



Universiteit Leiden



CALL FOR PAPERS

**ICON-S Benelux Chapter
Third General Conference
26-27 October 2026
Leiden, The Netherlands**

Trust in Transition: Public Law in a Changing World

The ICON-S Benelux Chapter organizes its third General Conference on 26-27 October 2026. The conference takes place in Leiden (NL), hosted by Leiden Law School, with a fully in-person program of plenary sessions and parallel panels.

The overarching theme of the conference is Trust in Transition: Public Law in a Changing World.

Conference Theme

Trust lies at the heart of public law. It structures the relationship between citizens and the state, underpins the legitimacy of legal institutions, and enables collective action in democratic societies. This trust operates in multiple directions: just as citizens must trust state institutions, governments must also place trust in their citizens, a dynamic reflected in regulatory choices ranging from goal-based frameworks that presume civic responsibility to prescriptive rules that assume the need for detailed control. Yet trust is neither static nor guaranteed. In an era marked by rapid technological change, pressing environmental

imperatives, and evolving institutional landscapes, legitimacy is continuously negotiated, and the foundations of trust are being tested, reshaped, and redefined.

Public law is increasingly called upon to respond to shifting expectations, contested authority, and new forms of governance. Digitalization, sustainability transitions, crises of representation, and the proliferation of misinformation challenge traditional modes of accountability and decision-making. The rise of populist politics has further complicated these dynamics, often reflecting and reinforcing patterns of selective trust and distrust towards different groups of citizens. At the same time, public law remains a key site for rebuilding trust, mediating conflict, and structuring long-term commitments in conditions of uncertainty.

Across the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg, shifts in public trust have become visible through concrete legal and political developments. In the Netherlands, the childcare benefits scandal exposed how digitalized administration and rigid enforcement undermined fundamental rights, triggering a broader reassessment of accountability, proportionality, and the role of public law in restoring trust. In Belgium, recurring institutional fragmentation and prolonged government formation, combined with crisis governance during COVID-19, have strained perceptions of democratic effectiveness and highlighted challenges of accountability in a multi-level federal system. Luxembourg, while maintaining comparatively high institutional trust, faces growing pressure linked to transparency, financial regulation, and sustainability governance, as increased international and EU scrutiny demands clearer legal frameworks for accountability and long-term commitment. Also at the broader European level, recent integrity concerns within EU institutions have raised fundamental questions about transparency, accountability mechanisms, and the robustness of checks and balances in supranational governance, affecting trust across all member states. Together, these cases illustrate how public law in the Benelux and beyond is being tested, and reshaped, as a central mechanism for mediating trust under conditions of uncertainty.

Against this backdrop, the third ICON-S Benelux Chapter General Conference invites scholars to explore how public law navigates transitions in trust. How do legal frameworks build, maintain, or restore trust amid profound societal shifts? When do new technologies enhance democratic accountability, and when do they undermine it? How can law foster trust in sustainability transitions that demand both immediate action and long-term commitment? How do regulatory choices reflect the trust (or distrust) that governments place in their citizens, and what are the implications for democratic legitimacy? What is the relationship between trust, truth, and evidence in an age of misinformation and contested

expertise? And what role do institutions play in cultivating the trust necessary for effective governance under conditions of uncertainty?

The conference encourages contributions that approach trust through doctrinal, theoretical, comparative, and empirical perspectives, and that engage with the full spectrum of public law, including constitutional law, administrative law, European law, and public international law.

Sub-Themes

Submissions may address the overarching theme from a wide range of perspectives, including but not limited to the following sub-themes:

Trust and Technological Transformation

- Algorithmic governance and democratic accountability
- Regulation of artificial intelligence and automated decision-making
- Digital rights, privacy, and data protection
- Platform governance and the digital public sphere

Trust and Sustainability Transitions

- Climate governance and intergenerational justice
- Environmental law and corporate accountability
- Energy transitions and the regulatory state
- Migration, displacement, and environmental change

Trust in and Between Institutions

- Judicial legitimacy and the role of courts in contested policy areas
- Administrative justice and citizen–state relations
- Institutional cooperation and multi-level governance
- Transparency, participation, and procedural justice
- Populism, selective trust, and the politics of inclusion and exclusion

Trust, Truth, and Evidence

- Empirical studies of trust in legal institutions
- Misinformation, expertise, and evidence-based governance
- The role of information and communication in building trust
- Trust, distrust, and healthy skepticism in democratic societies
- Comparative perspectives on institutional trust

Submissions

In addition to plenary sessions, the third ICON-S Benelux Chapter General Conference will feature parallel panel sessions taking place over the two days of the conference. Panels will be composed of submissions selected through this Call for Papers. Submissions should relate to the overarching conference theme.

There are two types of submissions:

1. Fully formed panel proposals (strongly encouraged)
2. Individual paper proposals

All proposals must be submitted, by **29 May 2026**, via the following link:

<https://www.leidenlawconference.nl/legal-courses/2026/trust-in-transition-icon-s-benelux-conference-2026/>

Fully Formed Panels

Fully formed panel proposals should include 3 to 5 presentations and consist of 4 to 5 participants in total. Every panel must have a chair, who may be one of the speakers or a separate designated person. All speakers must have agreed in advance to present together.

Panel proposals should reflect the Chapter's commitment to gender balance, seniority diversity, and diversity in academic affiliation. Panels including scholars from different institutions and countries are particularly encouraged.

For each fully formed panel, the submission should include:

- Panel title
- Short panel description (150 words max)
- Names and affiliations of all participants (speakers, chair); e-mail (institutional) address for all participants
- For each speaker:
 - Title of the presentation
 - Abstract (250 words max)

Fully written papers are not required at the submission stage.

Individual Submissions

Individual submissions should include:

- Title of the paper
- Abstract (250 words max)
- Name, affiliation, and email (institutional) address of the speaker(s)

Participation Rules

- Each participant may participate (as speaker or chair) in no more than 2 panels, provided that scheduling permits.
- The conference is not restricted to Benelux scholars nor to public lawyers. We welcome interdisciplinary contributions from scholars working in other fields of law (including civil, criminal, labour, and tax law), as well as from the humanities and social sciences (e.g. political science, sociology, economics, history) with a clear connection to the conference theme.
- Submissions from senior and junior scholars, including doctoral researchers, as well as from practitioners, are welcome. The ICON-S Benelux Young Scholar Research Forum (YSRF) will again host a dedicated workshop; further information will follow.

Language

Submissions are encouraged in English.

However, fully formed panel proposals in Dutch, French, or German (or a combination of these languages) will be accepted.

Non-English panels must:

- Be submitted in English
- Include an English-language title
- Clearly identify the language(s) of the panel in the title (e.g. “Judicial Review and Trust in Crisis Governance (Dutch/French)”)

Conference Organizing Committee

- Dr. Luísa Pinto e Netto
- Dr. Melanie Fink
- Dr. Franco Peirone
- Prof. Dr. Patricia Popelier
- Dr. Menelaos Markakis