

*#Reach for the Stars*

# YTUMUN 2025

## SPECPOL STUDY GUIDE

Agenda Item: Addressing Climate-Induced  
Displacement in Fragile and Conflict-Affected  
Territories

### Board Members

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## **1. Letter from the Secretary-General**

**Dear Esteemed Participants and Guests,**

Dear Esteemed Participants and Guests, It is my distinct honor and privilege to welcome you to YTUMUN'25. As Secretary-General, I am thrilled to invite you to what promises to be an enriching experience of debate, diplomacy, and collaboration mixed with unforgettable moments and memories.

Model United Nations is more than just a simulation of the UN; it is a platform where ideas meet action, and where the leaders of tomorrow practice the art of negotiation today. Whether this is your very first conference or one of many in your MUN journey, we are committed to providing you with an environment that challenges you intellectually and inspires you personally.

This year, our Secretariat has worked tirelessly to craft a conference where everyone feels welcomed. We believe that the variety of our topics reflects the complexity of our world and ensures that every delegate finds a space where their voice matters, and that every single participant will leave with amazing moments carved in their memories.

On behalf of the entire Secretariat, I thank you for joining us. We look forward to witnessing the passion, creativity, and leadership that you will bring to the conference. Together, let us make YTUMUN'25 a memorable and transformative experience for all. Let us reach for the stars!

**Yours sincerely,**

Bilel Elarem

Secretary-General of YTUMUN'25



## **2. Letter from the Chairboard**

Distinguished delegates, we would like to express our enthusiasm and excitement for being able to chair the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL) in the upcoming Yeldiz Technical University's Model United Nations Conference (YTUMUN). We welcome you all and hope that you'll have a remarkable Model United Nations experience.

We believe that Model United Nations (MUN) is a platform for self- progress and development. It will open the doors for you to learn about and discuss contemporary issues from around the globe. We highly advise you to embrace yourselves within this remarkable experience.

We have put together this Study Guide, which we hope you will take the time to read. The Committee will open the discussion for one Agenda item. Which discusses Addressing Climate-Induced Displacement in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Territories.

This committee will transfer you to another scope of discussion, in which you will act as the pioneers of change and the leaders of the future. The United Nations has long served the universe in regards to different contemporary issues, however the world of yesterday is far different than the world of today.

We highly expect from you to champion this agenda and delve into fruitful debates and discussion that serve the ultimate aim of the committee. We, however, are not expecting you to understand and consider every aspect of the agenda item, but merely to produce an overview of the most important questions that might arise and possible solutions to these situations. Don't hesitate in contacting us through [sabamadhoun3@gmail.com](mailto:sabamadhoun3@gmail.com) if any questions arise in your mind.

Good luck,

SPECPOL committee board,





### **3. Introduction to the Committee**

The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) considers a broad range of issues covering a cluster of five decolonization-related agenda items, the effects of atomic radiation, questions relating to information, a comprehensive review of the question of peacekeeping operations as well as a review of special political missions, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Israeli Practices and settlement activities affecting the rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories, and International cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space.

The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL) is one of the six united national general Assemblies. Its aim is centered around political questions that crystalize in international peace and security, national sovereignty, and international governance.

#### **3.1. Mandate and Role of SPECPOL**

SPECPOL's role centered in a normative, political, and policy related stance not operational. It doesn't have the authority to deploy forces or implement programs; however, it is highly present in the agenda setting arena, setting policy frameworks, and development plans. Its further coordinates among UN organs and member states for peace resolutions.

In summary, SPECPOL plays a critical part in examining the international policy frameworks related to different global disputes, promoting peace resolutions, strengthening multilateral cooperation, and identifying security related issues.

#### **3.2. Relevance of the Committee to the Agenda**

Climate induced displacement highlights one of the non-traditional security threats carried out by SPECPOL. As it is considered today as a major threat multiplier, in terms of areas such as: political stability, governance capacity, and regional relations. SPECPOL has long emphasized long-term solutions rather than short term responses when related to displacement. As it analyses how displacement restructures sociopolitical stability and how it requires resilience and political inclusion.

