IHRB

MAKING RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PART OF EVERYDAY BUSINESS

INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND BUSINESS
2024 REVIEW

In today's uncertain global context, innovative thinking on the roles and responsibilities of business is more necessary than ever. The Institute for Human Rights and Business continues to push the frontiers of thinking and possibilities for action.



Mary Robinson

IHRB Founding Chair and Patron, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and former President of Ireland



1 CEO Foreword



2 2024 in numbers



3 Inspiring just transitions



4 Moving the dial on responsible recruitment



5 Promoting responsible business in key migration corridors



6 Advancing respect for seafarers' rights



7 Supporting Indigenous people, community leaders, and human rights defenders



8 Training the next generation of leaders



9 Addressing widening conflict



10 Looking ahead

Unlocking the transformational potential of human rights

If ever there was a need for innovative thinking, cooperation, new alliances and forms of accountability, it is now.

Humanity faces multiple challenges: deepening and entrenched inequality; deadly environmental disasters met with inadequate climate action; and disruption to global supply chains and markets.

Businesses today face an increasingly complex landscape—one where systemic challenges face society and business alike and where new forms of leverage, accountability, and collective action are needed.

In the midst of this uncertainty, we at IHRB believe that human rights are as much fundamental freedoms as they are enablers of coordinated, effective interventions to solve these systemic challenges.

In 2025, IHRB will continue its work as part of a global community of organisations and individuals committed to advancing human rights.

We are being highly strategic in our approach, building leverage where it did not exist before through working collectively with governments, businesses, civil society, and the United Nations to improve the rights of workers and communities.

This includes migrants in contexts such as the Arab Gulf States; using data and technology worldwide to disrupt traditional approaches to issues such as forced labour; and demonstrating very concretely how transitions to a lower carbon economy need to be fair or they risk failing before they're off the ground.

John Morrison
IHRB CEO



2024 in numbers

10,000+

Downloads of our Voices Podcast, bringing listeners **expert analysis from leading thinkers** on the frontlines of change

250+

Participants in our **highly respected learning programmes** on business and human rights

50+

Events **fostering shared action** from thousands of representatives with business, government and civil society

24

Staff based in **six global regions,** with additional expertise from our Research Fellows and International Advisory Council members

Inspiring
just transitions

2024 Highlights

Net zero transitions are possible and they are happening right now, at depth and scale.
Yet the media landscape often only reports on failed climate action and community backlash.

In response, we launched **JUST Stories**, a first-of-its-kind global search for stories of ambitious just transition projects that are being designed and delivered in partnership with those most impacted.

Through multimedia, long-form features, this initiative unpacks the stories of the people, perspectives and relationships behind just transition projects, to inspire similar approaches worldwide.

Our first JUST Story features the coal town of Collie in Western Australia.



JUST Stories - capturing stories from around the world of people-centred net zero transitions

