



# **UHS MUN Fall**

## **UNHCR: Establishing Norms for Climate Refugees**

**Novice**

**Head Chair:** Niyam Ashar

**Vice Chair:** Krish Prem

Greetings delegates.

My name is Niyam, and I'm thrilled to be your head chair at UHS Fall. I am currently a senior capping out four years of MUN experience and I serve as "Chief of Staff" on executive board. My strengths in committee are research and speeches. The topic we'll be discussing is an extremely pertinent and multifaceted one, so I'm really excited to see how you all approach the complicated international dynamics that surround global warming and migration. When I'm not preparing for an MUN conference, I'm most likely playing my latest guitar composition, catching up on British politics, or watching the new episode of *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*. Best of luck, and I look forward to seeing you all on October 17th!

*Niyam Ashar, Head Chair*

Hello delegates!

My name is Krish, and I'm delighted to be serving as your vice chair for this committee. I'm currently a junior and I've been an MUN delegate for the past two years and counting. Our topic is one that is constantly changing and developing in the world around us. We hope that you'll use this committee as an opportunity to explore it from a new angle and discuss solutions that balance sustainability with political feasibility. Outside of MUN, I participate in Mock Trial, Student Council, and I'm training as a Black Belt in Karate. In my free time, I love reading, playing the piano, and coding my own video games. I can't wait to see everyone soon!

*Krish Prem, Vice Chair*

## Information about Papers

Single-spaced

2 pgs max not including works cited

12 Font Times New Roman

1 inch borders

MLA citations

Categories: Background, UN Involvement\*, Country Policy, Solutions, and Work Cited.

Position papers are due by **Sunday, October 11th at 11:59 pm** to **[this form.](#)**

Email **[uhsmodelun@gmail.com](mailto:uhsmodelun@gmail.com)** with any questions.

*Late papers will be ineligible for research awards. Delegates without papers submitted by the start of the conference are ineligible for committee awards.*

*\*We understand that, given the nature of the topic, UN Involvement may be more difficult to develop. Consequently, for this committee only, we will keep this in mind when grading your position paper. Still, please try to address this section thoroughly to the best of your abilities.*

## A Message From the Dais

### UNHCR: Specific Delegate Guidance

*The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is a General Assembly committee where delegates represent member-states of the United Nations. When doing research and writing your Country's policy/solutions, it is expected that you reflect the ideals that your country would/have support(ed). Finally, I urge that delegates put their best effort into fostering diplomatic discussion and resolutions, while not forgetting their country's policy and stance on the given issue. This being said, I feel strongly that the purpose of Model UN (and debate more broadly) is to understand conflict and the multitude of contexts and perspectives that make up our wonderful world, so I encourage every delegate to defend their country's policy as you would if you really were a delegate in New York. Good luck!*

### General Assembly Committee Procedure & Expectations

*This committee follows standard Model UN General Assembly procedure and flow. If you have any questions about procedure, do not hesitate to email us at uhsmodelun@gmail.com. As a baseline expectation, I encourage every delegate to come prepared with an understanding of the topic, a readiness for discussion, ideas for possible solutions to the issue at hand, and a ninety-second speech expressing those solutions.*

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## Topic Background & UN Policy

The Earth is warming at an alarming rate, and some countries will bear the brunt of these changes more than others. For example, large swaths of Mali and Sierra Leone's

population are dependent on agriculture vulnerable to climate change. Afghanistan, India, and Sudan face increasing drought. Guinea Bissau is a low-lying nation that is threatened by sea level rise. Further, as the climate crisis has worsened, natural disasters have become more common, increasing by more than 80% in the last four decades. International scientists believe that the most recent noteworthy global disaster, the September 2026 floods in Nepal that killed at least 1400 people, was caused by warming temperatures destabilizing a glacier, leading to its collapse. While these disasters account for only 12% of international migration at this time, as climate change intensifies, it is expected to displace between 143 million to 1.2 billion people before 2050 as a consequence both of natural disasters and more ambient changes caused by routinely higher temperatures and altered weather patterns.

In order to thoroughly consider this issue, two aspects must be examined: the role of the international frameworks and that of domestic frameworks that have and will regulate climate migration over the coming decades.

