



# UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME STUDY GUIDE



**SLRMUN '26**

Sri Lanka Rotaract Model  
United Nations VI

February 2026

# UN Environment Program

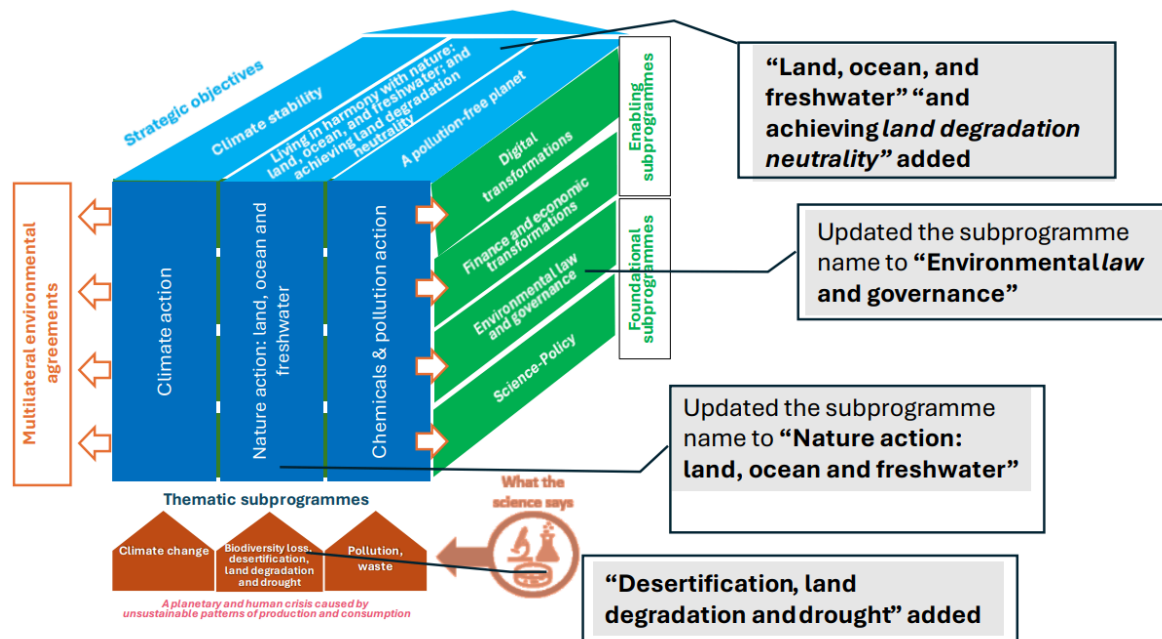
## 1. Mandate

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the United Nations' leading global authority on the environment, differentiating itself from other committees like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) & United Nations Convention on Biodiversity (UNCBD) through its expanded mandate, covering all aspects of the environment and universal membership.

The mandate of the UNEP is to promote international cooperation in regards to the environment, resulting in policy guidance and the facilitation & promotion of the sharing of environmental knowledge additionally, ensuring environmental issues are acknowledged and tackled by governments while also providing a special status for developing nations in regards to funding and environmental policy.

The full text of the UNEP's mandate can be found [here](#).

### 1.1. **UNEP 2025-2029 Strategy**



The UNEP outlined its 4 year strategy in its “2025 - 2029 Strategy” document which determines the scope of its work during the first half of the decade. It outlines 3 core planetary crises ; Climate Change, Biodiversity loss, Desertification, Land Degradation & Drought and Pollution & Waste, through these crises they have outlined 3 strategic objectives which correspond to a crisis; “*Climate stability*”, “*Living in harmony with*

*Nature: land, ocean and freshwater; and achieving land degradation neutrality” and “Towards a pollution-free planet” respectively.*

These strategic objectives are then expressed in 3 thematic areas of work; Climate Action, Nature action: land, ocean and freshwater and Chemicals & Pollution action. Supporting the work around these thematic areas of work are subprograms; enabling subprograms being the key transformative forces that the UNEP have identified to be crucial towards achieving its strategic objectives; on the other hand the foundational subprograms are core themes upon which solutions are based around.

Furthermore, in the “2022 - 2025 Strategy” is outlined the importance of stakeholder inclusion, a just climate transition, the reiteration of the concept of differentiated but common responsibilities outlined in the Paris agreement - providing special allowances for developing countries; coalescing in a “none left behind” approach which drives the outcomes of the UNEP.

UNEP 2025 - 2029 Strategy can be found [here](#).

