

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

Advancing Social, Economic, and Cultural Rights in a Polarised, Digitalised, and Unequal World

Launching Conference
of the NNHRR Working Group on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
and
of the project “Evolving Rights: Social Rights in the Era of Climate
Change and Digital Revolution”

Leiden University, 4th and 5th September 2025

Renewed momentum for social rights

In the Netherlands and around the world, economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR) — including the rights to housing, health, food, education, and social security — have long been viewed as “second-rank” rights. They face persistent barriers to codification, enforcement, and realization. As we confront escalating global crises — ranging from pandemics, wars, and climate change to digital disruption and deepening inequalities — ESCR are increasingly recognized as foundational to human dignity, democratic participation, and social cohesion. However, in practice, they are often still marginalised.

A key dimension of this debate concerns the role of the judiciary. The continued dichotomy between liberty rights and social rights — paired with limited mechanisms for judicial review — poses a significant obstacle. Yet our focus must go beyond courts to include administrative, political, and societal mechanisms for the realization of rights. New challenges are emerging in the digital era: from the increasing use of automated decision-making to barriers in accessing public services and legal remedies, the digitalisation of governance raises pressing questions about fairness, transparency, and inclusion in the protection of social rights.

While growing threats to civil liberties have rightly drawn public concern, social rights are more vital than ever — not only to protect the most vulnerable, but also to ensure meaningful democratic participation and resilient institutions.

This conference takes place at a time of renewed *momentum* for social rights. It aims to bring together scholars, practitioners, and advocates to collectively map the most pressing issues, identify existing research, and deepen understanding through critical exchange. By fostering collaboration across disciplines and jurisdictions, the conference seeks to generate both scholarly and societally relevant contributions to the advancement of ESCR.

A Double Launch Conference

This conference marks the official launch of the **Working Group on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights** within the Netherlands Network for Human Rights Research (NNHRR – Asser Institute), coordinated by Lucas Dijkers, Luísa Pinto e Netto, and Nathalie Schnabl. The Working Group aims to establish a platform for collaborative, critical, and interdisciplinary scholarship on ESCR in both domestic and global contexts.

The event also marks the launch of the multi-year research project ***Evolving Rights: Social Rights in the Era of Climate Change and Digital Revolution***, led by Luísa Pinto e Netto at Leiden University and supported by a Dutch government starting grant.

The conference will explore legal, theoretical, and practical dimensions of ESCR, including enforcement mechanisms, constitutional debates, and the intersection of ESCR with urgent global challenges such as climate change, inequalities and

discrimination, technological disruption, and rising authoritarianism and political polarisation.

The conference aims to provide a forum to bring together early career and established academics and practitioners to examine key original aspects within the broader umbrella mentioned above. The goal is also to foster the discussions among different jurisdictions, legal traditions, and practices.

We are honoured to announce that **Aoife Nolan**, Professor of International Human Rights Law, Director of the Human Rights Law Centre at Nottingham University, and President of the Council of Europe's European Committee of Social Rights, will deliver the keynote address.

Submission Guidelines

- Submissions should be sent by 30th June 2025 to [l.c.pinto.e.netto@law.leidenuniv.nl] with the subject line: “ESCR Conference 2025 – Abstract Submission.”
- Submissions must be in a Word document (.doc or .docx).
- Submissions must include:
 - the title
 - speaker(s) name(s), institutional affiliation(s), and contact information
 - the abstract (no more than 300 words)
 - a short bio (no more than 100 words) of the speaker(s)
- The conference will be held in person at Leiden University, on 4th and 5th September 2025.
- Both NNHRR members and non-members are welcome to apply.
- Submissions may be co-authored, if at least one author will attend and present in person.
- We strongly encourage submissions from PhD candidates, postdoctoral researchers, and all scholars conducting research on ESCR, as well as practitioners working with ESCR.
- We particularly welcome abstracts based on interdisciplinary research and/or employing distinct and innovative methodologies, including those based on a comparative approach, on intersectional analysis, or on empirical work.
- Authors of selected abstracts will be notified on 7th July 2025.
- Authors of selected abstracts are expected to submit a draft paper (no more than 5,000 words) by 18th August 2025.
- Selected speakers may be invited to contribute to an edited volume following the conference.
- The conference will be held in person and is free of charge. Selected speakers and participants will need to cover their own expenses for travel and accommodation.

For inquiries, please contact Luísa Pinto e Netto at l.c.pinto.e.netto@law.leidenuniv.nl