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36th Annual

**BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY MODEL UNITED NATIONS
CONFERENCE**

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SECRETARIAT

Dear Delegates,

Kate Markham
Security Council

Kelly Miles
*United Nations Children’s
Fund*

Akira Contreras
*Organization of American
States*

Mauricio Morales
*International Atomic Energy
Agency*

Jessie Moore
*General Assembly Third
Committee*

Benjo Phillips
Economic and Social Council

Kelly Russell
Executive Director

DAVID M. KENNEDY
CENTER FOR
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Cory Leonard
Assistant Director

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 36th annual BYU Model United Nations conference! My name is Benjo Phillips, I am excited to introduce you to myself and to our committee, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). I am currently a senior at BYU studying International Relations with an emphasis in Middle Eastern Politics and am planning on attending law school after I graduate. I represented the Republic of Tajikistan at the National Model United Nations in 2025 and am excited to direct this committee at BYUMUN36. I look forward to hearing your solutions to these important issues.

This year, the topics up for discussion in ECOSOC are:

- I. Addressing the Socioeconomic Impacts of Declining Global Fertility Rates
- II. Balancing the Prevention of Online Hate Speech with the Protection of Freedom of Expression in the Digital Age

ECOSOC is one of the principal committees of the United Nations, and has a very important role in establishing policy, coordinating the efforts of various sub-committees in working toward policy goals, and considering reports and studies created by the thousands of civil society actors that it collaborates with. ECOSOC is specifically responsible for working towards the Sustainable Development Goals. It is not intended that this background guide be the sole source of information as you prepare for BYUMUN36; rather, you should do research independent of the materials included in this guide that will help you to form innovative solutions for your Member State regarding the topics discussed below. Each Member State will have different views of the best ways to address these topics, and I look forward to seeing how you work together towards viable solutions. If you have any questions or concerns as you are preparing for the conference, do not hesitate to contact me and let me know.

Sincerely,

Benjo Phillips
Director, ECOSOC
BYUMUN36
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Committee Background

“The 2030 Agenda requires us to break down the silos that have hindered us from working together in the past. It inspires us to look closely at the inter-linkages between sectors. It compels us to better understand specific national and local situations and challenges, and to tailor our actions accordingly.”

-Wu Hongbo, ECOSOC Retreat 2017

Introduction

When the United Nations (UN) was established in 1945, the *Charter of the United Nations* (1945) created the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as one of its founding bodies, and one of six main organs of the UN.¹ ECOSOC plays a vital role in coordinating the efforts of many subsidiary bodies within the UN, including regional commissions dealing with economic and social issues, bodies of experts, and funding programs that help to effectuate the policies put in place by the UN.²

ECOSOC also plays a very important role in collecting information from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in a consultative status, using this information to create needed policies and to vet policies for efficacy after implementation. ECOSOC reformed its structure in 2007 to further facilitate work with NGOs by creating the High-Level Segment, a yearly meeting designed to bring together ECOSOC representatives, Member State governments, and NGOs in meeting policy goals.³

Mandates, Functions, and Powers

The mandate of ECOSOC is found clearly within the *Charter of the United Nations*, which says that ECOSOC, “may make or initiate studies and reports with respect to international economic, social, cultural, educational, health, and related matters and may make recommendations with respect to any such matters to the General Assembly to the Members of the United Nations, and

¹ United Nations, “About us,” Economic and Social Council. 2024. Accessed 1 July 2025.

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>

² Ibid.

³ ESANGO, “Consultative Status with ECOSOC and other accreditations,” NGO Branch. Accessed 1 July 2025.

<https://esango.un.org/civilsociety/displayConsultativeStatusSearch.do>

to the specialized agencies concerned.” ECOSOC is to be made up of 54 Member States, one-third of which are elected each year by the General Assembly to serve in overlapping terms.⁴

Over the 80-year span of its existence, ECOSOC has undergone various changes, including the above-mentioned structural change in 2007, to better help it to fulfill its mandate and benefit the UN and global community it serves. Other important developments in its history include reforms in the last ten years to strengthen ECOSOC’s ability to lead out in identifying challenges that are emerging in the modern world, and the creation of summits and conferences during the COVID-19 pandemic to facilitate response efforts.⁵