SPECPOL treats climate induced displacement as an element of disruption of demographic balances, national border sovereignty, and international institutional structures.



## **4. Introduction to the Agenda**

### **4.1. Climate Change as a Driver of Displacement**

Climate change and displacement are increasingly interconnected. As extreme weather events and environmental conditions worsen with global heating, they are contributing to multiple and overlapping crises, threatening human rights, increasing poverty and loss of livelihoods, straining peaceful relations between communities and, ultimately, creating conditions for further forced displacement.

The majority of people forcibly displaced by persecution, conflict and violence today live in countries that are highly vulnerable and ill-prepared to adapt to climate change.

Displaced populations frequently have no option but to live in remote locations, in overcrowded camps or informal settlements, with limited access to basic services or infrastructure and where they are highly exposed and vulnerable to climate hazards like floods, drought, storms and heatwaves. In addition, the climate crisis is disrupting livelihoods and making it more difficult for displaced people to become self-sufficient. Climate impacts can also escalate tensions and conflicts over vital resources like water, fuel and arable land, threatening peaceful coexistence between displaced populations and host communities.

### **4.2. Fragile and Conflict-Affected Territories: Why They Matter**

This climate report, published by UNHCR in collaboration with expert organizations, research institutes and refugee-led organizations, addresses the intersection of climate change, conflict and forced displacement, while also demonstrating that sustainable solutions are within reach. Using the latest evidence and data, we show how climate shocks are interacting with conflict, pushing vulnerable people into even more dire situations.

Millions of people across the globe continue to be forced to flee their homes because of violence, conflict, and climate-related hazards. In fact, the number of forcibly displaced people in the world today has never been higher – doubling to more than 120 million people over the past 10 years.

While conflict remains the primary driver of displacement, climate change can aggravate an already devastating reality. Its impacts disproportionately affect the world's most vulnerable



populations – including refugees, internally displaced people and the communities hosting them. Often lacking critical resources such as stable housing, financial security, institutional support, or access to essential services, displaced people now also struggle to prepare for, adapt or recover from disasters like floods, droughts and heatwaves.

People forced to flee war, violence and persecution are increasingly finding themselves on the front line of the global climate crisis, a new report warns, exposing them to a lethal combination of threats but without the funding and support to adapt.

Of the more than 120 million forcibly displaced worldwide, three-quarters live in countries heavily impacted by climate change. Half are in places affected by both conflict and serious climate hazards, such as Ethiopia, Haiti, Myanmar, Somalia, Sudan and Syria.

For example, the devastating conflict in Sudan has forced millions of people to flee, including 700,000 who have crossed into Chad, which has hosted refugees for decades and yet is one of the countries most exposed to climate change. At the same time, many who fled the fighting but remained in Sudan are at risk of further displacement because of severe flooding that has blighted the country.

## 5. Key Terms and Definitions

**Climate-Induced Displacement:** Forced movement of people due to climate-related environmental changes.

**Fragile States:** States with limited capacity to govern effectively or provide basic services.

**Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):** Individuals forced to flee their homes but remaining within their country.

**Conflict-Affected Territories:** Areas experiencing armed conflict or post-conflict instability.

**Threat Multiplier:** A factor that exacerbates existing risks, such as climate change intensifying conflict.





## **6. Historical Background**

### **6.1. Evolution of Climate-Induced Displacement**

Loss of place is always experienced through the present's cultural and historical interpretation, which shapes how loss, disruption, and adaptation look and feel. Building on the previous section's discussion of place and displacement, this one highlights historical shifts in how societies have related to land, change, and continuity—especially during the transitional rupture from land-based stewardship to industrial extraction. This historical survey is not a detour but critically reframes our present understanding of displacement and why some present-day interventions to mitigate it can succeed or falter, particularly in societies that are still largely land-based.

Climate displacement—forced movement triggered in part or primarily by the pressures of climate change and environmental degradation—is increasingly common. There were 26.4 million internal disaster displacements recorded in 2023, mostly due to extreme weather events, and models predict internal migration will grow further as the impacts of climate change worsen.