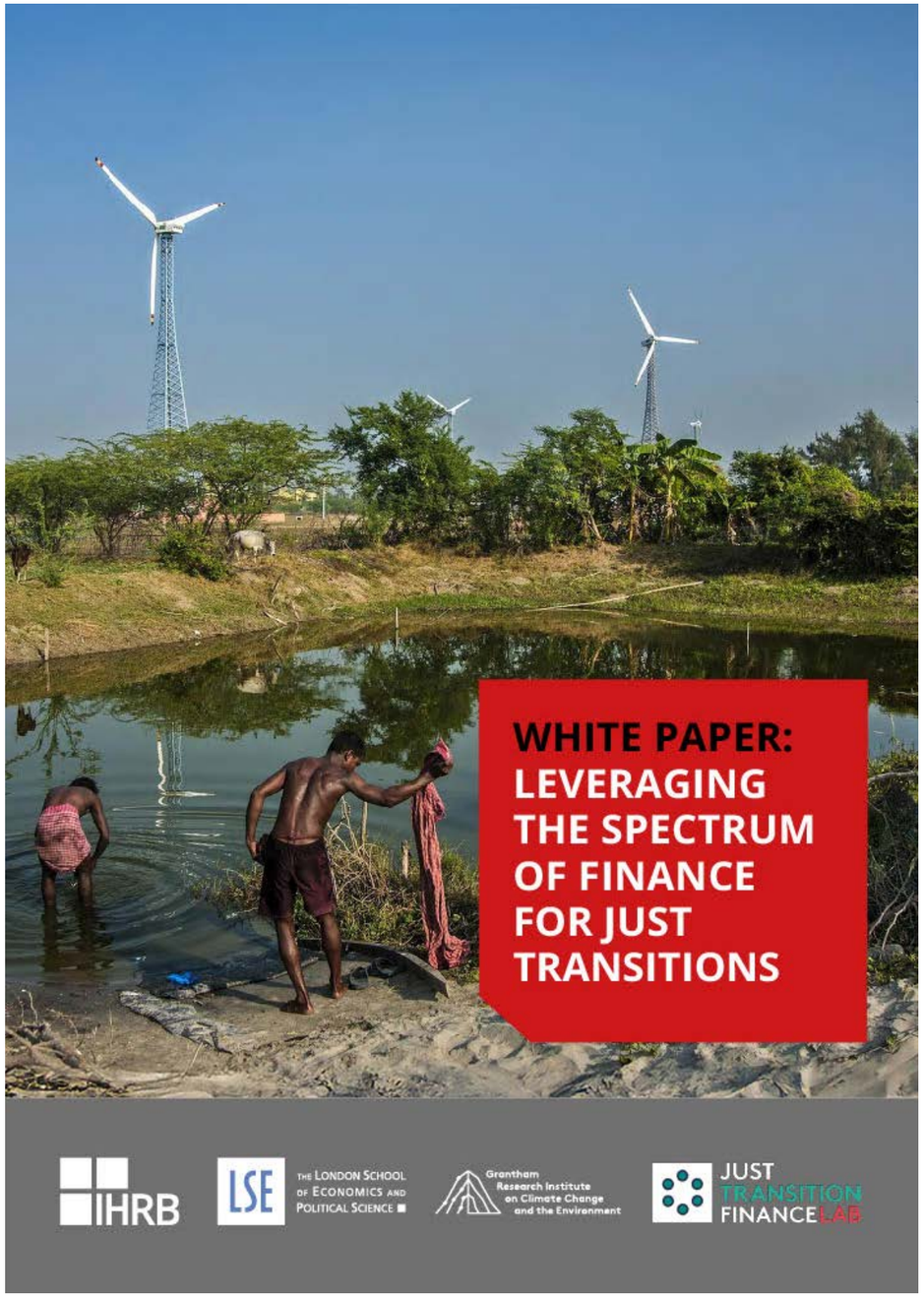
Those living on the frontlines of change already know there is likely no such thing as a ‘perfect’ just transition - but the bottom line is that they cannot be left out of the planning and decisions over the trade-offs involved. It’s why I am pleased to be co-chairing the JUST Stories Advisory Council, to tell the stories of those co-creating net zero transitions in true partnership with those most affected.

Sharan Burrow
Former General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation
and co-chair of the JUST Stories Advisory Council



We continued our in depth, multi-year research on **just transition finance** - an area that will likely make or break attempts to unlock urgent and fair climate action that respects the rights of communities and workers.

Together with the London School of Economics, we mapped promising financial models that support net-zero goals while mitigating negative impacts and maximising social opportunities.



In response to growing backlash to climate action in the built environment, IHRB published a landmark report: *Advancing Just Transitions in the Built Environment*.

It was the culmination of two years of global research on decarbonisation initiatives and their impact on human rights across eight cities. Launched in Brussels with representatives from the EU Commission, European Investment Bank, businesses, and civil society, the report findings have since influenced key publications by WorldGBC, UN Principles for Responsible Investment, GlobalABC, and many more.



The release of this report is timely as countries continue to strive towards a zero-emissions, efficient, and resilient buildings and construction sector that is inclusive of all communities, ensuring no one is left behind. IHRB makes a valuable contribution by advancing the agenda for a just transition for the sector.

