



ClarkMUN XVI



# SOCHUM

Rights and  
Climate

Freedom of  
Refugees



*Table of Contact*

<b>Letter from the Author</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Letter from the Chair</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction and committee overview</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Topic A: The Human Rights Implications of Climate-Induced Natural Disasters.....	4
Questions to Consider.....	6
Topic B: Protecting the Rights of Climate Refugees.....	7
Questions to Consider.....	8
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>9</b>

*Letter from the Author*



Dear Delegates,

Hello and welcome! My name is Beatrice Leenders, and I am the author of this background guide. I am the Vice President of Model United Nations at Clark University, majoring in Psychology with minors in Political Science and Women's and Gender Studies. I am originally from the Netherlands and currently a sophomore.

While I will not be chairing this committee, I am excited to have contributed to its academic foundation. This year, I authored two background guides for ClarkMUN XVI and will be directing the Pitch Perfect Crisis Committee. Although I won't be present in this committee room, I am confident you are in excellent hands.

Your chair for this committee will be Misha Kostin, the Treasurer of Model United Nations at Clark University. Misha is a sophomore majoring in Economics and is originally from Ukraine. We encourage you to familiarize yourselves with him, as he will be guiding debate and ensuring a productive and engaging committee experience.

This committee will focus on the human rights dimensions of the climate crisis, with particular attention to climate-induced natural disasters and the protection of climate-displaced persons. Delegates are encouraged to approach debate thoughtfully, grounding their arguments in human rights principles, international cooperation, and realistic policy solutions.

If you have any questions prior to the conference, please feel free to reach out to either your chair, Misha Kostin ([mkostin@clarku.edu](mailto:mkostin@clarku.edu)), or the author of this background guide, Beatrice Leenders ([bleenders@clarku.edu](mailto:bleenders@clarku.edu)).

We look forward to an engaging and substantive committee session.

See you soon,

Beatrice Leenders

## *Letter from the Chair*



Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the SOCHUM! My name is Misha Kostin, and it is my honor to serve as your Chair for the ClarkMUN Conference! I am a sophomore majoring in Economics and Data Analytics. I am a Treasurer for Model United Nations at Clark University, and I am beyond excited to conduct productive work with you during this committee.

In addition to Model UN, I am also a member of Clark University Student Council, which fosters my deep involvement with Clark and Worcester's community. Last year I interned for the local legal organization in the Immigration Law unit. It was my deep honor to be able to help people in vulnerable circumstances, who are in need of legal assistance especially in the current political climate. Topics covered in this committee are exceptionally important, as they also concern human rights, lives, dignity to live peacefully in one's native land, and sustainable development that prioritizes human wellbeing, health and safety.

As a chair of this committee, what I expect from the delegates is a collaborative and diplomatic work across the board, ideas that are grounded in equity and sustainable development goals outlined by the United Nations (The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development), and respectful attitude towards all fellow committee members and the Clark Community outside of the committee. Delegates performance will be evaluated based on their ability to comprise meaningful and collaborative solutions, as well as their ability to address the given topics with depth and profound understanding. Creative and reasonable ideas will be a great pathway to succeed in this committee!

All students are welcome to reach out to me, or my good friend and colleague, the fellow author of this background guide—Beatrice Leenders, with any questions in regards to this committee. Our respective emails are: [mkostin@clarku.edu](mailto:mkostin@clarku.edu) and [bleenders@clarku.edu](mailto:bleenders@clarku.edu).

We are looking forward to seeing you soon on Clark's Campus, safe travels and good luck!

Best regards,

Misha Kostin

### *Introduction and committee overview:*

The Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM) is tasked with addressing some of the most pressing issues related to human rights, social equity, and humanitarian protection within the United Nations system. As climate change accelerates, its consequences are no longer confined to environmental degradation alone. Instead, the climate crisis has emerged as a defining human rights challenge of the 21st century, reshaping livelihoods, destabilizing societies, and exposing deep global inequalities.

