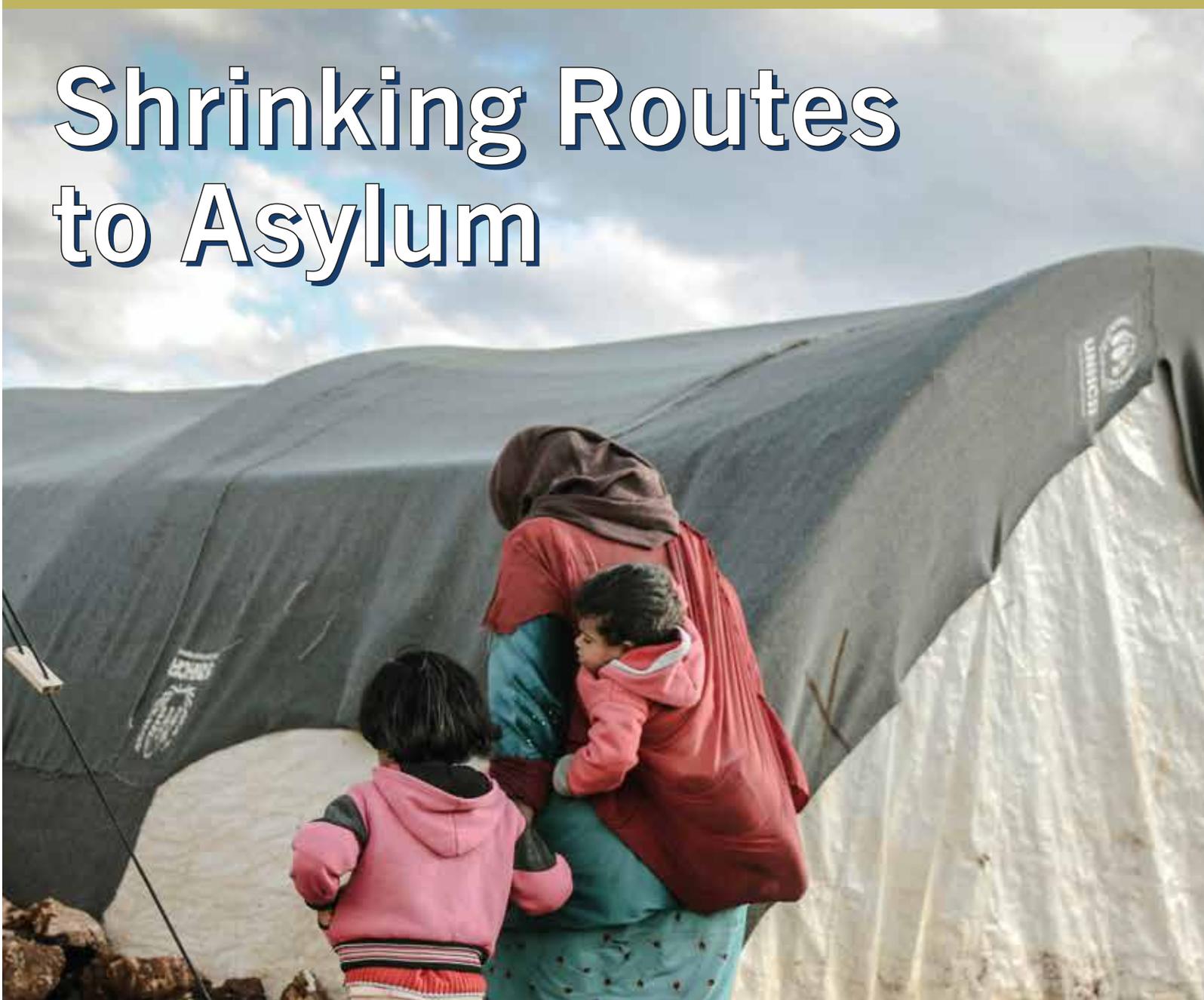


Borderlines

ISSUE 24 • SPRING 2026

NEWSLETTER AND CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Shrinking Routes to Asylum



The 2026 IBRU Training
Workshop Programme

Prescott Scholarship and
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EDITORIAL

Shrinking Routes to Asylum

Durham University Associate Professor of Geography and IBRU Board member Dr Lauren Martin reflects on eroding asylum norms, even as the world sees increasing numbers of people crossing borders in pursuit of refuge.

While the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees affirms universal human rights to seek protection from persecution outside of one's country of origin, it does not create an equal right to move across international borders to do so. In other words, asylum-seekers' ability to move to claim asylum is not itself protected even if their right to make a claim upon arrival is protected.

Moreover, people seeking asylum must be present on a state's territory in order to make this claim. Thus, the demarcation and defence of bordered territory is critically important to asylum-seekers—and to states seeking to welcome or deny them.