The UNEP terminology glossary can be found [here](#)

### 3. **Practice debate**

Topic – *Human Displacement caused by environmental change*

#### 3.1. **Background**

Human displacement caused by environmental change has recently emerged as one of the most pressing humanitarian and developmental challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Environmental degradation, climate change and natural disasters are increasingly forcing communities to leave their homes, with little long-term security. Despite growing concerns, there are no mainstream or definite course of actions, action plans or recommendations to guarantee international protection and resilience. In this practice debate, while we expect an equalization of concern as with traditional refugees, international actions on climate mitigation, disaster-risk reduction, protection and assistance to displaced populations must be reformed and accelerated under a UNEP mandate.

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), climate-induced displacement refers to the *“movement of a person or group of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment due to climate change, are obliged to leave their habitual place of residence or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, within a State or across an international border.”*

Though interest in the relationship between climate and migration has increased, environmental displacement has always been part of humanity's history and drives the rise and fall of civilizations. For example, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, during the "*Little Ice Age*," where thousands moved to cities from rural areas due to long and harsh winters that ruined crops - to the 1980s where water shortages in China caused state-mandated relocations. Today, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that an average of 20 million people are forcibly displaced to other areas worldwide due to weather-related events annually.

A core cause behind environmental displacement is undoubtedly sudden or gradual environmental change. Climate variability disrupts ecosystems and livelihoods, particularly in climate-sensitive sectors, such as agriculture and fisheries, which depend heavily on stable and predictable weather patterns and often are already in vulnerable areas which lack the means & knowledge to mitigate the effects of environmental change. In addition to this, there are several other causes that drive this crisis while climate change remains to be the most consequential.

#### **3.1.1. Insufficient Early Warning Systems (EWS)**

An early warning system (EWS) is a warning system that can be implemented as a chain of communication systems and meteorological detection subsystems for early identification of environmental hazards. They forecast and signal disturbances, providing time for the response system to prepare for the adverse event and to minimize its impact. Yet, the World Meteorological Organization commented that only 55% of nations have adequate EWS protocols.

#### **3.1.2. Lack of regular migration pathways for those displaced by climate change**

The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol does not extend legal status to individuals who have fled their home countries to climate change or environmental disasters. This makes it unlikely that refugees will be able to receive international protection or claim asylum on account of climate disasters. Although the OAU Convention and Cartagena Declaration broadens the scope of refugees to those displaced by environmental change, it is difficult to assess its effectiveness in practice.

### **3.2. Case Studies**

#### **3.2.1. United States of America**

Commonly referred to as “America’s first refugees,” the residents from Newtok, Alaska were forced to leave from their hometown over looming threats of rising sea levels and coastal erosion, which were primarily caused by the thawing of permafrost. Previously productive land was changed to mudflats, which makes it difficult to install infrastructure and settlements. By 2003, plans for relocation and resettlement were drafted when the community council at Newtok worked with the US Fish & Wildlife Service to shift their people towards a less vulnerable region called Mertarvik. However, the execution of the plan is slow due to funding constraints, bureaucratic rejection of housing plans and the lack of recognition for climate change as a reasonable qualification for disaster relief funds from interior authorities.

### **3.2.2. Sri Lanka**

In November 2025, Sri Lanka was struck by its most severe cyclone and flash flooding since Cyclone Ditwah in 2016. The disaster brought torrential rainfall, triggering landslides, soil saturation and erosion. Approximately 300,000 individuals were displaced, many of whom had been residing in areas unsuitable for land development due to inadequate land-use assessments and regulatory oversight. Furthermore, despite reports indicating that the Department of Meteorology had issued warnings about impending severe weather, political sources reported that the Government failed to take timely preventive action.

### **3.2.3. Nansen Initiative**

Launched in 2012 by Norway and Switzerland, the Nansen Initiative was a state-led, consultative process designed to address a critical legal gap: the protection of people forced to cross international borders due to natural disasters and climate change. Traditional refugee law typically excludes these individuals, as they are not fleeing persecution. The initiative culminated in the 2015 [Protection Agenda](#), endorsed by 109 states. This agenda focuses on international cooperation, standards of treatment, and operational responses. Since 2016, its implementation has been spearheaded by the [Platform on Disaster Displacement](#).

## **3.3. Questions to Address in Committee**

- How can UNEP’s mandate fit into protecting climate-induced refugees?
- What barriers prevent climate-induced refugees from being recognized in international protection frameworks?
- How can the international community accurately measure and predict environmentally driven displacement?
- Should states prioritize a climate mitigation strategy or relocation strategies?

- Can agriculture and land development be reformed to reduce displacement pressures?  
What is the role of desertification during rural-to-urban migration?
- How can we elevate standards of climate justice?

