



Call for Abstracts

Sustainability, Business & Human Rights: Evolutions from Soft to Hard Law

ESIL Research Forum 2026 – Kraków, 9-10 April 2026 'Sustainable International Law – Reconciling Stability and Change' ERC Pre-Forum Workshop

**7 April 2026
09:00-12:00 BST (online)**

Since the development of the UN Guiding Principles on Business & Human Rights, the international landscape has stressed that business and human rights should contribute ‘to a socially sustainable globalization.’¹ How to best conceptualise and operationalise this relationship remains debated globally, from international negotiations to local council meetings. Inspired by these debates, different actors have experimented with soft and hard law approaches to achieving the UNGP’s overarching objective. These include voluntary standards, certification processes, and mandatory due diligence instruments. Despite or perhaps because of this pluralism in approaches, significant questions remain about their effectiveness, legitimacy, and desirability, and how to manage or synthesise them.

Reflecting this complex history, this workshop offers an opportunity for early career scholars to reflect on the trajectory from soft law to hard law in this area and the multi-layered legal landscape that has resulted. To that end, the IG welcomes proposals from ERCs that draw on a wide variety of disciplines or methodologies to engage in this conversation.

Submission details

Please submit an abstract of 500 words maximum with the following to the IG’s email below:

- Name, affiliation, brief biography or cv (max 1pg)
- ESIL IG membership status (you must be an IG member to participate as a presenter)

Deadline: 9 February 2026 at 11:59 BST

Results notified: 17 February 2026

Submission email: esilighr@gmail.com

IG Convenors: Belén Olmos Giupponi, Cristina Popa Tache, Nina M Hart

¹ United Nations, *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations 'Protect, Respect and Remedy' Framework* (2011) 1.