Current Priorities and Areas of Concern

A central aspect of ECOSOC’s work revolves around the implementation of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015), also known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The High-Level Segment within ECOSOC is primarily responsible for the coordination of the UN efforts to work toward the SDGs, along with the Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG). Both are subsidiaries of and are overseen by ECOSOC.⁶ Some of the most notable SDGs especially relevant to this background guide are:

Goal 8- Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all;

Goal 10- Reduce inequality within and among countries;

Goal 11- Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable;

Goal 16- Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.⁷

Conclusion

ECOSOC plays a vital role within the UN; indeed, in many ways, it is the very heart of the UN itself. By tackling pressing social and economic issues through the lens of the SDGs, ECOSOC

⁴United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945. Accessed 10 June 2025 from: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>

⁵United Nations, Economic and Social Council, “About us,” United Nations. Accessed 10 June 2025. <https://ecosoc.un.org/en/about-us>

⁶United Nations, *Goals*, Sustainable Development Goals. 2021. Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

⁷United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (A/RES/70/1). Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://ecosoc.un.org/2030agenda/en/about-us>

makes important contributions in respect to reshaping the world into the bright future that we all hope to enjoy.

Annotated Bibliography

United Nations. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945. Retrieved June 10, 2025, from <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>.

This document is the founding guideline of the United Nations. It includes vital information about the mandate and powers of all founding bodies of the UN and provides an overview of the UN. Additionally, this document demonstrates how ECOSOC functions within the UN body.

United Nations, Economic and Social Council. “About Us.” n.d. Retrieved June 10, 2025, from <https://ecosoc.un.org/en/about-us>

This page, published by the UN, contains a brief overview of ECOSOC and details recent and notable events within its areas of concern. Also helpful from this page are the various hyperlinks which can redirect you to many useful ECOSOC resolutions, forums and NGOs.

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. “Consultative Status with ECOSOC and Other Accreditations.” n.d. Retrieved June 10, 2025, from <https://esango.un.org/civilsociety/displayConsultativeStatusSearch.do>.

This website features a brief overview of the role that ECOSOC plays as a consultative body. It also has a feature to search for and identify NGOs that work with ECOSOC in any capacity.

United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. 2015. Retrieved June 10, 2025, from <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>.

This page contains the 2015 resolution passed by the General Assembly outlining the 2030 SDGs. It provides an overview of the purpose of the SDGs as well as what each SDG is.

United Nations, Economic and Social Council. “Sustainable Development Goals.” 2021. Retrieved June 10, 2025, from <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

This page features the 17 SDGs and also includes a brief history of the overview of the SDGs, as well as current progress towards meeting them by 2030.

I. Addressing the Socioeconomic Impacts of Declining Global Fertility Rates

“Vast numbers of people are unable to create the families they want... The issue is lack of choice, not desire, with major consequences for individuals and societies. That is the real fertility crisis, and the answer lies in responding to what people say they need: paid family leave, affordable fertility care, and supportive partners.”

-- Dr. Natalia Kanem, Executive Director of United Nations Population Fund

Introduction

One of the few constants of recorded human behavior over the last 4 millennia has been the need in every civilization and generation to repopulate the earth. Simply put, without this, humans cease to exist in a matter of a few decades. The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in a country refers to the average number of children birthed by each adult woman in a population. TFR must average 2.1 children per woman to maintain population stability in the absence of migration. However, global fertility has dropped from about 5 births per woman in 1950 to 2.3 births in 2021—and is projected to fall further below replacement by the mid-21st century.⁸

Decreasing fertility rates negatively affect economies, especially as societies age without producing younger generations⁹. Economic research highlights the long-term fiscal burden of an aging society, including pressures on public finances, labor shortages, and constrained economic expansion.¹⁰ Population momentum further reinforces age-related imbalance: even a return to replacement fertility wouldn't rapidly reverse demographic aging. Lower fertility redistributes global demographics to a shrinking youth cohort and a rising proportion of working-age and elderly adults. This shift has immediate impacts on school systems, pension funds, and healthcare costs- and these aging trends are projected to intensify over decades.¹¹

Throughout the last 200 years, academic studies have found that the likelihood of women having children in their life fluctuates greatly. From 1800 until 1950, lifetime childlessness in Finland doubled, and similar patterns were observed elsewhere in the world. Other academic studies show fertility sensitivity varies by socioeconomic status (SES): disadvantaged groups often exhibit steeper fertility declines during crises, and enduring childlessness is more common

