

LAW UNBOXED

IMPACT STORIES FROM OUR FACULTY

A New Perspective on Societal Impact

If legal scholars had an official fan club, we, Olga Gritsai and Frances Singleton, would probably have been the founders. We realize that this is not a common view, and that declaring ourselves cheerleaders for our academic colleagues might lead to (incorrect) assumptions about the quality of our social lives. But as the first to ever fully map out the impact activities of our faculty, we ask for your trust. The unpaid, unregistered, and often unacknowledged ways in which our researchers ensure their knowledge benefits society are as creative and diverse as they are relevant. Beyond advising policymakers, courts and legislators, we discovered collaborations with artists, participation in key legal cases, and even the creation of an Etsy shop. This magazine reflects the work of a team that dedicated a year to making this diverse impact visible. We hope to inspire future collaborations within and beyond the faculty — and perhaps even gain new members for our fan club.



There are three persistent myths about societal impact: that it is not measurable, not visible, and misunderstood. These myths often lead to societal impact in the social sciences and humanities being comparatively undervalued to that of the technical sciences.

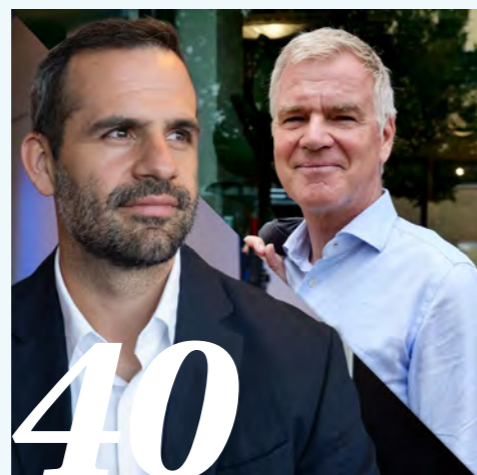
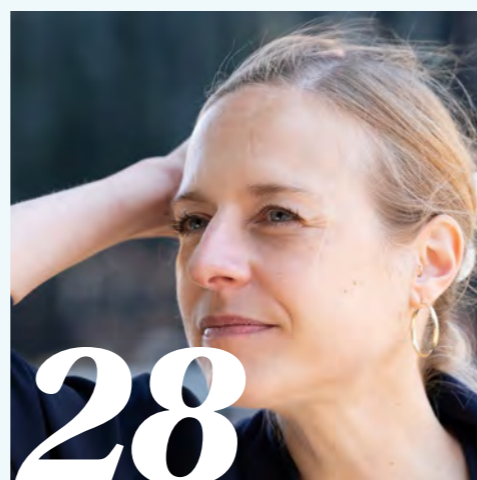
This misunderstanding dates back to the 1970s, when universities under financial pressure primarily saw their societal role as sharing knowledge with industry. Following the American example, knowledge centers and science parks were established in Europe. But fifty years later, a rapidly changing world demands much broader answers to political, philosophical and legal questions. Those who measure impact in pure market value see only a small part of what universities contribute. Everything that does not fit into an Excel spreadsheet (such as advising, evaluating, mentoring, and teaching professionals) remains invisible and unrecognised, unlike, for example, the launch of a startup.

Societal impact suffers from three persistent myths: that it is not visible, not measurable, and above all that it is misunderstood.

This magazine aims to showcase the multifaceted societal impact of the Faculty of Law at the University of Amsterdam and, in doing so, highlight the broader potential of the social sciences and humanities.

Our researchers have contributed to legislation and policy protecting self-employed workers, regulating artificial intelligence in healthcare, protecting users of digital platforms, and defending the rights of consumers. Through events, training sessions, and advisory groups, they are closely involved with policymakers at the EU and national level. A recent example is the largest climate case ever at the International Court of Justice, in which one of our researchers played an instrumental role and helping shape the (ultimately successful) outcome. Academics sometimes do not realise that they are creating impact, even when advising on policy or collaborating with non-profits. That is why it is important to make impact more visible and generate greater recognition. This magazine aims to be a first step in sharing new perspectives on impact, dispelling persistent myths, and sparking further conversation.

Frances Singleton & Olga Gritsai



Foreword by Frances Singleton and Olga Gritsai _____ 02

What does ‘impact’ actually mean?
Rector Magnificus UvA & Dean of Faculty of Law _____ 06

Unmasking toxic organisational cultures
Benjamin van Rooij _____ 10

Big pharma under the microscope
Katrina Perehudoff _____ 16

Venture minded _____ 20

Impact is a juggling act
Evert Verhulp _____ 24

The case that was heard around the world
Margaretha Wewerinke-Singh _____ 28

Lessons for Change _____ 32

Chasing a moving target
Joris van Hoboken & Paddy Leerssen _____ 34

Nothing in life is certain except death - and taxes
Stef van Weeghel & Juan Manuel Vázquez _____ 40

A new perspective on integration _____ 46

Legal expertise in times of crisis
Marieke de Hoon & Marten Zwanenburg _____ 52

The weight of the wild _____ 56

Read, Watch, Listen _____ 58

Legal Advice Clinics & Legal Map _____ 60

Colophon

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If you want to spark a debate at a university, ask people to define “impact.” Everyone agrees that the knowledge universities produce should be beneficial to society and be accessible to all. But what does that look like in practice? In search of answers, we spoke with Peter-Paul Verbeek, Rector Magnificus of the UvA, and Mireille van Eechoud, Dean of the Faculty of Law.

WHAT DOES IMPACT ACTUALLY MEAN?

We believe that societal impact cannot always be captured by numbers in a spreadsheet (and perhaps we shouldn't even by trying to quantify it at all!) In many cases, it is sufficient to make an activity visible. Do you agree?

Peter-Paul: “At the University of Amsterdam, we are actively building the infrastructure to support impact - take the Amsterdam Law Hub, for example. I was trained as a philosopher: when people talk about measuring impact, I always wonder what exactly it is that we are measuring. Especially now that we are rethinking how we recognise and reward academic work, we need to make room for stories and not just numbers. Impact is not only about statistics; it is also about reach, meaning, and relevance. And frankly, I don't believe in the opposition between curiosity-driven and impact-driven research. Our academic curiosity arises from societal questions.”

How does the UvA define impact, and how does that fit within its broader strategy?

Peter-Paul: “Our thinking on this is still evolving. For a long time, the focus was on ‘valorisation’; turning knowledge into economic value. That is one form of impact, but a very limited one.”



PETER-PAUL VERBEEK

Rector Magnificus UvA

MIREILLE VAN EECHOU

Dean of the Faculty of Law

“Impact is not a luxury or a side issue. It is fundamental to our mission.”

— Peter-Paul

“If we're not careful, impact will fade into the background, which is why we want to emphasize how much valuable work is already being done, both big and small.”

— Mireille

How much room is there in practice for projects that are not economically driven?

Peter-Paul: “That is a legitimate concern. Economic impact is important, but it is only one dimension. Impact can also be cultural, artistic, or democratic. These forms of impact are not always expressible in monetary terms. Our societal themes often align well with the funding priorities of governments and foundations. So funding is not solely about financial return. It is also about creating space for meaningful research.”

And how does this work within the Faculty of Law?

Mireille: “In law, impact is often embedded in our daily work, even if we do not always call it that. Much of it is intrinsically motivated. If someone wants to run a legal aid clinic, some funding may be needed. But policy advice or civic engagement often arises simply because people believe it matters. Alongside the traditional forms of impact that are already well embedded, we participate in larger interdisciplinary projects with societal partners which do require additional support. With limited budgets and

increasing teaching loads, time is scarce. If we are not careful, impact risks fading into the background. Not because of a lack of motivation, but because of a lack of capacity. That is why we also want to highlight how much valuable work is already being done, on both large and small scales, and make sure it is visible and appreciated.”

Could impact actually help alleviate that work pressure, for example through collaborations or new funding sources?

Mireille: “In theory, yes. But in law, we often work with NGOs and civil society organizations and they are financially constrained as well. We're in the same boat. That is precisely why it is important for universities to remain engaged, even when circumstances are difficult.”

Peter-Paul: “Budget cuts are a reality, but so are the challenges we face. One year it is public health, the next digital rights or economic resilience. The social sciences, in particular, can respond quickly to such developments. We are agile and that is a strength.”

And what about individual researchers, do they still have time for outreach or engagement when they are forced to make choices?

Mireille: “That is why recognition and rewards are so important. Impact must be valued just like teaching and research. You cannot always do everything at once and you don't have to. Sometimes you work on a policy project; later you focus on teaching or writing. What matters is that people can contribute where they are strongest, at the right moment and that the system enables that.”



“Impact must be valued just like teaching and research so that people can contribute where they are strongest, at the right time.”

- Mireille

The social sciences seem particularly well suited to respond quickly to societal developments. Should the university support that more actively?

Peter-Paul: “Certainly. But we should not underestimate other disciplines. Just look at how quickly COVID vaccines were developed. Still, the social sciences and humanities are often more agile, because we are less dependent on laboratories or equipment.”

Mireille: “And legal scholars often identify emerging risks at an early stage. Years ago, we were already pointing to democratic erosion in Hungary and Poland. Such insights arise because we are deeply rooted in legal systems. The challenge is to ensure that our institutions are agile enough to support that work.”

Let’s talk about everyday impact: those small but meaningful efforts that often remain invisible.

Mireille: “First, we need to ask: is it actually a problem if impact is not always visible? We know that our faculty is strongly engaged with society. But you do have to be clear about for whom you want to make it visible. If we want to show it externally, or use it internally to argue for better career paths, then we must recognize impact just as seriously as research.”

Peter-Paul: “Law has enormous impact, yet it is sometimes seen as too technical or not academic enough. That is a misconception. Law plays a crucial role in shaping society, from regulating new technologies to designing sustainability frameworks.”

