

Sociology of Rights Study Group

Annual Report, August 2026

Co-convenors: Kiril Sharapov & Claudia Blandon

1. About the Study Group

Established: 2007. The Sociology of Rights Study Group promotes the sociological study of rights. The group embraces a wide range of rights-based perspectives including theories of rights, indigenous peoples, women's rights, social movements, transnational organisations, security and surveillance, conflict and divided societies, migration, animal, and environmental rights. This list is not exhaustive: as the membership grows, we expect the group to reflect the fields of interest of its members, while keeping its focus on the core theme of human rights.

2. Membership

Membership figure (2026): The data provided in the BSA email puts the overall membership /JISC subscriber numbers at 139, including 12 BSA members and 127 non-members. Of the members who responded to this year's survey, two thirds (66%, 47 people) confirmed they are already subscribed to the mailing list, with a further group intending to subscribe.

3. Study Group expenditure 2025

As of 31 December 2025, the account balance for the Sociology of Rights Study Group was **£0**. There has been no new expenditure this year (since the new co-convenors joined the group in early 2026).

4. Aims of the Study Group

- To ensure a presence at BSA conferences and events by establishing a sociology of rights stream;
- To create an online community that shares information on developments in the field, job opportunities, and forthcoming conferences;
- To open up opportunities to promote the discipline of sociology and rights within universities that have a human rights focus;
- To create links with other disciplines working in the field of human rights (for example law, politics, and philosophy);
- To communicate activities regularly to the BSA so that new people entering the field are aware of the group;
- To collaborate with other BSA study groups to create and deliver bespoke training sessions.

5. Review of the year

After a period of hiatus, Kiril Sharapov and Claudia Blandon joined the BSA as co-convenors of the group early in 2026. In the first trimester, the co-convenors sent a survey¹ to the group's

¹ Thank you to Barry Maydom and Chao-yo Yeng from the Social Statistics Study Group for letting us use their survey format.

JISCMAIL subscribers to assess members' interests and needs. Around 70 responses were received, from members across a wide range of career stages, from students to professors and practitioners, and from institutions in the UK and internationally, including India, Pakistan, China, Japan, Taiwan, Turkey, Zimbabwe, Brazil, Portugal, the United States, and Australia. The findings below have directly shaped our thinking for the year ahead.

5.1. Members' interests and priorities

Respondents are mainly interested in three areas: research, policy, and teaching, with some also drawn to advocacy and practice. Asked which areas the group should prioritise, they pointed clearly to a top five: rights, activism and social movements; theories and sociologies of rights; research methods and ethics; gender and women's rights; and socio-economic rights. The fuller ranking is shown below.

Priority area (top 10 of 24)	n
Rights, activism, and social movements	44
Theories and sociologies of rights	40
Research methods and ethics for rights research	39
Gender and women's rights; sexuality	38
Socio-economic rights (health, housing)	36
Indigenous peoples' rights and decolonial approaches	32
Conflict, divided societies, transitional justice	30
Migration, asylum, bordering, and displacement	29
Equality, non-discrimination, and minority rights	29
Human rights in practice: monitoring	28

Members also proposed further themes under "other", including human rights and cities, body politics and the regulation of marginalised bodies, existentialism and human rights, the right to food, education rights, and Indigenous knowledge systems.

5.2. Preferred formats and locations

On modes of delivery, respondents overwhelmingly preferred online events (favoured by 35, against 28 for hybrid and 8 for in-person only). This fits the international membership and points towards an online-first programme with the occasional hybrid or in-person event. Where members could attend in person, London was the clear focus (34), though a large group (30) said they would attend online only. Birmingham, Manchester/Leeds, and Edinburgh followed. Several international members noted they could travel only with funding support.