⁸ United Nations Population Fund, “About us,” UNFPA. Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://www.unfpa.org/about-us>

⁹ Maynard, Melissa. “The Long-Term Decline in Fertility—and What It Means for State Budgets,” Pew Research Center. 5 December 2022. Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://www.pew.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2022/12/the-long-term-decline-in-fertility-and-what-it-means-for-state-budgets>

¹⁰ United Nations Population Fund, “About us,” UNFPA. Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://www.unfpa.org/about-us>

¹¹ Encyclopedia Britannica. “Population Pyramid.” Britannica Sociology. Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/population-pyramid>

among those with lower SES. Education, wealth, and urban residence broadly correlate with lower fertility.¹²

Despite the fact that advances in medical care for women have resulted in low infant mortality rates throughout the world, even in developing countries, global fertility rates continue to fall. One factor explaining the decline in TFR throughout the world, especially over the last 100 years, is concern in some regions of the world about overpopulation, leading to hesitancy about having babies in those populations. Those concerns, while valid in certain resource-poor countries, led to societal, and in some countries, legal pressure to have fewer children, greatly contributing to the decline in global fertility rates.¹³

International and Regional Framework

Throughout the world, countries and multinational organizations have taken steps to mitigate the increasing effects of lower TFRs. While some countries have simply revoked or revised past laws that may have incentivized having fewer children, other countries have gone so far as to provide tax credits and free state-sponsored child care in hopes of incentivizing people to have more children and consequently, to raise the TFR.

Under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Hungary has implemented a sweeping pro-natal package since 2019, including lifetime income tax exemptions for mothers of four or more children, interest-free loans tied to family size, generous baby grants (around €21 000), and subsidized housing and car purchases for large families.¹⁴ After an initial fertility bump- rising from roughly 1.2 to 1.59 births per woman by 2020- rates began sliding again, raising doubts about the long-term efficacy of such incentives.¹⁵

South Korea, with one of the world's lowest fertility rates (around 0.75 in 2024), has declared population decline a "national emergency." Measures to address this crisis include substantial cash handouts per newborn (up to about £59 000 proposed), expanded parental leave, monthly child allowances, and new support for single and non-marital parenthood- alongside campaigns to reduce social stigma around childbirth outside marriage.¹⁶

¹² Salonen, Milla, et al. "Fertility resilience varies by socioeconomic status and sex: Historical trends in childlessness across 150 years." National Library of Medicine. 9 Jun 2024. 27(7):110227. Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11253507/>

¹³ Roser, Max. "The global decline of the fertility rate." Our World in Data. 2014. Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://ourworldindata.org/global-decline-fertility-rate#:~:text=There%20are%20three%20major%20reasons,the%20decline%20of%20child%20labor>

¹⁴ Hungary. "I have a Small Child." Hungary Families. Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://csalad.hu/eletesemenyek/kisgyermekem-van>

¹⁵ Kozponti Statisztikai Hivatal. "Population and Population Movements." Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://www.ksh.hu/stadat?theme=nep>

¹⁶ Ibid.

Singapore's approach has shifted over decades from its "Stop-at-Two" campaign with sterilization incentives and penalties for large families (1960s-70s), to a pro-natal "Have-Three-or-More" program in the late 1980s that included cash bonuses, housing priority, childcare subsidies, and fertility support up to 75% coverage via national medical savings. Despite decades of effort, total fertility remains below replacement, further demonstrating that financial incentives alone may not be sufficient.¹⁷

Multinational bodies like the EU have also tried to address concerns with declining TFRs in their states. While the EU lacks direct authority to mandate fertility policies, its institutions have issued non-binding frameworks and ideas. The Toolkit for Europe offers ten strategic policy steps for countries to adopt within their own legislative bodies.¹⁸ These ideas range from improving parental leave and childcare to encouraging more father involvement within the home. The EU also commissioned research on "Fertility policy and practice," which mapped out initiatives at the European level.¹⁹

Role of the International System

Several of the SDGs address problems that may arise as the global fertility rate continues to fall. SDG 8, "Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all," and SDG 11, "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable," both hint at the fundamental need for humankind to repopulate if it is to be maintained.

