

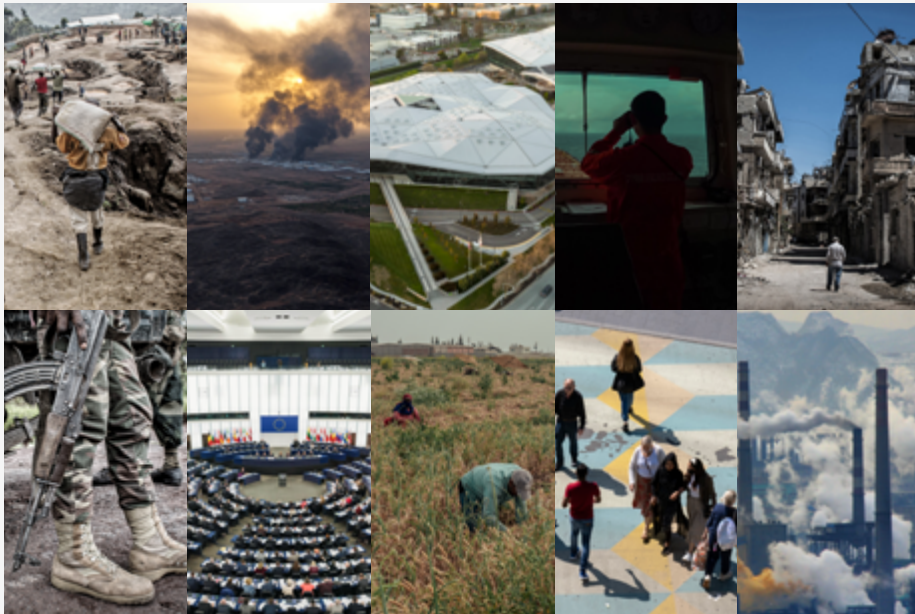


Institute for Human Rights
and Business

MAKING RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PART OF EVERYDAY BUSINESS

Institute for Human Rights and Business
2025 Review





2025 was marked by ongoing political, environmental and technological turmoil, adding new depths of complexity for businesses to contend with – and greater human rights risks.

IHRB advanced its mission to make human rights part of everyday business by scanning the horizon and publishing research on emerging challenges, convening diverse voices to create shared solutions, designing tools to advance practice, and training the next generation of leaders to embed human rights in business education.

This review highlights some of the ways IHRB continued to shape the human rights in business agenda during 2025, none of which would be possible without financial contributions from our partners in governments, businesses and philanthropy.

2025 IN NUMBERS

2000+

Practitioners engaged in our JUST Stories project - in-depth reports and lessons from promising just transitions

400+

Companies added to the Responsible Recruitment Register - our accountability tool for recruitment fees

1,800+

Participants at the Global Forum for Responsible Recruitment

40

Major maritime organisations joined our coalition against seafarer recruitment fees

200+

Organisations joined our Built Environment Just Transitions Accelerator convenings to advance rights-based green transitions in Denmark, Spain and the UK

12,500+

Downloads of our Voices Podcast, bringing listeners expert analysis from leading thinkers on salient issues in business and human rights

An aerial photograph of a large-scale construction or mining operation. A long, blue conveyor belt system runs diagonally across the frame, connecting a large pile of earth on the left to a processing area on the right. The ground is a mix of brown earth and muddy water. In the upper right, there are some industrial structures and a small building. The overall scene depicts a major engineering project in a rugged, natural environment.

ANTICIPATING TOMORROW'S CHALLENGES

IHRB's research, convening and analysis helps businesses, practitioners and policymakers anticipate emerging human rights risks before they become crises.

Our work in 2025 to address critical challenges included:



IHRB's annual Top 10 Business and Human Rights Issues

Looking below the surface of messy, global turmoil, our yearly forecast highlighted the pressure points for human rights where the actions of responsible businesses were most needed in the year ahead, such as 'green hushing', insurance, AI discrimination and the defence sector.

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The Costs of Green Conflict

Across the world, social backlash to rapidly developing green energy projects is growing, stalling urgent work to decarbonise. But the material costs of social opposition conflict remain largely hidden to renewables practitioners.

