



JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY
IN KRAKÓW



SUSTAINABLE INTERNATIONAL LAW. RECONCILING STABILITY AND CHANGE

The 2026 ESIL Research Forum will take place on **9-10 April 2026** and will be hosted by the Jagiellonian University in Kraków as part of the Flagship Project *Centre for Advanced Sustainability Studies* financed by the Excellence Initiative at the Jagiellonian University (ID.UJ).

The ESIL Research Forum is a scholarly conference that promotes engagement with research in progress by members of the Society in the early stages of their careers. It has a small and intensive format: no more than 25-30 paper submissions will be selected. During the Forum, selected speakers will receive comments on their presentations from members of the ESIL Board and invited experts.

Early-career scholars are:

- postgraduate law degree candidates,
- PhD candidates, or those who defended their PhD no longer than three years prior to the submission of an abstract,
- individuals in the first five years of their career after their last academic degree (excluding PhD), who have published legal research

The 2026 Research Forum addresses the following topic:

“Sustainable International Law. Reconciling Stability and Change”

Is international law able to retain stability in the increasingly volatile world? Could such stability be still reconciled with effective regulation of the social, economic, and environmental changes? Will we need a legal revolution, or should we instead place a stronger emphasis on the tried-and-tested?

Sustainability is about ensuring continuity in the face of change. To continue, one must not only withstand difficulties but also seize opportunities and uphold the foundations of their existence. This is why sustainability extends beyond environmental protection – it requires a thoughtful balance of interwoven environmental, economic, and social considerations, as exemplified, for instance, by the breadth of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (A/RES/70/1). For international law, the reality is doubly difficult – it is moulded and maimed by the very issues it is supposed to regulate.

Thus, sustainability and international law must be examined from two perspectives: the sustainability of international law and the international law of sustainability. The sustainability of international law requires maintaining legal certainty and ensuring the perseverance of the international community; this temporal dimension is particularly visible in the etymology of its French equivalent, *la durabilité*. The international law of sustainability, in turn, must provide a framework for balancing competing needs – protecting human rights while safeguarding ecosystems, managing shared concerns while respecting differences in capabilities, and securing prosperity today without compromising the security of tomorrow.

The sheer complexity of these tasks provides fertile ground for diverging views on the best path forward. Some suggest that law should be softer to be flexible – and that commitments which do not bite are good companions of far-reaching goals. At the other side of the spectrum, there are proposals focused on the language of enforceable rights, including a wider catalogue of human rights, animal rights, rights of various living and non-living elements of nature, or even rights of nature as a whole. Debates on the possible evolution of international law resemble a melting pot of various worries and perceptions of injustice, many of which are inherently contradictory.

The aim of the Research Forum is to present and critically evaluate a broad spectrum of approaches to this topic. Beyond identifying synergies and trade-offs in sustaining international law, we also seek to deepen awareness of the origins and implications of competing legal concepts. We aim to classify proposed changes as indispensable, beneficial, requiring further scrutiny, or potentially detrimental to the functions of international law. The Forum's outcomes will help guide a prudent approach to resolving the increasingly urgent, complex, and emotionally charged dilemmas of sustainability.

The organisers of the 2026 ESIL Research Forum invite submission of papers on aspects of “Sustainable International Law”, including the following themes:

- **Sustainability of International Law:**
 1. certainty, completeness, adaptability, and adequacy of present-day international law;
 2. pathways for evolution of the international order – global v. regional solutions, general v. specialised instruments, soft law v. hard law, established principles v. paradigm shifts;
 3. the impact of non-Western approaches and other competing theories on international law;
- **International Law of Sustainability:**
 4. transformation of environmental protection – debate on anthropocentrism in international law; transboundary harm; prevention and precaution; advisory opinions on climate change mitigation; Rights of Nature; ecocide;
 5. role of international law in social welfare and development – protection of minority and disadvantaged groups; mitigation of inequalities; potential new human rights; relevance of the notions of developing and least developed countries; common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities;
 6. economic dimensions of international law – limits to economic freedom and permanent sovereignty over natural resources; cost-benefit analysis of sustainability-driven solutions; cost-shifting and greenwashing; international law of innovation.

To apply, please submit an abstract of no more than 650 words to esil-rf@uj.edu.pl by **September 30, 2025 (12.00 CET)**.

The following information should be included with your abstract – your name, affiliation, email address, whether you are an ESIL member, plus a one-page curriculum vitae. The organisers also welcome proposals for poster presentations.

Successful applicants will be notified by email by **November 15, 2025**. The deadline for submission of the complete drafts to be discussed at the Research Forum is **February 28, 2026**.

To ensure a broad range of speakers at ESIL events, and to provide the opportunity for new participants to present for the first time, as a general rule, submissions from applicants who have not spoken at the most recent Annual Conference or Research Forum will be given priority.

The 2026 Research Forum will be held in Kraków as an in-person event, with the possibility of passive, online participation. Speakers will be expected to attend the Research Forum, though online participation may be permissible in exceptional cases. Speakers will be expected to bear the costs of their own travel and accommodation. A limited number of ESIL travel grants (link: <https://esil-sedi.eu/travel-grants/>) and carers' grants (link: <https://esil-sedi.eu/carers-grants-2/>) will be available to offer partial financial support to ESIL members who have exhausted other potential sources of funding. The deadline for grant applications is **January 20, 2026**.

It is a condition of participation that all attendees must be ESIL members (link: <https://esil-sedi.eu/individual-members/>). Most participants will be eligible for a reduced ESIL membership fee, and there are no registration fees to attend the Research Forum. Moreover, lunch will be offered on both days and a dinner for conference participants will be hosted on **9 April 2026**.

ESIL Interest Groups are invited to organise **online workshops** linked to the Research Forum. The workshops can take place in the days just before or just after the event.

Interested IG conveners are invited to write to esil.secretariat@eui.eu to express their intention to arrange a workshop. The Secretariat and the RF organisers will advertise the Call for Papers and the programme of the workshops.