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## Welcome to the ESELS Newsletter

This autumn edition offers an opportunity to look back on our highly **successful 2026 Annual ESELS Conference**, held last June in Ljubljana and skillfully organized by **Mitja Kovač and his team**. It was great seeing so many of you joining us in Slovenia.

This is also a good moment to **look ahead** and to reflect upon how dynamic and vibrant our ESELS community is throughout the calendar year. This is all thanks to you, our members.

What immediately comes to mind is the **growth, activity and constant development of our ESELS Working Groups**. A particular highlight is the **upcoming ESELS mini-conference in Prague (20-22 January 2027)**, organized by the chairs of our ESELS Working Group Criminal Law: **Jakub Drápal** and **Michal Šoltés**.

Moreover, we are very proud to introduce our **newest Working Group to you: Empirical Studies in Healthcare Law**. In this newsletter, you will learn more about this latest ESELS initiative from the chairs: **Farrah Raza** and **Szilvia Altwicker-Hámori**. We are confident that their very welcome initiative will become a great success.

We also introduce a **new item in our newsletter: 'Meet our ESELS members'**. In this inaugural edition, we proudly present ESELS member **Pascal Langenbach**, who will share his research interests and some of his upcoming activities in ELS.

Last but certainly not least, this newsletter also features our **first ELS Book Q&A**. **Jan Zglinski** discusses **Empirical Legal Studies in EU Law (CUP, 2026)**, the first book-length publication dedicated to ELS in EU law. He will share his insights and motivations for writing this important contribution to the field.

**Happy reading!**

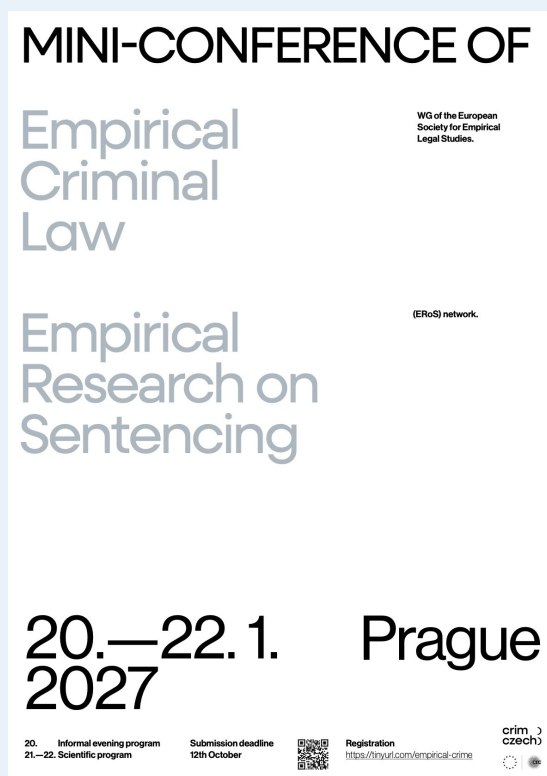
*Erik Wesselius*  
Secretary-General ESELS

*Do you have ideas, suggestions or questions about this newsletter? Please contact the ESELS Newsletter editor [Lisette Velema](#).*

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**Upcoming Events**

## ESELS 2027 Mini-Conference by the working group Empirical Criminal Law: Empirical Research on Sentencing



The Empirical Criminal Law Working Group of the European Society for Empirical Legal Studies and the Empirical Research on Sentencing (ERoS) network are happy to announce that they are holding a joint mini-conference in Prague from **20 to 22 January 2027**. The event opens with an informal evening program on 20 January, followed by a two-day scientific programme on 21 and 22 January.

