



SOCHUM

STUDY GUIDE

AGENDA

**PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF REFUGEES AND
INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPS)**

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INTRODUCTION TO THE UN

The United Nations is an international organization founded in 1945. Currently made up of 193 Member States, the UN and its work are guided by the purposes and principles contained in its founding Charter. The UN has evolved over the years to keep pace with a rapidly changing world. But one thing has stayed the same: it remains the one place on Earth where all the world's nations can gather together, discuss common problems, and find shared solutions that benefit all of humanity.

The main purpose of the United Nations is to maintain international peace and security, develop friendly relations among nations, promote human rights, and encourage international cooperation in addressing global challenges. The organization serves as a global platform where countries can collaborate to address common challenges such as conflict, poverty, inequality, climate change, and humanitarian crises. It operates under the principle of sovereign equality, where every member state has equal representation in the General Assembly, regardless of its economic or political stature. Through its various organs, agencies, and offices located in New York, Geneva, Vienna, and Nairobi, the UN continues to play a central role in promoting peace, security, development, and human rights worldwide.

COMMITTEE OVERVIEW

The Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM), also known as the Third Committee of the UNGA, is one of the six principal committees of the General Assembly. It serves as the primary forum for deliberating on global social, humanitarian, and human rights issues, fostering international cooperation to promote the dignity, equality, and fundamental freedoms of all people. It aims to protect fundamental human rights, safeguard vulnerable populations, and resolve global social, humanitarian, and cultural challenges.

While its resolutions are not legally binding, they carry considerable political and normative weight, often shaping international standards, influencing domestic policy, and guiding the work of specialized United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations.

INTRODUCTION TO THE AGENDA

Forced displacement remains one of the most significant humanitarian and human rights challenges confronting the international community. Armed conflict, persecution, political instability, human rights violations, and natural disasters continue to force millions of people from their homes each year. While refugees seek protection across internationally recognized borders, internally displaced persons (IDPs) remain within their own countries, often facing similar threats but under different legal and institutional frameworks. Both groups frequently encounter barriers to safety, access to essential services, and the realization of their fundamental rights.

The growing scale and complexity of displacement have highlighted the need for greater international cooperation and more effective protection mechanisms. Host countries, particularly those with limited resources, often face considerable social, economic, and administrative pressures while responding to large displaced populations. At the same time, prolonged conflicts and emerging challenges, including climate-related disasters and protracted displacement, continue to test the capacity of humanitarian actors and existing international frameworks.

Protecting the rights of refugees and IDPs extends beyond the provision of emergency assistance. It requires ensuring access to education, healthcare, legal identity, employment, and other fundamental rights while promoting dignity, inclusion, and long-term stability. Achieving these objectives demands coordinated action among Member States, United Nations bodies, regional organizations, and civil society, alongside a commitment to balancing humanitarian responsibilities with national interests and state sovereignty.

KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

i. Refugee:

A refugee is a person who has been forced to flee their country due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, and is unable or unwilling to return because of that fear.

ii. Internally Displaced Person (IDP)

An internally displaced person (IDP) is an individual who has been forced to flee their home due to armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations, disasters, or other crises but has not crossed an internationally recognized border, remaining within their own country.

iii. Asylum Seeker

An asylum seeker is a person who has sought international protection in another country and is awaiting a decision on their claim for refugee status. Not all asylum seekers are ultimately recognized as refugees.

iv. Stateless Person

A stateless person is someone who is not considered a national by any state under the operation of its laws. Statelessness can significantly limit access to fundamental rights and increase vulnerability to displacement.

v. Forced Displacement

Forced displacement refers to the involuntary movement of individuals or communities from their homes due to armed conflict, persecution, violence, human rights violations, or natural and human-induced disasters.

vi. Non-refoulement

Non-refoulement is a fundamental principle of international refugee law that prohibits states from returning individuals to a country where they would face persecution, torture, or other serious threats to their life or freedom.

vii. Durable Solutions

Durable solutions are long-term approaches that enable refugees and displaced persons to rebuild their lives in safety and dignity. The three internationally recognized durable solutions are voluntary repatriation, local integration, and third-country resettlement.

viii. Voluntary Repatriation

Voluntary repatriation is the voluntary return of refugees to their country of origin when conditions allow them to do so safely, voluntarily, and with dignity.