INCOME-BASED FINES

“ *People who are well-off should not have the right to cause harm simply because they can easily afford the fines.* ”

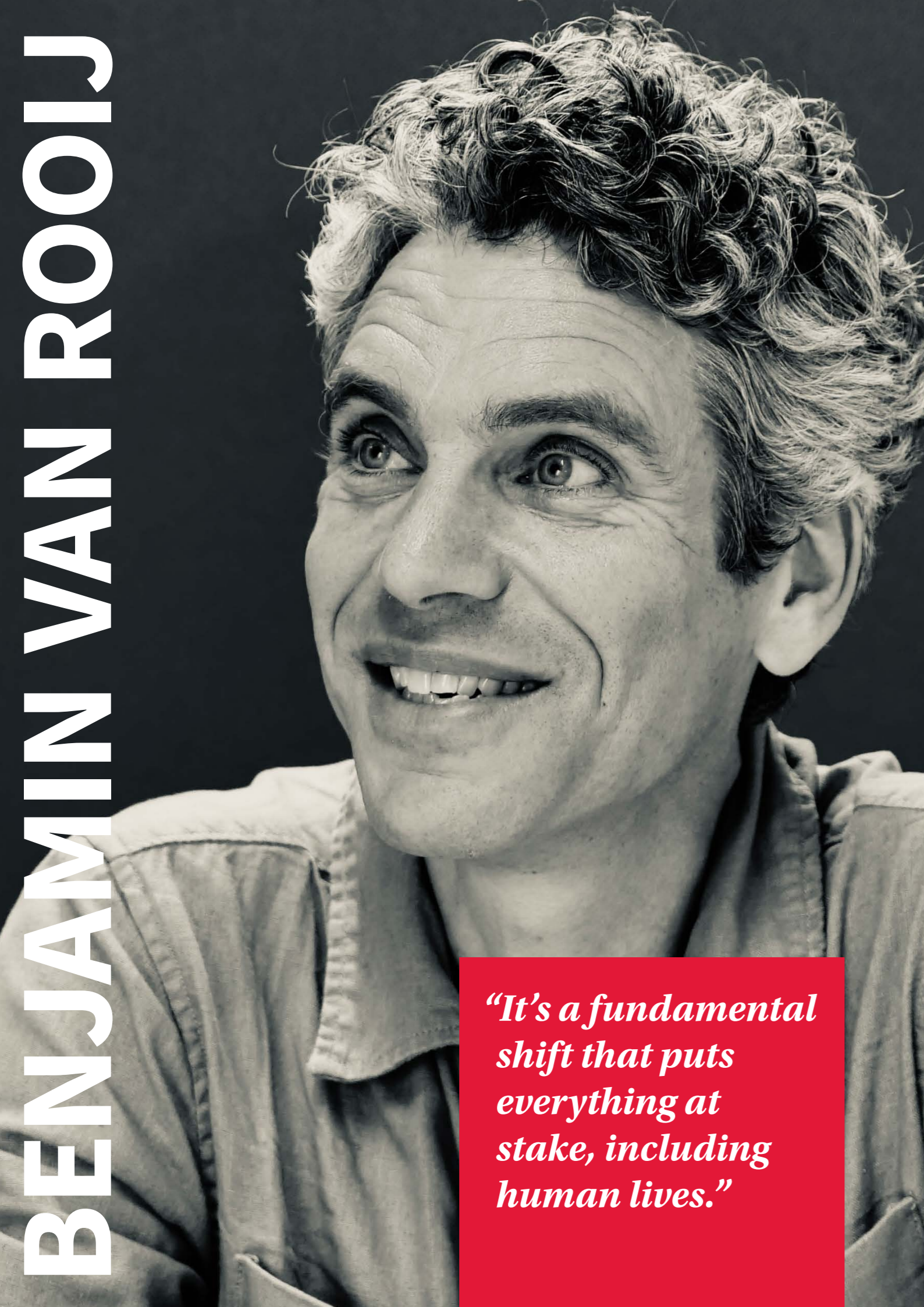
Researcher and professor of Law and Economics Giuseppe Dari-Mattiacci published an interview on June 13, 2023, through the Faculty of Law, discussing his research on so-called “day fines.” These are penalties—such as parking fines—whose amount is determined by the offender’s wealth or income. “They are called day fines because the penalty corresponds to a certain number of days of your income,” he explains.

The publication led to an interview with Het Parool and increased political attention in Amsterdam. The Labour Party (PvdA), for instance, proposed that several municipal fines, such as those for violating alcohol bans, should also be made income-dependent.



Giuseppe Dari-Mattiacci





“It’s a fundamental shift that puts everything at stake, including human lives.”

UNMASKING TOXIC ORGANISATIONAL CULTURES

From the Volkswagen emissions scandal to the pivotal role of Purdue Pharma in the opioid crisis; a toxic company culture can lead to immense societal harm. Regulation is one of our legal lines of defense to identify and address the wrongs carried out by businesses. Professor of Law and Society Benjamin van Rooij examines the underlying causes of corporate harm. Yet, according to him, our regulatory frameworks are currently falling short, allowing systemic misconduct by large organisations. How can we enforce change in the face of such a complex problem? “Ultimately, it’s about creating a culture in which ethical behavior and long-term thinking are rewarded.”

We have all read about scandals at companies such as Purdue Pharma, Volkswagen and Boeing. What concerns you most about these scandals?

“These organizations, which at first glance appear legitimate and even admirable, can cause enormous harm that deeply affects society. Take Purdue Pharma, which fueled the opioid crisis by aggressively promoting opioids with sales targets that prioritised profit over safety. Or the failures at Boeing, leading to tragic plane crashes and a heightened fear of flying.

Organizations are powerful entities. They bring people together, pool resources, and pursue larger goals. This makes them successful, but those same forces also enable them to cause greater societal harm than individuals or even governments. What all these examples share is that the damage was not caused by deliberate criminal intent or incompetence, but was systemic in nature. I am interested in understanding how and why organisations, despite their legitimate objectives, can nonetheless cause structural harm.”

How is it possible that organisations cause such large-scale damage?

“One of the biggest factors is the pursuit of unrealistic goals. These are often set with good intentions; ambition, growth, competitiveness; but they can push employees and systems beyond their limits. At that point, misconduct becomes almost inevitable.

Take Wells Fargo, for example. The bank set a target for employees to sell eight financial products per customer. On paper, that seemed ambitious yet achievable. In truth it was completely unrealistic. Employees, desperate to meet expectations, ultimately opened three million unauthorized accounts. It wasn’t just one or two bad actors. It was a systemic problem caused by a goal the organisation itself had imposed.

Alternatively, consider Volkswagen: they aimed to develop a small diesel engine that was both powerful and clean. It sounded promising, but VW did not yet possess the technology required to achieve this. Instead of acknowledging that their goal was unattainable, they committed fraud by installing

Soviets Report Nuclear Accident
Radiation Cloud Sweeps Northern Europe; Termed Not Threatening

Larry Nassar Sexual Abuse Scandal: Dozens of Officials Have Been Ousted or Charged

300 bad apples spoil Wells Fargo's reputation

Volkswagen in meltdown after faked diesel tests
... as share price crashes

Gray dies a week after his arrest
... was injured while police had him in custody

'Lord Labor' trio put ICAP at heart of rate-rigging scandal
• Fraud and conspiracy charges • Group pays £55m fine • Founder's political

Toxic Gaslighting: How 3M Executives Convinced a Scientist the Forever Chemicals She Found in Human Blood Were Safe

Boeing agrees to guilty deal over 737 Max crashes

software that manipulated emissions tests. The pattern is clear: unrealistic goals combined with intense pressure can create an environment in which harm is practically embedded in the system.”

Why doesn't legislation and regulation focus on these fundamental causes?

“This is a crucial point: our legal frameworks tend to intervene once the harm has already occurred, rather than attempting to prevent it. We are good at punishing misconduct once it comes to light, but we rarely address the underlying structures that facilitate it. There are no legal mechanisms that force companies to reassess or adjust unrealistic goals, even though those goals are often the root cause of misconduct. It's not just about catching companies that break the law, it's about understanding why they feel compelled to break the law in the first place.”

What role does short-term thinking play in these problems?

“It is a major factor, especially when short-term priorities overshadow long-term responsibilities. Boeing is a textbook example. In the 1950s, Boeing became a leader in aviation not by being the first to build commercial jetliners, but by being the first to place safety above all else. They understood that in aviation, you have no future if your product is not safe. But in the late 1990s, the focus shifted. Stock performance and quarterly results became more important than long-term vision. Safety, which had once been the key to their success; was gradually sidelined. This shift ultimately contributed to the two 737 MAX crashes.

When organisations lose sight of their long-term objectives by focusing on short-term results, the consequences can be devastating. This is not merely about poor decisions — it concerns a fundamental shift in priorities that puts everything at stake, including human lives.”

What can organisations do to balance ambition with responsibility?

“Ambition itself is not the problem, it's how it is pursued. Organisations must set challenging goals without creating environments where harmful behavior becomes the path of least resistance. They need to look beyond short-term gains and ask themselves how their decisions will affect people, the planet, and their reputation in the long run.

“Unrealistic goals combined with high pressure can create an environment in which harm is practically embedded in the system.”



Ultimately, it's about fostering a culture in which ethical conduct and long-term thinking are rewarded. And it's not just up to organisations — regulators, policymakers, and enforcement agencies must also support this. This is a systemic problem that requires systemic solutions.”

How do you collaborate with companies?

“Rather than working directly with companies, we rely on publicly available data and carefully select our case studies. We focus on organisations for which extensive information is already accessible; through investigative journalism, court records, and regula-

tory inquiries. This enables us to reconstruct in detail how decisive decisions were made.

For example, in the case of Volkswagen, there is a detailed account of a meeting among fifteen top executives discussing engine development and emissions manipulation software. In the case of Chernobyl, we can trace every decision taken in the crucial hours before the explosion and the days afterward, when authorities failed to inform the public in time. In most cases, there are comprehensive investigative reports, books, and detailed documentation available.”