Asylum across seas and rivers

Borders marked by seas and rivers, for example, ebb and flow. The US's "wet foot, dry foot policy" attempted to limit Cuban asylum seekers to those with "two dry feet." In place from 1995-2017, the policy allowed the US to return Cubans intercepted at sea to Cuba or a third country, while those already present in the US would not be deported. The boundaries of "at sea" and "on land" became contentious, however: people apprehended in the water, even ankle deep, were not yet in US territory and could be detained. Yet tides and infrastructure challenged these fuzzy boundaries: some climbed bridge supports, leaving them suspended over water but, in the end, with dry feet.



Helicopter rescue of a dinghy. Image by Hasan Çilingir from Pixabay

Governments use the ambiguity around maritime boundaries to limit asylum-seekers' access to territory. Australia's Pacific Solution has excised some of its islands as national territory for immigration and asylum purposes while expanding the territory of maritime policing. And river borders have created new risks for migrants moving along Europe's Balkan Route, so that border control officers play a dual role of defence and rescue.

Pushbacks and towbacks in the Mediterranean

The UK and European states have extended a similar logic to modes of travel, particularly arrival by small boat or dinghy. Cyprus, Greece and Malta have been found to regularly engage in pushbacks and towbacks, returning asylum-seekers to international or Turkish waters and leaving them adrift.

Similarly, the land border between Greece and Turkey along the Evros/Meriç—a river border—has seen a rise in land-based pushbacks. In 2024, human rights advocates documented thousands of pushbacks from Serbia, Poland, Turkey, Bulgaria and France, as well. Thus, even when asylum-seekers and migrants may arrive on the territory, states remove them before registering their arrival, using informal or extra-legal means to prevent asylum claims.

Travelling by sea is notoriously difficult and the closure of safe land routes, pushbacks and intimidation has resulted in rising migrant deaths at sea. In one of the deadliest shipwrecks, 650 people died 13-14 June, 2023, when

Cover Image: Syrian refugees. Photo by Ahmed Akacha Syria, courtesy of Pexels

the fishing vessel *Adriana* capsized in the Greek Search and Rescue zone near Pylos, Greece. Just over 100 people were rescued and 9 were subsequently charged with smuggling. Investigations have since revealed that the Greek Coast Guard had attempted to tow the boat back to Libyan waters, and caused damage to the boat. Since that time, multiple human rights investigations have found evidence of systematic use of pushbacks, violations of human rights, and lack of accountability among Greek agencies responsible for asylum, migration and borders.

Italy has long experimented with strategies to deter and deflect people arriving by sea. The Italian Navy tows boats back to Libyan waters in a similar fashion, exploiting the ambiguities around its duty in international waters to avoid responsibility for rescue or asylum claims. Human rights advocates argue that these practices constitute *refoulement*, or the return of asylum-seekers to places where they are at risk, a practice explicitly prohibited in the Refugee Convention. Moreover, Albania has agreed to detain asylum-seekers arriving by sea, which enables Italy to both provide access to asylum procedures and deny territorial presence.

The global retrenchment of asylum norms

In the UK, recent legislation disallows asylum claims from those arriving by "small boats" in the English Channel and criminalises those on board carrying mobile phones. This trend criminalises the mode of arrival despite the well-documented absence of "safe and legal routes" by air or land. Thus, the lack of protection for asylum-seekers *in transit* has created legal and territorial space for states to limit access to asylum.

Efforts like the Safe Mobility Initiative (SMI) in South America have also been terminated, ending one form of "safe route" from South to North America. Run by the International Organisation for Migration and UNHCR, the SMI allowed some migrants and asylum-seekers to apply for admission to the US, usually to reunite with family residing there. Travelling from Venezuela, Colombia or Ecuador requires navigating a dangerous and lengthy journey northward and has placed pressure on crossings at the US-Mexico border. The SMI was piloted to provide safe, legal alternatives to these routes, but ended in December 2024. The US' recent operations in Venezuela have produced further uncertainty in the region.

Despite increasingly restrictive policies in Europe and the US, the majority of the world's displaced people reside in Africa, South America and the MENA region. People fleeing persecution have always faced undue risks and most live in middle and low income countries and in regions experiencing conflict.

Diminishing resources for asylum seekers

Despite the growing need, resources available to asylum seekers have been shrinking. The United States cut foreign aid by 80 percent in 2025, while other countries, including France, the UK and Germany, have shifted humanitarian aid to military spending. This has impacted support for asylum seekers and refugees. Both UNHCR and the IOM saw 30% reductions in funding in 2025.

Uganda, which is often hailed as a model for refugee integration, has suspended refugee procedures for people from Eritrea, Somalia and Ethiopia due to lack of funding support. Uganda hosts the largest number of refugees in Africa, so its move bodes ill for the state of asylum regionally.