5.3. Activities members want

(a) Training workshops

Interest in short (roughly two-hour) training workshops is high: 40 said yes and 25 maybe, against only 6 no. The most requested topics were:

Workshop topic (top 8 of 12)	n
Grant writing and impact planning	40
Working with vulnerable or marginalised groups	37
Human rights monitoring and documentation	37

Workshop topic (top 8 of 12)	n
Writing for policy audiences; evidence-to-policy	32
Trauma-informed approaches and researcher wellbeing	29
Quantitative methods in human rights	27
AI and human rights	26
Mixed methods and triangulation	26

(b) Webinar / work-in-progress series

A monthly or bi-monthly webinar series attracted the strongest support of any activity: 43 yes, 22 maybe, 6 no. Members most valued work-in-progress research presentations (39), followed by methods and ethics case discussions (21), practitioner briefings on changing law and policy (17), and a grant incubator (15). One member suggested a pre-read discussion format, where participants read the paper in advance and the session is given over to discussion

(c) Reading group

A bi-monthly online reading group also drew interest (36 yes, 24 maybe, 9 no). Suggested themes and authors leaned towards critical, postcolonial, and decolonial scholarship: biopolitics and body politics; rights and citizenship beyond formal legal recognition; the tension between formal legal rights and lived social realities; and violence, denial, and resistance. Authors named included Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Upendra Baxi, Ratna Kapur, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Paul Farmer, and Miriam Ticktin. One member cautioned that text selection should stay inclusive of members from policy and practice backgrounds, not only classical sociological theory.

5.4. Getting involved and other feedback

The survey recorded a pool of potential help: 20 members said yes to helping plan and organise, with a further 30 saying maybe. Asked what involvement would suit them, respondents pointed above all to shaping the programme, hosting or chairing sessions, and supporting student and early-career activities.

Preferred involvement	n
Helping shape the programme (themes, speakers, formats)	17
Hosting or chairing sessions	14
Supporting student / ECR activities	10
Linking with external partners (NGOs, legal, public bodies)	8
Leading a reading group session	8
Supporting communications (list, social media, newsletter)	7
Running a methods / ethics clinic	4

Several members offered specific contributions: connecting the group to external editors of sociology journals, to legal practice networks, and to African partner organisations, and occasional speaking slots. One former co-convenor offered to act as an ambassador via the ESA Political Sociology network. Open comments raised themes the programme should keep in view. Members asked the group to help sociology rethink human rights amid the current crisis of the international order, and to engage directly with contemporary cases of rights

violations. There were calls for genuine inclusivity rather than like-minded echo chambers, for content aimed at the wider public (podcasts, videos, blog posts), and for training that meets a high international standard.

6. Looking ahead: possible directions

A quick note on capacity first. We are a small team (just two of us) running the group on a voluntary basis alongside our other work. The survey gives us plenty to aim for, but rather than promise a full programme we would rather be honest about what is realistic. Drawing directly on members' feedback, we propose to organise presentations, reading sessions, and online workshops across the year, meeting roughly bimonthly, and we are currently recruiting speakers for the coming year. The following are the directions we would like to move in, starting with whatever is most feasible and leaning on the members who offered to help.

- **Start small** with the webinar series. It drew the most interest of anything in the survey and is the lightest thing to run online. Even a handful of work-in-progress sessions across the year would be a good start, and we would like to try the pre-read discussion format one member suggested.
- **Offer** the occasional training workshop where we can find willing facilitators, beginning with the most-requested topics (grant writing, working with marginalised groups, human rights monitoring). Realistically we are more likely to co-host these than run them alone.
- **Explore** a bi-monthly reading group, which is fairly easy to keep going online and could be partly member-led, so it doesn't rest entirely on the two of us.
- **Keep** in-person events occasional and modest, most likely around London and always with an online option; and aim to establish a sociology of rights stream at BSA conferences. Anything larger, or with travel support for international members, would depend on partners or funding we don't yet have.
- **Grow** the mailing list and, just as importantly, share the load. A good number of members offered to help shape the programme, host sessions, or support early-career researchers; building even a small volunteer team around us would make everything else more possible.
- **Where** time allows, produce the odd public-facing piece and build links with partners in law, practice, and publishing, letting members' own interests guide what we focus on.