As environmental disasters and the impacts of climate change worsen, their effects on migration and displacement are becoming increasingly clear. Most climate-related displacement remains within a country's territory, but when people cross borders, it poses particularly tricky challenges. Policymakers in destination countries face the task of simultaneously managing borders and migration while being sensitive to arriving migrants' emergency assistance and international protection needs. However, the migration and refugee policy tools available are rarely, if ever, designed with climate displacement in mind. While the international protection system, anchored by the 1951 Refugee Convention, offers some options for responding to cross-border climate displacement, it sets a high threshold for the circumstances in which it applies. The system can grant protections from forcible return, legal status, and access to certain services and benefits for some climate-displaced individuals who meet specific grounds for protection, such as environmental defenders (considered to be facing persecution based on political opinion) and people fleeing conflicts in Sudan and South Sudan, where access to dwindling fertile land is one of the conflicts' drivers (and where the state is unable or unwilling to protect them from persecution).



But in most cases, climate-displaced people **are not** eligible for refugee status or another form of international protection. This system is also already straining under the weight of massive numbers of people (both those eligible for international protection and not) who view it as their only means of gaining entry to destination states, leading to asylum backlogs. When combined with the limited capacity of national refugee resettlement programs, trying to fit more climate-displaced people into this system may mean crowding out others.

## **6.2. Intersection of Climate Change, Conflict, and Forced Migration**

There is a general acknowledgement among the international community that people displaced across borders by climate change should receive some form of support and have certain rights safeguarded. This includes prevention of trafficking, upholding the rights of the child, and some type of assistance, whether it be emergency financial assistance and social service provision, permission to enter a country, or non-return to disaster-stricken areas. But in many cases, under the current international protection regime, governments are not legally or normatively obligated to provide this support. This is by design: international protection places significant obligations on host states not to return beneficiaries to places where they are at risk of harm, to grant them legal status, and to provide a set of rights and benefits. As such, there is a high legal threshold for some one to qualify for international protection, and governments have implemented policies and practices to adjudicate who has access. Because the system—the foundations of which were laid more than half a century ago—was not established or developed to specifically account for the effects of climate change, climate-displaced persons often have a difficult time meeting the legal threshold to qualify for protection and, in some cases, to even have their claims heard in the first place. Because the system... was not established or developed to specifically account for the effects of climate change, climate-displaced persons often have a difficult time meeting the legal threshold to qualify for protection.

Beneficiaries of international protection receive a variety of rights and benefits, but the core of the regime is the concept of nonrefoulement: the obligation for receiving states not to return a noncitizen who is on their territory to that person's country of origin under certain circumstances. This concept is outlined in a range of international legal instruments, most notably the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol.



While each instrument has its own specific criteria for determining when someone's return would constitute refoulement, the general principle is that people cannot be returned to a country where, as the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights describes it, "there are substantial grounds for believing that the person would be at risk of irreparable harm . . . including persecution, torture, ill-treatment, or other serious human rights violations." The principle of nonrefoulement applies in all states that are party to the relevant conventions and is considered by many to be a part of customary international law, meaning it applies even to non-signatory states. Nevertheless, countries must codify the principle in domestic law in order to operationalize it.

In a study of the long-term impacts of climate change on economic growth and development using data from 174 countries obtained between 1960 and 2014, Kahn et al. found that for every 0.01 degree Celsius increase in temperature, real income growth declines by 0.0543 percentage points. The study estimates that by 2100, climate change will reduce real world GDP by more than 7 percent per year if mitigation measures are not put in place.

If mitigation efforts are not adopted, the study projects an annual global loss of income of 23 percent by 2100.<sup>11</sup> Many authors have found that income losses are more pronounced in poor regions, especially in Africa, where a high proportion of the population is dependent on natural resources and rain-fed agriculture.

