



## ESIL Interest Group on International Organizations

### Call for Papers | ESIL Annual Conference 2022 | Utrecht

The ESIL Interest Group on International Organizations welcomes submissions from early career scholars for the interest group workshop taking place as part of the ESIL Annual Conference on **Thursday 1 September 2022, 09.00-12.00**, in Janskerkhof 3, Utrecht, The Netherlands.

THEME:

#### **International organizations, elites, and masses: perspectives on in/exclusion**

The question of inclusion in world institutions has been a persistent object of inquiry in international law and international relations. Typically these address questions such as who should be included in decision making or who should be present in meetings or conferences. Thus, many accounts have often focused on what some perceive ‘a head-counting exercise’: a certain number of women (or women of color) being included in a decision-making body or numbers of indigenous representatives traveling to the headquarters of international organizations (IOs) - numbers that anyway continue to be less than impressive. Less attention has been paid to the ways in which IOs and international experts promote orders that fail to serve the interests of masses or are devised to contain anti-systemic movements that might endanger the *status quo*. IOs do so, at times, by setting standards/promoting policies for ‘ideal life’, ‘healthy economy’ or ‘model state’ that often obscures and may even reinforce structural disparity in local and global orders. At the same time there is often an empowerment of global and local elites and disconnect from the masses from the potential of internationalist actions. For the 2022 ESIL Annual Meeting, we call for papers that discuss different pathways of inquiry into IOs and the making of local and global elites.

#### **International institutions, elites, and elitist orders**

Since the mid-19th century, several generations of international organizations have been established to exercise a variety of mandates. Regardless of whose interests they eventually serve, international organizations often present their work as improving the life of the masses, such as promoting programmes that benefit the majority and attending to the needs of the most vulnerable. The post-1945 world order and the rise of ‘development’ as a new standard of excellence for nation

states has reinforced the ‘public’ image of international institutions, suggesting that they act as a global structure for redistributing resources and promoting social justice.

Over the last several decades, international organizations have carved out an exclusive space for setting indexes and monitoring them, taken part in the making of modern states in the Global South, and became important points of contact for transnational networks of civil society organizations across the globe. Many of these activities have led to, institutionalized, and legitimized certain configurations of socio-politico-economic powers in local and global orders. Expertise as the social capital central to IOs’ identity, culture, and language has been the persistent mode of argumentation in support of certain orders. In other words, IOs, by presenting their indexes, standards, and policy choices as the most scientifically suitable options, seek to create a cloak of legitimacy that is somehow outside political contestation. Such a depoliticized image, of course, invisibilized the politics of expertise (and its distributive implications). This is what is known in critical and sociological international law and international relations as the ‘knowledge-power’ link.

Yet, it is not only knowledge-power linkages that can alienate masses and their interests from global governance. Global governance also happens through ignorance; through, for example, “racialized assumptions and frameworks, blindnesses and indifferences”.<sup>1</sup> One example is the campaign by UN agencies and development banks in support of neoliberal transformation of the developing world starting from the late 1970s, whereby liberalization of trade and finance were portrayed as essential to bringing about development and prosperity. The success of this agenda lay in presenting neoliberal choices as ‘the most scientifically suitable’ and ‘backed by evidence’. The neoliberal turn put an end to poverty amelioration programmes in many countries and international institutions and reinforced the rule of elites. More broadly, many technical assistance projects, organized by IOs, empower and legitimize elite minorities in developing countries contributing to continuing polarization on the basis of race or ethnicity. Further, peacekeeping or peace-building activities conducted by international civil servants can also serve to institutionalize the power of elites in war-torn countries, often prolonging unrest as a result.

We invite papers around the theme of international organizations, elites, and in/exclusion. Some suggested sub-themes are as follows:

- International organizations and the making of (transnational) elites
- Technical assistance in the Global South and the making of elites
- Universal standards, inequality, and ignorance
- International organization, depoliticization and exclusion
- International studies, neoliberal pedagogy, and international institutions

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<sup>1</sup> Mills, ‘Global White Ignorance’, in L. McGoe and M. Gross (eds.), *Routledge International Handbook of Ignorance Studies*, 219.

- International organizations, elites, expertise, and backlash
- Disconnect between elites and populations in the context of the work of IOs
- Legitimacy and accountability in the functioning of international organizations
- Internal policies and guidance on inclusion and diversity

The papers can focus on selected cases of international organizations and their initiatives or discuss IOs and in/exclusion in general terms. They can be solution-oriented (finding solutions within current local and global orders) or be written from the perspective of critique (uncovering less-visible power relations without necessarily offering a solution).

The abstracts should be between **500 and 600 words**, and be submitted, alongside a short biography of **200 words maximum** in the same document, to [CoordinatingCommittee@igioesil.blog](mailto:CoordinatingCommittee@igioesil.blog). The deadline for submission of the abstract is Wednesday, 20 April 2022. Participants will be expected to submit an extended abstract of **3,000 words** ahead of the Conference.

Given the aims and format of the panels adopted by ESIL, the Interest Group will select abstracts pursuant to the following criteria:

- Submissions by early-career scholars
- Originality and innovativeness of the work
- Relevance to the Panel theme
- Geographical and gender balance

The following information must be provided with each abstract:

- The author's name and any affiliation
- Small biography (should be included in the same document)
- The author's contact details
- Whether the author is a current ESIL member

The ESIL encourages anyone participating in its activities to become a member, as the Society relies primarily on membership contributions to ensure its sustainability.

### **Organising Committee**

- Lorenzo Gasbarri (Research Fellow in public international law, University of Bocconi)
- Laura Luisa Huici Sancho (University Professor in international law, University of Barcelona)
- Gail Lythgoe (Lecturer in International Law, University of Manchester)
- Negar Mansouri (PhD candidate, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies)

- Miša Zgonec-Rozej (Legal Officer, International Criminal Court)

**ESIL Young Scholar Prize (YSP)**

Papers accepted for this interest group workshop will be eligible for the ESIL YSP. Candidates must be ESIL members at the time of the submission of the abstract. More details about the prize, eligibility, and procedure can be found here: <https://esil-sedi.eu/esil-ysp/>