

**Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Issues (Third Committee)**

*Social Media and Misinformation*

**VicMUN 2026**



## **General Assembly Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee Overview**

### **Introduction**

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) is the central most policy-making and administrative body under the United Nations (UN). The UNGA is the UN's largest body, comprising all 193 member-states, each of which contributes to multilateral, international deliberations and decision-making on a myriad of global issues covered by the Charter of the United Nations.

The UNGA's Third Committee Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM) was established in 1945 in response to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. SOCHUM primarily covers issues related to human rights and dignity, ensuring a global commitment to the protection and acknowledgement of such rights. Though SOCHUM is grounded in a policy framework that promotes universality of human rights, SOCHUM covers issues relating to specific rights, including the rights of persons with disabilities, the rights of Indigenous peoples and their communities, and the rights of women and children.

### **Mandate, Structure, and Powers**

The UNGA is the principal deliberative organ of the UN, its mandate is directly grounded in the UN Charter, authorizing it to discuss and amend any matter situated on the scope of international peace and security within the Charter. Under Article 10 of the Charter, the GA is empowered to discuss and make recommendations on any matters within the scope of the Charter, including issues related to international peace, security, and human rights, provided such matters are not actively under consideration by the Security Council (United Nations, 1945). While the GA has no direct enforcement mechanisms, and is therefore nonbinding, it serves normative purposes to the broader political community by fostering multilateral consensus, enhancing member states adherence to international standards, and sculpting agendas. Thus, through discourse, deliberations, resolutions and declarations, the GA solidifies the United Nations as a successful archetype of customary international law, reinforcing the legitimacy of global governance norms.

Structurally, the GA is composed of 193 member states, each of which possess one vote regardless of population size, geographic location, economic relevance, or military capacity. The GA deliberates through annual sessions, emergency and special sessions, allowing the committee to respond flexibly to various issues covered under the UN Charter. The GA is divided into six central committees, each blanketing specific themes relevant to international peace and security. The division of such committees allows for a unified yet efficient international commitment to varying political issues.

Within this institutional framework, the Third Committee, the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM), operates as one of the six central GA committees responsible for carrying out substantive work of the GA (United Nations, n.d-c). SOCHUM's mandate covers a myriad of social, humanitarian, and cultural matters, notably the protection and advancement of fundamental freedoms, gender equality, children's rights, Indigenous rights, and rights of aging

populations and persons with disabilities. Thus, through sustained deliberation on such issue areas, SOCHUM is credited as a core forum in establishing resolutions that translate concerns on human matters into tangible international commitments to dignity, equality, and social inclusion (United Nations, n.d.-c). In doing so, the committee operationalizes the GA's broader human rights mandate by transforming abstract principles into politically negotiated and cemented international law frameworks.

Though SOCHUM's resolutions sustain international scrutiny of social, humanitarian, and cultural issues, the powers of SOCHUM, akin to the GA, are primarily normative due to its nonbinding enforcement capacities. SOCHUM, along with the other five committees, may warrant recommendations and actions under Article 10 through 14 of the Charter, allowing the committee to encourage peaceful advancement of human rights and fundamental freedoms without overstepping issues under Security Council's mandate (United Nations, 1945). Though outcomes of SOCHUM remain normative as its resolutions manifest as customary international law, SOCHUM articulates expectations of state behaviour while exercising moral authority.

### Governance

The governance architecture of the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM) facilitated a volume of resolutions produced annually, many of which have manifested as cornerstones of international human rights frameworks and discourse (United Nations, n.d.-e; United Nations, n.d.-f). The committee has been instrumental in advancing resolutions on the rights of Indigenous peoples, the advancement of women in society, and the protection of vulnerable populations (United Nations, 2023-a). These resolutions, while formally nonbinding, contribute to the development of institutional norms that shape domestic and foreign policy and guide the work of UN human rights mechanisms, including those operating under the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (United Nations, n.d.-c; United Nations, n.d.-e).

SOCHUM's governance is prominent in its sustained engagement with both persistent and emerging global challenges, notably Indigenous rights. The Committee has grappled with draft texts in both the 79th and 80th sessions, all reaffirming Indigenous people's rights to life, liberty, and security, along with meaningful participation in governance and increased commitments to consultation with Indigenous representatives (United Nations, 2025). In particular, the proliferation of social media disinformation and misinformation has emerged as a governance challenge that intersects many of SOCHUM's established issue-areas, as digital platforms are increasingly relevant in shaping public discourse, political participation, and the enjoyment of fundamental human rights (United Nations General Assembly, 2023).