ix. Local Integration

Local integration is the process through which refugees are legally, economically, socially, and culturally incorporated into their host country, allowing them to establish stable and self-sufficient lives.

x. Third-Country Resettlement

Third-country resettlement is the transfer of a refugee from the country where they initially sought protection to another state that has agreed to admit them and provide permanent protection.

xi. International Protection

International protection refers to the legal and practical measures provided by states and international organizations to safeguard the rights, safety, and well-being of refugees, asylum seekers, and, where applicable, other forcibly displaced persons.

xii. Host State

A host state is the country that receives refugees or asylum seekers and assumes responsibility for providing protection and ensuring access to rights and essential services in accordance with national and international law.

xiii. Country of Origin

The country of origin is the state from which a refugee or displaced person has fled or been displaced. It is often central to discussions regarding the causes of displacement and prospects for voluntary return.

xiv. Humanitarian Assistance

Humanitarian assistance comprises the emergency relief and essential services provided to populations affected by crises, including food, shelter, healthcare, sanitation, education, and protection, to preserve life and alleviate suffering.

xv. Vulnerable Groups

Vulnerable groups are individuals who face heightened risks during displacement due to factors such as age, gender, disability, health status, or other circumstances. These groups often include women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities and may require targeted protection measures.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Origins of International Refugee Protection (1945–1951)

The unprecedented displacement caused by the Second World War revealed the absence of a comprehensive international framework for the protection of displaced populations. Millions of people across Europe were left without homes, citizenship, or legal protection, demonstrating the need for a coordinated international response. In 1950, the United Nations established the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), followed by the adoption of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. The Convention established the legal definition of a refugee and outlined the rights of refugees and the obligations of states, including the principle of non-refoulement.

The Expansion of Refugee Protection (1967–1990s)

The 1951 Refugee Convention initially focused primarily on displacement in Europe before 1951. The 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees removed these limitations, making it universal. During the Cold War and the decolonization period, conflicts in Africa, Asia, and Latin America led to new patterns of displacement that highlighted the need for more inclusive international responses.

At the same time, the international community increasingly recognized that many displaced people did not cross international borders, particularly in the Balkans and the Rwandan Genocide, where large numbers of people were displaced within their own countries and often lacked legal protection.

These crises contributed to the development of the 1998 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which, while not legally binding, established an internationally accepted framework for the protection of internally displaced persons.

Contemporary Displacement Crises and Emerging Challenges (2000s–Present)

Conflicts in Syria, Myanmar, Ukraine, Sudan, and the Occupied Palestinian Territory have displaced millions of people, placing significant pressure on host countries and humanitarian systems, showing that displacement is no longer solely an emergency issue but also a development, governance, and human rights challenge.

In addition, contemporary displacement is increasingly shaped by factors such as climate-related disasters, food insecurity, urbanization, and funding shortfalls in humanitarian operations. The growing gap between humanitarian needs and available resources has limited the capacity of international organizations to provide adequate protection and assistance.

CAUSES

1. Armed Conflict and Generalized Violence:

International and non-international armed conflicts, civil wars, insurgencies, and widespread violence frequently endanger civilian populations, damage critical infrastructure, and disrupt access to essential services. In many cases, prolonged insecurity prevents displaced persons from returning home, contributing to long-term displacement and increasing humanitarian needs.

2. State-Sanctioned or Systematic Persecution:

Persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, ethnicity, or membership of a particular social group continues to force individuals to seek safety either within their own countries or across international borders. Discriminatory laws, restrictions on fundamental freedoms, arbitrary detention, and targeted violence may leave affected populations with limited options other than displacement. Such circumstances often require sustained international attention to ensure the protection of affected individuals while respecting international legal obligations.

3. Environmental Degradation and Climate Shocks:

Rising sea levels, prolonged droughts, floods, desertification, and extreme weather events can undermine livelihoods, damage infrastructure, and intensify existing social and economic vulnerabilities. It often interacts with conflict, poverty, and weak governance to increase the likelihood of forced movement.

4. Development Projects and Resource Scarcity:

Large-scale development initiatives, including infrastructure projects, urban expansion, and resource extraction, may result in the displacement of communities when adequate safeguards and resettlement measures are not implemented. Increasing competition over essential resources such as land, water, and food can contribute to social tensions and instability, particularly in regions already experiencing economic or environmental stress.