Our multi-year research project examined the financial and operational costs to companies of failing to respect community rights in renewable energy development. Drawing on cases of site-level company-community conflict, and extensive engagement with industry stakeholders - including [an expert dialogue with wind and solar companies](#) - the research identified common drivers of conflict and practical measures to strengthen community engagement and governance.

DISCOVER >



What next for mobilising finance for just transitions?

Trillions of dollars are urgently needed to meet net zero by 2050, but this calls for a significant transformation of financial models and practices.

Our research, carried out in partnership with the Just Transitions Finance Lab at the London School of Economics, mapped 30 examples of innovative financial instruments – public, private, and blended – being deployed to support people-centred decarbonisation.

DISCOVER >

A photograph of a group of people sitting around a long wooden table in a modern meeting room. A woman in the center is speaking into a microphone and gesturing with her hand. To her left, a man with curly hair is listening. To her right, two other women are also listening. The room has large windows in the background showing a city skyline at dusk. The image is framed by a white border with a geometric pattern in the top right corner.

CONVENING TRUSTED DIALOGUES WITH BUSINESS, GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY

One of IHRB's enduring strengths is creating trusted spaces where diverse stakeholders can address common dilemmas and challenges, identify practical solutions and come together for collective action.

Our convenings and groups in 2025 included:



Global Forum for Responsible Recruitment

Charging recruitment fees to workers remains a widespread practice. Often financed by debt, fees can push workers into forced labour.

Held in Bangkok and online, IHRB's eighth Forum brought together over 1800 participants – from retailers, to recruiters, to governments to unions – to urge stronger actions by all actors to advance responsible recruitment. In 2025, the Forum focused on the transformative potential of data and technology to strengthen accountability in labour recruitment and help prevent worker exploitation. All sessions are available on YouTube.

DISCOVER >



Action Group on Seafarer Recruitment Fees

IHRB's research shows that recruitment fees are endemic amongst seafarers, despite being illegal under the Maritime Labour Convention.

In response, we launched a new coalition of 40 of the world's largest shipping stakeholders to advocate against seafarer recruitment fees. This multi-stakeholder coalition includes companies such as Louis Dreyfus Company, Wilhelmsen Ship Management, Odfjell, CMA CGM, and Mercuria, as well as civil society organisations including Mission to Seafarers and the Sustainable Shipping Initiative.

DISCOVER >



Built Environment Just Transitions Accelerators

Resistance to green projects in urban places is rising. Meanwhile practices in the building sector are often falling short of new standards, neither green, nor affordable.

IHRB's Built Environment team established new action groups in Denmark, Spain, and the UK during 2025 to kick-start collective action embedding human rights due diligence in decarbonisation projects in the construction and real estate sectors. Over 200 leading built environment organisations attended our first convenings.

DISCOVER >



Transition Tensions Dialogue

Many argue that corporate sustainability commitments are in retreat due to political attacks and geopolitical crises that are diverting the attention of companies away from human rights, climate efforts and broader sustainability goals.

As part of efforts to address this pushback, IHRB convened senior leaders from businesses, civil society organisations, and governments to explore how companies can navigate increasingly complex climate, social and political expectations while ensuring respect for human rights.

DISCOVER >

Expert Roundtables

Throughout the year, we hosted a series of smaller roundtable discussions and online webinars to provide a safe and trusted space to explore topics including