“When long-term goals lose out to short-term results, the consequences can be devastating.”

This research forms an essential part of the UVA Research Priority Area Organisational Ethics, worked on by researchers from the FMG, FEB, FGW and FdR collectively.

Do you work directly with regulatory authorities?
“I collaborate with regulatory authorities in the Netherlands that are genuinely interested in organisational culture. They are open to discussion, to our perspectives, and they share their own insights as well. Regulators are under increasing media pressure to address corporate misconduct. As a result, many are focusing more on what they call ‘organisational culture.’”

By developing a better understanding of the underlying causes of corporate misconduct, I hope to provide practical tools to help prevent future crises. For example, we are compiling an overview of the most toxic cases of corporate wrongdoing - identifying where things go wrong at the most fundamental level - which can be used for education and training. A long-term goal is to develop a risk assessment model for organisations, similar to those used in criminal profiling: the higher a company’s risk factors, the closer its profile aligns with that of a potentially toxic organisation.”

What impact do you hope to achieve with this project?
“The first step is helping people understand the causes of corporate harm. If I write a book connecting multiple scandals and explaining the bigger picture - and people actually read it - that is already a success. In my earlier research, as outlined in my book *The Behavioral Code*, we developed six core questions concerning social norms, underlying moral values, opportunities, necessary capabilities, and external incentives that can be applied to any form of illegal or harmful behavior.

For this project, we are expanding that framework to include specific high-risk factors within organisations: What are the company’s goals? Are sufficient resources available to achieve them? Are incentives structured in such a way that people focus exclusively on those goals while neglecting other crucial concerns? Are decisions driven by short-term thinking?

Even better would be if readers begin to question the way their own organisation develops and incentivises their work. The aim is to encourage reflection on their own environment, its structures, and the pressures placed on the people within it.”



STRATEGIC CLIMATE LITIGATION

“ *I think we will experience the increasing impact of climate change and that means more people will demand action.* ”

Christina Eckes, professor of European Law, regularly publishes strategic blogs, opinion pieces, and reports for NGOs. Her work has repeatedly led to invitations from national and European political parties, parliamentary committees, and ministries.

She has advised multiple European governments and parliaments on withdrawing from the Energy Charter Treaty, as well as on the implications of EU trade agreements, such as the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement and the EU-Mercosur deal, for democratic decision-making and sustainability.



Christina Eckes



BIG PHARMA UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

“We discovered that unfair drug prices cost every Dutch citizen an extra €68.”

What do we think of when we imagine a legal scholar? An older gentleman perhaps? Someone with a preference for tweed jackets with leather elbow patches? The type of person who smokes a pipe in between lengthy discussions on points of law all of which could be summarised as ‘it’s complicated’?

Katrina Perehudoff is one of many researchers at the Faculty of Law rewriting perceptions of the ‘typical legal scholar’. Her academic work explores how law and regulations can support equitable access to medicines. Not content to leave such valuable knowledge collecting dust in a library, Katrina works with citizens, NGOs, governments and institutions to ensure her findings improve healthcare outcomes. Katrina is an Advisory Board member of *Farma ter Verantwoording* (the Pharmaceutical Accountability Foundation, in English); a Dutch nonprofit foundation fighting for fair pricing of medicines through

legal means, including the courts if necessary; has successfully advocated with Lucía Berro Pizarossa for the World Health Organization to reclassify the abortion combination drug as a ‘core’ essential medicine; was recently requested by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to give expert advice to the next report on access to medicines to be presented to the Human Rights Council in 2025; and was invited by the Dutch Parliament to present evidence supporting a legal push for more transparency about expensive medicines prices. It remains unclear when she finds the time to sleep.

“Early on, I was fortunate to meet academics not just studying their subjects, but passionately advocating for them and that became my definition of ‘normal.’”

THE FIGHT AGAINST UNFAIR DRUG PRICING

It is Katrina’s advice on a case brought by *Farma ter Verantwoording* against AbbVie that is one of the most visible signs of her impact on Dutch citizens. Together with a group of experts in medicine and law, they are using strategic litigation to address the excessive price of arthritis drug Humira (brand name for adalimumab). They allege that the company acted unlawfully because Humira was sold at such a high price that it violated human rights and the ‘duty of care’, and that the company abused its dominant position in the Dutch market.

Previous cases in the EU accepted a profit margin for a drug to around 25% of the product’s turnover as ‘fair’. After deducting a ‘fair’ profit margin, AbbVie made *an additional 53% profit* on the product – something *Farma ter Verantwoording* calls ‘excessive’. Or to put it in simpler terms; over the span of 14 years,

the Dutch health system overpaid *about 1.2 billion euros for the medicine*, or €68 per Dutch citizen.

For those still unconvinced, it is worth noting that AbbVie’s own actions suggest that Humira’s initial market price was unjustified. “When competing arthritis drugs entered the market in 2018, *AbbVie dropped the price of Humira by 80%*. The initial high price was obviously inflated and unnecessary, both from a human rights perspective and in a business sense.”

INSPIRING SUCCESS

This won’t be the first case that Katrina and her colleagues have taken legal action against excessive pricing policies by drug manufacturers. Seven years ago, *Farma ter Verantwoording* filed a complaint with the Netherlands Authority for Consumers and Markets about *Leadiant’s* excessive pricing of rare disease medicine CDCA.



In February 2025, a Rotterdam court confirmed that the company's *500x price hike* was unjustified and an abuse of market dominance, resulting in a *€17 million* fine for the drug manufacturer. Farma ter Verantwoording's initiative inspired NGOs in Belgium, Italy and Spain to lodge copycat unfair pricing claims with national competition authorities. While the case in Belgium is still pending, Leadiant has received fines of *€3.5 million* in Italy and *€10.25 million* in Spain for misuse of its economic power position.

Just like the researchers who inspired her own advocacy work, Katrina is also passing on her impact ethos to the next generation of academics. One of her former pupils with whom she is still in contact is an active member of the student advocacy group; Universities Allied for Essential Medicines (UAEM). Sabrina Wimmer co-authored a UAEM exposé revealing that up to 97% of the Oxford/Astra Zeneca's COVID-19 vaccine funding came from taxpayers or charitable trusts. "Sabrina was just finishing just finishing her medical studies at the University of Groningen and yet her research was *the top story in The Guardian newspaper*." Their research was later published in the prestigious medical journal, *BMJ Global Health*.

PART OF A COMMUNITY

For Katrina, collaboration and community are at the core of her academic work and her impact activities. Her successes in academia and advocacy are not hers alone, but rather shared with a team of like-minded

thinkers and do-ers. Far from the world of leather elbow patches, ivory towers and incomprehensible lecture series; law for Katrina is about investing in networks, sharing knowledge or opportunities and (sometimes) picking a fight with a corporate giant on behalf of the citizens unfairly paying twice for a medicine. Especially when it's a fight you win.

"The supportive and inspirational community working on access to medicines has kept me in this field. Some of the people I met when I was an intern at the World Health Organization went on to be my mentors. Now, I'm at a place in my career where it's my turn to create that space and give back to the new voices."

For those interested in following the progress of the case Katrina and Farma ter Verantwoording have brought against AbbVie, they share regular updates on their [website](#). Better yet, you can show your support for their work by signing an [endorsement letter](#).

UvA students can also get involved with Farma ter Verantwoording or the Amsterdam chapter of Universities Allied for Essential Medicines (uaem.uva@gmail.com).

Venture minded

Over the years, researchers and students from our faculty have started a wide range of companies and (non-profit) initiatives. Below is a selection of the startups, foundations, and projects with origins in our faculty.



WOMEN'S LEGAL AID CLINICS

The Women's Legal Clinic Amsterdam (Vrouwenrechtswinkel) was founded by the Law Hub in 2021 together with Bureau Clara Wichmann and the Municipality of Amsterdam, as the very first legal aid centre for women. We are now active in three locations: Amsterdam, Leiden and in 2025 a third Women's Legal Clinic was launched in Utrecht. These centres offer free legal advice to all women on issues such as divorce, street harassment, and domestic violence. The Women's Legal Clinic was founded to reduce inequality and to empower women through accessible legal support.



ARBEIDSMARKTRESEARCH

ARR (Labour Market Research in English) was founded in 2010 by Professor Evert Verhulp. ARR develops digital, legal knowledge systems in the field of labor law. The calculation tool 'Hoe Lang Werkloos?' (How Long Unemployed?), the digital, interactive decision tree 'KOO' which provides an estimate of the chance of success in a manifestly unreasonable dismissal procedure, and the tool 'Mag ontslag?' (Can I be fired?) are examples of knowledge systems developed by ARR.



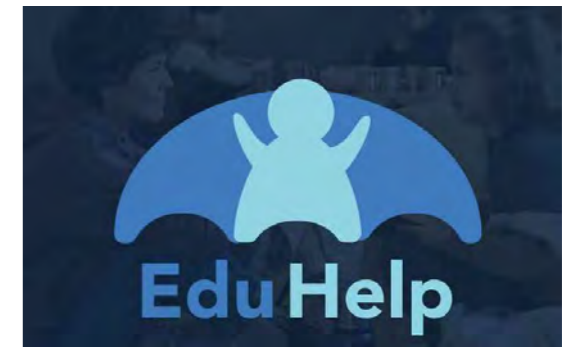
TENANT HERO

The housing crisis in Amsterdam not only makes it difficult to find a place to live, but also potentially exposes tenants to exploitation. The startup TenantHero offers a solution: an advanced AI model supplemented with manual assessments to examine the legality of contracts. TenantHero enables tenants to fully understand their agreements, including identifying the rights they may have that are missing from their current agreement.



N-EXTLAW

N-EXTLAW is an ERC-funded research project by Marija Bartl (ACT), which focuses on identifying how the law can promote socio-ecological transformation. The project explores ways to reshape legal frameworks to stimulate meaningful change. N-EXTLAW aims to make sustainability not just an ideal, but a practical and feasible reality.