Within SOCHUM's governance framework, social media and disinformation are approached as social and human rights concerns with direct implications for freedom of expression, equality, non-discrimination, and social cohesion (United Nations General Assembly, 2023, p. 2). By framing disinformation within a human rights paradigm, SOCHUM reinforces governance approaches that prioritize dignity while recognizing risks posed by unregulated digital information ecosystems (United Nations General Assembly, 2023, p. 2). GA Resolution 78/213

notes with concern the adverse impacts artificial intelligence and machine-learning technologies without adequate safeguards may hinder enjoyment of human rights and otherwise bolster discriminatory outcomes (United Nations General Assembly, 2023, p. 4). Moreover, GA SOCHUM's engagement with disinformation and information technologies is closely linked to its longstanding resolutions on combating racism and xenophobia, which increasingly places artificial intelligence and social media ecosystems in the center of international human rights governance (United Nations, 2023-a).

Thus, SOCHUM's work on social media disinformation and digital ecosystems including the advancement of artificial intelligence technologies underscore the committee's relevance in contemporary global governance. While rooted in a humanitarian mandate with dignity at the center, SOCHUM's commitment to digital information integrity reflects the need for international oversight mechanisms capable of monitoring and guiding digital ecosystems that foster productivity and innovation while emphasizing non-discrimination and the protection of human rights (United Nations, 2023-b). Through its normative authority and consensus governance model, SOCHUM continues to function as a core forum in addressing social consequences of technological change and advancement within the GA.

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## **Social Media, Misinformation, and Disinformation**

### **Introduction**

The spread of false or misleading information across the digital media space is an increasingly prevalent issue that poses direct consequences for human security and the stability of the international order. This dissemination of false information occurs in the form of both misinformation and disinformation. Misinformation refers to false or misleading information that is shared without the intent to deceive, while disinformation refers to the intentional creation or sharing of false information for a manipulative or misleading purpose (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Though distinct, both forms contribute to the rapid spread of misleading narratives across digital media platforms.

The issues of misinformation and disinformation are of particular concern to the UNGA' Third Committee (SOCHUM) due to their direct impact on access to information, meaningful civic participation, and human dignity. Access to reliable information is essential to ensuring individuals can make informed decisions about issues including health and political participation. When the digital environments that provide this information are flooded with falsehoods and inaccuracies, vulnerable populations, including children, elderly individuals, minorities, and those with limited digital literacy, are often disproportionately affected (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2021).

### **Global Trends and Projections**

Though the spread of misinformation and disinformation has existed globally for centuries, recent years have demonstrated an increase in the volume, speed, and reach of such information, contributing to increasing political polarization, declining trust in public institutions, and heightened social tensions. Misleading narratives impact electoral processes, public health responses, and conflict framing. The undermining of trust in public health systems that resulted from widespread misinformation and disinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the ensuing vaccine hesitancy it contributed to, demonstrates the real world impacts of this spread of false information. (World Health Organization, 2020).

Looking beyond the sphere of public health, this corruption of digital media spaces contributes to eroding trust in democratic institutions, responsible news sources, and multilateral bodies like the UN and the WHO. Additionally, false information has the ability to exacerbate ethnic or religious tensions, incite violence, and obstruct humanitarian responses, especially in fragile or conflict-ridden settings, further demonstrating the real world impacts of this issue. (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2021). The impacts of this issue are not isolated national challenges, but rather transnational phenomena with widespread global consequences.

## Current Political Context

The issues of misinformation and disinformation have become increasingly urgent in light of rapid technological advances, evolving geopolitical tensions, and the increased use of digital tools for political communication. Rapid advances in generative artificial intelligence have further enabled the production of realistic false content, posing significant challenges for detection and response (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2021; United Nations, 2023).

Distinct national approaches to the regulation of online spaces pose the risk of creating a fragmented global digital landscape (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2023). Some states emphasize transparency and media platform accountability, while others favour restrictive measures that raise potential concerns of censorship (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2021). These differing approaches have intensified debate surrounding issues including sovereignty, freedom of expression, and the role of international institutions in information governance. Purely national solutions have proven insufficient as misinformation and disinformation continue to transcend borders. In recognition of this challenge, the UNGA has emphasized the need for international cooperation and multi-stakeholder agreement (United Nations, 2022).

## Existing Governance Efforts

Despite this issue's complexity, efforts to address it have been made by governments, international organizations, and civil society actors. On an international level, the UNGA has adopted resolutions recognizing the threat that is posed to human rights and democratic government by the spread of false information (United Nations General Assembly, 2022). These resolutions emphasize that international human rights law must be considered when approaching this issue.

Normative and practical guidance on this issue has been advanced by specialized UN bodies and partner organizations including UNESCO, which has promoted media and information literacy in an effort to strengthen societies' ability to identify these falsehoods in media (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2023). Additionally, United Nations human rights mechanisms place an emphasis on transparency and accountability in state responses to disinformation (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2021). In parallel to these approaches, some digital platforms have implemented content moderation policies that involve fact-checking partnerships and reporting mechanisms, though the scope and effectiveness of these measures can vary (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2023).