Gulnara Roll
Head of Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction (GlobalABC) Secretariat

In 2024, as an example of turning policy into practice, the Bergen Inclusion Centre opened in Bergen, Norway. The award-winning refugee and community centre applied IHRB's **Dignity by Design Framework** to embed human rights into its design and construction.

As well as benefiting the local community and refugees, the project led to wider change after the city of Bergen adapted its public procurement templates to strengthen human rights due diligence.

"The new centre makes me feel proud, safe - like I belong"

Bergen Inclusion Centre user

The award-winning Bergen Inclusion Centre, Norway



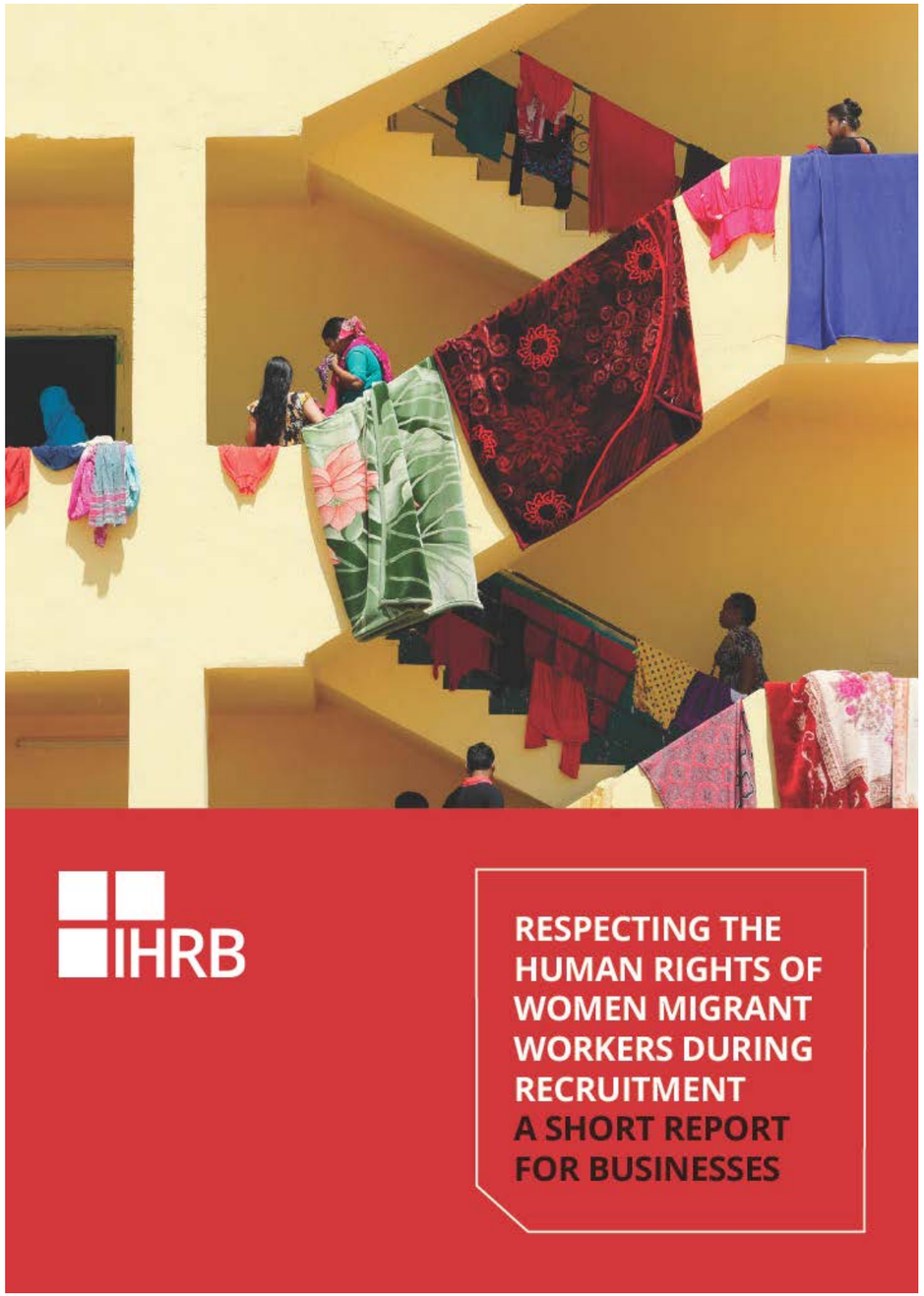
Moving the dial on **responsible recruitment**

2024 Highlights

Despite their enormous contribution to the global economy, migrant workers continue to be charged recruitment fees across industries worldwide.

