

## **Emerging Voices in the Multipolarity of Business and Human Rights Research: 10 Years of the Business and Human Rights Young Researchers' Summit**

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In the serene and beautiful city of St. Gallen in Switzerland, from September 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>, 2025, twelve emerging scholars from six continents converged for the 10<sup>th</sup> Business and Human Rights (BHR) Young Researchers' Summit. Since its first edition in 2016, the Summit has evolved into a vital platform for early-career scholars to present and refine their work, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration in the growing field of BHR.

The 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the Summit was a collaborative effort involving several leading institutions in the field of BHR. Hosted by the Institute of Business Ethics at the University of St. Gallen, the event received support from the Geneva Centre for Business and Human Rights at the University of Geneva, the Center for Business and Human Rights at New York University's Stern School of Business, and the Business and Human Rights Journal.

Distinguished Prof. Dr. Dorothee Baumann-Pauly (Director of the Geneva Center for BHR and Research Director of the New York University Stern Center for BHR) and Prof. Dr. Florian Wettstein (Director of the Institute for Business Ethics at University of St. Gallen) organized the Summit. They created an invaluable platform for emerging scholars to engage with and learn from leading experts in BHR research and practice – such as, Christoph Good (Attorney at Good & Partner Rechtsanwälte), Samentha Goethals (Assistant Professor at SKEMA Business School), Berit Knaak, (Senior Research Associate at the Geneva Center for Business and Human Right), and Andrea Graf (Director at Pillar Two).

### **The Expanding Reach of BHR Initiatives**

A central theme emerging from the sessions was the broad and evolving impact of BHR initiatives across multiple dimensions of global governance and practice. More than a decade after the UN Human Rights Council endorsed the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), paper presentations at the Summit highlighted how this framework remains relevant to the BHR debate, consolidating international standards. Reflecting, at the same time, on how state-led and company-led initiatives are key to filling gaps in this governance framework, to address systemic discrimination and inequality.

Papers presented at the Summit also explored the regulation of human rights within global supply chains, underscoring the responsibilities of states and corporations in safeguarding human dignity in evolving transnational business operations. The discussions reflected on the implications of human rights due diligence laws, such as the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) in states hosting the operations of transnational corporations, and the importance of developing dynamic capabilities within companies to effectively implement human rights due diligence in their business operations.

Considering the current challenges of the BHR field, sessions at the Summit also critically examined the potential and limitations of the UNGPs framework to inform the debate of regulating cyberspace to address hate speech and the tensions around the operation of Global Supply Chains in conflict-

affected regions. Panels also discussed the urgent need to combat modern slavery in Global Production Networks, and the role of business in recognising migration as a right.

Equally significant were discussions on papers highlighting the need to center community and Indigenous perspectives in shaping BHR frameworks, adopting a bottom-up approach for the protection of human rights. Considering the third pillar of the UNGPs – Access to Remedies – discussions called attention to adopting a capability approach to strengthen remedies and the importance of judicial extraterritorial mechanisms to address corporate accountability.

### **Taking action on BHR**

Beyond discussing academic papers, the Summit offered young researchers an opportunity to expand their network internationally, fostering collaborations and encouraging participants to bring change to the BHR field. A key highlight of the Summit was a session reflecting on the 10th anniversary of the initiative. The panel featured former participants of the BHR Young Scholars Summit, sharing practical insights drawn from their experiences, discussing lessons learned over the years, strategies for applying these lessons in professional contexts, and effective ways to communicate the BHR agenda in actionable and industry-relevant terms.

The final session of the event focused on publishing and disseminating BHR research, where Florian Wettstein shared his experience as the Editor-in-Chief of the Business and Human Rights Journal, and Dorothee Baumann-Pauly shared valuable insights on her commitment to combining rigorous research with policy papers to communicate with a wider audience. They reinforced the key role of academic research in promoting knowledge exchange and advancing evidence-based policies in the BHR field.

### **Looking ahead**

The ten years of the BHR Young Researchers' Summit highlight how this experience serves as a launching point for emerging scholars and practitioners to deepen their engagement with the advancement of the business and human rights agenda. During a visit to the Aescher Hut in the Canton of Appenzell at the close of the Summit, this year's cohort not only socialized and took in the stunning views of the Swiss Alps but also began exploring potential collaborations and ways to build on the insights gained during the event.

The BHR Young Researchers Summit is a unique event for its capacity to bring together a diverse and international group to share best practices and reflect on ways to fill gaps to guarantee the protection of human rights and corporate accountability. The learnings of this experience will echo future research projects, corporate practices and national and international policies.

The event, which fostered rich engagement, constructive feedback, lively discussion, and meaningful networking, could not have been held without the sponsors - Cambridge University Press and Nestlé. Their institutional and financial support enables the organization of the Summit to secure coffee breaks, meals and accommodation for all participants, as well as travel scholarships for participants based outside Europe. For some of the attendees, this was the first international event they could participate in as part of their doctoral degree, bringing new voices to the BHR debate.