#### 4. **Conference**

Topic - *Sustainability and Environmental Efficiency in Urban Areas*

##### 4.1. **Background**

When looking at the trajectory of global urbanisation, it becomes obvious that as populations rise and cities expand, urban waste, emissions and biodiversity loss have become critical bottlenecks for sustainable development. Currently, cities are responsible for 70% of all global emissions, with the vast majority of waste and pollution originating from dense urban centers and their surrounding suburbs. Consequently, as environmental displacement in rural areas and socio-economic drivers continue to push humanity toward urban centers, the pressure on existing city infrastructure has reached a point of turmoil.

However, the complication that arises is that traditional urban expansion often occurs at the expense of the local ecosystems and surrounding environment. To address this, it is imperative to build cities around a philosophy of co-existence with the environment, rather than viewing nature and infrastructure as competing interests. This requires a fundamental shift in how we define urban efficiency - moving beyond simple growth to prioritize the mitigation of emissions, the restoration of biodiversity, and the implementation of circular waste management.

Therefore, the base upon which cities are currently making massive transformations is the integration of technology and nature into existing infrastructure. By keeping sustainability at the core of decision-making for new developments and retrofitting old systems for environmental efficiency, cities can manage high-density populations while maintaining ecological harmony. This involves not only the physical planting of nature but the application of technological frameworks that allow all urban functions to operate within a sustainable, closed-loop system.

##### 4.1.1. Case study 1 - City In Nature : Singapore

Urban forestry is a versatile planning philosophy that integrates biodiversity directly into the urban fabric to enhance sustainability and livability. By strategically scaling green infrastructure - from sparse sidewalk plantings to dense park networks and integrated "green services" - cities can achieve significant improvements in air/water quality and

urban cooling. This approach provides a dual benefit: mitigating environmental stressors while boosting local economic prospects and public health. Urban forestry is also a flexible concept allowing new cities to be developed with it in mind while existing cities can integrate the concept at a relatively low cost.

Singapore as part of its *2030 Green plan : City in Nature* outlines 5 key strategies to transform Singapore through urban forestry; (1) Growing nature park networks, (2) Intensify existing parks and gardens, (3) Restoring nature in urban areas, (4) Connecting green spaces through ecological corridors, (5) Enhance animal care. The plan also outlines goals to plant over 1 million trees, enhance 170ha of existing parks and create another 130ha of new parks as well as ensuring all households are within a 10 minute walk of a park.

This plan seeks to integrate nature into existing infrastructure while simultaneously enhancing existing urban infrastructure. A key technology used to achieve this is a digital twin model, which is a 3D version of the city created to accurately visualise the impact of developments on both nature, infrastructure and human activity thus, allowing planning and development to be far more efficient and effective.

#### **4.1.2. Case study 2 - Paris**

Paris has been considered a leader in the push for sustainability by cities, with a plan to be carbon neutral by 2050, having already seen much success with a 50% decrease in emissions (between 2004 & 2014). The methods the Paris City Council implemented have several benefits beyond just a reduction in emissions.

One of the key strategies that Paris used was to improve cyclability and pedestrianisation within the city centering the transformation of the city around the *15 Minute City Philosophy* - reducing and disincentivising the use of cars therefore, not only reducing emissions but reducing congestion and improving air-quality in the city. This improves livability within cities and also helps manage population growth by allowing smoother movement between parts of the city at a low environmental & economic cost and provides more room to integrate environmental technologies like urban forestry due to road space being replaced by walkways which are more flexible in terms of their use and structure.

A major side effect of this strategy is the increased need to manage waste and trash collection within the city; with an ever increasing amount of pedestrians/cyclists the importance of clean walkways increases meaning that cities are incentivised to develop better ways to manage their waste - with Paris implementing a Circular Economy

approach to waste management composting organic waste and incinerating unrecyclable items to generate electricity.

#### 4.2. **Talking Points**

- How can cities integrate sustainable technology/philosophy into urban planning?
- How can eco-tech/nature be integrated sustainably into existing infrastructure?
- How can cities manage the environmental impacts of increasing populations in a sustainable way?
- How can cities improve their environmental efficiency?
- What consumer-side policies can be put in place to effectively manage waste?
- How can LEDCs make the transformation into eco-cities?

#### 4.3. **Further Reading**

- <https://www.reforestaction.com/en/magazine/urban-forests-challenges-and-benefits>
- [https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/TreePAL\\_UNECE\\_0.pdf](https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/TreePAL_UNECE_0.pdf)
- <https://unfccc.int/climate-action/un-global-climate-action-awards/climate-leaders/city-of-paris>
- <https://cdn.paris.fr/paris/2025/06/25/plan-climat-en-9E8O.pdf>
- <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/resource-efficiency/what-we-do/cities/city-activities>
- <https://unhabitat.org/11-6-environmental-impact-of-cities>