In the Middle East, ongoing displacement in Palestine and the impacts of conflict that is rapidly spreading throughout the Gulf region is increasing refugee populations.

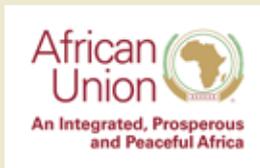
Globally, conflict, sexism, homophobia, and discrimination force people to seek sanctuary. The right to asylum rests on a shared commitment to universally recognised humanity. Limiting access to asylum is testing states' commitment to fundamental rights for all, a dangerous precedent to set in an uncertain geopolitical context.



Refugees behind a fence. Image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay

2025 Milefsky Award winner: African Union Border Programme (AUBP)

In 2025, IBRU awarded the eighth annual Raymond Milefsky Award to the African Union Border Programme, for its contribution to the delimitation of over 80,000 kilometres of borders on the continent as well as its support for cross-border cooperation. IBRU's Director Professor Philip Steinberg, spoke with Dr Sunday Angoma Okello, Head of the AUBP.



What led to the establishment of the AUBP?

The establishment of the African Union Border Programme in 2007 was the result of a deliberate policy evolution rather than a reaction to a single event.

Since 1964, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) adopted the principle of respect for borders inherited at independence, as articulated in the Cairo Resolution. That principle provided political stability at a critical moment in Africa's state formation. However, over time it became evident that many boundaries remained insufficiently delimited and demarcated, and that this lack of clarity could contribute to tensions, administrative uncertainty, and obstacles to integration.

In January 2007, the AU Assembly encouraged the Commission to strengthen structural conflict prevention, including through the operationalization of a continental border programme. This led to the First Conference of African Ministers in Charge of Border Issues in June 2007, which formally adopted the Declaration establishing the AUBP.

The Programme was therefore conceived as a preventive instrument, designed to assist Member States in clarifying boundaries peacefully, strengthening institutional capacity, and promoting cooperation along border areas. It was not triggered by one isolated crisis, but by a recognition that proactive boundary clarification and governance are essential components of long-term peace and integration.

What has been the AUBP's greatest challenge?

If I were to identify one overarching challenge, it would be the complexity of translating a continental political commitment into sustained, technical, and nationally owned processes on the ground.

Border delimitation and demarcation are not simply technical exercises. They are legal, historical, political, financial, and sometimes highly sensitive processes. Each Member State context is different. Some boundaries are already delimited but not demarcated. Others require archival research, bilateral negotiations, field surveys, and long-term financing. This means progress is rarely linear.

A second related challenge is resources. Delimitation and especially demarcation can be costly and time intensive. Many Member States face competing national priorities, and border processes may not always receive immediate budgetary allocation.

On the one hand, the AUBP seeks better definition of borders. On the other hand, the AUBP promotes cross-border integration. How does the AUBP align these two, potentially divergent, priorities?

At first glance, defining borders more clearly and promoting cross-border integration may appear to pull in different directions. In practice, they are mutually reinforcing.

The starting point is clarity. When a boundary is delimited and, where possible, demarcated, it removes ambiguity. Ambiguity is often the source of tension, administrative confusion, and competing claims over land, resources, or jurisdiction. Legal certainty reduces the risk of dispute and creates a stable framework within which cooperation can take place.

In that sense, delimitation is not about hardening borders. It is about stabilizing them. Once two states have clarity about where their boundary lies, they can move confidently toward facilitating movement, trade, and joint management initiatives without fear that cooperation will prejudice sovereignty.

Instruments such as the Niamey Convention and the AU Strategy for Better Border Governance recognize that African borders are not just lines on a map, they are lived spaces. Communities, markets, ecosystems, and

cultural networks often straddle those lines. Good border governance therefore combines respect for sovereignty with practical cooperation at local, national, and regional levels.

Clear borders provide predictability. Predictability builds trust. And trust creates space for integration. So rather than being divergent priorities, delimitation and cross-border cooperation are two sides of the same objective: peaceful, stable, and prosperous borderlands across the continent.

"Delimitation is not about hardening borders. It is about stabilising them."

Other world regions also suffer from the colonial legacy of ill-defined, and perhaps ill-conceived, borders. What could they learn from the AUBP's experience?

One of the key lessons from Africa's experience is that clarity and stability can be pursued without reopening foundational political questions. The continent made an early and decisive choice, through the 1964 Cairo principle on respecting inherited borders, to avoid redrawing boundaries and instead focus on clarifying and managing them peacefully. That principle created predictability, even where historical complexities remain.

A second lesson is that boundary issues should be institutionalized, not personalized. The AUBP has encouraged the establishment of joint boundary commissions, technical committees, and regular dialogue mechanisms. When boundary management is handled through standing structures rather than ad hoc political negotiations, it becomes more technical, more transparent, and less susceptible to escalation.