Climate change acts as a multiplier of existing vulnerabilities. Communities already affected by poverty, conflict, weak governance, or geographic exposure are disproportionately impacted by climate-induced hazards. Floods, droughts, storms, and rising sea levels are not merely natural events; they interact with political, economic, and social structures to determine who is protected and who is left behind. For SOCHUM, this raises fundamental questions about state responsibility, international cooperation, equity, and the universality of human rights.

This committee invites delegates to move beyond purely technical or environmental discussions and instead engage with the human consequences of climate change. Delegates are expected to approach debate through a humanitarian lens, grounding their arguments in international human rights law, principles of dignity and justice, and the lived realities of affected populations.

#### **Topic A: The Human Rights Implications of Climate-Induced Natural Disasters**

Climate-induced natural disasters represent one of the most immediate ways in which climate change affects human lives. Rising global temperatures intensify weather patterns, leading to more frequent and severe floods, droughts, heatwaves, storms, and wildfires. While these hazards may appear natural, their impacts are deeply shaped by human systems: governance, infrastructure, inequality, and access to resources determine who is protected and who is exposed.

From a human rights perspective, climate-induced disasters challenge the ability of states to fulfill their obligations under international law. When disasters strike, the right to life is endangered by inadequate preparedness, unsafe housing, or insufficient

emergency response. Health systems may collapse under pressure, undermining the right to health. Food and water insecurity can intensify rapidly, especially in regions dependent on agriculture or vulnerable supply chains. Education is disrupted when schools are destroyed or children are forced into displacement, and the right to housing is threatened when communities lose their homes with little prospect of recovery.

For example, the 2022 floods in Pakistan illustrate how climate disasters profoundly disrupt human life by damaging homes, livelihoods, health, and long-term security. Triggered by unusually intense monsoon rains and accelerated glacier melt linked to climate change, the floods submerged roughly one-third of the country, killed more than 1,700 people, and affected about 33 million others, forcing millions to flee their homes. The disaster destroyed over two million houses, farmland, roads, and bridges, leaving many families without shelter, income, or access to basic services, while crop losses and livestock deaths worsened food shortages and pushed millions toward poverty. Floodwaters also created serious public-health crises, spreading water-borne diseases, increasing malnutrition, and disproportionately harming vulnerable groups such as children, older adults, and low-income laborers who lack social protections. Overall, the Pakistan floods show that climate disasters do not only cause immediate destruction but also deepen social inequality, disrupt economies, and create long-lasting humanitarian challenges for affected communities (Nabi).

Importantly, climate disasters do not impact all populations equally. The rate of vulnerability is shaped by poverty, gender, age, disability, geographic location, and political marginalization. Informal settlements, rural communities, and Indigenous populations are often located in high-risk areas and lack access to social protection or political influence. As a result, climate-induced disasters frequently exacerbate existing inequalities, raising serious concerns regarding non-discrimination and equal protection under the law.

Climate-related disasters have serious human rights implications because they undermine fundamental rights protected under international law (Amnesty International). Extreme events such as floods, droughts, and wildfires threaten the right to life and health, destroy homes and livelihoods, and limit access to food, water, sanitation, education, and work. These impacts disproportionately affect marginalized communities, raising concerns about

equality and non-discrimination. In cases of displacement caused by sea-level rise or desertification, rights related to movement, cultural identity, and self-determination may also be at risk. As a result, climate disasters constitute systemic human rights challenges that trigger state obligations to prevent harm, protect vulnerable populations, and ensure accountability.

At the international level, climate-induced disasters raise questions about responsibility and solidarity. Many of the states most affected have contributed the least to global emissions and lack the financial and technological capacity to adapt effectively. This imbalance places climate justice at the center of SOCHUM's mandate. Delegates must consider how disaster risk reduction, adaptation, and recovery can be framed not merely as development goals, but as enforceable human rights obligations supported through international cooperation.