The UN has taken several measures in the past few decades to address concerns with declining fertility rates in Member States throughout the world. ECOSOC partners with the World Health Organization (WHO) to coordinate research and collaborative efforts amongst NGOs and the UN. One of the most useful organizations in addressing the concern is the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), which researches global population patterns and aims to empower women to have children in a safe and healthy environment.²⁰

These organizations have published significant findings over the last 10 years that demonstrate the effect of declining birth rates on the global population. One paper published in 2019 by the UNFPA sought to understand and assess the efficacy of different policy methods attempted by Member States with the goal of confronting declining fertility rates. It found that increasing educational opportunities, healthcare, and childcare were among the most effective of these

¹⁷ Yap MT. "Singapore's "three or more" policy: the first five years." *Asia Pac Popul J.* 1995 Dec;10(4):39-52. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12291532/>

¹⁸ Tiemann, Emily. "Fertility policy and practice: a Toolkit for Europe." *Economist Impact.* 2 Oct 2024. Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://impact.economist.com/health/fertility-policy-and-practice-toolkit-europe>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ United Nations Population Fund, "About us," UNFPA. Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://www.unfpa.org/about-us>

policy methods.²¹ UNFPA's *State of World Population 2025: The Real Fertility Crisis* emphasizes that 20% of adults across 14 countries cannot have their desired number of children due to socioeconomic and systemic barriers- not lack of desire. The report underscores reproductive rights, economic support, and gender equality as central to policy instead of coercive structures or financial incentives.²²

Conclusion

Declining fertility rates throughout the world contribute to a number of social and economic consequences. As fertility rates decrease, populations get older, placing stress on economic systems without being able to provide needed productivity and capital to fuel those systems. Furthermore, despite having better health care for women than in previous centuries, fewer women are having children now than ever before, and traditional family structures which contribute to healthy and happy children are becoming increasingly rare.

In order to address these problems, Member States and multinational organizations, including the UN, have tried various strategies to encourage people to have children. Results from such efforts are mixed at best, and in order to ensure that sustainable human life is perpetuated on the earth, more must be done to affect rising fertility rates.

Questions to Consider

1. What is a sustainable fertility rate for the world based on existing research? Does that depend on the region that a Member State is in?
2. Do Member States have a responsibility to incentivize their citizens to increase the number of kids that they have?
3. Should states choose and/or be compelled to prioritize repopulation above economic accumulations?
4. How can the UN fulfill SDG 11, to "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable," by addressing declining fertility rates?
5. How do ethnically and racially diverse countries address differing fertility rate concerns among their citizens?

²¹ Brzozowska, Zuzanna, et al. "Policy responses to low fertility: How effective are they?" May 2019. Accessed 1 July 2025. https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Policy_responses_low_fertility_UNFPA_WP_Final_corrections_7Feb2020_CLEAN.pdf

²² Ibid.

Annotated Bibliography

Brzozowska, Zuzanna, et al. *Policy Responses to Low Fertility: How Effective Are They?* May 2019. Accessed July 1, 2025. https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Policy_responses_low_fertility_UNFPA_WP_Final_corrections_7Feb2020_CLE_AN.pdf

This study is from a working paper that studied the efficacy of different policies on fertility rates within a country. Its main findings are that incentives for removing socioeconomic barriers to having children (such as healthcare or childcare provision) are the most effective ways to manipulate upward progress in fertility rates.

Encyclopedia Britannica. "Population Pyramid." *Britannica Sociology*. Accessed July 1, 2025. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/population-pyramid>

This is the Encyclopedia Britannica's page on population pyramids. Also included on this page are charts and links to several additional sources that will be useful for broad-level orientation about fertility rates.

Hungary. "I Have a Small Child." *Hungary Families*. Accessed July 1, 2025. <https://csalad.hu/eletesemenyek/kisgyermekem-van>.

This is Hungary's official national page about its pro-natal policies.

Központi Statisztikai Hivatal. "Population and Population Movements." Accessed July 1, 2025. <https://www.ksh.hu/stadat?theme=nep>.

This is an official Hungarian webpage that tracks and analyzes population data for Hungary. Its trends can be used to look at the success rates of Hungary's strong pro-natal agenda over the last 5 years.

Maynard, Melissa. "The Long-Term Decline in Fertility—and What It Means for State Budgets." *Pew Research Center*. December 5, 2022. Accessed July 1, 2025. <https://www.pew.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2022/12/the-long-term-decline-in-fertility-and-what-it-means-for-state-budgets>.

This is a fascinating study sponsored by the Pew Research Center about the socioeconomic impacts of declining fertility rates. It is one of the most general and complete studies ever done on the topic.