Third, delimitation and cooperation should move together. Africa's experience shows that once legal clarity is pursued through peaceful processes, it becomes easier to promote cross-border development initiatives, shared infrastructure, and joint resource management. Borders do not need to be erased to allow integration. They need to be well governed.

The broader message is that borders need not be sources of permanent instability. With legal clarity, structured dialogue, and cooperative governance, they can become anchors of peace and platforms for regional integration.

Do you see a future for the AUBP once all of Africa's borders have been delimited and demarcated?

Absolutely. The 2007 Ministerial Declaration that established the AUBP framed delimitation and demarcation as foundational, but not exhaustive, components of border governance. Since then, AU instruments such as the Niamey Convention and the Strategy for Better Border Governance have expanded the focus toward sustainable, cooperative border management.

Border governance is dynamic. Population movements, climate change, cross-border trade, infrastructure corridors, and evolving security risks constantly reshape border realities. The role of the AUBP will increasingly be to support Member States in managing borders as zones of interaction, not simply as lines of separation.

Nominations for the 2026 Raymond Milefsky Award

The Raymond Milefsky Award is now in its ninth year and has highlighted the excellent work being conducted all over the world by boundary scholars and practitioners.

The award is for an individual or organisation who:

- Has advanced knowledge of boundary-making or cross-border cooperation, OR
- Has implemented a programme over that past year that has contributed substantially to boundary-making or cross-border cooperation.

The awardee will receive an award of £745, as well as a profile in the next edition of *Borderlines*.

Letters of nomination should be sent to ibru@durham.ac.uk and must be received by **31 August 2026**.

Selection of the awardee will be made by a committee consisting of the members of the IBRU Steering Community, plus one external representative.

<https://www.durham.ac.uk/research/institutes-and-centres/ibru-borders-research/news-and-events/milefsky-award/>

Borders in the news 2025

January

In January, **Thailand** announced that a new Joint Technical Committee (JTC) had not yet been formed to negotiate with **Cambodia** on their maritime dispute because the Thai government could not act without parliament's consent. The dispute involves the 26,000-square-kilometer overlapping maritime claim area between Thailand and Cambodia in the Gulf of Thailand off the coast of Trat. Instead, Thailand stated "The government will negotiate with the Cambodian government based on international law and other relevant legal frameworks."

In January, the **US** President said he was seeking "immediate negotiations" to acquire **Greenland** for national security reasons. The repeated demands by the US to take control of the territory were rejected by Greenland's leaders, and by **Denmark**, of which the island is a semi-autonomous territory. The proposed acquisition led to a wider diplomatic row, with the US subsequently threatening additional trade tariffs against a number of European allies for opposing the plans. Recently there has been increased interest in Greenland's natural resources, including rare earth minerals, uranium and iron. It could also have significant oil and gas reserves; however the US has more consistently based its interests in Greenland's geostrategic location.

March

In March, **Guyana** filed a Request for Provisional Measures at the International Court of Justice in the case concerning the Arbitral Award of 3 October 1899 (**Guyana v. Venezuela**), pursuant to Article 41 of the Statute of the Court and Articles 73, 74 and 76 of the Rules of Court. Guyana stated that its Request is prompted by Venezuela's announcement that it will hold consultative referendums in Guyana's

Essequibo region in 2025 about the purported creation of a new region. Guyana argued that the referendums would violate "Guyana's sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence, as well as the Court's Order [on the indication of provisional measures] of 1 December 2023."

Kyrgyzstan and **Tajikistan** signed a landmark peace deal which will see the end of their border dispute and the demarcation of their shared 970 km border. The border dispute had led to clashes between the militaries of the two countries over the last few years. The peace deal led to the creation of a legal and regulatory framework between the two countries which aims to ensure stability and security, as well as create favourable conditions for Kyrgyz and Tajik citizens, especially in the border regions. The agreement also specifies details on the reopening of road, rail, and air transport links between the two countries.

In March, **Spain** raised concerns over a new offshore energy agreement between **Morocco** and Israel, fearing this could further complicate ongoing maritime disputes in disputed waters near the **Canary Islands**. The Spanish territory has long been locked in negotiations with Morocco over unresolved maritime boundaries, due to overlapping Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), both Morocco and Spain are entitled to a 200-nautical-mile EEZ, but the Canary Islands' proximity to Morocco's coast—its closest point is about 95 km (59 miles) from the coast of Morocco—has resulted in contested waters.

In March, the Supreme Court of **India** scheduled a final hearing for September 2025, to address petitions challenging the 1974 and 1976 agreements that ceded the Katchatheevu islet to **Sri Lanka**. Katchatheevu is a

285-acre uninhabited island located in the Palk Strait between Tamil Nadu and Tamil Eelam. Historically, both India and Sri Lanka claimed sovereignty over the island.

