



CHREN HUMAN RIGHTS CLINIC

Project in collaboration with Center for Spatial Justice (Mekanda Adalet Dernegi), Istanbul, Turkey

Call for Applications

When Lawsuits Silence Critics: An Amicus Submission on Environmental Defenders in Turkey

I. Project description

SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) are lawsuits or legal actions brought not primarily to win in court, but **to intimidate, burden, or silence critics**. They are often filed by governments, politicians, corporations, or powerful individuals against journalists, activists, academics, civil society organizations, or ordinary citizens who speak on matters of public interest. This creates what is known as a "chilling effect"—others observing these cases may decide not to speak out to avoid similar consequences. Because of their impact on freedom of expression and democratic participation, several jurisdictions—including the European Union—have adopted or are developing anti-SLAPP measures designed to allow courts to dismiss abusive lawsuits at an early stage and deter their misuse.

International human rights organizations and legal scholars have argued that Turkey has seen an increase of legal proceedings that resemble SLAPPs, particularly against journalists, lawyers, academics, environmental defenders, and NGOs. These cases **can weaken democratic participation** in several ways: They discourage public criticism and they consume civil society's limited (financial) resources.

This CHREN Human Rights Clinic project will focus on the preparation of a legal submission in a case, or more than one case, that bears the characteristics of a SLAPP and concerns environmental human rights defenders in Turkey.

[The Center for Spatial Justice](#) monitors SLAPP cases initiated against environmental defenders and has previously published a [report on SLAPPs](#) in the Turkish context. The Clinic project starts from the premise that SLAPPs are not merely ordinary private-law or criminal-law disputes, but may function as tools to restrict civic space, public participation, environmental advocacy, freedom of expression, and the work of public watchdogs.

In the Turkish legal context, where courts may give particular weight to expert opinions, including opinions prepared by or with the involvement of universities, the project will explore **how academic legal research can be translated into a practical court-facing submission**. Depending on the procedural stage of the selected case(s), the final product may be framed as an amicus curiae submission (**amicus curiae = friend of the court**; a person or organization with expertise or a strong interest in the legal issues who asks the court to consider additional information, legal

arguments, or broader policy implications before making a decision) or as an expert legal opinion submitted through the available procedural route.

The Center for Spatial Justice, as the partner organisation, will identify the relevant case(s), obtain all necessary approvals from the environmental human rights defenders, and provide the necessary case documents, subject to confidentiality and security requirements.

As a formal submission, the CHREN Human Rights Clinic will provide input for an amicus curiae-style submission or legal expert opinion for use in the selected SLAPP case(s). The submission will be prepared in English and, as required by Turkish procedural law and the needs of the case, translated into Turkish for submission together with the English original.

A team of 4-6 students will contribute to the project through **legal research, case analysis, comparative human rights analysis, and collaborative drafting of the final submission**. Students will draw primarily on comparative European standards, including the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive, the Council of Europe Recommendation on countering SLAPPs, relevant European Court of Human Rights case law, and international human rights standards concerning environmental human rights defenders, access to justice, public participation, and freedom of expression.

The students' research will address, in particular, the following questions:

- What features of the selected case(s) indicate that the proceeding may constitute a SLAPP or abusive legal proceeding?
- How do European standards define or identify SLAPPs, and what procedural or substantive safeguards do they recommend?
- How do freedom of expression, public participation, and environmental human rights standards apply to the conduct of the environmental defender?
- What is the relevance of media, civil society, local communities, lawyers, experts, and other public watchdogs in the case?
- Why and how can European and international human rights standards be relevant in the Turkish legal context?
- How can EU and Council of Europe standards be translated into a persuasive legal submission for a Turkish court?

Depending on team capacity, students may also prepare shorter public-facing materials, such as an info-note or blog post on SLAPPs, environmental defenders and civic space. Any public communication about the case or the project will be agreed in advance with the Center for Spatial Justice and, where necessary, with the affected defender or legal representatives. In line with the timing agreed with the lawyers, the original submission and/or public-facing materials may be published on the Center for Spatial Justice's website.

Any and all published material **will credit students individually as authors, if desired**.

During the course of the project, selected students will develop the following skills:

- comparative legal research on SLAPPs, civic space, environmental human rights defenders, public participation, and freedom of expression;
- analysis of European and international human rights standards, including Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, EU and Council of Europe Anti-SLAPP standards, and relevant case law;
- court-facing legal writing, structuring legal arguments, drafting, peer review, and citation management;
- teamwork, project management, presentation skills, and ethical handling of confidential case materials.

Estimated project time commitment from students:

- approximately 4 hours per week for research, reading, drafting, peer review, and student team coordination; during intensive drafting phases, the time commitment may be higher;
- 1-hour weekly meetings with project supervisors in person or online;
- participation in the initial kick-off meeting, foundational training sessions, at least one mid-point meeting with the Center for Spatial Justice, and a final reflective session.