Some scholars have identified climate-induced water shortages as a contributing factor to the 2012 Syrian Conflict. Even though longstanding religious and political factors were the primary cause of the civil war, the worsening environmental conditions, especially droughts, triggered internal migration of rural farmers to urban centers like Damascus and Aleppo which exacerbated the extent and severity of the resulting civil unrest. In some cases, researchers concluded that climate-related disasters increased armed conflict in areas where it was already occurring.

A recent study by UNDP found that climatic changes place additional burdens on institutions in fragile countries and weaken their ability to respond to internal and external threats. This in turn creates a conducive environment for violent extremist groups to illicitly control key natural resources and thrive.



In Mali, frequent droughts have led to the intensification of conflict over the use of scarce resources between sedentary farmers and nomadic herders, which not only increases the likelihood of violent attacks in Mali but also threatens the stability surrounding countries in the Sahel region.<sup>34</sup> Given the clear linkages of climate, development, fragility, and security, it is therefore essential to consider an integrated approach that coordinates global actors, to harmonize climate action in collaboration with developing and fragile states.

Despite developing countries' disproportionate vulnerability to the economic and security threats from climate change, while not having contributed substantially to historical emissions, many have ambitious goals to combat climate change. But many developing countries are financially under-resourced. These countries therefore need financial and technical assistance from countries like the United States to help them to adapt to climate change impacts.

## **7. Legal and Institutional Framework**

### **7.1. International Refugee and Human Rights Law**

#### **7.1.1. The 1951 Refugee Convention**

Founded in Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of human rights 1948, which recognizes the right of persons to seek asylum from persecution in other countries, the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted in 1951, is the centerpiece of international refugee protection today. The Convention entered into force on 22 April 1954, and it has been subject to only one amendment in the form of a 1967 Protocol, which removed the geographic and temporal limits of the 1951 Convention. The 1951 Convention, as a post-Second World War instrument, was originally limited in scope to persons fleeing events occurring before 1 January 1951 and within Europe. The 1967 Protocol removed these limitations and thus gave the Convention universal coverage. It has since been supplemented by refugee and subsidiary protection regimes in several regions, as well as via the progressive development of international human rights law.

The core principle of the 1951 Convention is non-refoulement, which asserts that a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom.



The document outlines the basic minimum standards for the treatment of refugees, including the right to housing, work and education while displaced so they can lead a dignified and independent life. It also defines a refugee's obligations to host countries and specifies certain categories of people, such as war criminals, who do not qualify for refugee status. In addition, it details the legal obligations of the States that are party to one or both of these instruments.

#### **7.1.2. International human rights law protecting the right to life, housing, and dignity,**

The international human rights movement was strengthened when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) on 10 December 1948. Drafted as 'a common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations', the Declaration for the first time in human history spells out basic civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that all human beings should enjoy. It has over time been widely accepted as the fundamental norms of human rights that everyone should respect and protect. The UDHR, together with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its two Optional Protocols, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, form the so - called [International Bill of Human Rights](#).

A series of international human rights treaties and other instruments adopted since 1945 have conferred legal form on inherent human rights and developed the body of international human rights. Other instruments have been adopted at the regional level reflecting the particular human rights concerns of the region and providing for specific mechanisms of protection. Most States have also adopted constitutions and other laws which formally protect basic human rights. While international treaties and customary law form the backbone of international human rights law other instruments, such as declarations, guidelines and principles adopted at the international level contribute to its understanding, implementation and development. Respect for human rights requires the establishment of the rule of law at the national and international levels.

International human rights law lays down obligations which States are bound to respect. By becoming parties to international treaties, States assume obligations and duties under international law to respect, to protect and to fulfil human rights. The obligation to respect means that States must refrain from interfering with or curtailing the enjoyment of human rights. The obligation to protect requires States to protect individuals and groups against human rights



abuses. The obligation to fulfil means that States must take positive action to facilitate the enjoyment of basic human rights.

Through ratification of [international human rights treaties](#), Governments undertake to put into place domestic measures and legislation compatible with their treaty obligations and duties. Where domestic legal proceedings fail to address human rights abuses, mechanisms and procedures for individual complaints or communications are available at the regional and international levels to help ensure that international human rights standards are indeed respected, implemented, and enforced at the local level

## **7.2. Role of the United Nations and policy makers**

Policymakers should seek to cultivate a wider set of tools not grounded solely in international protection, and to understand their trade-offs. Broader options that can be used to proactively enable safe climate mobility—thereby providing alternatives to irregular migration and relieving pressure on asylum systems.