April

In April, the **US** denial of **Mexico's** request for water from the Colorado River put an 81-year-old treaty under pressure and raised concerns for drought-stricken El Paso. The treaty, signed in 1944, addressed the utilization of surface water from the Rio Grande and Colorado Rivers. It had been reported that Mexico had fallen behind on delivering the U.S. their allotment of water from the Rio Grande. Subsequent negotiations in December appear to have resolved the dispute.

Japan accused **Russia** of restricting sea navigation around the Kuril Islands. Japan accused Russia of introducing restrictions on the navigation of foreign military and civilian ships around the southern Kuril Islands from April 16 to May 1. Both countries claim sovereignty over the island chain known in Russia as the Kuril Islands and in Japan as the Northern Territories, preventing the sides from signing a treaty formally marking the end of World War II.

Finland completed the first 35 km (22 miles) of a 4.5-metre (15-ft) high fence it is building on its closed eastern border with **Russia** to stop migrants from crossing via the wilderness, the Finnish Border Guard announced in mid-May. Finland began constructing the fence, which will eventually cover 200 km (124 miles) of the border's total 1,344 km (835 mile) length, in 2024 in response to increased migration.

The **UK** signed a deal to return the **Chagos Islands** to **Mauritius** and lease back a key military base in May. The agreement means Mauritius would gain sovereignty of the islands from the UK but allow

the US and UK to continue operating a military base on one of the islands, Diego Garcia, for an initial period of 99 years. The UK purchased the islands for £3m in 1968, but Mauritius has argued it was illegally forced to give away the islands in order to get independence from Britain.

May

In May, **India** announced that it will stop its water from flowing over international borders. India's Prime Minister was quoted as saying "India's water will flow for India's benefit, it will be conserved for India's benefit, and it will be used for India's progress." Although **Pakistan** was not specifically mentioned, the comments came two weeks after India suspended a 65-year-old water sharing treaty with its neighbour. Relations between India and Pakistan had slowly been in decline since the beginning of 2025 with India accusing Pakistan of backing cross-border terrorism. There are several rivers flowing from India into Pakistan, which provide vital water supplies to about 80% of Pakistan's farms. Pakistani leaders had previously warned that any attempt to stop the flow of water "will be considered as an act of war." The 1960 Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), which governs the water sharing of six rivers in the Indus basin between India and Pakistan, has often been referenced as a good example of trans-boundary water management

In May, Judges at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that **Equatorial Guinea** has a legal claim to a cluster of small islands in the Gulf of Guinea, settling a decades-long dispute with neighbouring **Gabon**. In its final and binding ruling, the ICJ sided with Equatorial Guinea and said its claim on the islands, based on a 1900 convention dividing up French and Spanish colonial assets in West Africa, should be honoured. The two countries have been arguing over the isles - Congo, Mbanié and Cocoteros -

Borders in the news 2025

since the early 1970s. The islands are virtually uninhabited but are in a maritime zone thought to contain significant oil deposits.

In May, intensified fighting between **Thailand** and **Cambodia** led to more deaths and thousands of civilians being displaced in a border dispute that dates back to inconsistencies in how 800km of borders between the two countries were drawn during the French occupation of Cambodia. The violence expanded to six provinces in northeastern Thailand and five provinces in Cambodia's north and northwest.

June

In June, **Cambodia** decided to take its border dispute with **Thailand** to the ICJ following an exchange of gunfire by soldiers of the two countries. The Thai government has advocated for bilateral negotiations to address the ongoing border dispute, using existing mechanisms such as the Joint Boundary Commission (JBC), the General Border Committee (GBC) and regional border committee, while Cambodia has sought to turn to court mechanisms or third parties to resolve the matter.

In June there were celebrations at the border between **Ethiopia** and **Eritrea** as communities from the frontier villages came together for the first time in five years. Separated by the closed border since the outbreak of the 2020 conflict in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region and subsequent political tensions, the coming together was a symbolic moment of peace and reconciliation. For five years, relatives and friends whose communities straddled the international boundary had not been able to see each other across the militarised border.

Santa Rosa, an island in the Amazon River and home to

around 3,000 people, is the centre of a decades long argument between **Peru** and **Colombia**. As the Amazon River moves, so too does the international boundary between the two countries. Peru claims Santa Rosa because many of the island's inhabitants identify as Peruvian and it is administered by Peruvian agencies. In June, the Peruvian government declared it a district, with the stated aim of increasing residents' access to public services and "consolidating sovereignty." Peru also claims Santa Rosa was previously part of Chinería Island, territory granted to Peru under the 1922 Salomón-Lozano Treaty. Colombia disputes this, contending that Santa Rosa did not exist when the treaty was signed and therefore cannot be claimed under its terms. Colombia also argues that the river boundary has shifted, placing Santa Rosa in its territory.