EDU HELP

EduHelp was founded by one of our PPLE students, Maria Iordan, who wanted to support refugee children in COA (asylum) centers. To promote better integration, EduHelp now operates in two COA locations in Amsterdam. Through this program, students teach refugee children in their native language, enabling them to integrate into society more quickly. EduHelp wants to make education a right for everyone, not a privilege.



LET US SPEAK

A startup with a multifaceted mission: enabling citizens to participate in a demonstration safely and legally. To this end, they use practical workshops, games, and film screenings to empower individuals to protest with confidence and to connect with fellow change-makers. Notably, their educational game 'Werewolf: Climate Edition' was sold out during Dutch Design Week, and they are currently publishing their first protest handbook.



YERA HUB

The Young Environmental Research & Advocacy Hub Europe conducts research into EU environmental legislation with a commitment to representing young voices. Their mission is to influence EU legislation to better protect the environment by sharing their findings with civil society organisations and key stakeholders, and by building alliances with like-minded NGOs to stimulate impactful advocacy.



PILPG

PILPG (PUBLIC INTERNATIONAL LAW AND POLICY GROUP)

Marieke de Hoon is Director & Senior Counsel of the Dutch office of The Public International Law & Policy Group; a global pro bono law firm providing free legal assistance to parties involved in peace negotiations, drafting post-conflict constitutions, and war crimes prosecution/transitional justice. To facilitate the adoption of this legal assistance, PILPG also provides policy planning assistance and training on matters related to conflict resolution.

CIVIC Stichting Civic

CIVIC FOUNDATION

Tamar de Waal is an Assistant Professor of General Legal Theory at the University of Amsterdam. In 2017, she obtained her PhD on the proliferation of civic integration policies in EU member states. She founded the Civic Foundation with the aim of improving Dutch civic integration policy based on scientific insights.

AI AND ELDERLY CARE

“ *Digital age discrimination can lead to health inequality among older people: creating systematic, avoidable differences in health outcomes between population groups.* ”

Hannah van Kolschooten launched a campaign against the irresponsible use of AI in elderly care. Her work highlights how “digital age discrimination” can emerge throughout the entire lifecycle of medical AI. She researched how the EU addresses this issue and concluded that the negative effects of age discrimination in medical AI are still insufficiently recognised. Now appointed as a member of the World Health Organization’s Technical Advisory Group on Artificial Intelligence for Health (TAG-AI), Hannah is able to apply her expertise on a global scale.



Hannah van Kolschooten



Racism & Technology Center

RACISM AND TECHNOLOGY CENTER

The Racism and Technology Center uses technology as a mirror to reflect and make visible existing racist practices in Dutch society. As a knowledge center, UvA & HvA researchers Naomi Appelman, Jill Toh, and Hans de Zwart provide a platform, resources, knowledge, skills and legitimacy to anti-racism and digital rights organisations to help them create an understanding of how racism is manifested in technology with the goal of dismantling systems of oppression and injustice.



IMPACT IS A JUGGLING ACT

As a professor of labour law, Evert Verhulp; one of the Netherlands' most cited scholars; studies radical shifts in the labour market. But beyond academia, he advises at the highest levels (including the Dutch government), founded his own company, and is a familiar face in the media. How does he juggle so many different activities at once?

"I never planned to become a professor of labour law. In fact, it wasn't even on my radar. But as so often happens, one thing led to another, and before I knew it I was immersed in the complexities of the labour markets; self-employment, pensions, gig-work and fundamental rights. One thing I have always known, though: I could never do purely theoretical research which is detached from reality. For me, research must have societal impact."

IMPROVING LABOUR LAW?

For years, Verhulp has combined academic research with advisory work, entrepreneurship and writing for a broad audience. "But I don't just study labour law. I want to improve it."

"I don't just study labour law. I want to improve it."

One of the most urgent issues he has tackled recently concerns pension funds and the growing number of self-employed workers who do not pay contributions (but may still be entitled to a pension). "It's a ticking time bomb," he says. "Take the healthcare sector: an estimated quarter of a million self-employed professionals may be entitled to pensions they haven't personally funded. If they claim those rights, the financial strain on the system will be enormous, with negative consequences for employees who have consistently paid their contributions." Verhulp has repeatedly raised the alarm and continues to push for legal reform.

According to him, the biggest challenge in combining research with impact is reaching the right audience. Those who can actually make change happen. "Be deliberate about who you want to influence, whether that's civil servants, academics or students. A strategic approach amplifies your impact."

WORKING WITH GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Until 2022, Verhulp served as an independent Crown-appointed member of the Social and Economic Council (SER), where he sat on the executive board and chaired the Committee for the Promotion of Employee Participation. "Becoming a Crown-appointed member was an eye-opener," he reflects. "I saw first-hand how politics works and how important networks are."

One of his most meaningful roles was chairing the Committee for the Cultural Sector. "Working conditions in that sector were poor, and the committee's research and reports helped drive improvements. Seeing policy change as a result of your work is incredibly rewarding."

"It's a myth that research and impact are mutually exclusive."

Where such roles were once filled through co-optation, they now require a formal application. Verhulp's advice is simple: "If you get the opportunity, take it. You expand your influence and gain direct access to policymakers." For him, it wasn't a turning point; he had already worked with the SER; but it certainly strengthened his impact.

BRIDGING RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Education, he stresses, is just as important as research and practice. Together with colleagues, he developed a post-academic course for professionals with three to five years of experience in labour law. Those who pass the exam can join the Dutch Employment Lawyers Association.

"Ultimately, politicians make the decisions, but scientists can help shape them"

“The course fosters valuable discussions where academics and practitioners learn from one another.” His entrepreneurial journey began with a Dutch Supreme Court ruling on severance pay, which required complex calculations for the expected duration of unemployment. “I realised an algorithm could do this far more efficiently, using data from institutions like Statistics Netherlands.” Rather than navigating layers of faculty bureaucracy, the faculty director suggested starting a company. Today, the firm employs four people. “It doesn’t make millions, but it’s financially independent and that in itself is a success.”

His advice to legal researchers: “If you have an idea, make it usable. If people use it, it has value. If they’re willing to pay for it, even better. That enables reinvestment and innovation. The idea that research and entrepreneurship are incompatible simply isn’t true.”



ENGAGING WITH THE MEDIA

How can researchers strategically use media and build relationships with journalists? Verhulp’s approach is refreshingly direct: “If you don’t have a contact, find a journalist’s details and call them. Pitch your idea. If they find it interesting, it will get published.”

Articles addressing recognisable societal issues can even lead to parliamentary questions. “Ministries may reach out for input and suddenly you’re part of the conversation. Reaching policymakers isn’t complicated. You just have to do it.”

That said, public debates; particularly around labour issues like self-employment; can be sensitive. “Opinions differ, and one poorly chosen word can trigger irritation or anger. I stick to legal research and sharing its outcomes. But making research accessible to a wider audience often means journalists omit nuances. That took some getting used to.”

“Don’t keep discoveries to yourself.”

LOOKING AHEAD

Another issue currently on his mind is continued wage payments during illness. “I believe the current Dutch system needs reform.” Under existing rules, employers must continue paying an employee’s salary for up to two years of illness. “While effective at a macro level, it places a heavy burden on smaller employers.”

He offers a practical example: “Imagine a physiotherapist with two employees. If one falls ill, the others have to work twice as hard — hiring a replacement is often financially unfeasible. Ironically, a policy designed to support sick employees can, in such cases, have the opposite effect and may not actually aid reintegration.”

Ultimately, politicians make the decisions, but scientists can help shape them. “It starts with a strong argument, investing time, and putting forward clear proposals. Don’t keep your findings to yourself if they can improve law or policy. Publish them. Draw attention to them. Call a journalist, a politician, a civil servant. Share your insights. That’s how change begins.”



A NEW LEGAL STRUCTURE FOR SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

“We are looking at how to embed a social mission and impact goals through development of a new legal structure for social enterprises. My motivation is that you can make these kinds of sustainable business practices much more common by embedding them in law.”

In December 2023, Nena van der Horst spoke in an interview with the faculty about her research into a new legal structure aimed at making socially responsible entrepreneurship more accessible and commonplace. The goal: to support sustainable business practices and normalise social impact as a core business objective. Her work soon caught political attention. She was contacted by the Dutch party D66, inspired to help put a new legal framework for social entrepreneurship on the parliamentary agenda.



Nena van der Horst





MARGARETHA WEWERINKE-SINGH

“What began as a student initiative grew into a global campaign.”

THE CASE THAT WAS HEARD AROUND THE WORLD

As the self-proclaimed International City of Peace and Justice, The Hague is home to both the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Public attention often gravitates toward the ICC, known for prosecuting world leaders such as Putin and Netanyahu. Yet the ICJ’s recent advisory opinion on climate change may have far more immediate consequences for citizens worldwide. Including those living in the Netherlands.

On July 23, 2025, the Court spoke out for the first time on the legal obligations of UN Member States in tackling climate change. In this landmark opinion, it made clear that the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is a fundamental human right. States are bound under international law not only to address climate change, but also to safeguard human rights.

FROM STUDENT PETITION TO GLOBAL CASE

The origins of this historic case lie with a group of students from the island nation of Vanuatu and other Pacific islands. Guided by legal scholar and University of Amsterdam professor of Sustainability Law, Margaretha Wewerinke-Singh, they set out in 2015 to bring the pressing challenge posed by climate change to the International Court of Justice.

Their message was clear: those who are not responsible for polluting the planet, yet bear its heaviest consequences, deserve legal protection.

It began on a small scale, with a petition launched by students from Pacific Island Law Schools. “What began as a student initiative grew within a few years into a global campaign,” Margaretha explains, “supported by more than 130 countries.” Over the past decade, she has been the driving force behind the case.

In March 2023, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 77/276 by consensus (without a vote), with 132 states acting as co-sponsors. In December 2024, the Court held two weeks of public hearings, attended by 96 states and 11 international organisations.

