



International Business
and Human Rights
Interest Group



Call for Papers

ESIL Interest Group on International Business and Human Rights
Annual Conference of the European Society of International Law (ESIL):
“Reconstructing International Law”
Berlin, Germany | 10–13 September 2025
(Interest Group Workshops: 10 & 11 September 2025)

Theme:

“Reconstructing International Law:
Structural Shifts Under the UN Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights”

International Business and Human Rights Annual Workshop

20th ESIL Annual Conference
11 September 2025
Berlin, Germany

Workshop Overview

Aligned with the theme of the ESIL Conference, ‘Reconstructing International Law’, this workshop examines the potential of the UN Treaty on Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises with Respect to Human Rights to reshape the relationship between international business and human rights. The treaty seeks to go beyond the voluntary framework of the 2011 UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights by introducing binding corporate accountability mechanisms. This entails changes to the architecture of International Business and Human Rights Law (IBHRL), with potential spillover effects on other branches of international law.

Discussions will explore how this instrument can address existing gaps in international law, considering both the impact of transnational corporations on fundamental rights and the opposition of some states and corporations, which argue that the treaty could negatively affect investments and competition.

The workshop will bring together inter-, pluri-, and transdisciplinary perspectives to examine how the treaty may contribute to the reconstruction of the international legal landscape, the strengthening of corporate legal responsibility, and the protection of vulnerable communities. Among other aspects, it will assess the treaty’s implications for international business law,

enforcement mechanisms, and the balance between international regulations and global economic interests.

While the focus of the workshop is on the prospective UN Business and Human Rights Treaty, we also welcome contributions, which seek to explore the impacts and implications of introducing mandatory and legally binding rules in this context with reference to other developments taking place in a comparative and global perspective.

Key Themes

Contributions are encouraged to address, but are not limited to, the following topics:

+ Gaps in Existing International Legal Frameworks

To what extent can the UN Treaty address the current shortcomings in protecting human rights from the impact of transnational corporate activities? How can economic interests and obligations to uphold fundamental rights be balanced?

+ Mandatory vs. Voluntary Obligations

Is this treaty a decisive step towards corporate legal accountability, or does it risk triggering adverse reactions from the private sector? What are the implications for principles of international law and existing business regulatory mechanisms?

+ Role of Non-State Actors

What role do civil society, trade unions, and international organisations play in the treaty negotiation process? To what extent can their participation influence the content and implementation of the treaty?

+ Corporate Environmental Accountability and Human Rights

What role should environmental and climate considerations play in the UN Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights? Should companies have autonomous obligations regarding environmental and climate impacts, or should these be integrated solely as elements linked to human rights? What legal and practical implications would each approach have for corporate responsibility and victims' access to justice?

+ Impact on Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

How might this treaty reshape the international legal framework by introducing more effective mechanisms for corporate accountability? What relationship will it have with international commercial and investment arbitration tribunals?

+ Decline of Bilateral Investment Treaties (Bits) and its Effects on Investment Flows

How will the UN Treaty influence the global investment environment, considering the decreasing number of bilateral investment treaties? What impact will new regulations have on investor protection and states' policies for attracting foreign capital?

+ Comparative Dimension

What lessons can be learned from other international legal initiatives on business regulation and human rights protection? How does this treaty compare with emerging national and regional frameworks, such as the EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive?

+ Reconstruction Dimension

What architectural changes might the treaty introduce to the international legal system? How could it influence the evolution of international regulations on

corporate accountability and human rights in a dynamic geopolitical and economic context?

ESIL Selection Criteria

- **Originality**
- **Methodology**
- **Relevance to the theme**
- **Respect for diversity, equity, and inclusion**
- **Priority for ESIL members**

We also aim to ensure a balance between senior scholars and early career researchers.

Submission of Proposals and Timeline

All members of the ESIL Interest Group on International Business and Human Rights are invited to submit abstracts of up to **500 words**.

- **Deadline for abstract submission:** 15 April 2025
- **Submission email:** esiligbhr@gmail.com
- **Required information:**
 - Author's name and affiliation
 - A short biography of the author
 - Contact details, including email address
 - Membership in ESIL and the IG
 - If you would like to be considered for the ESIL Early-Career Scholar Prize

Please email your **CV and abstract (max. 500 words, PDF format)**, indicating in the subject line '**ESIL IG BHR Call for Papers**'.

Selected authors will be notified by **1 May 2025**. They will be required to submit a draft paper of approximately **4,000 words** by **22 August 2025**, which will be circulated among workshop participants.

A detailed programme of the workshop, including the thematic blocks for presentations and discussions, will be circulated and published by the end of **May 2025**.

Important Information

- The Interest Group cannot provide funding for travel and accommodation.
- ESIL travel grants and financial support options are available.
- All participants must register for the **ESIL Annual Conference**. There is an option to register for the Interest Group Workshops only, but all participants are warmly encouraged to attend the full event.
- Selected authors may opt to be considered for the **ESIL Early-Career Scholar Prize**, subject to eligibility conditions available on the **ESIL website**.

We wish everyone a productive academic year and look forward to meeting you!

For any inquiries, please email us at: esiligbhr@gmail.com.