Roser, Max. "The Global Decline of the Fertility Rate." *Our World in Data*. 2014. Accessed July 1, 2025. <https://ourworldindata.org/global-decline-fertility->

II. Balancing the Prevention of Online Hate Speech with the Protection of Freedom of Expression in the Digital Age

“To drown out the voices of hate, we need partnerships at every level: among governments, civil society, private companies and religious and community leaders. We need to counter toxic narratives with positive messaging and empower people to recognize, reject and stand up to hate speech.”

-António Guterres, United Nations Secretary General

Introduction

Technological advancements in society over the last 80 years since the founding of the UN have led to increased opportunities for communication and cooperation between Member States, cultures, and communities. However, with rising technological innovations, unprecedented challenges rise as well. Online hate speech, defined by scholars as “any [online] form of hateful or contemptuous expression that attacks, degrades, or vilifies people based on their social identities,”²³ has become nearly ubiquitous across social media platforms, and can have a crippling effect on cultural and social unity and harmony.

Ethnic and racial minorities tend to face even more severe consequences of hate speech online, and online hate speech trends for those groups are especially influenced by current events. After the October 7th attacks on Israel from Hamas, anti-semitic hate speech and rhetoric online saw a 5000% increase, whereas anti-Muslim hate speech and rhetoric increased 4000%.²⁴ It is estimated that 61% of Jews globally have experienced online hate speech directed at them or their beliefs. Even despite social media companies’ efforts to mitigate the effects and limit the spread of hate speech on their platforms, global events affect, and often increase, the amount of hate speech present online.²⁵

Research revolving around hate speech has traditionally focused on offline, rather than online, interactions, but the digital research that exists reports alarming trends of increasing hate speech among younger generations. Recent studies suggest that while offline hate speech is incredibly damaging, incidents of online hate speech attacks are more frequent and far-reaching.²⁶ Hate

²³ Ruscher, Janet B. *Hate Speech*. Cambridge University Press. 4 Dec 2024. Accessed 1 July 2025

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/elements/abs/hate-speech/209639857B6BE08580C713AB99AFAB71>

²⁴ Rose, Hannah and Paula-Charlotte Matlach. “Narratives of Hate: Post-7 October Antisemitism and Anti-Muslim Hate on Social Media.” Institute for Strategic Dialogue. 2024. Accessed 1 July 2025. https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Narratives-of-hate_Post-7-Oct.pdf

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Dreißigacker, A., Müller, P., Isenhardt, A. et al. “Online hate speech victimization: consequences for victims’ feelings of insecurity.” *Crime Sci* 13, 4. 2024. Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s40163-024-00204-y>

speech disproportionately affects young people and can have deeply negative psychological effects. Online media targeted at or created by college students was found to have nearly 25% more hate speech than other media.²⁷ Furthermore, individuals who are part of minority groups or have a history of mental illness are impacted more greatly by online hate speech.

A major challenge to stemming the growing tide of online hate speech comes as companies and Member States seek to reduce harm online while still promoting and protecting the freedom of speech and freedom of expression that are outlined within many Member State constitutions and several UN documents. While people generally disagree with the rhetoric of hate speech, speech being subjectively amoral to someone cannot automatically disqualify it from being a valid use of free speech. Some suggest that a viable alternative to removing hate speech online is by making sure it is challenged by “counterspeech,” which would address negative stereotypes and rhetoric.²⁸ Deciding how and when to enforce restrictions about online hate speech is still a widely debated topic amongst Member States and within the UN today.

International and Regional Framework

Member States throughout the world have developed different approaches to countering the increasing waves of hate speech while attempting to protect freedoms of speech and expression. While not all approaches have the same effect, there are merits and drawbacks of the different methods that have been put in place.