Charting a Fairer Course: Advances in Seafarers' Rights

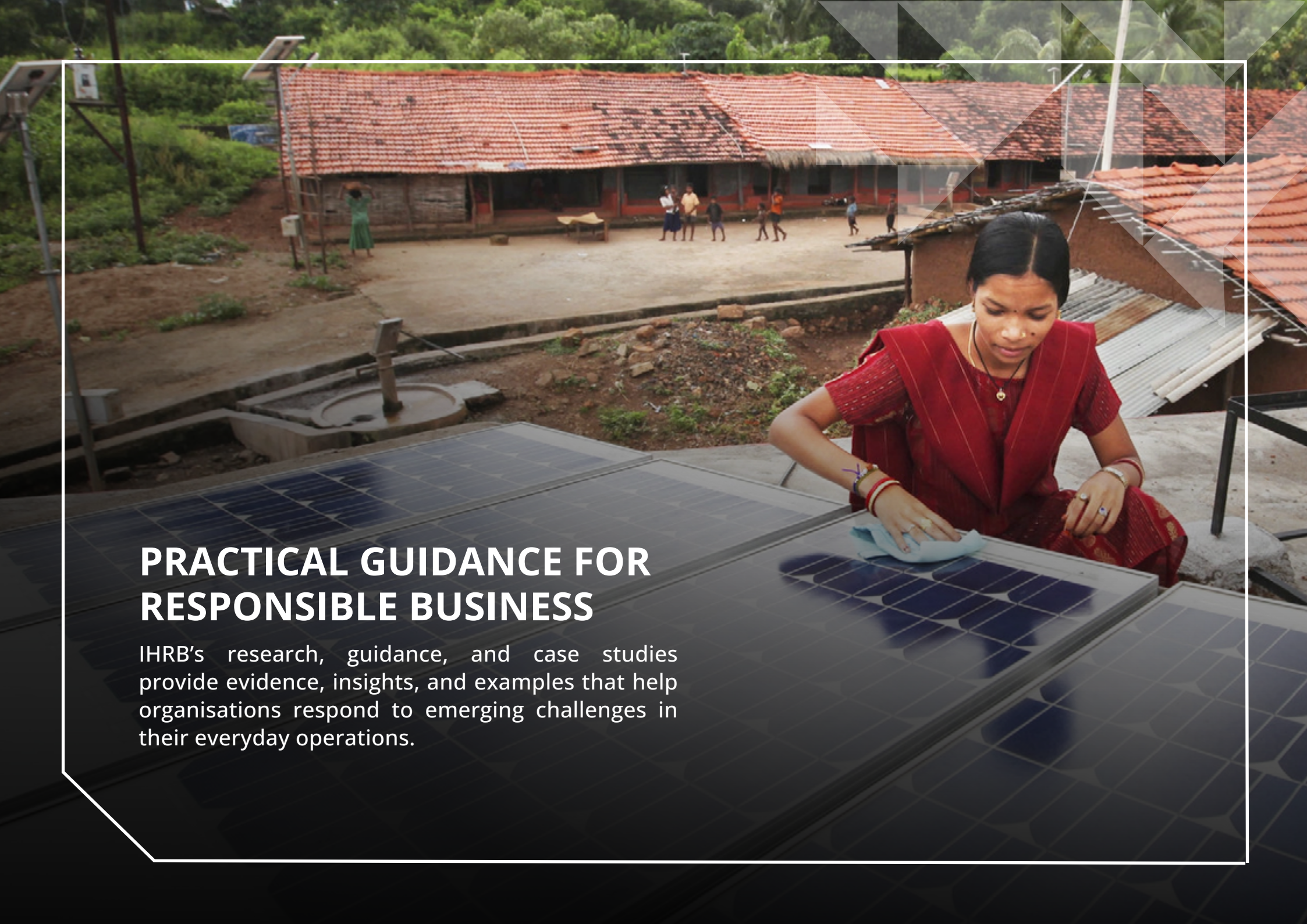


Business, governments and rights: who gets to shape the future of cities?



Practical due diligence challenges and responsible sourcing solutions in line with IHRB's own Commodity Trading Guidance.



A woman in a red sari is cleaning solar panels on a rooftop. In the background, there is a village with traditional houses and a well.

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS

IHRB's research, guidance, and case studies provide evidence, insights, and examples that help organisations respond to emerging challenges in their everyday operations.

Our work in 2025 addressed issues including:



Respecting the rights of women migrant workers

Recruitment fees pose specific, disproportionate challenges for women migrant workers.

In response, IHRB published new guidance featuring 35 practical recommendations for recruiters on how they can deliver professional services to their clients and customers in ways that respect the rights of women.

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JUST Stories

The concept of 'just transitions' - decarbonisation projects designed with the workers and communities most affected - is gaining traction, yet media reports often only focus on cases when they go wrong.

IHRB's solutions journalism initiative, JUST Stories, responds to this by documenting real-time just transitions in action. Our first four cases span diverse sectors, from agriculture to salt production to housing, to coal closures. Our features of live just transitions capture the people, perspectives, and relationships at their heart, and to date have engaged 2000+ business practitioners in the lessons they offer.

DISCOVER >



Smart Cities and human rights

The urban model of 'smart cities' leverages technology to optimise the running and liveability of cities, but the concept presents an array of human rights risks.