5. Weak Governance and Institutional Fragility:

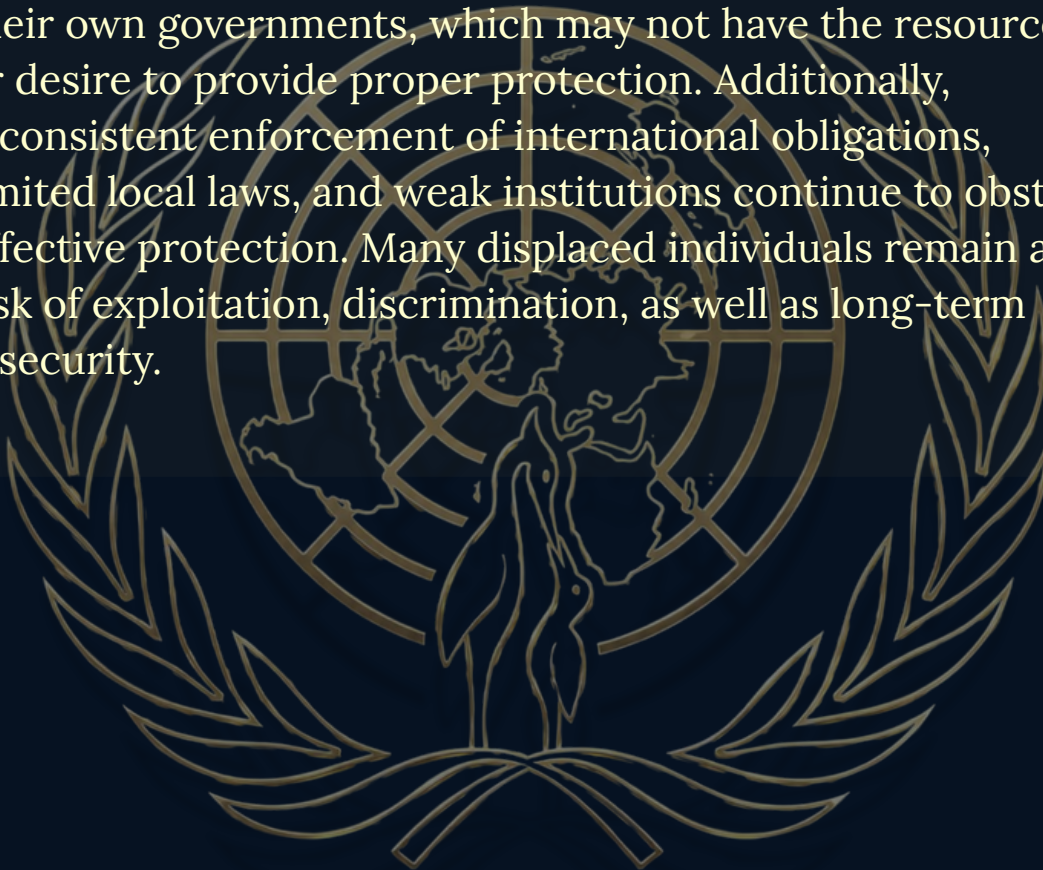
Weak governance, political instability, corruption, and limited institutional capacity can exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and increase the risk of displacement. Where public institutions are unable or unwilling to uphold the rule of law, protect human rights, or respond effectively to crises, communities may face heightened insecurity and reduced access to essential services.

6. Funding Constraints and Humanitarian Capacity

Humanitarian agencies often deal with significant funding shortages that hinder their ability to provide adequate protection and support to displaced populations. As the global number of forcibly displaced persons continues to grow, the financial and logistical resources often fail to meet the rising humanitarian demands. A lack of funding can affect the delivery of essential services, long-term recovery efforts, and overall sustainability of humanitarian operations.

7. Legal and Institutional Protection Gaps

Even with international legal frameworks like the 1951 Refugee Convention and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, gaps still exist in protecting refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). While refugees have a solid international legal foundation, IDPs often depend on their own governments, which may not have the resources or desire to provide proper protection. Additionally, inconsistent enforcement of international obligations, limited local laws, and weak institutions continue to obstruct effective protection. Many displaced individuals remain at risk of exploitation, discrimination, as well as long-term insecurity.



STAKEHOLDERS

1. Refugees

Having crossed international borders to escape persecution, armed conflict, or other serious threats, they often face challenges in accessing legal protection, education, healthcare, employment, and long-term stability while adapting to life in host countries.

2. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

IDPs continue to fall under the protection of their national government. They frequently experience displacement due to conflict, violence, disasters, or environmental factors while facing limited access to humanitarian assistance and essential services.

3. Host States

Host states play a central role in providing protection, humanitarian assistance, and access to essential services for displaced populations. Many host countries, particularly those receiving large numbers of refugees, face significant economic, social, and administrative pressures while balancing national priorities with international obligations.

4. United Nations and International Organizations

Organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNICEF, and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) coordinate humanitarian assistance, support protection efforts, advocate for displaced populations, and assist Member States in responding to displacement crises.

5. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society

International and local NGOs complement the efforts of governments and UN agencies by providing emergency relief, legal assistance, healthcare, education, psychosocial support, and community-based protection programmes. They also play an important role in advocacy, awareness, and the promotion of human rights.

6. Local and Host Communities

Communities hosting refugees and IDPs are directly affected by displacement through increased demands on housing, education, healthcare, employment, and public services.

CASE STUDIES

1. Myanmar

In August 2017, Myanmar's military launched large-scale "clearance operations" in Rakhine State following attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). The campaign involved widespread killings, sexual violence, and the destruction of villages, forcing over 740,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh. Combined with earlier displacement, Bangladesh now hosts over one million Rohingya refugees, primarily in Cox's Bazar, the world's largest refugee settlement. The crisis is exacerbated by the 1982 Citizenship Law, which effectively rendered most Rohingya stateless, denying them citizenship and fundamental rights.

2. Ukraine

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 triggered one of the fastest-growing displacement crises since the Second World War. Within months, millions fled to neighbouring European countries while millions more became internally displaced. The EU activated the Temporary Protection Directive for the first time, granting displaced Ukrainians immediate access to residence, employment, education, and healthcare without undergoing lengthy asylum procedures.

3. Sudan

Since fighting erupted between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in April 2023, Sudan has experienced the world's largest displacement crisis. By the end of 2025, approximately 9.1 million people remained internally displaced within Sudan, while millions more had fled to neighbouring countries, including Chad, South Sudan, Egypt, and Ethiopia. The conflict has devastated civilian infrastructure, disrupted humanitarian access, and contributed to severe food insecurity and disease outbreaks.

PAST FRAMEWORKS AND ACTIONS

1.1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

The 1951 Refugee Convention remains the cornerstone of international refugee law. It established the internationally recognized definition of a refugee, outlined the rights afforded to refugees, and defined the obligations of states towards individuals seeking protection. One of its most significant principles is non-refoulement, which prohibits states from returning refugees to territories where they may face persecution.

2.1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees

Originally, the 1951 Convention applied only to persons displaced in Europe before 1951. The 1967 Protocol removed these geographical and temporal limitations, allowing the Convention to apply universally and ensuring its continued relevance in addressing modern displacement crises.

3. Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998)

Recognizing that internally displaced persons remain within the borders of their own countries and are therefore not protected under the Refugee Convention, the United Nations introduced the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement in 1998. Although these principles are not legally binding, they provide internationally accepted standards for preventing displacement, protecting IDPs, and supporting durable solutions

4. Global Compact on Refugees (2018)

Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2018, the Global Compact on Refugees seeks to strengthen international cooperation in responding to refugee situations. It encourages greater responsibility-sharing among Member States, supports host

communities, expands opportunities for refugee self-reliance, and promotes durable solutions through voluntary repatriation, local integration, and third-country resettlement.



UN BODIES AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION

1. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):

Established in 1950, UNHCR is the primary UN agency responsible for protecting refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and, in many situations, internally displaced persons. The agency coordinates humanitarian assistance, supports voluntary repatriation, facilitates resettlement programmes, and advocates for the protection of displaced populations worldwide.

2. International Organization for Migration (IOM):

IOM works closely with governments and humanitarian partners to support migrants and displaced populations through emergency assistance, resettlement programmes, data collection, capacity-building, and long-term recovery initiatives.

3. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA):

OCHA coordinates international humanitarian responses during emergencies, bringing together UN agencies, governments, and humanitarian organizations to improve the delivery of assistance to crisis-affected populations.

4. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF):

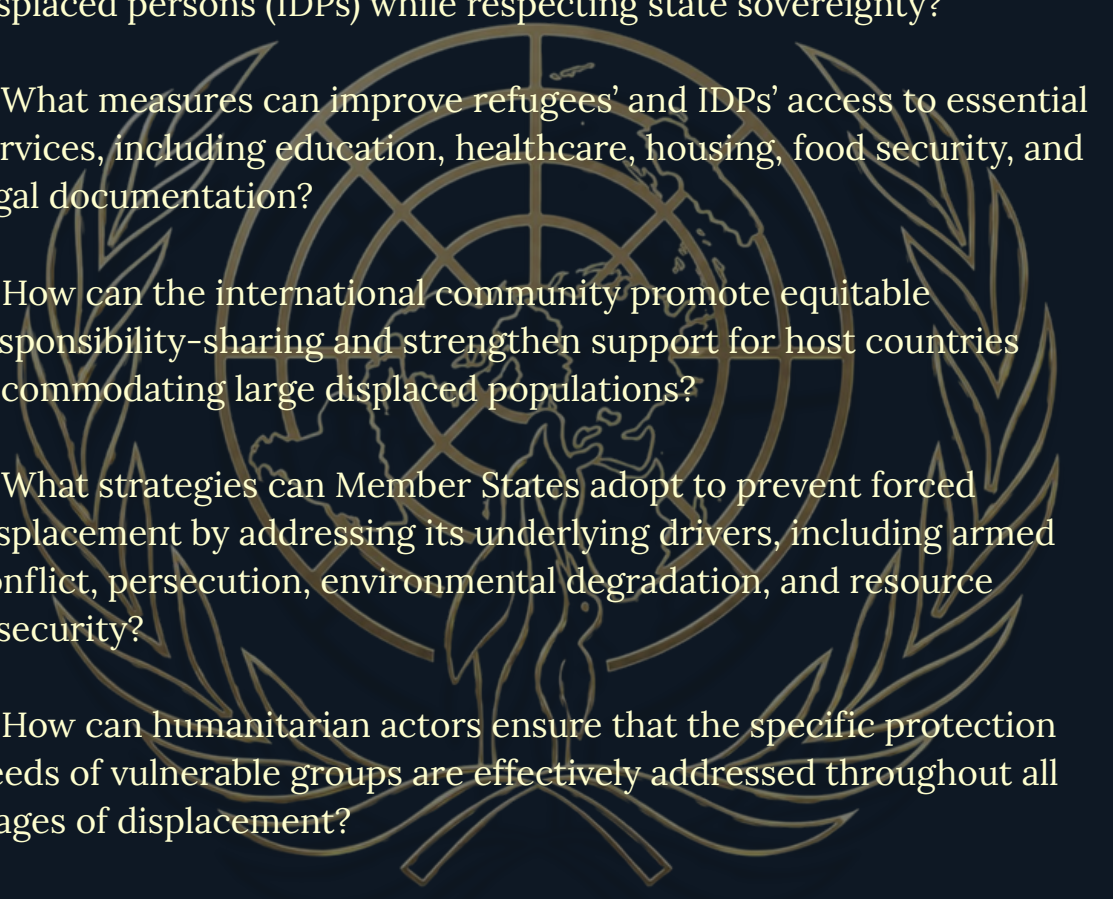
UNICEF focuses on protecting displaced children by supporting access to education, healthcare, nutrition, child protection services, and psychosocial support during humanitarian crises.

5. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR):

OHCHR monitors and promotes the protection of human rights, provides technical assistance to Member States, and advocates for the rights of refugees, IDPs, and other vulnerable populations in accordance with international human rights law.



QUESTIONS A RESOLUTION MUST ANSWER

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1. How can Member States strengthen national and international legal frameworks to ensure the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) while respecting state sovereignty?
 2. What measures can improve refugees' and IDPs' access to essential services, including education, healthcare, housing, food security, and legal documentation?
 3. How can the international community promote equitable responsibility-sharing and strengthen support for host countries accommodating large displaced populations?
 4. What strategies can Member States adopt to prevent forced displacement by addressing its underlying drivers, including armed conflict, persecution, environmental degradation, and resource insecurity?
 5. How can humanitarian actors ensure that the specific protection needs of vulnerable groups are effectively addressed throughout all stages of displacement?
 6. What mechanisms can improve coordination among governments, United Nations agencies and international organizations to deliver effective humanitarian assistance?
 7. What accountability mechanisms should be implemented to address violations of the rights of refugees and IDPs, including within designated humanitarian or safe zones?

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