

Global political challenges

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Global Politics · HL

IB Diploma Programme Global Politics HL (the guide first assessed in 2026). This topic covers the **HL extension**, which only HL students study. It looks at **global political challenges**: problems such as climate change, pandemics and forced **migration**, which cross borders and which no state can solve alone. You research real, recent cases of these challenges. Paper 3 (1 hour 30 minutes, 30% of the HL grade) gives you **stimulus** material and asks you to analyse the challenges using the cases you have researched.

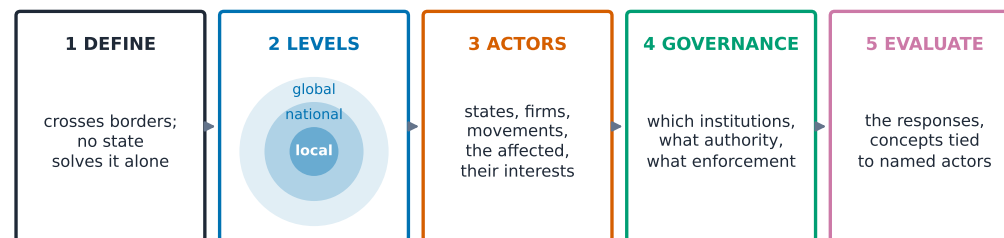
In August 2022 heavy monsoon rain and melting glaciers put about one third of Pakistan under water. More than 1,700 people died and about 33 million were affected. The floods destroyed crops and homes, spread disease, and pushed millions of people into poverty. Pakistan produces less than 1% of the world's greenhouse gases, yet it suffered some of the worst effects. One event joined four challenges: environment, health, poverty and equality. Paper 3 asks you to see links like these.

Must-know for the HL extension:

Area	Key content
the challenges	borders, environment, equality, health, identity, poverty, security, technology
method	define the challenge; levels; actors and interests; governance; evaluation
cases	recent, real cases that you research yourself
links	how one challenge makes others worse or better
Paper 3	1 hour 30 minutes; stimulus-based; 30% of HL

How to analyse a challenge

A global political challenge crosses borders, affects many actors and causes political disagreement about who should act and who should pay. Analyse each case in five steps.



The case must be contemporary: a challenge still open, not a closed history.

The Paper 3 scaffold: work through the first four steps before you evaluate any response.

1. **Define** the challenge in one sentence.
2. **Levels**: how it appears locally, nationally and globally, and how the levels affect each other.
3. **Actors** and their **interests**: states, IGOs, NGOs, companies, movements, and the people affected.
4. **Governance**: which institutions and rules deal with it, and whether they can enforce decisions.
5. **Evaluate** the responses, using the key concepts: power, sovereignty, legitimacy and interdependence.

Four challenges and their cases

■ Environment: climate change

Climate change is a global problem, but emissions are controlled by sovereign states.

Agreement	Year	How it works
UN Framework Convention on Climate Change	1992	sets up yearly negotiations; “common but differentiated responsibilities”
Kyoto Protocol	1997	binding cuts for richer countries only
Paris Agreement	2015	every country sets its own target, a nationally determined contribution (NDC), and reports progress; the goal is well below 2 °C, aiming for 1.5 °C

Paris has almost universal membership because no target is forced on anyone. The same design is its weakness: there is no punishment for missing a target, and the total of all NDCs is not enough to meet the goal. Each state has a reason to let others pay,

a **collective action problem**

■ **Health: COVID-19**

The **World Health Organization** (WHO) gives advice, sets standards and coordinates, but it cannot force states to act. In 2020 states closed borders and competed for medical supplies and vaccines. COVAX, a programme to share vaccines with poorer countries, delivered nearly 2 billion doses, but these arrived much later than doses in rich countries. The case shows the limits of sovereignty (a virus ignores borders) and of IGOs without enforcement power.

■ **Borders: forced migration**

The 1951 **Refugee Convention** defines a **refugee** as a person who has left their country because of a well-founded fear of persecution, and says they must not be sent back to danger. People leaving because of poverty or climate change are not covered by this definition. By 2024 the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, counted more than 120 million people forced from their homes worldwide. States control their borders (sovereignty), but refugees have rights under international law.

■ **Technology: artificial intelligence**

Artificial intelligence is developed mainly by a few large companies in a few countries, but it affects jobs, elections and security everywhere. The European Union’s AI Act (2024) is the first broad law on AI; other states prefer voluntary rules or their own national laws. The case asks who has power over a technology that crosses borders instantly, and whether companies or states should set the rules.

Links between challenges

Paper 3 often asks how challenges connect. Use a chain:

Starting point	Leads to	Then to
climate change: floods and droughts	crops fail; people leave rural areas (poverty, borders)	pressure on cities and on neighbouring states (security, identity)
a pandemic	schools and businesses close (poverty, equality)	trust in government falls (security, legitimacy)

Worked plan. A sample question from the IB: *”With reference to two of the cases you have researched, examine the links between multiple global political challenges.”*

1. Thesis: the challenges are linked mainly through poverty and equality, which make every other challenge hit the poorest hardest.

2. Case 1, the 2022 Pakistan floods: environment → health (disease after the floods) → poverty (crops and homes lost) → equality (a low-emitting country paying for others’ emissions; this led to demands for a “loss and damage” fund, agreed at the COP27 climate conference in 2022).
3. Case 2, COVID-19: health → poverty (lost jobs and school time) → equality (late vaccines for poorer countries).
4. Counter-argument: some links reduce challenges: technology spread information and vaccines quickly; the pandemic increased cooperation in some areas.
5. Judgement: the links are strongest where governance is weakest; global institutions handle one challenge at a time, but the problems arrive together.

Checklist

- The HL extension: Paper 3, 1 hour 30 minutes, stimulus-based, 30% of HL; cases you research yourself.
- The challenges: borders, environment, equality, health, identity, poverty, security, technology.
- The five steps: define, levels, actors and interests, governance, evaluate.
- Climate change: UNFCCC 1992, Kyoto 1997, Paris 2015 and NDCs; the collective action problem.
- COVID-19: the WHO’s limits; COVAX.
- Forced migration: the 1951 Refugee Convention; sovereignty and rights.
- Artificial intelligence: the EU AI Act 2024; companies and states.
- Links between challenges, with the Pakistan floods and COVID-19.