In partnership with UNDP Asia, IHRB published concrete, actionable guidance to help ensure technological progress does not come at the expense of people's rights. The toolkit aims to make cities not just smarter – but more inclusive, accountable, and people-centred.

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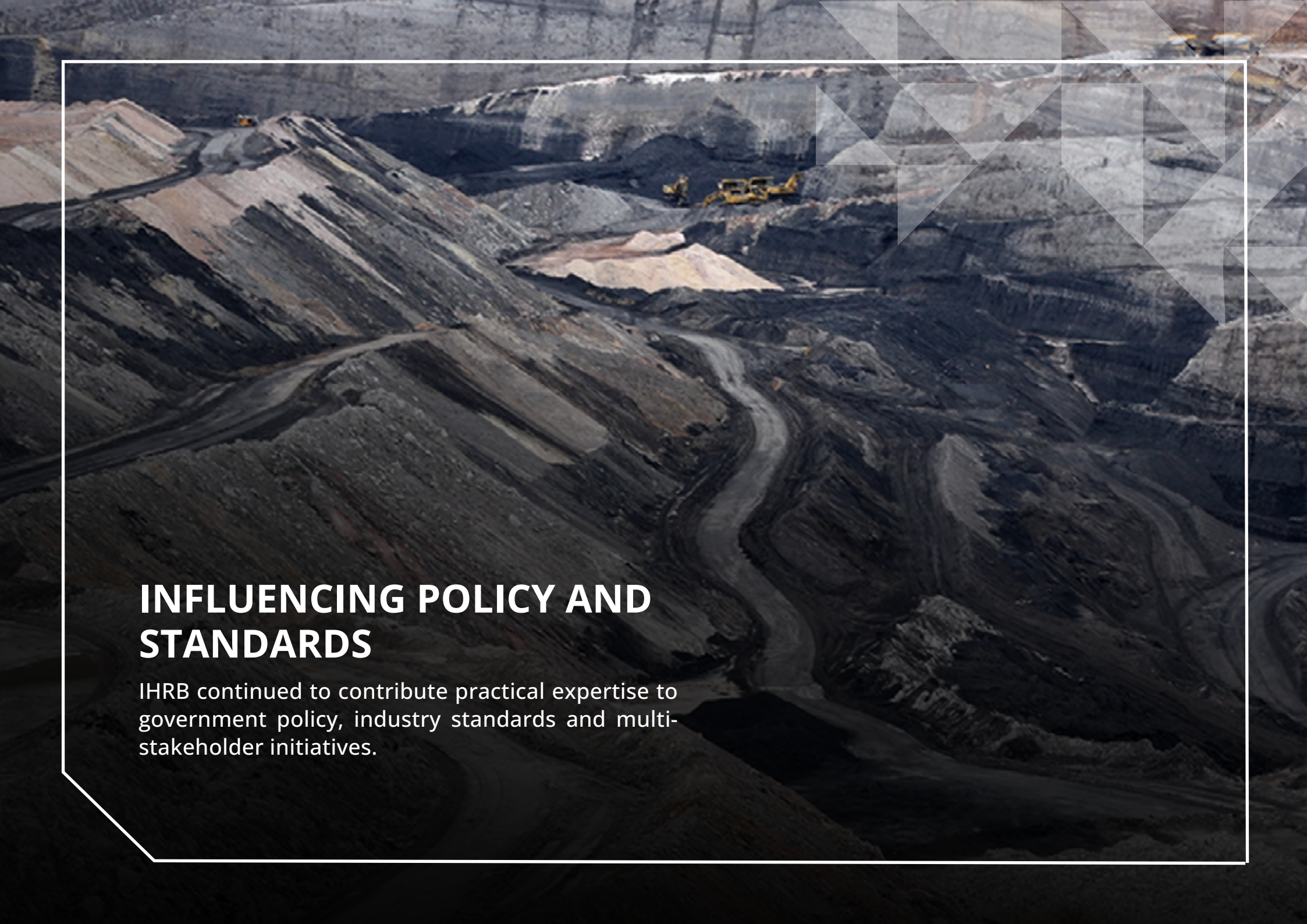


Dignity by Design

Embedding respect for rights and human dignity in a building project requires actions at all stages, from land acquisition to demolition.

