



BlueRights

bluerights.eu
info@bluerights.eu



Funded by
the European Union



UNIVERSITÀ
CATTOLICA
del Sacro Cuore

BlueRights 2027 International Conference on the Right to Liberty at Sea,
11 – 12 February 2027, Milan, Italy (COST Action CA23103)

COST Action BlueRights Conference 2027 *Protection of Liberty at Sea*

11-12 February 2027
Milan (Italy)

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

COST Action CA23103 *BlueRights*, Working Group 2 - *Protection of Liberty at Sea*, is organizing an international Conference on *Protection of Liberty at Sea*, to be held from 11 to 12 February 2027 at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, Italy.

We invite all interested scholars to submit an abstract in accordance with the below instructions.

Context

While the oceans are attracting growing attention, people at sea still receive little consideration from stakeholders, scholars, and the public at large. Violations of the fundamental rights protecting life, liberty, and health often remain invisible, inadequately investigated, or insufficiently remedied.

Across maritime spaces, personal liberty and freedom are frequently compromised without adequate legal protection or effective remedies. Seafarers may be abandoned on vessels for months without wages, medical care or repatriation; fishers and migrant workers may be subjected to forced labour, trafficking and conditions amounting to modern slavery; migrants intercepted at sea may experience prolonged confinement and legal uncertainty; and crews can become trapped aboard vessels affected by armed conflicts, sanctions, or complex jurisdictional disputes. The remoteness of the maritime environment, coupled with fragmented systems of responsibility and enforcement, often leave individuals without effective access to justice.

This lack of protection is also due to the State-centred character of the law of the sea. In its classical formulation, “freedom of the sea” is usually linked with a State’s entitlement, i.e. the freedom of navigation, the freedom of fishing, and any other freedom of States to use the ocean without interference from others. Individual human beings scarcely appear in this framework. The Conference proceeds from the conviction that this traditional, State-centred understanding is insufficient. Maritime spaces are not merely venues for inter-State relations; they are environments in which people live and work, are confined or exploited, are rescued or abandoned, are protected or left without remedy.

Protecting People at Sea

Their Rights to Life, Liberty and Health.

Conference theme

The aim of the Conference is to centre attention on the individual dimension of freedom in the maritime context, building on the right to liberty and freedom at sea as a fundamental human right, and exploring the legal, institutional and operational conditions that determine whether individuals can effectively enjoy such a right.

The Conference seeks to examine **the protection of liberty at sea in its multiple legal dimensions**: as a right protected by international human rights instruments, as a constraint on the exercise of State enforcement powers in maritime spaces, and as a standard against which the conduct of both public and private actors must be assessed. Rather than approaching liberty solely as the absence of physical confinement, the Conference invites reflection on the broader conditions that determine whether individuals at sea can effectively exercise their fundamental rights.

The Conference aims to bring together scholars and practitioners working on the protection of liberty at sea in all its dimensions, raising fundamental questions that span the full range of international human rights law, the law of the sea, maritime law, criminal law, and other relevant legal disciplines. At the same time, we welcome socio-legal and interdisciplinary perspectives from geopolitics, anthropology, sociology, medicine, public health, migration studies, security studies, and other relevant fields.

Contributions are encouraged to examine the following thematic areas (non-exhaustive list):

- **The legal and theoretical foundations of the right to liberty at sea**, addressing the fragmentation of legal regimes, the involvement of multiple State and non-State actors, and the specific challenges posed by the maritime environment;
- **Situations of detention** on board vessels, confinement resulting from migration-control measures, ship arrest and confiscation, law enforcement operations at sea, and other forms of restriction affecting persons in maritime spaces, including the criminalization of seafarers;
- **Situations of coercion, exploitation and abuse on board ships**, including trafficking in persons, migrant smuggling, forced labor, modern slavery in fisheries and other maritime sectors, as well as forms of discrimination capable of compromising one's liberty at sea;
- **The relationship between navigational safety, maritime security and the protection of liberty at sea**, including in the context of search and rescue operations, piracy and armed robbery at sea, maritime accidents, environmental hazards and other threats to human liberty;
- The *de facto* restriction of liberty through **abandonment of seafarers** by shipowners;
- **Questions of State jurisdiction** for the protection of individual liberty at sea, addressing the limits to the application of human rights instruments in maritime spaces as well as the jurisdictional basis for the protection of liberty at sea, including in the context of enforcement operations and outside of it;
- **Questions of substantive obligations**: duty bearers as regards the protection of the right to liberty in maritime spaces, question whether the content and scope vary depending on the nature of the duty-bearer (e.g. flag State, coastal State, port State, etc.);
- **The role, responsibilities, and potential liability of private actors**, such as shipowners, shipmasters, operators, employers, classification societies, insurers, and private maritime

Protecting People at Sea

Their Rights to Life, Liberty and Health.

security companies, whose conduct may directly and profoundly affect the enjoyment of fundamental rights at sea;

- **Questions of accountability:** available remedies when individuals are deprived of their liberty, subjected to exploitation, or exposed to violence or discrimination in maritime contexts.

While these themes provide the principal framework for discussion, the Conference welcomes proposals addressing any aspect of the right to liberty at sea, including broader questions of maritime governance, accountability, and access to justice.

Submission Guidelines and Publication Plans

Scholars and stakeholders interested in presenting a paper at the Conference are invited to submit an abstract of up to 800 words, together with a short biographical note of up to 250 words, in one single document to francesca.devittor@unicatt.it and andrea.longo@novalaw.unl.pt, by 27 September 2026.

Abstracts will be evaluated by the organizing committee by 25 October 2026 and authors of selected papers will be invited to submit a draft paper in advance of the conference, by 24 January 2027. Draft papers will be presented and discussed at the Conference.

Participants whose proposals are selected for presentation at the Conference will be reimbursed for their travel and accommodation expenses in accordance with the reimbursement rules set out in the Annotated Rules for COST Actions (<https://www.cost.eu/uploads/2025/11/COST-094-21-Annotated-Rules-for-COST-Actions-Level-C-V3.0-25-IX-2025.pdf>).

The conference is designed not only as a forum for discussion, but also as the foundation for a collective publication project. Papers presented at the conference will be considered for inclusion in a peer-reviewed edited volume. The volume will bring together the contributions discussed during the conference and will aim to advance interdisciplinary scholarship on freedom, human rights, and maritime governance.

Key dates

- Submission of abstracts and bios: **by 27 September 2026.**
- Notification of acceptance or rejection will be sent **by 25 October 2026.**
- Selected participants will need to send their draft paper **by 24 January 2027.**
- Conference date: **11-12 February 2027.**
- Submission of final paper (for papers selected for publication) **by 30 April 2027.**