July

Nepal and **India** have agreed to complete bilateral boundary work within three years in July. The decision was made in New Delhi during the 7th meeting of the Nepal-India Boundary Working Group (BWG). In previous years, the two sides had set two deadlines—in 2015 and 2017—but officials could not meet them. Nepal and India share a 1,880 km long border spanning over 27 districts. Within three years, survey officials from Nepal and India will install and repair 8,554 boundary pillars, install GPS facilities and resolve the boundary dispute where the river has changed course.

An exchange of gunfire in July between **Uganda** and **South Sudanese** forces along the contested Kajo-Keji border region left at least six security officers dead, deepening long-standing tensions over territorial boundaries. Despite ongoing diplomatic discussions between the two nations, the incident underlines the continual border disputes

that have plagued bilateral relations since South Sudan's independence in 2011.

August

In August, a report highlighted that **Vietnam's** island building in the Spratly Islands may soon surpass **China's**. Satellite imagery showed that since the start of 2025 Vietnam has expanded island-building to eight features previously untouched by a round of reclamation that began in 2021. The imagery shows that all 21 Vietnamese-occupied rocks and low-tide elevations in the Spratly chain have now been expanded to include artificial land, when four years ago a majority hosted only isolated pillbox structures. New expansion has also begun at three features that already hosted medium-sized artificial islands created in earlier rounds of dredging.

In August, **Azerbaijan** and **Armenia** signed an agreement at the White House in Washington, DC that aimed at ending decades of conflict. The two countries have been fighting since the 1980s over Nagorno-Karabakh, an ethnically Armenian enclave in Azerbaijan, with frequent violent flare-ups. As part of the deal, the US will help build a major transit corridor to connect Azerbaijan and its autonomous Nakhchivan enclave, which is separated by Armenian territory.

November

A maritime border agreement was signed between **Cyprus** and **Lebanon** in November. The agreement delineates the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) boundaries between the two countries. Efforts to establish an EEZ delimitation between Cyprus and Lebanon began in 2007 when an agreement was made but was never implemented.

December

In December, **South Korea** reaffirmed its sovereignty over the Dokdo Islands following **Japan's** renewed claim on the islets that are known in Japan as Takeshima. A South Korean Official reasserted that no territorial dispute existed over Dokdo: "Dokdo is an integral part of Korean territory historically, geographically and under international law. We will sternly and firmly respond to Japan's unjust claims over Dokdo."

Taiwan and **Japan** voiced concern in December over Chinese military activities in the region, after it was reported that China had deployed a large number of vessels across East Asian waters in its largest maritime show of force so far.

The **Pakistani** and **Omani** navies held bilateral exercise to strengthen maritime security cooperation in December. The Pakistan Navy and the Royal Navy of Oman have been conducting the exercises regularly since 1980 with both sides aiming to enhance maritime security cooperation.

Ethiopia reiterated that securing access to a seaport is a national necessity and crucial for strengthening regional cooperation and ensuring stability in the Horn of Africa.

In December, The **Libyan** parliament condemned calls by **Greece** to cancel the 2019 memorandum of understanding signed between Libya and **Turkey** on maritime border delimitation, describing it as a "clear violation of national sovereignty." Libya called on Greece to respect Libyan sovereignty and stop interfering in its internal affairs. The dispute centres on the maritime area south-east of Crete, rich in gas resources. Greece considers the area part of its territory, while it was included in a joint zone under the 2019 agreement between Libya and Turkey.

JRV Prescott Scholarship Awardee Interview

IBRU welcomed Daniela Martins, currently studying at the University of Lisbon for a PhD in the Law of the Sea, to the workshop 'Finding an Equitable Solution in Maritime Boundary Delimitation' which was held in Durham in September 2025. Daniela was able to attend thanks to the JRV Prescott Scholarship, which helps post graduate students attend training to further their careers in the boundary field.

Daniela spoke to Liz Buxton about how the Prescott Scholarship has helped her.



What do you currently do in your career and how does your work relate to international boundaries and border-related issues?

I am a Guest Lecturer in Public International Law and am currently completing a PhD in the Law of the Sea. My dissertation focuses on the impact of sea level rise on maritime delimitation. In particular, I examine how subsequent geographical changes affecting the territory of coastal and island States should be taken into account in light of the principle of equity in the maritime delimitation process.

What postgraduate course did you study and how will this develop your career?

I hold a Law degree and a Master's in Public International Law. During my Master's, I focused on the legal personality of States at risk of disappearing due to sea level rise, and I had the opportunity to publish my dissertation on this topic. I then enrolled in a PhD program to continue this research from the perspective of the Law of the Sea, with a particular focus on maritime delimitation. My doctoral research investigates the impact of sea level rise on maritime boundaries.

This IBRU workshop has been particularly valuable for me, as it provided practical insights and technical foundations beyond my strictly legal training. Maritime delimitation is inherently multidisciplinary, requiring knowledge in both legal and technical areas, and this workshop has helped me bridge that gap, giving me the tools to complement my legal expertise with a practical understanding of cartography and spatial analysis.