- a. Facilitating safe, orderly entry for climate- and disaster-displaced persons. Governments already have several tools at their disposal to allow such persons to enter their territory in a managed way, Displacement and International Protection including streamlining entry procedures by waiving certain documentation and visa requirements, expediting visa processing, and issuing humanitarian visas.

These tools have primarily been used in response to a specific disaster, such as a hurricane or earthquake, rather than as standing mechanisms to allow climate- and disaster-affected people, in general, to seek admission (though Argentina has tried to create a standing disaster displacement humanitarian visa). These have proven to be important tools to facilitate entry, but their ad hoc nature means they mostly benefit disaster-displaced people whose cause garners sufficient attention from destination states, leaving many out.

- b. Providing flexible forms of status. Many climate- and disaster-displaced people do not qualify for asylum, but governments may opt to offer other, often temporary, forms of legal status. Examples include the U.S. government's use of Temporary Protected Status for the nationals of certain countries following environmental disasters (such as Hondurans and Nicaraguans after Hurricane Mitch). Similarly flexible approaches to





providing protection have been used in response to large-scale displacement from Syria, Venezuela, and Ukraine. The challenge, however, is that these temporary measures often become permanent, leaving immigrants in protracted legal limbo and unable to fully contribute to their new communities without the certainty and rights of a more permanent status.

- c. Strengthening climate-affected people's access to mainstream mobility options. Some people from climate-vulnerable communities may be able to migrate via existing work, study, or family reunification immigration pathways. For example, seasonal worker and other programs have enabled some Pacific Islanders to move safely to Australia and New Zealand, and such pathways can promote climate resilience if migrants choose to invest earnings and remittances in climate adaptation measures. And in regions where free movement agreements exist, these can facilitate movement in the wake of disasters (such as in the Caribbean after hurricanes in Dominica). Such options, however, may leave those most vulnerable behind; for example, labor pathways often require certain skills and credentials. And a focus on regional mobility agreements shifts the burden of addressing climate impacts and supporting displaced people away from high-income countries, which have contributed the most to climate change, and to similarly climate-vulnerable neighboring countries in the Global South.
- d. Creating bespoke climate mobility pathways. While visa programs meant specifically for climate mobility are rare, both out of a lack of political will and difficulties defining who would qualify, some destination-country governments have begun to explore innovative ways to enable migration and relocation from the most climate-impacted countries. These include New Zealand's attempt to launch a "climate refugee" visa (which failed after resistance from Pacific Islander communities that preferred to stay rather than move), and an agreement adopted in 2023 that would allow 280 Tuvaluans to permanently move to Australia each year. It will be important to glean lessons from these experiments, including about the importance of local consultations, as climate impacts increasingly factor into why people move. As policymakers work to build out this diversified toolbox, they should be aware of the limitations and trade-offs of existing policy tools. The international community should seek to clarify what role, albeit likely limited, the international protection system should play in responses to climate displacement,



especially in Africa and Latin America where regional refugee instruments may provide more flexibility. More work is also needed to ensure climate-displaced persons who qualify for international protection are able to access it, including by ensuring asylum adjudication officers are fully trained on the intersections between climate and protection issues. Thus, while maintaining safeguards and addressing the humanitarian needs of climate-displaced people, policymakers should be thinking proactively about how they can use existing migration policy tools to address climate vulnerability in ways that are sustainable, fair, and scalable.

Caution is warranted when linking migration to climate change. Migration decisions are shaped by a combination of economic, social, political and environmental factors, and climate change typically acts as a contributing factor rather than the sole cause.

Addressing climate-related migration requires coordinated efforts across sectoral areas. Just as migration is shaped by a combination of environmental, economic, and social factors, responses would need to bring together different areas of work to strengthen societal resilience to climate-related stress through interventions such as climate adaptation, disaster response, social protection and livelihood support. To be effective, actions would need to reflect the full range of reasons why people move or stay — not just environmental ones.