To maintain much needed momentum on this issue, our seventh annual **Global Forum for Responsible Recruitment** brought together 140 in-person and more than 1500 online attendees to discuss remaining barriers and ways forward to advance responsible recruitment in global supply chains.

The forum was an opportunity to focus on the unique challenges faced by women migrant workers by sharing experiences and recommendations from our report - *Respecting the Human Rights of Women Migrant Workers During Recruitment - A Short Report for Business.*



The **Employer Pays Principle**, which states that no worker should pay for a job and was established by IHRB in 2016, continued to be adopted into national laws and company policies (listed in our **Responsible Recruitment Register**).

A due diligence platform, SEDEX, used by many leading companies in the UK and Europe, adopted the EPP as part of its Sedex Members Ethical Trade Audit protocol (SMETA).

Its inclusion provoked fierce discussion between leading retailers and agricultural suppliers about who should be responsible for these costs, leading to a UK Government Feasibility study into the Employer Pays Principle in the Horticulture Supply Chain.

Panelists at the Global Forum for Responsible Recruitment 2024



“I am very grateful for the support and opportunity IHRB’s Forums have provided. With your support and collaboration, we will continue to advocate for the dignity and rights of all migrant workers globally.”

Mahendra Pandey, Director, Forced Labor & Human Trafficking, Humanity United

Promoting responsible business in key migration corridors

2024 Highlights

The Arab Gulf States are undergoing significant economic transformations as part of the global green transition. With this comes both great risk and opportunity for migrant workers.

Leveraging our regional expertise and deep understanding of labour protections, IHRB's regional initiative, **Gulf Sustain**, spent 2024 building cross-stakeholder partnerships, and undertaking research - an approach which helped identify the main gaps and concrete needs of businesses, governments and other institutions to advance worker welfare in each of the six Gulf Cooperation Council countries.



Deputy CEO Julia Batho speaking at the Qatar CSR Summit 2024

Gulf Sustain

Responsible Business
for People and Planet



Advancing respect for **seafarers' rights**

2024 Highlights

Seafarers, who transport 90% of the world's goods, face considerable challenges.

In 2024 they faced heightened threats from global conflicts spilling over into shipping lanes - and some were even directly targeted by Houthi rebels in the Red Sea.

Vessel abandonment has risen year on year, and since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the increasing use of 'dark fleet' ships has posed huge risks for those finding themselves working on such vessels.

Since its launch in 2021, IHRB has been encouraging uptake of the **Seafarers' Rights Code of Conduct**, which can be seen by a continued rise in shipping companies' completion of the RightShip's Crew Welfare Self-Assessment Tool.

Advancing seafarers' rights has been a collective endeavour and throughout 2024 IHRB has worked closely with industry and civil society to address issues in seafarer welfare - in particular: Illegal recruitment fees, abandonment, the issue of verification of shipping company self-assessments, and issues facing shipyard workers.

"Our partnership with the Institute of Human Rights and Business gives the Mission access to intelligence and best practice it would otherwise struggle to find.

The team's ability to bring key decision-makers to the table, alongside their expertise and commitment to just business principles sharpens our insight, and helps us to ensure that the voices of seafarers are heard in the global discourse on human rights."

Ben Bailey
Director of Programme, Mission to Seafarers

Continuing our cross-stakeholder efforts to end the practice of recruitment fees in specific industries, we published research with TURTLE a maritime recruitment platform, which revealed the impact of **illegal recruitment fees** on the lives of seafarers - findings show the practice is endemic, resulting in widespread debt with potentially serious consequences for crew's mental health.

The research was widely reported in the maritime media, raising awareness of the problem among leaders in the shipping industry.

