



Call for Papers

The Reconstruction of Victimhood in International Human Rights Law

**Pre-Conference Workshop of the Interest Group on International Human Rights Law
Convened by Elena Abrusci, Joyce De Coninck, Otto Spijkers and Pierre Thielbörger**

**2025 ESIL Annual Conference on “Reconstructing International Law”
10-13 September 2025, Berlin
Hosted by the Department of Law of Freie Universität Berlin**

The concept of victimhood occupies a central place in international human rights law, shaping narratives of justice, inclusion, accountability, and reparations. Traditionally, the focus is on victims as passive recipients of harm looking for compensation, emphasizing their suffering while potentially overlooking their agency, resilience, and contributions to transformative justice. With this in mind, strict legal understandings of victimhood cause exclusionary effects and further exacerbate the marginalization and disadvantages experienced by certain categories of victims.

As contemporary challenges emerge in relation to democratic backlash, armed conflicts, climate crisis, and modern technologies, the field of international human rights law must not only reimagine how rights are interpreted and implemented, but it also needs new understandings of access, harm, and representation. Therefore, a reconstruction of ‘victimhood’ is both timely and necessary.

This call invites innovative contributions that critique and reconstruct how ‘victimhood’ is understood, represented, and operationalized in (international) human rights law and litigation, both at substantive and procedural level across international, regional and domestic regimes. We aim to foster discussions that highlight victim/survivor-centred approaches, amplify marginalized voices, and envision pathways for empowerment and justice.

We encourage submissions that address, but are not limited to, the following topics:

1. Reconstructing ‘Victimhood’

- How can international human rights law better recognize the agency and resilience of victims?
- Is ‘victim’ even the most appropriate term, and if not, what is a better alternative?
- How does this term intersect with the notions of dependency, intersectionality and vulnerability?
- How is the admissibility condition of victimhood in accessing legal remedies modulated across different international, regional and domestic regimes and how

does this affect access to an effective remedy?

- How can international tribunals, truth commissions, and reparations programs adopt more inclusive and participatory approaches to victims, in terms of access, representation and remedies?

2. Re-imagining Victimhood Through Alternative Lenses

- Can cross-fertilisation between international human rights law and other fields of international law advance novel approaches to victimhood?
- How can international human rights organs benefit from other disciplines, e.g. criminology, victimology?
- How do political and cultural narratives and media representations shape global understandings of victimhood?
- What roles do art (music), literature, and storytelling play in reconstructing victim identities?

3. Emerging Challenges and Actors

- How should international human rights law address new forms of harm, such as digital violence and climate displacement?
- What roles do actors such as Indigenous peoples, NGOs, civil society or grassroots movements, play in shaping new understandings of victimhood?
- How does the emergence of digital evidence impact the establishing of victim status?

Submission Guidelines

Submissions are welcome from scholars, practitioners, and activists across disciplines and career stages. Presentations should present original research or novel theoretical insights that align with the conference theme, i.e., reconstructing international law.

Abstracts of no more than 500 words, along with a short (200 words) biography, should be submitted by 20 April 2025. Participants will be notified about the outcome of the selection process by 30 April 2025.

Submissions and inquiries should be directed to esilighumanrightslaw@gmail.com and o.spijkers@luc.leidenuniv.nl.

We look forward to welcoming participants in person for this workshop, which will be held onsite in Berlin. Before you submit an abstract proposal, please ensure that you are able to travel to Berlin.

Conference Details

The 2025 ESIL Annual Conference on 'Reconstructing International Law' will take place from 11-13 September 2025 in Berlin. Further information about registration and logistical arrangements can be found on the conference website: <https://www.esil2025.de/>.

The Interest Group is unable to provide funding for travel and accommodation. Selected speakers will be expected to bear the costs of their own travel and accommodation. Some ESIL [travel grants](#) and ESIL [carers' grants](#) will be available to offer partial financial support to speakers who have exhausted other potential sources of funding.

All participants at ESIL Interest Group workshops are required to register for the Annual Conference. There will be an option to register to attend only the IG workshops; however,

all participants are warmly invited to attend the entire event.

Selected speakers should indicate their interest in being considered for the ESIL Early-Career Scholar Prize, if they meet the eligibility conditions as stated on the ESIL website. The ESIL Secretariat must be informed of all selected speakers who wish to be considered for the Prize before 30 April.