We relaunched our ***Dignity by Design Framework***, which has influenced award-winning human-centred building design, as an enhanced digital platform helping developers, planners, architects and investors integrate human rights in the full lifecycle of construction projects.

DISCOVER >

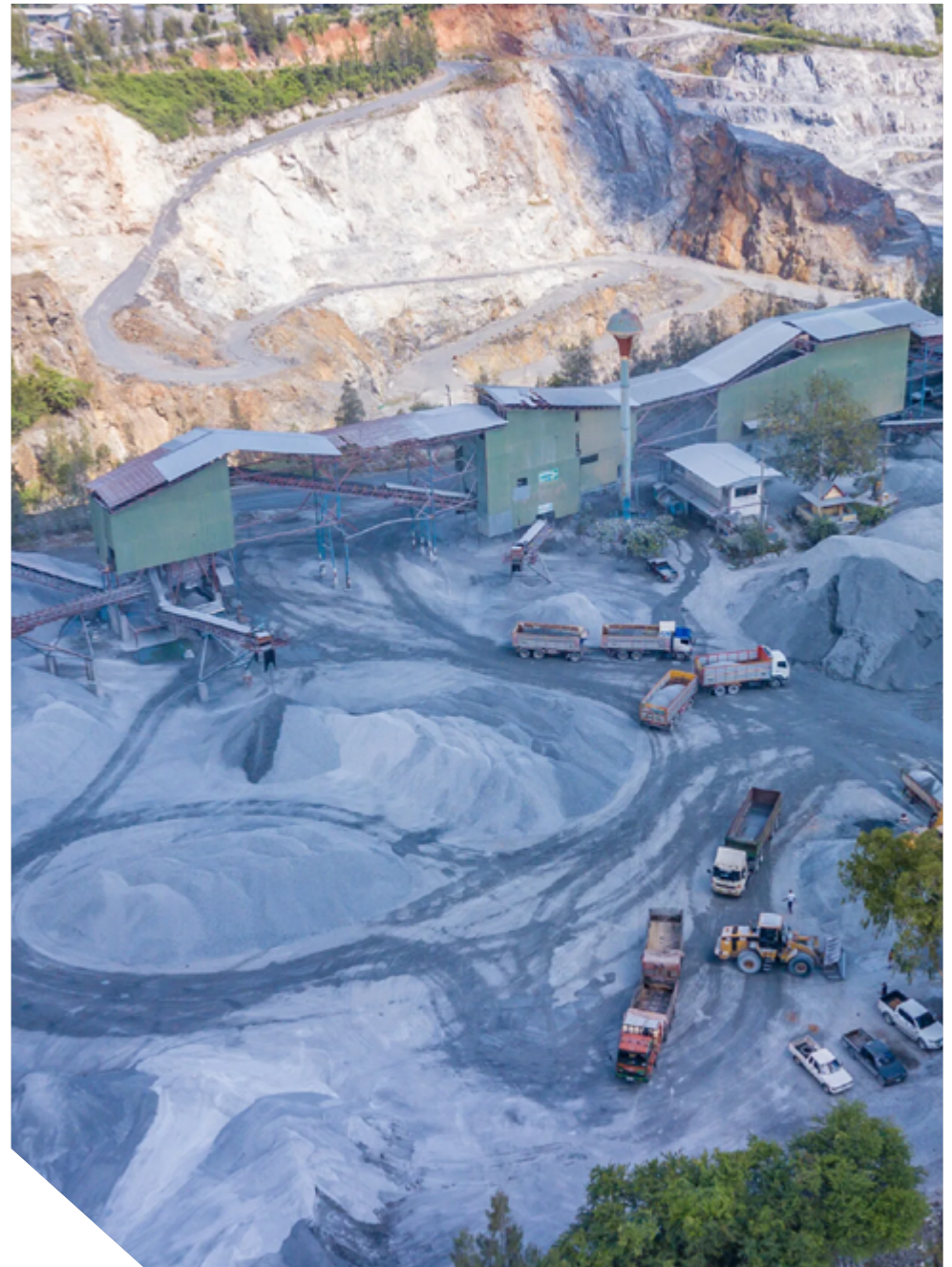
An aerial photograph of a massive open-pit mine. The mine's terraced levels are visible, showing the scale of the excavation. Several yellow excavators are positioned on the upper levels of the mine. The terrain is rugged and dark, with some lighter-colored material visible in the center. The image is framed by a white border, and a semi-transparent geometric pattern is overlaid on the right side.