These efforts demonstrate growing awareness and engagement, however, governmental approaches remain fragmented, unevenly implemented, and are often reactive rather than proactive. This raises concerns regarding the effectiveness of current frameworks and highlights the need for greater international coordination.

## Guiding Questions

Given the global scope and complexity of the issues of misinformation and disinformation, several key questions arise for delegates' consideration. The central question around which this issue revolves is how societies can address the risks posed by misinformation and disinformation while upholding freedom of expression and access to information, as it is protected under international human rights law. In light of this question, the role of international institutions, including the United Nations, in promoting information integrity transnationally must be considered. Delegates must also consider existing governance mechanisms and their effectiveness, placing a focus on where current approaches fall short. Finally, the extent to which education, media and information literacy, and public trust can be strengthened alongside regulatory measures remains a critical area for discussion.

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## Special Topics in Social Media and Disinformation : Issues in Current Policy Making

### Artificial Intelligence (AI) Sanctioned Misinformation and Disinformation

Advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the emerging global use of machine-learning systems such as generative AI have significantly transformed the social media ecosystems in which citizens of the world find themselves. AI and generative tools have capacity to amplify misinformation and disinformation in these social media ecosystems, as these tools enable rapid creations of highly realistic false content and imaging, including deep fakes, synthetic images and text, or manipulated and altered photographs, all of which are prone to broad scale dissemination with minimal cost or requirements of technological knowledge for operation. These rapid and realistic technological capacities have a consequential stake in information integrity, as AI generated machine-learning content is increasingly difficult for media users and regulators to detect efficiently and effectively, thereby exacerbating the scope and speed of misleading and harmful narratives and imaging.

Considering the mere concern of AI through rapid and realistic production of misleading content, SOCHUM brings forth a human centred approach to the management of AI systems, particularly in regard to potential obstructions of human rights. AI enabled disinformation and misinformation existing in social media ecosystems carries capacity to hinder freedom of expression, access to transparent information, and has potential to conflict with international standards of equality and non-discrimination. The United Nations warns algorithmic systems used in media ecosystems may inadvertently reinforce existing biases, amplify harmful rhetoric, and marginalize vulnerable populations if deployed without adequate safeguards (United Nations, 2023). AI generated content existing in social media ecosystems does not only accelerate disinformation, misinformation, and harmful content, but it can reshape the digital information environment in ways that may undermine human dignity.

International governance efforts and current GA resolutions on AI generated content and AI sanctioned misinformation have all grounded recommendations in a human rights approach. UNESCO's Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms illustrates the need for a transparent public oversight framework in the management and regulation of AI technologies that have capacity to manipulate information flows (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2023). GA Resolution 78/213 addresses the broader human security implications of AI, emphasizing the urgency of international cohesion on AI in military spaces (United Nations General Assembly, 2023, p. 2). Resolution 78/213 unveils concerns relevant to civilian digital and media ecosystems, including destabilizing effects of unregulated AI technologies on international security, peace, and public trust (United Nations General Assembly, 2023, p. 2).

Akin to Resolution 78/213, GA Draft Resolution 78/L.49 is consistent with SOCHUM's mandate, given it recognizes the improper and malicious design features of AI and misuse of generative content may undermine information integrity and civilian dignity (United Nations General Assembly, 2023). 78/L.49 emphasizes transparency and importantly human oversight processes and procedures throughout the AI lifecycle, cementing international standards for human-centred AI management and regulation. Collectively, these resolutions signal AI as a multifaceted human rights concern that produces threats to the integrity of digital information

and media ecosystems. Delegates in this committee are encouraged to explore AI sanctioned misinformation and disinformation, as the increased presence of manipulated and extorted AI content in civilian media ecosystems remains paramount in understanding current threats to information integrity.

### Role of the State in Generating and Managing Misinformation or Disinformation

State sanctioned misinformation and disinformation, defined previously as “false or misleading information that is shared without the intent to deceive, while disinformation refers to the intentional creation or sharing of false information for a manipulative or misleading purpose” manifests as a significant barrier to the enjoyment of fundamental human rights and poses threats to international security. State sanctioned misinformation campaigns often leverage civilian spaces such as social media ecosystems to manipulate public opinion or suppress dissent, undermining democratic institutional processes, as observed by GA Resolution 76/227 (General Assembly, 2022). The intentional creation and acceleration of false narratives and content as a geopolitical and ideological tool contravenes internationally recognized norms of freedom of expression (General Assembly, 2022).