#### Questions to Consider

To compete effectively in this committee, delegates should reflect on the following questions:

1. How does your country follow international human rights obligations in the context of climate-induced disasters?
2. Should disaster preparedness and prevention be treated as core human rights responsibilities rather than optional policy choices?
3. How can states ensure that disaster response efforts do not discriminate against marginalized or vulnerable populations?
4. What role should international cooperation and climate finance play in enabling states to meet their human rights commitments?
5. How can accountability be ensured when climate-induced disasters result in large-scale rights violations?
6. To what extent should historical emissions and climate justice influence responsibility for disaster response and adaptation?

7. How can human rights frameworks be integrated into national disaster risk reduction strategies?
8. What role can SOCHUM realistically play in strengthening rights-based approaches to climate disasters?

### **Topic B: Protecting the Rights of Climate Refugees**

Climate change is increasingly reshaping patterns of human mobility. Sea-level rise, desertification, water scarcity, ecosystem collapse, and extreme weather events are forcing individuals and communities to leave their homes, often with little warning or choice. While most climate-related displacement currently occurs within national borders, cross-border movement is expected to grow as certain regions become progressively less habitable.

Despite the scale of the issue, international legal frameworks have struggled to keep pace. The 1951 Refugee Convention does not recognize environmental or climate-related causes as grounds for refugee status, leaving climate-displaced persons without clear legal protection. As a result, many displaced individuals fall into a protection gap, lacking access to asylum, legal residency, or long-term security, in particular the ex-situ strategies.

In the context of climate change, ex-situ national strategies refer to measures taken outside a country's original ecological or territorial context to preserve populations, ecosystems, or cultural heritage threatened by environmental catastrophes. This can include relocating communities displaced by sea-level rise, preserving seeds in international seed banks (such as the Svalbard Global Seed Vault), safeguarding cultural artifacts abroad, or even discussing legal and political continuity for states facing potential territorial loss (e.g., low-lying island nations). Ex-situ approaches are typically considered last-resort adaptation mechanisms when in-situ protection—protecting people and ecosystems within their original location—is no longer viable, raising complex legal, sovereignty, and human rights questions regarding statehood, citizenship, and self-determination in a warming world.

The human rights implications of this gap are profound. Climate-displaced persons frequently face barriers to employment, healthcare, education, and housing, and are at heightened risk of exploitation and discrimination. In cases of permanent displacement,

communities may also lose cultural heritage, land-based identities, and political self-determination. These challenges raise difficult questions about sovereignty, borders, and the limits of existing international norms.

State perspectives on climate displacement reflect differing levels of vulnerability and responsibility. Highly climate-vulnerable countries, particularly Small Island Developing States such as Vanuatu and Tuvalu, call for formal international recognition of climate-related displacement, predictable financing through mechanisms like the UNFCCC Loss and Damage framework (established at COP27 in 2022), and equitable responsibility-sharing based on common but differentiated responsibilities. Transit and destination countries often emphasize migration management, legal limitations—since the 1951 Refugee Convention does not cover climate displacement—and domestic political constraints. High-emitting developed states face increasing pressure to provide funding, expand protection pathways, and address their disproportionate contribution to climate change within a climate justice framework.

SOCHUM provides a forum to explore these tensions through a human rights lens, even in the absence of binding legal change.

### Questions to Consider

To engage competitively with this topic, delegates should consider the following:

1. Should climate-displaced persons be formally recognized under international law, or should alternative protection mechanisms be prioritized?
2. What minimum human rights protections should be guaranteed to climate-displaced persons regardless of legal status?
3. How does your country balance humanitarian responsibility with concerns over sovereignty and border control?
4. What obligations do states have to prevent displacement through climate adaptation and resilience-building?
5. How should responsibility for climate displacement be shared among states with

- differing historical emissions and capacities?
6. What protections are most realistic for internally displaced persons compared to those crossing international borders?
  7. How can cultural identity and community integrity be protected in cases of permanent displacement?
  8. What role can regional frameworks play in addressing climate-induced migration?
  9. How can SOCHUM contribute to norm-setting even without creating binding refugee law?

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