What was asked of the court?

At the heart of the case were several pressing questions: what must states do to protect the climate and environment? What are the consequences if they fail to act (either now or in the past) especially when other countries suffer harm as a result? And should states provide compensation to vulnerable nations impacted by climate change?

These questions touch upon major international agreements, including the Climate Convention, the Paris Agreement, the Law of the Sea Convention, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. An ICJ opinion has the potential to set both a legal and political precedent, influencing national court rulings, public policy, and future negotiations.

The proceedings spanned more than two years, from March 29, 2023 (the adoption of Resolution 77/276) to July 23, 2025 (the advisory opinion). The Court received 91 written statements and 62 written comments. In December 2024, two weeks of hearings took place at the Peace Palace in the Hague.

What made this case remarkable was the scale and diversity of its participants: from global powers to small island states, from youth representatives to Indigenous leaders. The Netherlands also submitted a written statement.

What does the ICJ say?

The Court emphasised that climate change threatens fundamental human rights, including the right to health, an adequate standard of living, and privacy. According to the ICJ, a clean and healthy environment is not only a human right in itself, but also a prerequisite for the enjoyment of other rights.

Although the opinion is not legally binding, the ICJ's authority as the highest judicial body of the United Nations carries significant weight. Its conclusions serve as a guiding force in the development of international law.

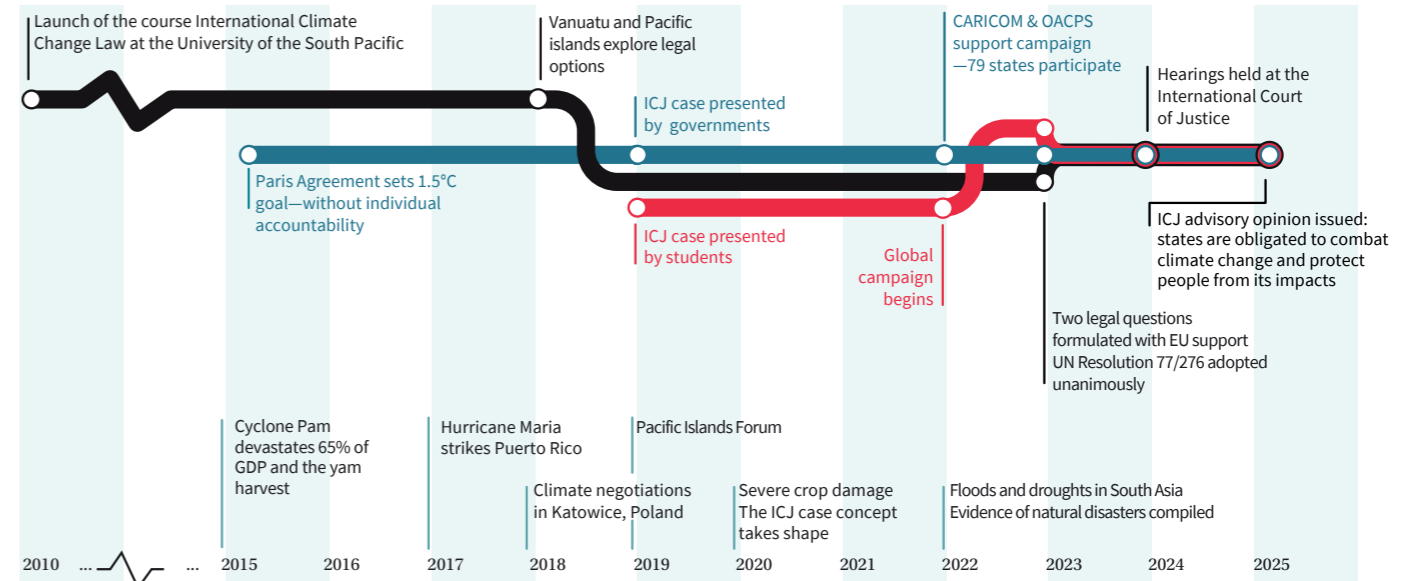
The Court confirms that states may be held accountable for failing to meet their obligations. In such cases, they are required to cease harmful activities, prevent it happening again, and repair any damage caused. The opinion clarifies that all states, including the Netherlands, are already under a legal obligation to take effective action against climate change and to protect human rights.

THE BEGINNING OF SOMETHING BIGGER

The Vanuatu case demonstrates what is possible when small voices resonate across the globe. This is not an endpoint, but a beginning. The focus now shifts to implementation.

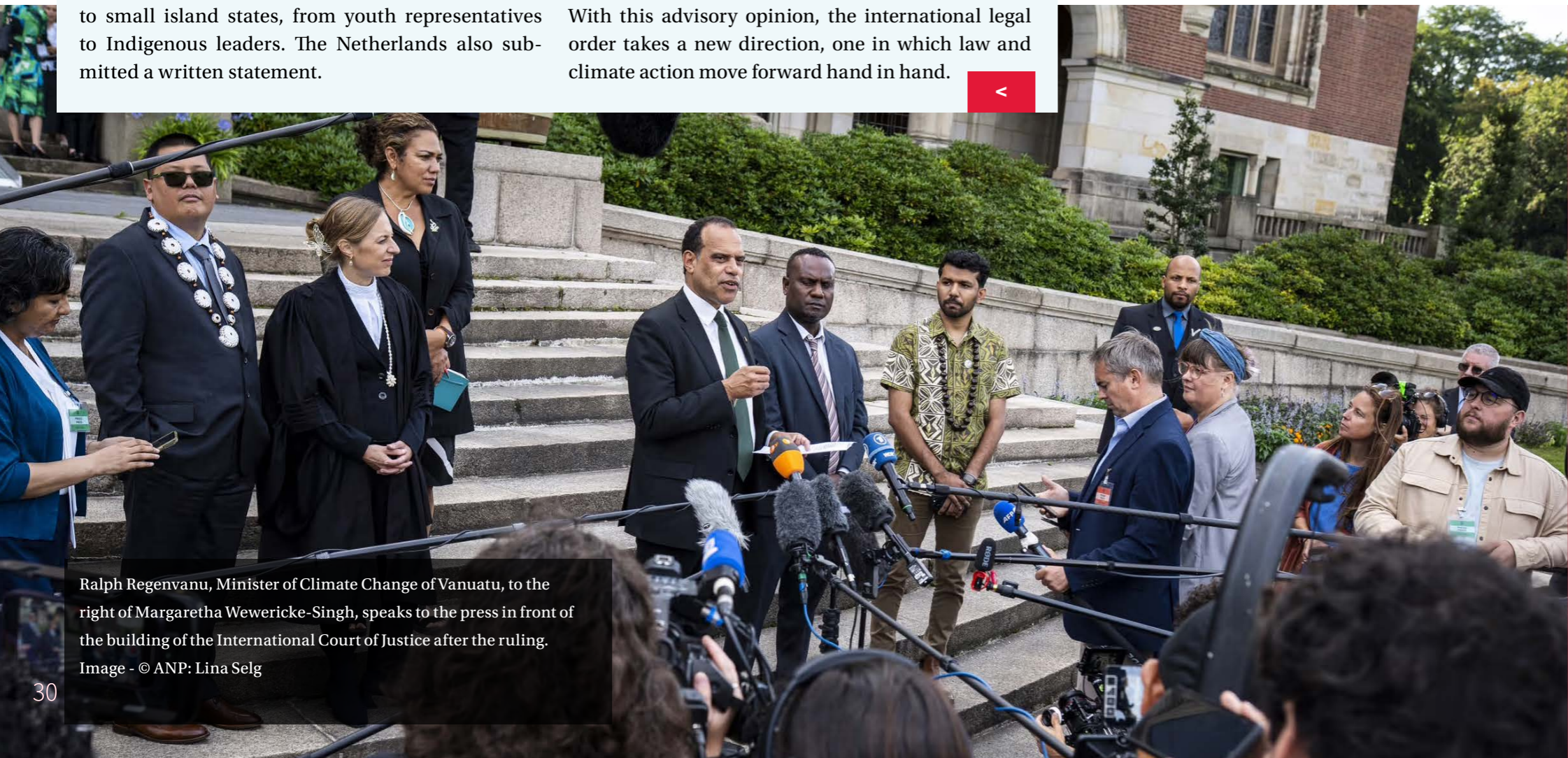
With this advisory opinion, the international legal order takes a new direction, one in which law and climate action move forward hand in hand.

THE PATH TO CLIMATE JUSTICE



Discover the key milestones behind this groundbreaking climate case. Proof that the road to justice is paved through global cooperation.

- Key actors:**
- VANUATU & PACIFIC ISLAND
with Margaretha as lead representative
 - GOVERNMENTS
action at national and international levels
 - STUDENTS
the spark that started it all



Ralph Regenvanu, Minister of Climate Change of Vanuatu, to the right of Margaretha Wewericke-Singh, speaks to the press in front of the building of the International Court of Justice after the ruling. Image - © ANP: Lina Selg

What Has the Case Achieved So Far?

- 1. International Recognition:**
Climate responsibility is now firmly established as a legal issue, not merely a moral or political one.
- 2. Awareness and Mobilisation:**
The case galvanised thousands of young people, legal experts, policymakers, and citizens worldwide. Public debates were held in dozens of countries, often supported by sponsors.
- 3. National-Level Preparation:**
Several countries, including EU member states, are preparing to incorporate the ICJ's opinion into domestic legislation and legal proceedings. Cases such as Urgenda in the Netherlands, KlimaSeniorinnen in Switzerland, and climate litigation in Germany and Australia may gain powerful new support.
- 4. Documentation and Knowledge Sharing:**
Thanks to sponsorship contributions, extensive documentation has been compiled from scientific reports to testimonies of affected communities. This publicly accessible body of knowledge lays the groundwork for future climate litigation.