> **"What I experienced is giving money under the table to give me a contract by the fleet manager of the manning agency. If I refuse, I will be made to wait for a long time for my next ship assignment."**
>
> **Anonymous seafarer**



Supporting Indigenous people, community leaders, and human rights defenders

2024 Highlights

The rush for renewable energy, alongside land and ocean grabs for production or mining of other resources, poses multiple human rights risks.

Working with our sister organisation CREER in Colombia and partner organisation HOMEF in Nigeria, we have been **supporting Indigenous people, community leaders, and local organisations** to make coastal wind projects more equitable.

This includes advocating for community access to clean, affordable electricity, as well as long-term and sustainable revenue-sharing mechanisms between communities and energy developers.

Mangrove planting in Colombia



> **IHRB's Just Wind project has connected stakeholders ranging from communities to government representatives as well as academics and CSOs – leading to increased conversations and buy-in of communities.**
>
> **Nnimmo Bassey**, Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF)

Mining for **transition minerals and other commodities** has been a critical focus, and we continued to see a rise in uptake of our human rights guidance for commodity traders.

At the OECD Forum on Responsible Mineral Sourcing in May 2024, IHRB organised *'Seeing the Mine Site From the Trading Desk'*, bringing together human rights defenders, commodity traders, government and civil society to discuss the need for heightened human rights due diligence in high risk mining operations such as those in the DRC.

To help inform international norms and standards, IHRB has joined the Stakeholder Advisory Group of the Consolidated Mining Standard Initiative, which seeks to merge four existing mining standards into a single certifiable standard.

This will simplify the landscape for traders in determining whether the hard commodities they trade are responsibly sourced.

To complement this work, IHRB became a Partner of the Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA).

Workers at a rare metals mine in DRC. Copyright: Erberto Zani / Adobe Stock



Training the **next generation of leaders**

2024 Highlights

As part of our efforts to embed human rights in business education, our annual Masters Course in Business and Human Rights grew in 2024 to its highest intake of 60 students since the course was first offered in 2018.

The course, run in partnership with the University of Bergen and Rafto Foundation, is now in its eighth year.

This highly-respected Masters Course forms part of our yearly programme of education initiatives.

In addition to the course, since 2018, our staff have trained almost 1000 Masters business students from 30 countries as part of the CEMS network - a leading global alliance of business schools - and in 2024 IHRB was awarded ‘best external seminar’ by CEMS students at Aalto University, Finland.



Students from IHRB’s Masters course
Credit: Magnus Buseth Danielsen

The Masters Course gives participants a platform to learn how other companies are integrating human rights into their policies, the difficulties they face in doing so and the tools they use to overcome these.

I was particularly impressed with the line-up of both speakers and participants - all of whom came from various types of industries and backgrounds.

Masters Course participant
2024

Addressing widening conflict

2024 Highlights

Global conflicts are rising and the subsequent dilemmas for businesses operating in conflict zones are a key concern throughout our research and engagements.

In response, we organised a series of engagements on conflict-related challenges, from responsible exits to the role of technology, beginning with a roundtable in Washington D.C in January and culminating in a panel event hosted by the ICRC in Geneva in October attended by 100 in-person and 200 online delegates, and with keynotes from the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Swiss Government's Head of Peace and Human Rights Division.

We published lessons from this series of convenings in a briefing paper - *Responsible Business in Uncertain Times* - to identify the priority issues and the future direction for rights-respecting business amid ongoing conflict and instability.



The UN Deputy Commissioner for Human Rights
speaking at an IHRB event on the role of business in conflict



“The panel for each industry was thoughtfully put together, and the conversations were priceless.”

Attendee, Responsible Business in Uncertain Times
Geneva

Looking ahead

In the year ahead we will continue to deploy our expertise to address salient and emerging issues, some of which are highlighted in our annual list of *Top 10 Business and Human Rights Issues for 2025* published on Human Rights Day.

Through field-forming research and expert dialogues, we will help businesses navigate key human rights challenges of the day as we continue in our mission to make respect for human rights part of everyday business.

As an international non-profit, we thank our funders - governments, private foundations, international organisations, and businesses for supporting our work and mission.

Meet our team and learn more about our expertise.

