



ESIL Interest Group on International Criminal Justice Call for Abstracts

Is the International Criminal Court in Conflict?

The ESIL Interest Group on International Criminal Justice is organizing a hybrid Workshop to discuss the question: 'Is the International Criminal Court in Conflict?' The workshop will take place in Málaga on Thursday 3 September 2026, from 9.00-12.00, immediately prior to the commencement of the ESIL Annual Conference.

Workshop Theme

The theme of this year's ESIL Annual Conference, "International Law and Conflict: An Enduring Tension?", invites reflection not only on the role of international criminal law in situations of armed conflict, but also on the ways in which the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the Rome Statute themselves may become sites of institutional, normative, and political contestation. Against this background, the workshop proposes to examine not merely whether the ICC exists because of conflicts - through its mandates to encourage peace and alleviate the suffering of the victims of war - but whether it can instead be understood as an institution that operates in and through conflict.

The workshop seeks to explore how conflict is generated, experienced, and managed within the Rome Statute system itself. It proposes to do that by approaching conflict through three, interrelated dimensions.

First, conflict exists within the ICC as an institution. This includes tensions between prosecutorial discretion and judicial oversight; the relationship between prosecutorial strategy and victims' expectations; investigatory priorities and cooperation efforts; apprehensions between the registry and chambers; and divergences in judicial reasoning across chambers. Attention may also be given to the long-term institutional practice of the Court and to questions of internal governance, including tensions between the Court and the Assembly of States Parties, particularly where political dynamics intersect with prosecutorial or judicial independence, or the processes surrounding elections and institutional accountability.

Second, conflict arises at the level of normative interpretation. The interpretation of crimes against humanity, genocide, and certain war crimes continues to generate debate regarding contextual elements, evidentiary thresholds, and the scope of liability. Questions concerning immunity — particularly in relation to heads of state and officials of non-States Parties — remain contested as matters of judicial interpretation and have given rise to disputes between the Court and States Parties over cooperation, and even to withdrawal. Disagreements over

the interpretation and enforcement of cooperation obligations, including arrest and surrender, further reveal tensions between judicial authority, state consent, and political reality.

Third, conflict manifests itself in the ICC's external relationships. In particular, pressure exerted by powerful non-States Parties operating both "inside" and "outside" the Rome Statute system has sought to undermine the Court's legitimacy when it concerns them, but not when it concerns others. These dynamics have reinforced Global North and Global South narratives and perceptions of asymmetry or selectivity, which the Court must continually navigate, whether criticism comes from within or beyond the Rome Statute system.

Through these perspectives, the workshop aims to foster a comprehensive discussion on whether conflict should be understood as a threat to the ICC's legitimacy, an inevitable feature of its institutional design, or a constitutive element of international criminal justice more broadly. Participants are encouraged to submit proposals engaging with one or more of these dimensions, adopting doctrinal, institutional, empirical, or interdisciplinary approaches.

Format

The workshop will consist of an invited keynote speaker who will offer a framing intervention, followed by four papers selected through this call. The keynote will engage with the selected papers in a reflective and discussant capacity in order to stimulate dialogue among participants.

Submission of Proposals and Timeline

We invite proposals for papers that address one or more of the above themes. Abstracts should be no more than 300 words.

The deadline for submissions is 7 April 2026. Please email your abstracts to esiligicj@gmail.com.

The following information should be provided with each abstract in the same document:

- The author's name, affiliation, and contact details, including email address;
- A short biography (maximum 150 words);
- Whether you intend to attend the conference in person.

Additionally, please make sure to name your file with your surname and the title of the abstract for easy identification.

Submitters will be advised of the outcome of the selection procedure by 22 April 2026.

Authors of accepted abstracts must submit a draft paper of approximately 3,000 words by **24 August 2026**. The draft will be circulated among the workshop participants.

The Interest Group may pursue appropriate publishing opportunities following the Workshop should there be sufficient interest amongst the chosen speakers.

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.

Please visit the [ESIL Annual Conference website](#) for all relevant information about the event.

All participants, including speakers and chairs, at ESIL Interest Group workshops are required to register and are warmly invited to attend the whole Annual Conference.

Detailed information will follow on the registration options including information on preferential fees for ESIL Members and the option to register to attend the pre-ESIL Annual Conference workshops only.

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.**

Conveners: Alexandre Skander Galand, Claudio Pala, Franka Pues, Kyra Wigard, Caleb Wheeler