Alternatively, states bear primary responsibility for managing misinformation and disinformation, consistent with international law. Under United Nations *Countering Disinformation*, states are obligated to prohibit advocacy of national, racial, or religious discrimination that constitutes hostility, violence, or barriers to the enjoyment of human rights (n.d.). Responses to misinformation and content that promotes discriminatory narratives in civilian media ecosystems shall encompass transparent measures rather than punitive restrictive measures that risk censorship and violations to freedom of expression (United Nations, n.d.). SOCHUM approaches would further encourage states to invest in media and digital literacy programs, support civilian or independent fact-checking and monitoring programmes, mobilize civil society and journalism, and promote a broader public participation to build social resilience to false and misleading content (United Nations, n.d.). For delegates in this committee, the dual role of the state, as both a producer or arbitrator of misinformation, underscores the mere importance of balancing accountability, freedom of expression, transparency, and international cooperation when addressing social media and misinformation within SOCHUM.

### Combating Extremism and Protecting Human Rights in Online Spaces

While civilian media ecosystems offer opportunities for civic participation, freedom of expression, and social inclusion, these ecosystems may be subject to exploitation for the dissemination of extremist ideologies and hate speech. The United Nations Human Rights Council observed online environments enable the rapid spread of polarizing narratives, particularly when extremist content circulates with limited oversight or insufficient moderation protocols (2021). Misinformation and disinformation often function as entry points to extremism

by normalizing false claims, fostering grievance-based identities, and undermining trust in democratic institutions.

The human rights impacts of extremism facilitated by and exacerbated in digital media ecosystems are severe and unevenly distributed. Extremism and digital hate campaigns disproportionately target minority populations, including racialized groups and religious minorities, migrants, and Indigenous communities, of which undermine rights to non discrimination and security or privacy of the person (UNHRC, 2024). The normalization of hate speech and incitement in digital media ecosystems contributes to not only psychological distress but also tangible consequences offline, including harassment and acts of violence. As such, SOCHUM would approach online extremism as both a human security concern but supplementarily as a structural human rights issue that threatens social cohesion and dignity of vulnerable populations.

Addressing extremism requires a careful, thoughtful balance between regulating harmful content and protecting the freedom of expression, as guaranteed under international human rights law. The Human Rights Council cautioned that vague restrictions aimed at countering extremism risk infringing free speech (2021). This challenge is furthered by the involvement of a myriad of actors, including national governments, international institutions and corporations, and media companies, each with differential responsibilities for intervention and management of potential online extremism (UNHRC, 2021, p. 4). Within a complex governance landscape, SOCHUM must articulate international standards that encourage dialogue between states and private actors to ensure interventions to online extremism remain reasonable while balancing freedom of expression. Thus, delegates in SOCHUM are encouraged to evaluate balanced responses to extremism and hate speech existing in digital media ecosystems that prevent discrimination and misinformation and preserve freedom of speech and civilian enjoyment of social inclusion online.

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## **Additional Resources**

### **United Nations Countering Disinformation (UN Secretary General Report)**

<https://www.un.org/en/countering-disinformation>

Description: This official UN resource synthesizes challenges of disinformation and its human rights implications, along with potential state and non-state actor responses, all grounded in international human rights standards. It includes recommendations aligned with GA and HRC resolutions on free expression and information integrity.

Why It Matters: This document provides delegates with a UN framework on how misinformation and disinformation intersects with fundamental rights, particularly regarding freedom of expression, and outlines responses that delegates may draw on to draft resolutions.

### **UNESCO Action Plan to regulate Social Media Platforms**

<https://www.unesco.org/en/freedom-expression-online>

Description: UNESCO's Action Plan summarizes a global consultation on how to regulate digital platforms to curb disinformation while protecting freedom of expression. It emphasizes stakeholder approaches and the role of regulators and monitoring systems.

Why It Matters: This plan offers normative standards and concrete measures that encourage tailored regulatory frameworks, useful for delegates crafting balanced solutions that foster freedom of expression while monitoring misleading and false narratives.

### **UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases “Amid Rise in False Narratives, Global Communications Department Ensuring Information Integrity of UN’s Work, Says Under-Secretary-General, as Committee Opens Session.”**

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/pi2317.doc.htm>

Description: This press coverage highlights UN strategic communication roles in combating misinformation by promoting information dissemination. This press release covers some states' concerns of rising disinformation and misinformation and reveals the collective urge to implement transparent information on all media platforms.

Why It Matters: This article may help delegates understand how the UN as an institution can facilitate meaningful deliberation in protecting information integrity.

### **OECD Mis-and disinformation**

<https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/disinformation-and-misinformation.html>

Description: The OECD mis and disinformation hub offers a myriad of policy briefs, statistics, research, and guidance on enhancing trust in media spaces, and distinguishes types of misleading content and policy frameworks to mitigate and manage false information.

Why It Matters: Delegates may draw on statistics and may find relevant management strategies and governance through the multitude of resources under this site.