Several landmark court cases in various Member States provided greater clarity on the subject, defining hate speech or establishing a clearer boundary between protected and unprotected speech. The court case *Reno v. ACLU* (1997) determined for the United States that while most digital expressions are protected by the U.S. Constitution’s First Amendment, that freedom of expression does not include taking actions that may be harmful to children- in which case the freedoms of speech and expression can be lawfully limited.²⁹

Within Europe, the United Kingdom’s *Communications Act* (2003) provides sweeping legislation on media protections for freedoms of speech and expression. Section 127 of that act criminalizes “grossly offensive” digital communications and provides additional clarifications on the framework for identifying this offensive material.³⁰ While the act, along with other UK

²⁷ Saha K, Chandrasekharan E, De Choudhury M. “Prevalence and Psychological Effects of Hateful Speech in Online College Communities.” Proc ACM Web Sci Conf. 2019 Jun;2019:255-264. Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7500692/>

²⁸ Bright, Jonathan, et al. “Understanding Counterspeech for Online Harm Mitigation.” The Alan Turing Institute, The Interaction Lab, Heriot-Watt University. 1 Jul 2023. Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2307.04761>

²⁹ US Supreme Court. “*Reno v. ACLU*, 521 U.S. 844 (1997).” JUSTIA. Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/521/844/>

³⁰ UK Public. “Communications Act 2003.” [Legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk). Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/21/section/127>

legislation, seem somewhat successful in limiting hate speech content on social media platforms within the country, some have criticized the laws as being too restrictive or inconsistent with other UK legislation.

The *Network Enforcement Act* (2017) in Germany did not seek to establish more laws governing hate speech principles, but rather, to more carefully enforce existing social media platform laws and regulations, establishing strict fines for companies that were not in line with hate speech prevention policies.³¹ The *Act to Amend the Network Enforcement Act* (2021) was later passed to address criticisms that the initial act was too restrictive on free speech principles and possibly unconstitutional.³²

On a regional scale, the EU has implemented various measures to address the impacts of online hate speech within its borders. In 2016, the European Commission introduced its official code of conduct governing the prevention of online hate speech. Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube entered into an agreement with the EU to abide by it. By 2021, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and LinkedIn had also all signed on to the code of conduct. In early 2025, a revised version of the code of conduct was published by the European Commission, expanding the framework to hold companies accountable to abiding by code standards.³³

Role of the International System

In its Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the UN made principles of free speech and expression an early priority. Article 19 of that document states that, “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”³⁴ While the UN has sought to adapt to the digital age and address hate speech as a growing concern in the 21st century, prospective preventative programs have been rejected by UN committees and Member States themselves, hindering progress.

Several UN bodies play specific roles in countering online hate speech. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has long worked with over 700 research groups and NGOs to create policies that will both protect freedom of speech and reduce

³¹ Bearbeitungsstand. *Act to Improve Enforcement of the Law in Social Networks*. Perma.cc. 7 Dec 2017. Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://perma.cc/7UCW-AA3A>

³² “Germany: Network Enforcement Act Amended to Better Fight Online Hate Speech.” Library of Congress. 6 July 2021. Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2021-07-06/germany-network-enforcement-act-amended-to-better-fight-online-hate-speech/>

³³ “The EU Code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech online.” The European Commission. Updated 2025. Accessed 1 July 2025. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/eu-code-conduct-countering-illegal-hate-speech-online_en

³⁴ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. United Nations. General Assembly resolution 217 A. 10 Dec 1948. Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

hate speech. Their efforts resulted in the removal of millions of pieces of content containing hate speech from social media and the increased ability of 10,000 content creators to counter hate speech due to UNESCO training.³⁵

Additionally, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the leading UN body on human rights abuses, published the *Rabat Plan of Action* (2012) in its efforts to more effectively identify and discourage hate speech online.³⁶ This plan includes the “Rabat threshold test,” which utilizes six qualifications for any piece of content- context of the statement, speaker’s position or status, intent to incite audience against target group, content and form of the statement, extent of its dissemination, and likelihood of harm, including imminence- to determine whether that content should be considered hate speech and dealt with accordingly.³⁷ The *Rabat Plan of Action* was expanded in 2018 and 2019 to include more Member States and to adjust to developing concerns.

Conclusion

While UN bodies are active in their efforts to address concerns about harmful online hate speech, there is still great debate on the extent to which current efforts are successful and on how to determine moral appropriateness with cultures of the world subscribing to different social norms and moral codes. More research is needed to understand to what extent it is acceptable to limit speech for the sake of minimizing hateful rhetoric, as well as how this trade-off will affect essential freedoms within society.

Questions to Consider

1. How can the United Nations work to reconcile apparent conflict between promoting freedom of speech and eliminating hurtful online hate speech?
2. What responsibility should social media platforms have for the opinions shared on their sites?
3. How should global views of hate speech and the freedom of expression be viewed within the context of a Member State’s existing and developing legislation?

