# Charting Paths: Proposals and Emerging Frameworks for Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) Regulation and Accountability

CALL FOR PAPERS

**Date:** Friday 7 March 2025, 9.00-17.00. **Location:** University of Stirling.

**Organiser:** Dr Domenico Carolei (Lecturer in Public International Law and Public Law, University of Stirling).

# OVERVIEW

We warmly invite individuals to attend and present at this one-day workshop, which is generously funded by the Society of Legal Scholars (SLS). By bringing together researchers, NGO representatives, and policymakers, this workshop aims to facilitate academic and policy discussions on normative proposals and emerging frameworks for enhancing accountability within non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at the international level. The workshop has three core objectives:

1. Facilitate academic and policy dialogue on NGO law and accountability.
2. Create a network for ongoing collaboration.
3. Promote legal research on NGO accountability and charity law.

The workshop will be hosted at the **University of Stirling** on **Friday, March 7, 2025.** The workshop will be conducted **in-person**. There are **no registration fees**. Thanks to our funder, we will offer refreshments and lunch on the day of the workshops for all participants. We are able to **cover reasonable travel expenses** and provide **overnight accommodation** for the speakers who require support – see below for further details.

# BACKGROUND, WORKSHOP THEMES AND ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Interest in NGO regulation and accountability has surged recently due to several high-profile scandals. The 2018 Oxfam GB scandal in Haiti, involving allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers, highlighted deficiencies in NGO accountability. Similar incidents with other NGOs, such as Save the Children UK, underscore the need for urgent reforms. The death of George Floyd sparked accusations of racism within Médecins Sans Frontières, further amplifying calls for stricter oversight of NGOs.

In 2021, Mark Lowcock, former UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, proposed an independent commission to enhance accountability in the aid sector. The Dutch Government and the UK House of Commons International Development Committee have also advocated for an international ombudsman for NGOs.

The lack of a comprehensive framework for NGO accountability under international law has led to innovative approaches. For instance, in 2016, Survival International filed a complaint under the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises against WWF, alleging human rights abuses in Cameroon. This was the first use of OECD Guidelines by one NGO against another. In 2023, the European Parliament explored corporate accountability standards for NGOs, and commissioned a study which suggested an ombudsman model for EU grant-funded NGOs. Domestic courts have exercised extraterritorial jurisdiction, holding NGOs accountable for overseas misconduct. For example, in the 2015 case of Steven Patrick Dennis v Norwegian Refugee Council, the NGO was held liable in Norway for incidents in Kenya.

Promoting NGO accountability through regulatory measures is increasingly necessary, but protecting civic space remains vital for human rights and democratic governance. Growing restrictions on foreign funding and NGO operations worldwide threaten their essential roles in advocating for human rights and holding governments accountable. The 2023 CIVICUS report highlights troubling trends, with 40 countries classified as having ‘obstructed’ civic spaces and 50 as ‘repressed’. New frameworks, such as the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society, aim to balance the importance of protecting civic space while ensuring NGO transparency and accountability.

Against this background, we are seeking abstracts from academics, policymakers, and NGO practitioners on the following themes:

* Exploring the feasibility and implications of establishing new accountability institutions, such as an international ombudsman, dedicated to overseeing NGO accountability.
* Application and adaptability of accountability frameworks designed for other sectors, particularly business and human rights instruments, to NGOs.
* Role of international organizations and international courts in promoting NGO accountability and protecting civic space.
* Effectiveness of sectoral and organizational self-regulatory instruments in addressing accountability and safeguarding failures.
* Roles and limitations of non-profit watchdogs and charity regulators in promoting NGO accountability and oversight overseas.
* Comparative approaches to NGO regulation, both state-level and self-regulation, to identify best accountability practices and policies.
* Examination of NGO restrictions across or within continents, in different regulatory environments, particularly authoritarian contexts, and the subsequent effects on the accountability practices of NGOs.
* Use of domestic tort and criminal law frameworks to hold NGOs accountable for misconduct occurring overseas through extraterritorial jurisdiction.

The above list is not exhaustive, and we welcome abstracts that align with the workshop's general theme. Interdisciplinary papers beyond legal studies are also welcomed and the list above is not intended to be prescriptive in terms of the methods, theory, object or approach taken. We encourage applications from PhD candidates and individuals from minority and underrepresented groups.

For any questions or clarifications on relevant topics, please email Dr Domenico Carolei: domenico.carolei@stir.ac.uk

The abstract should clearly state the research question, methodology, and key findings. Please submit an abstract of no more than **500 words** by **Tuesday 15 October 2024, 17.00** (UK time), using the provided form: <https://forms.office.com/e/6Zn91fW1YS>

In preparation for the workshop, speakers are required to submit **a presentation outline or draft paper** of at least 4.000 words.

The academic panel reviewing the submitted abstracts consists of Dr. Domenico Carolei (University of Stirling) and Dr. John Picton (University of Manchester).

# ACCOMODATION AND TRAVEL EXPENSES

There are **no registration fees**. Thanks to the generous funding of the Society of Legal Scholars (SLS), we are pleased to cover the expenses for **overnight accommodation** for speakers who require support.

For those traveling within the UK, we can reimburse **reasonable travel expenses** in accordance with our funder’s policy, which states that costs should be modest and reasonable. Additionally, all modes of travel claimed should be eco-friendly and/or the most economical means. Please note that, depending on the amount claimed, reimbursement may be only partially covered in certain cases.

For international travelers, we can only offer limited reimbursement for travel expenses.

To be considered for funding, **please fill in the relevant part of the form** when submitting your abstract.

**KEY DATES**

* 16 September 2024 - Call for papers published.
* 15 October 2024 - Deadline for abstract submission.
* 23 October 2024 - Applicants notified of success and speakers’ registration opens.
* 14 November 2024- Speakers’ registration closes.
* 21 February 2025 - submission a presentation outline/draft paper (4.000 words minimum)
* 7 March 2025 - workshop takes place.

**RESEARCH OUTPUT**

As the workshop's outcomes will include a range of papers and presentations, we will explore the possibility of further dissemination by discussing with the workshop speakers the potential compilation of their papers into an edited book centred on the workshop's core theme (publisher to be confirmed). We will contact all participants after the workshop to ascertain their interest in submitting a full paper and to keep them informed about potential publication plans.