Lessons for Change

The Faculty of Law offers an enormous range of educational programs and training courses for students and professionals. Each program contributes, in its own way, to the tapestry of societal impact generated by the entire faculty.

The Responsive Civil Servant



What: Iris van Domselaar developed the professional training program 'The Responsive Civil Servant'.

For whom: a two-day masterclass specially developed for lawyers working within (executive) government institutions.

The Compliance Bible



What: Benjamin van Rooij developed a handbook for professionals working in the compliance sector. It is a practical guide to the legal and ethical considerations in compliance activities.

For whom: for everyone in the business world who deals with compliance.

Capacity Building – Competition law



What: Kati Cseres develops training courses together with Article 19, including a 2-day Capacity Building to provide NGOs with a solid basic knowledge of the key legal and economic principles of EU competition law, the enforcement system and the institutional structure.

For whom: for NGOs under pressure, in countries such as Hungary or Poland to use consumer protection laws to defend human rights.

Summer school: Platform regulation



What: Paddy Leerssen co-organises and teaches this five-day summer course, given by experts from the field. The course offers an intensive introduction to the Digital Services Act (DSA) and other important EU rules regarding platform governance.

For whom: Professionals and researchers in the field of technology regulation, law, digital rights or platform governance who wish to delve deeper into the DSA and expand their network.

Impactful education



Sterk op je werk Recht in de klas

What: Agnes Akkerman, Susan Leclercq, Judith Hoefnagel & Frances Singleton developed the educational programs *Recht in de Klas* and *Sterk op je Werk* together with the Amsterdam Law Hub and Stichting MetRechtInvesteren.

For whom: *Recht in de Klas* focuses on increasing the legal awareness of Amsterdam children (grades 6 through 8) by transferring (legal) knowledge from students. In *Sterk op je Werk*, MBO, HBO, and WO students devise solutions together for problems faced by young people in understanding and defending their rights on the workfloor.

European Judicial Training Network

What: Christina Eckes developed the training for European Judicial Training Network

For whom: a two-day training course for the European Judicial Training Network on climate litigation and judicial decision-making with 55 participants for the first edition.

Masterclass Entrepreneurship

What: Nathalie Dijkman-Atria and Liesbeth Hulst together devised the Masterclass Entrepreneurship for Social Lawyers.

What and for whom: in order to contribute to a stronger inflow and reduced dropout rate of young social lawyers, they developed, together with practitioners, a masterclass to guide these novice social lawyers through entrepreneurship over three evenings.





“The DSA affects so many people, and everyone is trying to understand it. We help put the puzzle pieces in the right place.”

- Joris van Hoboken

CHASING A MOVING TARGET: THE DSA OBSERVATORY

Regulating Big Tech is like trying to repair a train while it is speeding ahead at full throttle (and someone else is controlling the switches). But for the DSA Observatory, a research initiative of the University of Amsterdam, that race against the clock began long before politicians woke up. “We had already been working on platform regulation for over ten years,” says Joris van Hoboken. He and Paddy Leerssen are the principal investigators of the Observatory. “And suddenly, the world caught up with us,” Leerssen adds.

The Digital Services Act (DSA) was, from the outset, a law destined to change the playing field. This EU regulation is one of the first international attempts to hold tech giants accountable for their impact on human rights and democratic values. What surprised many was the speed at which it happened: normally, legislation of this scale takes years, yet the DSA was adopted within a single year. Now the law is reshaping the digital landscape and the Observatory helps map and interpret those developments.

NEW RULES

In 2019, the European Commission began outlining what would later become the DSA. Van Hoboken and his colleagues at the Institute for Information Law (IVI) knew the moment was ripe. The E-Commerce Directive; the framework governing online services since 2000; was hopelessly outdated. Something new was needed.

That same year, the DSA Observatory was established and officially launched in 2020, just as Brussels began seriously drafting new rules for the digital age. “We knew: this is a once-in-a-generation moment,” says Van Hoboken. “The shift from self-regulation to public oversight. That doesn’t happen every day.”

A HUB WITH A MISSION

At its core, the DSA Observatory consists of four researchers, supported by a broader circle of collaborators within the UvA and across Europe. But its reach extends much further. The Observatory serves as a hub where academics, regulators, policymakers, and civil society organisations converge around the fast-evolving field of platform regulation.

Unlike governments, tech companies, or NGOs, the Observatory brings something unique: independent, socially engaged academic expertise.

“The DSA is not just about technology,” says Van Hoboken. “It’s about democracy, freedom of expression, and fundamental rights. That’s where we can make a difference. Our work is to dig deep, think critically, and show the bigger picture.”

The Observatory operates at the intersection of law, politics, and society. That position can be delicate. Are they researchers? Activists? Something in between?

“We’re not activists,” says Leerssen. “But we’re not neutral either. We care about how these laws shape society, and we are honest about that.” He puts it plainly: “Legal research is political, whether we acknowledge it or not. The only thing we can do is be transparent about our values and rigorous in our arguments.” The Observatory does not take official positions, but the researchers involved are not hesitant to speak out through open letters, advisory opinions, or critical analyses when necessary. “There is room for disagreement,” Van Hoboken adds. “That makes the Observatory a platform, not a mouthpiece.”

A CHANGE OF COURSE

Initially, the team assumed they would have more time to influence the legislative process: publishing papers, organising debates, building coalitions. But Brussels moved faster than anyone expected.

“We had to change course,” says Leerssen. “Instead of helping shape the law, we had to help others work with it.”

That shift transformed the Observatory’s mission. If they could no longer amend the DSA, they could help civil society organisations make the most of it by interpreting the law, translating it into practice, and guiding stakeholders on how to engage with it.

BRINGING THE DSA TO LIFE

The DSA has been adopted, but what does it mean in concrete terms?

That remains to be seen. The law imposes strict obligations on online platforms: transparency requirements, moderation standards, public ad archives, and data access for researchers. In theory, a major leap forward. In practice, often a legal maze. And that is precisely where the Observatory steps in.

“We receive constant questions,” says Leerssen. “Can I request this data? What does this term mean? How should I respond to this notice?” People need guidance.”

The Observatory organises workshops, publishes explanatory materials, and fosters dialogue between regulators, NGOs, and academics. It has also launched the DSA Research Network: a joint initiative with German partners aimed at promoting sustainable cross-border collaboration.

“It’s about community,” says Van Hoboken. “The DSA affects so many people, and everyone is trying to understand it. We help put the puzzle pieces in the right place.”

VISIBLE IMPACT

Has their work made a difference?

Absolutely. Some of the DSA’s most innovative provisions began as academic ideas. Leerssen’s PhD research contributed to the requirement for public advertisement archives; an important step toward transparency. His advocacy for stronger safeguards around data access for research has since been taken up by the European Commission.

A particularly notable moment for the Observatory was the lawsuit against X (formerly Twitter), in which a Dutch PhD candidate sued the company over shadow banning using legal arguments grounded in Leerssen’s research. The case made headlines. “It shows how ideas can travel,” he says. “From theory to the courtroom.”

Van Hoboken points to earlier achievements. Research conducted with colleagues on platform liability informed the DSA’s risk-based approach. “Sometimes you only see the impact of your work years later,” he says. “But a seed is always planted.”



Platform regulation is no longer a niche issue. The DSA makes front-page news, sparks lawsuits, and draws attention from American politicians. Yet that visibility also has a downside. “Unfortunately, some researchers in this field become targets,” Van Hoboken warns. “We see people attacked, harassed, even sued simply for doing their job.”

But the stakes are high. “We’re dealing with real power here,” says Leerssen. “This isn’t just about tech policy. It’s about who shapes the public debate and who gets to be heard.” They are particularly concerned about marginalized groups. “The DSA contains provisions meant to protect people; especially women, journalists, and minorities; from online harm,” says Van Hoboken. “But that only works if the law is properly enforced.”

REGULATORS

As ambitious as it may be, the DSA is no silver bullet. Some of the most pressing questions about enforcement, resources, and lobbying pressure are only now coming into view.

The Observatory keeps a critical eye on developments. “We’re not a fan club,” says Van Hoboken. “We support the DSA’s objectives, but we also ask tough questions and hold institutions accountable.” That also means debunking myths. As the DSA attracts global attention, misinformation spreads quickly. “We hear many claims that are simply incorrect,” says Leerssen. “Sometimes we have to step in and say: ‘That’s not what the law says at all.’”

Ultimately, the Observatory works toward more than knowledge production. It documents a pivotal moment of transformation and helps shape what comes next.

Colleagues from the Faculty of Law who contribute (or have contributed) to the DSA Observatory include: *Ilaria Buri, Naomi Appelman, Natali Helberger, Anna van Duin, Joao Quintais, John Albert, Magdalena Jozwiak, Ronan Fahy, Martin Senftleben, Max van Drunen, Iris Toepoel, Gabriela Trogrlic, and Linda Weigl.*

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THE STATE OF THE RULE OF LAW

“ *Why is no one hitting the emergency brake?* ”

Legal philosopher Tamar de Waal writes political columns for *De Groene Amsterdammer* and regularly appears in outlets such as *Vrij Nederland* and *NRC Handelsblad*, as well as on radio and television, to discuss the state of the rule of law.

“We have invested far too little in the rule of law. The West has complacently leaned back, assuming that tolerance, progressiveness, and the separation of powers were secure. But for the past thirty years, the democratic rule of law has been losing ground.”



Tamar de Waal





**NOTHING
IN LIFE IS CERTAIN
EXCEPT DEATH
- AND TAXES**

BENJAMIN
FRANKLIN

We live in interesting times. From the re-election of Donald Trump to wars in Ukraine and Gaza, the rise of tech giants, artificial intelligence, and the lingering impact of the global pandemic. Politicians and citizens alike are trying to adapt to digital disruption, economic instability, climate change, and growing social inequality.

