of refugee law.

Online Radicalization — The process by which individuals adopt extremist beliefs through exposure to content and communities on the internet.

Platform — In the context of online content, a digital service that hosts and distributes user-generated content, such as social media sites, video sharing services, or messaging apps.

Refugee Convention (1951) — The foundational international agreement defining who qualifies as a refugee and the rights they're entitled to. Does not cover climate displacement.

Special Rapporteur — An independent expert appointed by the UN to examine and report on a specific human rights issue or country situation.



Footnotes

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