What made you apply for the Prescott Scholarship Award and how did you feel when you were awarded the scholarship?

Pursuing a program at Durham has long been both a personal and academic aspiration. The legacy of Victor Prescott, whose writings first inspired me to dedicate my career to maritime delimitation, has been a lasting source of motivation. I saw the Prescott Scholarship as a unique opportunity to further my studies in this field. Moreover, the support provided by the scholarship was crucial in enabling me to attend the workshop.

When I received the email informing me that I had been awarded the Prescott Scholarship, I was overwhelmed with joy and gratitude. The recognition of my dedication and potential by such a prestigious scholarship committee was truly humbling!

How do you think the IBRU workshop, the course paid for by the scholarship, has helped you in both your studies and your future career?

My academic path has always been closely connected to the Law of the Sea. While my training is strictly legal, the Law of the Sea relies

heavily on geographical concepts—baselines, coasts, projections, and proportionality—without which legal rules risk being applied abstractly, detached from the realities they are meant to regulate. Attending the workshop "Finding an Equitable Solution in Maritime Boundary Delimitation" was a pivotal step in my PhD. It allowed me to directly address the gap in my training: learning to read and interpret maps, translate geographical data into legal reasoning, construct equidistant lines in practice, and understand how equitable solutions are developed in real delimitation processes.

This kind of interdisciplinary training is essential for grounding my research in practical reality. Most law courses focus heavily on literature and case law, often neglecting the geographical foundation that underpins legal reasoning. The workshop demonstrated how legal and technical expertise are integrated to reach practical solutions, an insight that is invaluable for both my research and future professional work.

Would you have been able to attend the workshop if the funding from the Prescott Scholarship had not been available and how important was this scholarship to you?

As a young scholar at the beginning of my career, the Prescott Scholarship was instrumental in enabling my participation in the workshop. It not only facilitated my attendance but also recognized my potential in this specialized field.

It provided access to high-quality training, strengthened my interdisciplinary skills, and validated my dedication to advancing my knowledge in maritime delimitation. I am deeply grateful for the support and recognition provided, which has played a key role in shaping my path toward becoming an expert in this area.



Thank you very much to IBRU and Durham University for this opportunity. I hope I can come back soon! It was a lovely experience!

JRV Prescott Student Scholarship Programme

Thanks to a generous donation from the estate of international boundaries scholar JRV Prescott, IBRU is pleased to offer a scholarship programme to support postgraduate attendance at IBRU professional training workshops.



IBRU will award the annual Prescott Scholarship to one deserving individual who is studying or has completed a postgraduate qualification in the last 5 years, to attend an IBRU training workshop.

The annual Prescott Scholarship recipient will receive a full waiver of workshop registration fees (typically around £2,250) as well as access to up to £250 to offset costs associated with travel and subsistence.

For more information, including instructions on how to apply, see: <https://www.durham.ac.uk/research/institutes-and-centres/ibru-borders-research/training-and-workshops/services/>

Applicants are encouraged to apply by 31 May 2026 for the Scholarship.

2026 TRAINING PROGRAMME

Professional Training Workshops

IBRU's unique boundary training programme has been running since 1996, attracting over 1,800 participants from over 125 countries around the world.

Our professional training workshops are led by teams of expert tutors and provide a relevant combination of background theory and practical application in an informal teaching environment. Numbers are limited to maximise interaction between tutors and participants, so we advise you book early to guarantee your place.

Professional Training Workshop

15-17 June 2026
Durham, UK

Price: £2,685 per person*
£1,685 for LDCs

Boundary Demarcation & Maintenance

Delimitation of a boundary in a treaty is a crucial first step in boundary-making, but on its own delimitation is of limited value. For borderland populations, boundaries rarely have much meaning until they are identifiable on the ground – and it is arguable that it is only when a boundary has been physically demarcated that it can begin to function effectively.

Many of the world's international boundaries have never been made visible on the ground, and many of those that have been demarcated have subsequently become invisible due to inefficient maintenance regimes. Led by an experienced team of tutors and combining classroom sessions and practical exercises, this unique workshop will assist policymakers and practitioners in developing strategies for the effective demarcation and maintenance of international boundaries in different physical and human landscapes.



Professional Training Workshop

14-16 September 2026
Durham, UK

Price: £2,685 per person*
£1,685 for LDCs

Maritime Boundary Delimitation

Clearly-defined maritime boundaries are essential for good international relations and effective ocean management, yet few coastal states have agreed all their maritime boundaries with their neighbours. Part of the reason for this is that boundary delimitation requires a range of specialist legal and technical skills which are not always readily available to governments.