Yet while the media often focuses on the visible symptoms of crisis, there is a less conspicuous (but no less powerful) force shaping much of what we see: taxation. This is hardly a topic destined to trend on social media. And yet taxes play a decisive role behind the scenes; from Europe's rearmament plans in geopolitically tense times, to the way second-hand fashion and content creators are reimagining digital economies.

TAX SHOULD BE CENTER STAGE, NOT SIDELINED

Stef van Weeghel, professor of International Tax Law and until recently interim chair of the Tax Law department at the UvA, argues that taxation is not merely a technical matter or political footnote. On the contrary: taxation (and the reform thereof) lies at the heart of social and political change. From the Boston Tea Party that sparked the American Revolution to the recent uproar surrounding the Dutch childcare benefits scandal (de toeslagenaffaire), history is filled with social transitions driven by unfair tax practices.

“Tax may not be sexy, but it is fundamental and it determines how we live.”

Tax is a mirror of our values, an instrument of justice, and increasingly a battleground for addressing the greatest crises of our time. In conversation with Stef and Juan Manuel Vázquez, deputy director of the Amsterdam Centre for Tax Law (ACTL), four global trends in tax law take center stage, as they explain why it is high time these issues received greater attention.



JUAN MANUEL VÁZQUEZ
STEF VAN WEEGHEL & JUAN MANUEL VÁZQUEZ

TAX FOUR GLOBAL CHALLENGES

IMPORT DUTIES

The return of economic nationalism

The problem: As countries turn toward protectionist policy measures, tariffs (taxes on imported goods) are making a comeback as economic weapons. From EU measures against Chinese subsidies for electric vehicles to the ongoing trade rivalry between the US and China, tariffs are reshaping global supply chains.

Why it matters for tax law:

“Tariffs are often presented as an instrument of foreign policy,” Stef notes, “but at their core, they are simply taxes.” They have a direct impact on consumer prices, corporate profit margins, and even inflation figures. “One important reason for current tensions in international trade is that some EU countries have adopted tax policies that the US strongly opposes, claiming that these rules unfairly disadvantage American companies and go too far,” Juan Manuel adds. The Tax Law department examines how EU customs policy can better align with international trade obligations while still protecting crucial sectors.

Did you know? In 2023, more than €25 billion in import duties were paid within the EU: a significant, but also volatile, source of revenue for Member States.

CLIMATE CHANGE

A taxing problem

The problem: The world is not on track to meet the Paris climate goals. CO₂ emissions continue to rise, and climate disasters disproportionately affect the Global South and lower-income groups.

Why it matters for tax law:

“Carbon pricing, green tax incentives, and subsidies for sustainable technologies are among our most powerful tools,” Stef explains. But they must be both effective and fair. Wealthier countries and corporations often succeed in passing the costs of carbon pricing on to poorer populations. The tax law department conducts research into climate tax models with redistributive effects, ensuring that those who pollute the most also pay the most. Revenues can then be used to support vulnerable communities and invest in green infrastructure.

Did you know? Only around 23% of global emissions are currently covered by some form of carbon pricing.

REARMAMENT OF THE EU

Who Pays for Peace?

The problem: Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has triggered an unprecedented shift in European security policy. The EU is moving toward greater military integration and higher defense spending. This requires additional public funding, while at the same time the EU must repay funds deployed during the COVID crisis. The question remains: who will foot the bill?

Why it matters for tax law:

“The reality is that rearmament requires stable, long-term financing,” says Stef. “Historically, countries have raised taxes in preparation for possible wars, and in today’s tense geopolitical climate this will likely happen again,” Juan Manuel adds. Traditional revenue sources such as wage taxes are already under pressure. Meanwhile, differences in national debt levels and economic performance complicate burden-sharing among Member States. Tax scholars are therefore exploring new fiscal instruments, such as a pan-European defense levy or joint borrowing structures, to finance collective security in a fair manner.

Did you know? Since 2022, the EU has pledged more than €20 billion in military support to Ukraine, yet shared financing mechanisms remain politically fragile.

TAXING THE INTANGIBLE

A new form of income

The problem: The rise of Big Tech, digital platforms, freelance marketplaces, and digital nomads are transforming how people earn, live, and contribute (or sometimes fail to contribute) to public finances. On top of that, blockchain, crypto-assets, artificial intelligence, and algorithms present unprecedented challenges and opportunities for fair taxation.

Why it matters for tax law:

The debate over how (and where) to tax large tech companies has been ongoing for nearly a decade. Meanwhile, countries where users reside struggle to tax these companies in order to finance public services. Platforms such as Uber, Airbnb, Amazon, and Vinted make it easier for many to earn income but often operate in legal grey areas. The tax law department explores how digitalisation and technology can help create fair tax systems in which compliance is simple and avoidance is minimised. This includes research into digital services taxes, real-time reporting tools, new liability rules for platforms, and enhanced international cooperation.

Did you know? A 2022 study found that nearly 30% of Dutch freelancers in the gig economy were effectively “bogus self-employed” - undermining both labor protections and tax revenues.

“Given current tensions, countries are likely to raise taxes to finance defense spending.”

A LACK OF TAX AWARENESS

Looking back on his decades-long career, Stef repeatedly returns to one theme: connection. “People don’t see the link between their everyday behavior and the bigger picture. Someone selling a sweater on Vinted isn’t thinking about EU defense policy. But through tax law, those things are connected.”

For precisely this reason, recent criticism of the influence of commercial actors in tax innovation has prompted the department to take steps toward

greater transparency. Through public events, citizen science projects, and collaboration with policy-makers, efforts are underway to develop fairer and more responsive tax systems.

In a world filled with uncertainty, tax may not be glamorous but it is fundamental. It determines how we live, what we value, and how we respond to the crises of our time. “And perhaps,” Stef concludes, “it deserves a place of honor on the stage of public debate.”

A FAÇADE OF COMPLIANCE

“ *Is it worth rejecting cookies when visiting a website? I still take cookies seriously. I always say ‘no.’* ”

In March 2024, Amit Zac was interviewed about the widespread use of cookies by websites without proper consent. As a reminder: cookies can track data such as your location, IP address, previously visited pages, and even your email address. Legally, websites are required to ask for permission before collecting personal data—hence the ubiquitous pop-ups.

“The purpose of that legislation was to protect Europeans’ online privacy,” Amit explains. Subsequent media coverage exposed the large-scale collection of cookies without consent, leading to publications in Het Parool and BNNVARA.



Amit Zac



Stichting Civic is committed to rethinking today's integration policies. Through its *Humans of Inburgering* project, the organisation aims to put a human face to the experience of integrating in the Netherlands. In 2025, participants were interviewed about their experiences in light of the new integration law, which came into force on 1 January 2022. Texts are by Chela Lemmens, with photography by Julian Sarmiento.



#1 Razan

“Don't keep reinventing policy based on ad hoc solutions.”

Razan has lived in the Netherlands since 2011. “There are no shortcuts to true integration. To me, it's a lifelong process that demands determination and resilience. Mutual understanding, dialogue and cooperation are essential. I will only feel fully integrated when I am genuinely included — when I belong. Not in spite of being different, but because of it. How powerful would it be if society stopped seeing ‘difference’ as a threat or an obstacle, and instead embraced it as an enrichment?”



This series of portraits and interviews is part of the **Humans of Inburgering** project, created by journalist and photographer **Iris Timmermans** in collaboration with Stichting Civic, founded in 2017 by researcher **Tamar de Waal**.

#2 Mohammed

“Participation happens in real life. At work, on the street, through everyday interactions.”

Mohammed arrived in the Netherlands in 2017 and only truly came to understand Dutch society by actively taking part in it.

“There are countless customs and cultural norms you simply can’t learn through a predefined programme. You have to experience them in daily life. I had already been living and working here for years before I became a naturalised citizen. That exam added nothing to my understanding of Dutch society.”

What does work, he argues, is immediate inclusion.

“Participation isn’t something you learn from a textbook or multiple-choice test. It happens in practice. At work, on the street, in your interactions with colleagues, neighbours and customers. Let people take their place. Give them space and the rest will follow naturally.”



#3 Ako & Nashmil

“I can’t believe this could happen at a government institution. Our future was falling apart.”

Ako and Nashmil Salehi arrived in the Netherlands in 2014 with their one-year-old son.

“On 4 July 2019, after passing our final integration exam, we were officially integrated. We were overjoyed. I had been accepted into a Master’s programme in Architecture, and my wife Nashmil into a vocational programme in Social Care for experiential experts. We thought to ourselves: now the rest of our lives can begin.”

But just two weeks later, the Dutch agency Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs (DUO) demanded repayment of their integration costs, claiming they had not completed the process on time.

“In December, DUO responded to our appeal by saying we had submitted it too late and that we should have done so in June. Our future was collapsing around us. How could this happen? I can’t understand how such deadlines can be enforced by a government institution. Who pays for the delay in our lives?”

Fortunately, in April 2021, the court ruled that DUO had to withdraw its repayment claim. After two long years, Ako and Nashmil were finally free of their debt.



THE CHILDCARE BENEFITS SCANDAL

“ *It is clear that AI played a significant role in the Dutch childcare benefits scandal. Too much trust was placed in software that relied on discriminatory algorithms.* ”

Following an interview in January 2025 with professor of legal philosophy and ethics Iris van Domselaar about the aftermath of the Dutch childcare benefits scandal (de toeslagenaffaire), she was invited by the State Secretary for Finance to share her expertise, potentially contributing to further investigation.



Iris van Domselaar





“How quickly can you get in a taxi to Hilversum? Russia has just invaded Ukraine.”

LEGAL EXPERTISE IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Research usually moves slowly - and that is a good thing. Thorough academic work often takes months or years. After all, no one wants important legal conclusions hastily assembled in a single afternoon, fuelled by endless cups of coffee. Academic research operates more like the slow shifting of tectonic plates than the volcanic eruptions of the daily news cycle. But sometimes those shifting plates suddenly do erupt, after years of simmering legal tensions. In those moments, researchers must be ready to provide insights immediately, communicating quickly, clearly, and responsibly. That is precisely when UvA scholars Marieke de Hoon (international criminal law) and Marten Zwanenburg (military law) take a step forward: when their work suddenly becomes immediate and urgent.