Upon completion of the project, students will receive a letter of recommendation from the project supervisors of the CHREN Human Rights Clinic, as well as from the Clinic Director. Participation in the project might also count towards internship hours depending on student's principal course of study at FAU, students from the **Law School** can be credited with 2 SWS as an optional course in "**Schwerpunktbereich 11: Grund- und Menschenrechte**" or "**Schwerpunktbereich 5: Internationales Öffentliches Recht**" and/or as "Schlüsselqualifikation" (§ 2 I JAPO).

Timeline:

Timeframe	Project phase
Early October 2026	Selection of the student team and completion of confidentiality arrangements
Week of 12 October 2026	First student team meeting and official launch of the project
Late October 2026	Kick-off meeting with the Center for Spatial Justice and introduction to the case materials
November 2026 - early December 2026	Foundational sessions on SLAPPs, environmental human rights defenders, freedom of expression, European Anti-SLAPP standards, documentation methods, Turkish legal context, and legal drafting
December 2026	Mid-point meeting with the partner organisation; presentation of preliminary analysis and proposed structure
January 2027	Drafting, peer review, partner feedback, and finalisation of the legal submission
End of January 2027	Delivery of final legal submission and supporting materials

First half of February 2027	Final meeting to present deliverables and reflective session with students
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II. Desired student profile

We welcome students from Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, specifically those enrolled in the Law School, the MA Human Rights, and other departments with relevant human rights expertise, such as political science, environmental studies, geography, philosophy, development studies, economics, or related programmes.

We seek individuals with a strong dedication to human rights, environmental justice, civic space, public participation, and the rule of law. Applicants should be motivated to work in an interdisciplinary team and to engage with a real-life case in a careful, ethical, and confidential manner.

Proficiency in English, both written and spoken, is mandatory. Knowledge of Turkish is advantageous but not obligatory.

We expect one student to take on the role of “student project manager”. This person will be in charge of organizing communication among the student team and ensuring deadlines set by the project supervisors are met. We also expect a student to take responsibility for the consistent form of the text. Furthermore, one person should take responsibility for correct and consistent citation. Please indicate your willingness to fulfil one of these roles in your application.

III. Application process

Interested students are kindly requested to provide the following documents:

- a. Curriculum vitae
- b. A concise letter of interest (maximum 500 words) detailing their relevant academic and/or
- c. professional background for the project, their current field of study, their motivation to work on SLAPPs, environmental defenders and civic space, and instances of prior teamwork experiences.
- d. Please also indicate whether you would be willing to take on a student coordination, text consistency, or citation role within the team.
- e. Although not mandatory, including samples of written reports, papers, and/or PowerPoint presentations would strengthen your application.

It's important to note that the project leaders do not expect applicants to possess prior professional experience in the field. The aim of CHREN Human Rights Clinic is to offer participants an opportunity to gain valuable experience with human rights projects. Therefore, examples of academic work completed during your bachelor's and master's degrees are also acceptable.

Application materials should be sent to Özlem Zingil Kök (oezlem.zingil@fau.de) and Daniela Kolland (daniela.kolland@fau.de) by 15 September 2026.



Interviews will be held in person or online in early October 2026.

About the CHREN Human Rights Clinic

The *CHREN Human Rights Clinic* is an initiative launched by the Chair for Public Law, Public International Law and Human Rights (Professor Patricia Wiater) and the Center for Human Rights Erlangen-Nürnberg (CHREN) in the winter semester 2024. The *CHREN Human Rights Clinic* continues the work of the former *FAU Human Rights Clinic* that was founded in 2021 and led by Professor Anuscheh Farahat in cooperation with Professor Katrin Kinzelbach and Professor Patricia Wiater, as well as of the former *Human Rights & Business Clinic* that started working in 2022 and was led by doctoral researchers from the [International Doctoral Program Business & Human Rights](#).

The *CHREN Human Rights Clinic* has two primary objectives:

Firstly, the Clinic is an innovative teaching format that offers talented students the opportunity to develop their skills by working on real-life cases and projects relating to International Human Rights Law. Under the supervision of experts from human rights practice and human rights researchers at FAU, students will conduct interdisciplinary research to help partner organizations tackle cutting-edge human rights questions.

Secondly, the Clinic seeks to provide high-quality advice on complex human rights questions to NGOs, lawyers, international organizations and other partners from the field of human rights. To this end, practitioners can contact the clinic for advice on their advocacy work, research gaps and pro bono work. The Clinic does not act as the legal representative of a victim of human rights violations and does not initiate proceedings before courts or other human rights institutions. For more information, see '[For Clients](#)'.

Project supervision:

The Clinic Director is [Professor Patricia Wiater](#).

The Project will be supervised by two human rights researchers and doctoral candidates at FAU.