Improving the availability and quality of migration data for climate-related analyses and planning. This could include data on both international and internal migration covering stocks and flows, including returns, which are often unavailable in low-income countries. Data could also allow for analysis of migrants' sociodemographic profiles, be more timely, geographically disaggregated and accessible.

## **8. Current Situation and Case Studies**

### **8.1. Regions Most Affected**

#### **8.1.1. Middle East:**

Water scarcity is acute in the Middle East, and increasingly 'water is becoming a catalyst for confrontation – an issue of national security and foreign policy as well as domestic stability' (Berman & Wihbey 1999). However, while the issue of water has exacerbated tense relations



between countries in the region, such tensions have rarely translated into full-fledged violent wars between neighbours. This article argues that rather than leading to conflict, mutual dependence on the same sources of water can create means for cooperation and ultimately contribute to peace if countries develop shared development goals and natural resource policies. Highlighting the importance of water as a source of conflict in the region, internal factors (population growth, agricultural techniques, pollution and economic development) and external factors (pressures from neighbouring countries for greater access to water) are examined that create and increase water scarcity – and thus tensions – between Turkey, Syria and Iraq. After a detailed investigation of the causes and impact of water scarcity, the focus moves to the Turkey-Syria-Iraq case and ways in which water can be transformed from a source of conflict to a source of development and peacebuilding

### **8.1.2. Asia and the Pacific**

Catastrophic flooding and landslides, driven by intensifying cyclones and seasonal monsoons, are devastating communities across South and Southeast Asia. Since 17 November, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand, Viet Nam and Malaysia have been among the hardest hit, facing record-breaking rainfall, storm surges and widespread inundation.

#### **8.1.2.1. SRI LANKA**

On 28 November, Cyclone Ditwah made landfall, bringing torrential rainfall and destructive winds and triggered widespread flooding and landslides and is believed to be the worst floods in recent history. While authorities have successfully restored several primary road networks, significant infrastructure disruptions persist, including widespread power outages due to floods and landslides. The Government is taking the lead in search and rescue operations and has allocated Rs. 30 billion for immediate relief.

Concurrently, Southeast Asia has around 9.2 million people affected due to the Northeast Monsoon and tropical disturbances, including Tropical Cyclones SENYAR and KOTO.

#### **8.1.2.2. INDONESIA**

Persistent heavy rains between 22 and 25 November triggered severe floods and landslides in Aceh, West Sumatra and North Sumatra, displacing thousands of people. Priority



relief efforts focus on search and rescue operations, meeting the basic needs of displaced people, restoring access to isolated areas, and accelerating relief distribution by land and air.

#### **8.1.2.3. THAILAND**

Monsoon activity has intensified over the Gulf of Thailand, the South and the Andaman Sea since 17 November, bringing widespread torrential rain across southern Thailand. DDPM reports that twelve southern provinces have been affected. Songkhla, one of the hardest-hit provinces, conducted evacuation operations as heavy rainfall and flooding continues. The government is leading the relief operations to the affected communities.

#### **8.1.2.4. MALAYSIA**

In Malaysia, NADMA reports flooding across eight northern states (Kelantan, Perlis, Perak, Selangor, Kedah, Pulau Pinang, Terengganu and Pahang). The Government of Malaysia is leading the response, closely monitoring developments and issuing regular updates and advisories.

#### **8.1.2.5. VIETNAM**

In October, The Viet Nam Joint Response Plan (JRP) was launched to address the profound humanitarian needs caused by the severe and long-lasting 2025 typhoon season, including Typhoons Bualoi and Matmo, which triggered extensive flooding and landslides across six provinces in Northern and Mountain provinces. Central Viet Nam continued to experience persistent flooding and landslides since mid-November. The situation is aggravated by Tropical Cyclone KOTO, located over the northwestern East Sea, expected to weaken into a low-pressure system by 2 December.