INFLUENCING POLICY AND STANDARDS

IHRB continued to contribute practical expertise to government policy, industry standards and multi-stakeholder initiatives.

Key developments in 2025 included:

- IHRB's *Employer Pays Principle* was included in the UK Government's Transparency in Supply Chains Guidance, and the Malaysian Government's National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights.
- We contributed insights to the Consolidated Mining Standard Initiative, the Aluminium Stewardship Initiative's performance standards update, ICoCA, and the Voluntary Principles — directly shaping the global framework for responsible extractives.
- We presented on emerging standards and legislation to 40 commodity traders at European Commodities Trading Week.
- At national levels, we responded to calls for submissions from governments and institutions, including:
 - Inquiry into modern slavery risks faced by temporary migrant workers in rural and regional New South Wales
 - Response to consultation on Decent Homes Standards in the UK
 - Submission to the Indonesian JETP Secretariat on the JETP Progress Report



A woman with dark hair, wearing a grey dress and a black blazer, stands in a classroom, gesturing with both hands raised. Behind her is a green chalkboard with handwritten text. In the foreground, the backs of several audience members' heads are visible, indicating she is addressing a group. The image has a white border and a semi-transparent geometric pattern on the right side.

PROVIDING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS WITH BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

Building future leadership remains central
to IHRB's mission.

Key achievements in 2025 included:



IHRB's Masters course returned for its ninth year. Hosted at the University of Bergen in partnership with the Rafto Foundation, our highly-respected course continued to engage new generations of professionals from more than 20 countries in a syllabus that bridges theory and lived practice in corporate responsibility.

DISCOVER >



We launched the first edition of our *International Certificate on Social Risk and Opportunity in the Built Environment*, developed in partnership with the Ove Arup Foundation and Ramboll Foundation. The course supported 24 participants from all over the world to deepen their understanding of business and human rights frameworks and how they relate to land acquisition, building materials supply chains, and construction workers' rights. The course will return for 2026.

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LEARNINGS

Against fierce political backlash and regulatory uncertainty, these are undoubtedly challenging times for responsible businesses.

Meanwhile global conflicts continue to proliferate at levels not seen since World War II, stretching company resources and sometimes harming the work being done to address and manage human rights and environmental concerns in their supply chains.

We will take a number of learnings from 2025 into the year ahead, but a few stand-out areas for attention include:

“At a time when division often dominates, we need collaboration, respectful dialogue, diplomacy and collective action more than ever. One of IHRB’s enduring strengths is its ability to bring together diverse voices to tackle complex challenges and find common ground.”

Julia Batho
IHRB CEO



Meaningful engagement

- some detractors use cost to argue

against sustainability, yet companies are experiencing the very real costs of failed engagement with communities, and this will only increase with the proliferation of new mega infrastructure and gig projects, from renewables to AI data centres.



‘Corporate and green hushing’

- political

backlash is pushing companies to go quiet about their sustainability commitments, but information vacuums can mask backsliding or embolden opponents at a time when progressive business leadership is needed most.



AI and insurance

- both sectors offer real

opportunity to further ESG - but those developing and deploying products need guidance.



Narratives matter

- what people see,

feel and hear about progress in sustainability can help move the dial towards sustained action, but focusing on the *how* is as important as the *why*. People - from communities to executives - need to see exactly how sustainability improves lives.

HELP US CONTINUE OUR WORK ON CRITICAL ISSUES IN THE YEAR AHEAD

As a not-for-profit, our work is made possible by the support of governments, businesses and foundations.

Unrestricted donations enable some of our most innovative work, from path-forging research to important convenings on emerging issues. Businesses can also support us by:

- **Joining Horizons**, our network of core donors, for exclusive insights and convenings on emerging human rights issues. Contact julia.batho@ihrb.org
- **Commissioning tailored capacity-building** from our experts, tackling unique business challenges – from supply chain due diligence, to responsible AI adoption and more. www.ihrb.org/learning/academy
- **Enrolling in our annual Business and Human Rights courses**, accredited by University of Bergen and NOVA School of Law. www.ihrb.org/learning