BETWEEN LAW AND CURRENT AFFAIRS

Wars in Ukraine and Gaza, the downing of flight MH17, atrocities in Sudan; these are not only tragedies, they are also legal events. They raise questions about war crimes, proportionality, sovereignty, and accountability. At such times, experts are needed who can distinguish between opinion and law, between speculation and evidence.

For Marieke and Marten, responding swiftly to such events is second nature, sometimes in the middle of the night or in a break between two lectures. The goal is not to make the news themselves, but to ensure that when the news breaks, reliable and independent legal interpretation is available. They achieve this through media appearances, blogs, toolkits, and collaboration with NGOs and governments: all ways of connecting slow-moving scholarship to a constantly changing reality.

Not everyone watches the evening news. To have impact, legal knowledge must reach different audiences.”

The news of the 2022 invasion of Ukraine reached the Netherlands in the hours of the early morning. At 6 a.m., Marieke’s phone was already buzzing



nonstop with requests to comment on the consequences with respect to international criminal law. But not all international developments happen at night. Sometimes they occur during a lecture: when the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants against, among others, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Marieke turned her class into an impromptu yet highly relevant discussion with her students. The perfect warm-up for the interviews she would give afterward.

Marten is often asked to provide legal interpretation of specific incidents, such as the massacre in Bucha. Such events unfold at lightning speed, and the public forms its understanding based on contradictory and fragmented reports. His task is to explain quickly and clearly what the law says, when something constitutes a violation, and what avenues exist for accountability.

BEN TELDERS

An inspiration for Marten is Ben Telders, who was Professor of International Law in Leiden during the Second World War. Telders publicly wrote about the illegality of the German occupation and, together with colleague Rudolph Cleveringa, opposed the notorious “Aryan declaration” intended to exclude Jewish academics from the university.

Cleveringa's famous protest speech in 1940 built on Telders' legal reasoning. Telders was arrested and died in 1945 in Bergen-Belsen. His story demonstrates how powerful and inspiring academic voices can be in times of crisis: they bring not only knowledge, but also moral authority.



BEYOND THE MEDIA

Not everyone follows the nightly news. To have impact, legal knowledge must reach a variety of audiences. Marten regularly writes for legal blogs such as Articles of War and EJIL: Talk! These platforms are read not only by scholars, but also by legal advisers in ministries, NGOs, and international organisations. In fact, he once read them himself when he worked as a lawyer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; now he writes to inform the next generation of decision-makers.

Marieke leads the Dutch branch of Public International Law & Policy Group (PILPG), a nonprofit that provides legal advice in (post-)conflict settings. After the downing of MH17, members of parliament requested a legal analysis of the disaster. Marieke led the team that produced a report later cited in parliamentary debates, and she herself provided explanations during ministerial briefings. Perhaps even more important was her collaboration with Patroon Legal Design on the website mh17.legal: specifically designed for next of kin who have no formal legal training. The site explains the complex web of legal proceedings through a clear, visual narrative. It is a strong example of how law (when properly explained) can offer not only justice, but also comfort.

“The law is not only for courtrooms, but for everyone.”

Marten is also involved in founding the International Humanitarian and Criminal Law (IHCL) Platform, where researchers from the Netherlands and Belgium come together to discuss complex legal

questions. At a time when warfare evolves faster than legislation, such conversations are essential to keeping international law relevant.

ECHOES OF IMPACT

Do all these efforts make a difference? There are clear indications that they do.

Marten has experienced the strange reality of hearing his television statements being quoted verbatim in parliamentary questions to ministers: “Professor Zwanenburg said this — what is your response?” His media appearances have thus become moments of democratic accountability.

Marieke was allowed to convince the Ministers of Justice of the Council of Europe of the desirability of default judgments in the new Tribunal for the Aggression of Ukraine. It is unclear what her effect was exactly, but it was initially not included in the statute, and now it is.

VALUE FOR SOCIETY

The bridge between science and society can sometimes seem fragile. The tectonic plates of knowledge and practice move slowly alongside and over one another, until the tremor comes. When knowledge is communicated carefully, it can adapt quickly to unfolding events. The law is not only for courtrooms, but for everyone; and it must be understood precisely when the ground is shifting.



At those moments, researchers like Marieke and Marten play a key role in bridging information and society. They do not abandon their academic principles; rather, they translate them into the pressing questions of the day. Through accessible, independent explanation, they help policymakers, journalists, and the public arrive at a shared understanding of legal reality. And that is crucial. Because when legal issues touch real lives, the ability to explain the law clearly is often the first step toward justice.

CHATGPT AS THERAPIST

“My fear is that the intense focus on the technical possibilities of AI will make us lose sight of the profound complexity of our lives - and the meaningful practices that shape them.”

Ethicist and legal researcher Marijn Sax studies digital manipulation and deception, including in the field of AI. He has been outspoken in criticising the use of AI in healthcare, advocating instead for what he calls “radical humanity.”

His opinion piece; highly critical of AI as a replacement for psychologists; led to a video collaboration with Omroep Human. Earlier, in 2017, he also criticized a commercially driven rewards program by Zilveren Kruis. That piece resulted in an invitation to discuss the issue and ultimately contributed to the discontinuation of their digital healthcare program.

Together with colleague Jeff Ausloos, Marijn also researched the manipulation of children in Fortnite. Their findings prompted the Dutch Authority for Consumers and Markets (ACM) to invite them for further explanation and eventually led to a multimillion-euro fine for the game's developer, Epic Games.



Marijn Sax



THE WEIGHT OF THE WILD

Directed by Andrea Leiter (UvA) & Nathaniel Bockley (Critical Angle).

'Counting each blade of grass and every bee, one by one? Yeah - that's pretty ambitious.'

The Weight of the Wild, a short documentary by Andrea Leiter and filmmaker Nathaniel Bockley (Critical Angle), begins with this observation. In 2014, the Romanian village of Armeniș became one of the first places where the rewilding of Europe's largest land mammal, the European bison, took place.

Ten years later, the project, led by WeWilder Campus and WWF Romania, has set in motion a socio-economic transformation: increasing local business activity, reducing reliance on salaried work and urban migration, and reevaluating life and work on the land.

A planned highway route straight through the mountains puts the last ten years of work at stake. To divert the road away from the treasured bison and the farming community that depends upon them, the project must translate its achievements into 'measurable value' which goes beyond the spreadsheet logic of the Ministry of Transport.

The film follows conversations with the two women at the heart of the WeWilder initiative. Their insights demonstrate how to balance a regenerative way of life with the pressures of economic development - not either/or, but rather both/and. Their presence and commitment have earned the community's trust. Cadence, perseverance, sustainability - the alchemical recipe for a collective future.



READ



A Democratic Crisis

Source: *UvA Podia*

The greatest crisis of our time is that of the current state of democracy. This is far from a recent problem brought about by the arrival of Trump and other radical populists on the scene: democracy has been weakening for decades. In *‘Wat iedereen aangaat’*, Lievisse Adriaanse explores what a better democracy could look like. Now that democracy is under pressure, the key is to come good on its promise: what concerns everyone must be decided by everyone.

€ 22,99 *DE BEZIGE BIJ*



How Does Fascism Work Today?

In her book *This is Fascism*, political scientist Rosan Smits explains how fascism begins: with language, rather than tanks. With democratic elections, instead of a coup. Fascism erodes a democracy from within. It gains ground thanks to people who believe things won't deteriorate further — until suddenly they do. Something painfully visible in the modern age. As a political scientist, Smits has spent years researching radicalisation.

Publishing date: October 14

€16 — *De Correspondent*

WATCH



The Neighborhood Court shows how a judge can also be a listener, a connector, and a human being

Source: *NPO Doc*

What if the courtroom wasn't located far away in a grand marble hall, but simply around the corner? In the Venserpolder neighborhood in Amsterdam-Zuidoost, judges take their seats in a lively community center. There, they handle cases involving debt and school absenteeism, as well as minor criminal offenses.

In *NPO Doc: The Neighborhood Court*, residents and support organisations are actively involved in the search for sustainable solutions to legal problems.

Watch on *NPOdoc.nl* and *NPO Start*.

LISTEN



The Amsterdam Law Hub Podcast explains how the rule of law and democracy work — or sometimes fail to.

In the Amsterdam Law Hub Podcast, you'll hear all about innovation within the legal field. The legal world could sometimes stand to be a bit less conservative. In the latest season, the Law Hub teams up with legal expert and journalist Folkert Jensma to speak with researchers at the University of Amsterdam about 'The House of Cards of the Rule of Law.'

Listen on *Spotify* and *Apple Podcasts*.



Study friends Hidde Bruinsma (freelance lawyer) and Niels van der Neut (Assistant Professor at the University of Amsterdam) show that law can be fun too.

It's serious — but not entirely. Through juicy court rulings, current (employment law) issues are discussed in a humorous and lighthearted way.

Listen on *Spotify* and *Apple Podcasts*.



From Black Holes to Pandemics

Net Echt is the podcast of the University of Amsterdam in which films, series, and pop culture are examined through a scientific lens. Do the images we are presented with actually match reality, and what can science tell us about them? For example, in the episode about the atomic bomb in Oppenheimer, theoretical physicist Machiel Kleemans, as an expert in the field, explains in detail how it really worked.

Listen on *Spotify* and *Apple Podcasts*.

LEGAL ADVICE CLINICS & LEGAL MAP

www.juridischekaart.nl



Looking for legal advice? You can go to the legal clinics of the Faculty of Law!

To support legal practitioners and citizens, the Amsterdam Law Hub, together with Patroon Legal Design, has developed a social-legal map of Amsterdam. At a glance, it shows which law clinics, legal aid desks, neighbourhood teams, and (pro bono) lawyers are active in each district of the city.