³⁵ “Countering hate speech: It starts with words” UNESCO. Updated 2025. Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://www.unesco.org/en/countering-hate-speech>

³⁶ “Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.” United Nations Office of the High Commissioner. 11 January 2013. Accessed 1 July 2025. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Rabat_draft_outcome.pdf

³⁷ “OHCHR and freedom of expression vs incitement to hatred: the Rabat Plan of Action.” United Nations Office of the High Commissioner. Accessed 1 July 2025. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/freedom-of-expression>

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“Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.” *United Nations Office of the High Commissioner*. January 11, 2013. Accessed July 1, 2025. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Rabat_draft_outcome.pdf.

This is one of the annual reports provided to the OHCHR that discusses human rights. This one in particular sounds alarms about online hate speech and provides a good overview of the concerns.

Bearbeitungsstand. *Act to Improve Enforcement of the Law in Social Networks*. Perma.cc. December 7, 2017. Accessed July 1, 2025. <https://perma.cc/7UCW-AA3A>.

This is the German act that created and enforced regulations for social media platforms. The content is somewhat controversial, and some claim that it infringes on free speech.

Bright, Jonathan, et al. “Understanding Counterspeech for Online Harm Mitigation.” *The Alan Turing Institute, The Interaction Lab, Heriot-Watt University*. July 1, 2023. Accessed July 1, 2025. <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2307.04761>.

This paper looks at what degree so-called “counterspeech” can be an effective tool for addressing and fighting hate speech online. It is one of the only academic papers to assess the efficacy of such methods.

Dreißigacker, A., P. Müller, A. Isenhardt, et al. “Online Hate Speech Victimization: Consequences for Victims’ Feelings of Insecurity.” *Crime Science* 13, no. 4 (2024). Accessed July 1, 2025. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s40163-024-00204-y>.

This paper examines how online hate speech interactions affects individuals’ self-worth and perceived insecurity. It finds, unsurprisingly, that mental health is adversely affected by online hate speech, and that these detrimental consequences are increased in those who have before been victims of discrimination.

“Germany: Network Enforcement Act Amended to Better Fight Online Hate Speech.” *Library of Congress*. July 6, 2021. Accessed July 1, 2025. <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2021-07-06/germany-network-enforcement-act-amended-to-better-fight-online-hate-speech/>.

This is an article from the Library of Congress chronicling the German Network Enforcement Act. It has several helpful links to relevant modern laws concerning hate speech and the freedom of speech.

“OHCHR and Freedom of Expression vs Incitement to Hatred: The Rabat Plan of Action.”
United Nations Office of the High Commissioner. Accessed July 1, 2025.
[https://www.ohchr.org/en/freedom-of-expression.](https://www.ohchr.org/en/freedom-of-expression)

This is another page published by the OHCHR that details the Rabat Plan of Action, which is one of the most encompassing international plans for addressing hate speech.

Rose, Hannah, and Paula-Charlotte Matlach. “Narratives of Hate: Post-7 October Antisemitism and Anti-Muslim Hate on Social Media.” *Institute for Strategic Dialogue.* 2024. Accessed July 1, 2025. <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Narratives-of-hate-Post-7-Oct.pdf>.

This is a very interesting study that looks at the increase of both anti-Muslim and antisemitic online hate speech in the wake of the October 7th attacks and is relevant to the current landscape of this topic.

Saha, K., E. Chandrasekharan, and M. De Choudhury. “Prevalence and Psychological Effects of Hateful Speech in Online College Communities.” *Proceedings of the ACM Web Science Conference, June 2019, 255–264.* Accessed July 1, 2025.
[https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7500692/.](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7500692/)

This study looks extensively at the psychological effects of encountering online hate speech, especially as it pertains to college students and young people. It finds that college students are the most likely group to encounter hate speech online.

“The EU Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online.” *The European Commission.* Updated 2025. Accessed July 1, 2025.
[https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/eu-code-conduct-countering-illegal-hate-speech-online_en.](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/eu-code-conduct-countering-illegal-hate-speech-online_en)

This page provides an excellent overview of the European Commission’s code of conduct and its history. It also provides links to the code itself and the recent changes that have been effected with it.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights. United Nations. General Assembly Resolution 217 A. December 10, 1948. Accessed July 1, 2025. [https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.](https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights)

This is the seminal piece of legislation about global human rights. It is massively important in its establishment of human rights as essential freedoms around the world and introduces the conflict between freedom of speech and prevention of hate speech.