Combining lectures, discussion and practical exercises, IBRU's most popular workshop helps participants develop the skills needed to achieve an equitable division of maritime space and clearly defined maritime boundaries.



Professional Training Workshop

2-4 November 2026
Durham, UK

Price: £2,655 per person*
£1,655 for LDCs

Preparing for Third Party Settlement of Boundary & Sovereignty Disputes

Although it is widely recognised that boundary disputes are best settled through negotiation, there are times when recourse to third party settlement also needs to be considered as an option. This workshop is designed to help governments and their legal advisors to evaluate the benefits and disadvantages of third-party adjudication, and to equip them with information and skills to ensure a successful outcome from the process.

Led by highly experienced international lawyers and boundary practitioners, the workshop will offer practical instruction on topics such as: choice of forum; assembling and assessing evidence; building and managing a team; presenting your case and rebutting your opponent's case.

The workshop, organised in partnership with leading international law firm Foley Hoag, will be of value not only to countries currently involved in boundary litigation or arbitration but also to any country seeking to achieve a peaceful boundary settlement with its neighbours.

IBRU is delighted to be running this workshop in partnership with Foley Hoag, which has one of the world's foremost boundary dispute resolution practices.



* price includes 3 nights accommodation

To make an enquiry about our workshops, please contact the IBRU Team

Tel: +44 (0)191 334 1965 Email: ibru@durham.ac.uk Find out more and book online at: www.durham.ac.uk/ibru

Help for LDCs to attend IBRU professional training workshops

In 2026, IBRU will continue to offer 10 places per professional training workshop to delegates from the 44 countries that appear on the 'United Nations Least Developed Countries List', at a reduced cost.

The full list of eligible countries can be found on the United Nations website:

<https://unctad.org/topic/least-developed-countries/list>

Places will be restricted to only 2 places per LDC country per workshop at this reduced rate. Any additional places will be available at the full cost price. Places will be available on a first come first served basis.



ONLINE TRAINING COURSES

IBRU's online training courses complement our world-renowned professional training workshops.

They feature IBRU and Durham University academics, as well as invited expert guest practitioners, and provide broad introductions to core topics in international boundaries and border management. They are a great way to learn more about specific topics or simply refresh your knowledge in areas where you may already have some experience. They can be taken on their own or in preparation for attending one of our more focused, practitioner-led, face-to-face workshops. IBRU's online courses are designed to be completed at your own leisure, at a time and place convenient to you.

Introduction to International Boundaries: Definition, Delimitation and Dispute Resolution

Online training

Price: £250

International boundaries are a major source of friction between neighbouring states. Many land boundaries remain poorly defined and fewer than half of the world's potential maritime boundaries have been fully agreed. Governments recognise the value of clearly defined boundaries, yet the political, economic and social complexities of boundary regions, as well as the details of topography and history, often make resolving competing territorial and jurisdictional claims extraordinarily difficult.



This four-hour online training course provides a simple, contextual overview of international boundaries and the practical measures that can be taken to resolve international boundary disputes. Through a series of short online lectures and a final practical exercise, the course explores the relevance of borders and looks at land and maritime boundary disputes, before covering methods available for dispute resolution.

The videos can be watched in your own time and will be available for review as long as your licence is active. You will not need to complete the course in one go but can fit it around your schedule as required.

This course is available in both English and French.

Asylum, Borders and Human Rights

Online training

Price: £100



Borders around the world are increasingly crossed by migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers.

According to the UN High Commission for Refugees, there are over 45 million refugees and asylum-seekers worldwide. Who are they? What rights do they have as border crossers? What are the obligations and powers of states that receive refugees, and how is this reflected in the way that borders are managed?

IBRU's online course on Asylum, Borders & Human Rights details the legal framework governing migrant mobilities.

In this online, one-hour mini-course, Durham University migration scholars Dr Lauren Martin and Dr Léonie Newhouse unpack key terms like 'refugee', 'asylum-seeker', and 'migrant', analyse the lasting impact of the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol, as well as covering a range of other treaties and agreements that impact the status of refugees and the borders that they cross.

To book your place on the online courses, please visit our website:

www.durham.ac.uk/ibru

Images: Courtesy of Pixabay, Mexico Border Wall courtesy of Estela Parra, Refugees on a boat Pixabay, Shinkiri Refugee camp Pixabay, Kalhh Pixabay, DVIDSHUB Flickr, Refugees behind fence Pixabay



Borderlines is the newsletter of IBRU, the Centre for Borders Research at Durham University. It has a readership of more than 3,500 boundary scholars, practitioners and enthusiasts around the world.

Since its founding as the International Boundaries Research Unit in 1989, IBRU has been the world's leading research centre on international boundary making and dispute resolution. Today, IBRU brings together work in international boundary law with the geographic study of borders and bordering in the 21st century.

For more information about IBRU visit our website at: www.durham.ac.uk/ibru

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