#### **8.1.3. Sub-Saharan African**

A hard-won recovery in sub-Saharan Africa has been overtaken by recent events. The sudden shift in the global outlook has clouded the region's short-term prospects and significantly complicated policy making. After four years of crisis, sub-Saharan Africa's authorities had already faced a significant challenge in their efforts to deliver economic stability while also advancing long-term development goals, all amid high social expectations. This task has now been made even more difficult by yet another shock, in the form of higher global borrowing costs, additional constraints on external funding, a downturn in global demand, lower prices for



some key commodities, and a step increase in economic uncertainty. An extra premium is now on resilience—a country’s ability to rebound quickly from future shocks.

## **8.2. Ongoing Challenges and Gaps in Response**

### **8.2.1. Legal Protection Gap for Climate Migrants**

Climate migrants face a fundamental legal challenge: they simply don’t fit within established international protection frameworks. The cornerstone of international refugee law—the 1951 Refugee Convention—defines refugees specifically as individuals fleeing persecution based on “race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.” Environmental factors driving displacement are conspicuously absent from this definition.

This legal gap has significant consequences. Without formal refugee status, climate-displaced persons often lack:

- **Legal right to cross borders** – When climate disasters make regions uninhabitable, affected populations have no guaranteed right to seek safety in neighboring countries
- **Protection against forced return** – The principle of non-refoulement, which prevents returning refugees to dangerous situations, doesn’t automatically apply
- **Access to humanitarian assistance** – Without recognized status, climate migrants may be ineligible for refugee-specific aid programs

Recent attempts to address this gap have gained limited traction. The 2018 Global Compact for Migration acknowledges climate-induced migration but remains non-binding. Regional instruments like the 2009 African Union Kampala Convention take a more progressive approach by extending protection to those displaced by natural disasters, but implementation remains inconsistent.

### **8.2.2. The Definitional Challenge**

Part of the difficulty in addressing climate displacement lies in categorization. Unlike sudden-onset disasters like hurricanes or floods, many climate impacts occur gradually—rising sea levels, desertification, and changing precipitation patterns may force migration over years rather than days. This slow-onset displacement complicates efforts to establish direct causality



between climate change and migration decisions, making it difficult to distinguish climate refugees from economic migrants.

The terminology itself remains contested. Terms like “climate refugee,” while evocative, lack legal standing and may create confusion about applicable protections. Many experts and organizations prefer “climate-displaced persons” or “environmental migrants” to avoid implying rights that current frameworks don’t provide.

### **8.2.3. Internal Displacement: The Overlooked Majority**

Climate migration discussions often focus on cross-border movement, yet the vast majority of climate-displaced persons remain within their countries of origin. This internal displacement creates different but equally challenging protection issues.

Internal climate migrants operate outside the international refugee framework entirely, as refugee status only applies to those who cross international borders. Instead, they fall under the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement—a non-binding framework that acknowledges displacement from natural disasters but provides limited practical protections.

## **9. Questions to be Addressed**

- How can the international community better recognize and protect climate-displaced persons?
- What role should SPECPOL play in coordinating political responses?
- How can fragile states be supported without undermining sovereignty?
- What funding mechanisms can ensure sustainable solutions?
- How can early warning and preventive strategies reduce displacement?

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[The 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees | UNHCR](#)

[International Human Rights Law | OHCHR](#)

[UN General Assembly - Fourth Committee - Special Political and Decolonization](#)

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[Regional Economic Outlook for Sub-Saharan Africa, April 2025 | Recovery Interrupted](#)

[Asia and the Pacific: Southeast and South Asia Cyclones and Floods Humanitarian Snapshot \(Covering 17 November to 3 December 2025\) | OCHA](#)

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<https://climatechange.academy/climate-change-society/challenges-climate-refugees-legal-resettlement/>

## **1. Suggested Readings and Research Pathways**



- ☐ UNHCR reports on climate displacement,
- ☐ World Bank studies on climate and migration,
- ☐ IPCC assessments on climate impacts,
- ☐ UN General Assembly resolutions on displacement and climate security.