The principal international framework regulating refugees writ large is the **1951 Refugee Convention**. This document is the foundation of the operations of UNHCR. It outlines the basic standards that govern the treatment of refugees, including but not limited to their rights to freedom of movement, religion, and social protection, and it defines who does and does not qualify for refugee status. Article 1 of the Convention defines a refugee as someone who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of [their] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themselves] of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of [their] former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is

unwilling to return to it." It is clear that the convention has a clear focus on those fleeing political repression and state persecution. It being 1951, before the onslaught of climate change was fully understood, there was no language drafted in the Convention that defines, protects, or regulates climate-driven refugees. Additionally, The United Nations has partnered with the **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** and "promotes policy coherence, contributes to advocacy efforts, harnesses resources and fosters innovation to align migration policies with development goals and deliver coordinated and impactful solutions around the world." The **UN Network on Migration** organizes to meet the comprehensive **Global Compact for Migration (GCM)** that establishes objectives and implementation frameworks for global migratory needs. However, much like the 1951 Convention, none of these initiatives directly or structurally address climate migration. This status-quo has been upheld by the fact that climate change has yet to unleash its full destructive potential on migratory norms.

Domestic frameworks, where they (sparsely) exist, are similarly ineffectual as it relates to climate migration. However, internal attitudes towards refugees might be a more apt hallmark for attitudes towards refugees in the global north and climate-resistant host countries. In western nations, while roughly one-third of respondents to a UNHCR-Ipsos poll indicate that they believe that refugees will positively contribute to society, another third hold the opposite view. There is also public concern over refugees' implications on national security and public services. As the sheer volume of international climate migrants increases and compounds with other effects of climate change--resource shortages and overall societal instability--it will be vital to understand and mitigate international public hostility towards migrants if sustainable solutions are to be established.

Further complicating the circumstances is the existing structural inequity in the global system. For example, while Nepal bore the brunt of the aforementioned climate change driven disaster, it contributes less than .1% of the greenhouse gasses that heat up the atmosphere, a common relationship between climate change and the populations that it most intensely affects. This raises important questions into who is responsible for international instability and how the United Nations and the rest of the global system should regulate and control migration.

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## **Possible Solutions**

*Note: Given the lack of previous discussion and action on climate change, the Dais strongly encourages delegates to be creative, novel, and unique while also remaining grounded and practical. The “Solutions” section of your position paper will be graded specifically on its effectiveness and visionary potential, and having strong ideas will color and deepen the quality of debate in committee.*

There are a few ways that delegates may approach formulating solutions to establishing norms for climate refugees.

First, attempting to avoid the worst of the climate crisis altogether should not be ignored. Delegates can propose more forceful international action on global warming, like establishing binding regulation and incentivizing the transition to green energy. Additionally, developing resilience to environmental changes in vulnerable areas would be effective in curbing some preventable migration. However, even if action is quickly taken, the climate crisis will still displace large amounts of people over the coming decades.

Thus, international systems need to be robust and equipped to handle this volume of refugees. When establishing these systems, they must physically process and account for all of the migrants who pass through borders in order to adequately provide for and protect them. Safe and reliable migratory pathways need to be developed, and a resource and population analysis of host countries would accompany these pathways in order to formulate a practical and sustainable slate of organized destinations for climate migrants. This will also serve to mitigate resentment among host populations as migration to their countries increases. Additionally, this action must be catalyzed and maintained by regulation. Given that, at the moment, no international framework addresses climate migration, documents including but not limited to the 1951 Refugee Convention, IOM, and GCM might be amended to clearly and unambiguously define what a “climate refugee” is and how they will be protected under the systems to be established.

Finally, delegates should consider reparatory action, where developed countries (often in the global north) are held accountable for their role in causing global warming. Top historical polluters would contribute to developing green energy, enable climate resilience in vulnerable areas, and face obligations to host climate refugees. They would also fund United Nations initiatives to address these issues.

### **Questions to Consider**

1. What defines a “climate refugee?” Will their protections, rights, and obligations differ from traditionally defined refugees?
2. How will safe migratory pathways be established? Which countries will host refugees and how will their aptitude to do so be analyzed?

3. What are the specific ways that existing documents governing international migration will be amended to consider climate refugees?
4. How will international ideals for addressing climate migration be reconciled with the reality of resource scarcity and internal hostility within host countries?
5. To what extent should polluting countries carry the burden of providing for refugees and developing broader climate resilience?

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