

Human Rights Centre Clinic

Business and Human Rights Unit

Partner: [Rights and Accountability in Development \(RAID\)](#)

About

The Business and Human Rights Unit (BHRU) is a specialised ongoing unit launching within the Human Rights Centre Clinic in the 2025-26 academic year. It marks a collaboration between the Clinic and the Essex Business and Human Rights Project ([EBHR](#)). The BHRU builds on two decades of business and human rights scholarship and education expertise at Essex Human Rights Centre and Essex Law School.

The BHRU is led by [Dr Anil Yilmaz](#) and supported by [Dr Jessica Lawrence](#) and [Dr Justin Jos Poonjatt](#).

Dr Anil Yilmaz directs the EBHR. She teaches and researches in the fields of business and human rights and international investment law. For over a decade, she led numerous projects involving students and academics that aimed to advance business accountability for human rights and environmental harms.

Dr Jessica Lawrence's research focuses on issues relating to international economic integration, including trade, investment and human rights. She has extensive experience in providing research and training for governmental and non-governmental organizations on issues related to trade and investment agreements and their impact on social policy goals.

Dr Justin Jos Poonjatt researches in the fields of waivers in business and human rights and exclusion clauses in contract law. He has previously worked in different academic as well as non-academic positions across Australia, Brazil, and India.

Project overview

BHRU participants will work with academic supervisors and partner organisations to conduct research and develop outputs that support the advancement of human rights and environmental protection in the context of business operations across the globe. Students will have the opportunity to work on a range of projects, including conducting investigative research on corporate human rights reporting and carrying out background research on potential court claims for remediation of corporate harms. The work will allow students to develop their understanding of human rights challenges in the world of corporations, develop

skills in assessing facts and determining their pertinence to a given human rights issue, identifying possible legal pathways to hold corporations accountable, and understand practical challenges involved in tackling human rights and environmental harm caused by business activity. Students will strengthen their research and writing skills while working on practical business and human rights issues. The expected time commitment for BHRU members is 4-6 hours per week.

In 2025-26, we are partnering with [RAID \(Rights and Accountability in Development\)](#). RAID is a UK-based NGO that investigates and exposes corporate wrongdoing, environmental harm, and human rights abuses. They work alongside local communities and victims to hold companies to account using both hard and soft law, including strategic litigation, public campaigns, and rigorous research. Their investigations are grounded in both field and forensic desk research, and they bring complaints and cases before supervisory bodies, courts, and international institutions. RAID seeks not only to document harm but to achieve justice by testing new legal approaches and pushing the boundaries of what is possible through law and advocacy.

Background

One of RAID's core areas of focus is the global shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy. While this transition is essential to addressing the climate crisis, it is increasingly marred by a troubling race to extract critical minerals – such as cobalt and copper – used in electric vehicle (EV) batteries and other clean technologies. [RAID's work](#) is at the forefront of exposing how this “green” economy is being powered by harmful practices that [disproportionately affect communities](#) in resource-rich countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In the DRC's copper and cobalt belt, industrial mining is often associated with severe environmental pollution, unsafe working conditions, and systemic human rights abuses, all within a context of weak regulation and limited accountability.

Project output

BHRU participants will work with a collaborative team of activist lawyers and legal researchers at RAID and play a meaningful role in developing research and strategies that focus on just transition, human rights, and critical minerals in the context of cobalt and copper extraction in the DRC.

The team will also submit 1,000 word blog post in May 2026.

Timeline

Phase 1: November – December 2025:

- Learning about business and human rights frameworks and understanding the project.
- In depth review of RAID's two recent publications on industrial cobalt mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo and other relevant research material provided by RAID.
- Attending regular meetings with RAID and the supervisors to plan the research.

- Start working on initial research tasks identified by the partner.

Phase 2: January – March 2026:

- Review environmental impact assessments, company reports, and ESG/sustainability disclosures on environmental concerns.
- Research on air pollution regulations and mining impacts in Africa, as well as on international standards, and identify any relevant case law.
- Research on access to environmental information under international human rights law, the African system of human rights and in the DRC.

Phase 3: April – June 2026:

- Finalising research tasks based on the feedback received from the partner.
- Blog for RAID, on their site or another platform, about the main findings of the project.
- Presentation of research findings to the partner organisation.

Initial reading

1. [United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#)
2. Report of the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises: Extractive sector, just transition and human rights, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/78/155>
3. RAID, 'No excuse for poverty pay': NGOs call out mining companies during DRC Mining Week 2025' (10 June 2025) <https://raid-uk.org/drc-kolwezi-living-wage-mine-workers-rights-2025/>
4. RAID, *Beneath the Green* accessible at <https://raid-uk.org/post-library/report-beneath-the-green/>
5. RAID, *The Road to Ruin? Electric vehicles and workers' rights abuses at DR Congo's industrial cobalt mines* accessible at <https://raid-uk.org/post-library/the-road-to-ruin-electric-vehicles-and-workers-rights-abuses-at-dr-congos-industrial-cobalt-mines/>
6. Robert McCorquodale, *Business and Human Rights* (OUP 2024) Chapter 1 (pp.1-14) – Accessible via Essex University library as an e-book.
7. Anil Yilmaz Vastardis and Sheldon Leader, *Improving Paths to Accountability for Human Rights Abuses in the Global Supply Chains*, (December 2017), available at <http://repository.essex.ac.uk/21636/1/Improving-Paths-to-Accountability-for-Human-Rights-Abuses-in-the-Global-Supply-Chains-A-Legal-Guide.pdf>

8. Emmanuel Umpula, Abbi Buxton, Brendan Schwartz, Islands of responsibility? Corporate sourcing of artisanal cobalt in the Democratic Republic of Congo, IIED 2021
<https://www.iied.org/20436iied>

Focal point

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