

Thanks to a generous donation, the CBR has established the Gavin C Reid Prize for the Best Paper by a CBR Early Career Researcher. The prize is named in honour of Professor Gavin C Reid, a long-time supporter of the Centre and currently one of its Senior Research Associates and Chair of its Advisory Board. The £400 cash prize, to be awarded annually, is open to early career research staff and research associates of the Centre for Business Research.

The 2026 Prize has been awarded to Dr Maayan Menashe for his article, 'How International Labor Law is Actually Enforced and Why It Matters', which was published in the *Harvard International Law Journal*, volume 67, number 1, Winter 2026, pp.203-240.



**Gavin C Reid**

Honorary Professor in Economics & Finance,  
University of St Andrews

Senior Research Associate and Chair, Advisory  
Board, Centre for Business Research, University  
of Cambridge

Gavin writes:

This powerful research offering, by Dr Maayan Menashe, which has been awarded the 2026 Gavin C. Reid Prize of the CBR, is a fine interdisciplinary research paper. It has been a joy to read.

In intent, and in execution, this paper challenges the efficacy of the efforts which have been deployed so far, in trying to achieve harmonisation in the enforcing of international labour law. It focuses on the preeminent institution in this sphere, the International Labour Organization (ILO). As a specialised agency of the United Nations, its global purpose is to set labour standards, to promote rights in the workplace, and to improve working conditions.

To get to the core of what is a complex paper, in short, Maayan asks: how do international organisations like the ILO enforce international norms? The main impediment to this happening seems to lie in the lack of governmental action. This is typically attributable to key actors not acting coherently. In the face of this negative scenario, Maayan turns to solutions that lie within the powers that the ILO already has, namely over the beliefs and expectations of key actors. These, in his own words, 'can expand the toolkit of enforcement' of international labour law. He then maps out how this task can be defined, interpreted, and finally broadly applied.



This fine paper builds its argument in four steps: first, coherence in labour practices; second, empirical findings; third, perspectives for more effective (including financial) actions; and fourth, seeking inspiration (e.g., through labour law case studies) which shows how international law has the capacity to shape expectations. Thus, a new progressive platform may be created for encouraging desirable enforcement practices.

Of the many intellectual influences on the content of this fine paper, I should particularly mention the inspiration of Professor Simon Deakin, the Director of the Centre for Business Research (CBR) in Cambridge. For example, the work of Deakin and John Hamilton (2021) showed how the rule of law could emerge as a social norm. Their findings were based on qualitative fieldwork in Russia.

This has been one of the influences on Maayan's writings and indeed is germane to his current research. The qualitative study of Deakin and Hamilton (2021) demonstrated how economic actors can facilitate the emergence of social and economic norms, like those supporting market-based activity. In the concluding argument of Maayan's paper this emphasis, on how the rule of law can emerge as a social norm, becomes a paramount consideration.

By the conclusion to this fine research paper, Maayan has formulated what he calls a 'pragmatic enforcement approach'. This emphasises the influence of qualitative factors of change, for example, those derived from societal and domestic actors, who are effective in engaging with public international regimes. Hopefully, his approach will herald new domestic enforcement trends and strategies, which are aligned with further enlightened developments in international law, and with its adherence.

As a Scot, and a graduate of two Scottish ancient universities, I am aware of the long history of the joint teaching and research of political economy and law in these universities. That has endured since the Scottish Enlightenment. Ethics, jurisprudence, and political economy were intermingled. Thus, today it is heartening for me to witness such a powerful - and original - contemporary example of this intermingling, emerging from the CBR of Cambridge University, in the form of this remarkable paper of Dr Maayan Menashe. I commend a wide potential audience of readers, in research and in practice, to read and to reflect upon this fine research paper. They will be informed, refreshed, and hopefully, activated by it.



### Maayan Menashe

Senior Lecturer in Law, [City St George's, University of London](#)

Research Associate, Centre for Business Research

Affiliated Lecturer, Faculty of Law, [University of Cambridge](#)

Maayan writes:

I am honoured to be the recipient of the 2026 Gavin C Reid Prize for my article '[How International Labor Law is Actually Enforced and Why It Matters](#)', published in the Harvard International Law Journal, and I am grateful to the Cambridge Centre for Business Research (CBR) for this recognition of my work.

This article emerged from a broader research project that I led at the University of Cambridge as a [British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow](#) between 2021 and 2024. A central theme of that project was the relationship between law and social norms: how legal rules shape social expectations and behaviour, and how societal forces can be harnessed to advance legal objectives. Drawing on insights from law, economics, and sociology, the research explored these dynamics in the context of international labour regulation. This article represents one contribution to that wider research agenda.

The article addresses a longstanding puzzle in international labour law. The enforcement of international labour standards has traditionally been viewed as a major weakness of the system. The International Labour Organization (ILO) lacks the coercive enforcement powers available to domestic governments, while many influential actors in global labour markets, including multinational corporations and states that have not ratified the relevant conventions, are often not directly bound by these international legal obligations. As a result, the ILO has frequently been portrayed as limited in its ability to ensure compliance with international labour standards.

Against this backdrop, the article examines how international labour law is actually enforced in practice. Through an empirical analysis of contemporary labour rights enforcement regimes, it identifies increasing reliance on the ILO's system of standard-setting and supervision across a wide range of enforcement mechanisms operating outside the organisation itself, including trade agreements, corporate codes of conduct, supply chain initiatives, and judicial processes. Although international labour standards often do not formally apply to the actors involved, the article shows that the norms, interpretations, and supervisory activities of the ILO are increasingly being used as the benchmark against which behaviour is assessed. The analysis points to the growing role of social norms in reinforcing these standards beyond their formal legal reach.

These findings suggest a different way of thinking about international labour law enforcement. Rather than viewing the field as divided between the ILO's traditional supervisory system and external enforcement mechanisms, the article identifies an emerging middle ground. In practice, the ILO increasingly relies on external actors to advance and enforce its norms, and it does so rather effectively through its normative authority, expertise, and influence over perceptions of appropriate behaviour in global labour markets. By shaping societal expectations regarding acceptable conduct, international labour standards can guide and constrain the design of transnational enforcement regimes even when they are not directly legally binding.

This perspective has important implications both for international labour law and for international governance more broadly. By identifying the processes through which international legal standards shape social norms and perceptions of acceptable behaviour, and by offering initial guidance on how these dynamics can be strengthened, the article expands the available toolkit for promoting compliance with international norms while also improving coherence across fragmented enforcement regimes. More generally, the article suggests how international organisations can remain influential in an increasingly decentralised global regulatory environment.