Researchers working on empirical approaches to criminal law and sentencing are invited to submit their work. **The submission deadline is 12 October 2026.**

**Registration and more information**

## ELS Academy Kick-off Event 2026 – Crafting your ELS career

## ELS ACADEMY KICK-OFF EVENT 2026 *CRAFTING YOUR ELS CAREER*

13 OCTOBER 2026 | LEIDEN LAW SCHOOL

|          |                                             |
|----------|---------------------------------------------|
| 09:00 AM | Registration and Welcome Coffee             |
| 09:30 AM | Opening by ELS Academy Director Jessie Pool |
| 09:45 AM | Keynote by prof. Benjamin van Rooij         |
| 11:15 AM | Presentation workshops (round 1)            |
| 12:30 PM | Lunch                                       |
| 13:30 PM | Presentation workshops (round 2)            |
| 15:15 PM | Keynote panel                               |
| 16:00 PM | Pitching competition for the research grant |
| 16:30 PM | Drinks and announcement of grant winner     |



The **ELS Academy** is the leading interuniversity research school on Empirical Legal Studies in the Netherlands. It serves as a platform that brings together (aspiring) empirical legal scholars from all universities in the country, building a nationwide ELS community. Every year, it organises a kick-off conference to open the academic year with fellow empirical-legal scholars in the Netherlands.

This year, the event is themed **‘Crafting your ELS career.’** How do you build a career as an empirical legal scholar? How do you position yourself and your research, find funding, develop collaborations, and make the most of opportunities along the way?

On **13 October at Leiden University**, ELS scholars will be brought together to discuss these questions, share research and exchange experiences. There is still some time to register, so do not miss out!

[Registration and more information](#)

## News

### New ESELS Working Group: Empirical Studies in Healthcare Law





*Dr. Farrah Raza  
(Royal Holloway Law School,  
London; Pembroke College,  
University of Oxford)*

*Dr. Farrah Raza is a Lecturer in Law at Royal Holloway Law School in London and a Retained Lecturer at Pembroke College, University of Oxford. She was previously a Minerva Fellow and Head of Research Group at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, Germany. Her research areas include public law and regulation, healthcare law, and human rights law. Her first monograph is entitled 'Religious Accommodation and its Limits', and her research investigates how patients' beliefs and values are reflected in clinical settings and care. She holds a doctorate in law from King's College London and an LLM from the University of Cambridge.*



*Dr. Szilvia Altwicker-Hámori  
(Winterthur Institute of Health  
Economics, ZHAW)*

*Dr. Szilvia Altwicker-Hámori is a Senior Researcher and Lecturer at the Winterthur Institute of Health Economics at ZHAW. She is an economist whose research combines health economics, health services research, empirical legal studies, and social security law. Her work includes quantitative research on healthcare and social protection, with a particular focus on medical evidence, judicial decision-making, and access to healthcare. She holds a doctorate in economics from the University of Mannheim and an MSc in Economics from the London School of Economics.*

### **What inspired you to establish a Working Group on Empirical Studies in Healthcare Law?**

We are interested in how law is understood in practice, particularly in healthcare settings where legal rules interact with institutional, professional, and individual realities. This shared interest inspired us to establish a Working Group specifically dedicated to empirical studies in healthcare law. By bringing together our complementary expertise in healthcare law and in empirical legal studies, with a particular focus on health-related questions, we hope to strengthen the role of empirical evidence in the field. The European Society for Empirical Legal Studies is the ideal host for this initiative, given its methodological openness and its commitment to examining legal frameworks through an empirical lens.

### **In your view, what makes healthcare law a particularly fruitful area for empirical legal research?**

Healthcare law covers and intersects with several distinct areas of law, including public law, private law, and social security law. What makes it particularly fruitful for empirical legal research is the opportunity to examine how legal frameworks are understood, interpreted and applied in practice. This is especially significant in healthcare, because of the highly personal nature of many of the issues involved, and because legal decision-making often depends on complex medical evidence. Empirical research can therefore shed light on the experiences of patients and healthcare professionals, as well as on how courts and other institutions assess medical evidence and reach decisions. This can provide important insights for patients, professionals, policymakers, and the wider public.

We are excited to lead on two key workstreams: **Mental Health, Capacity, and Consent** (Dr. Raza) and **Medical Evidence, Judicial Decision-Making and Social Protection** (Dr. Altwicker-Hámori), and look forward to collaborating with new members.

### Whom would you encourage to join the Working Group?

We would encourage researchers from a range of disciplinary backgrounds to join the Working Group, including those working in healthcare law, health economics, econometrics, and data science, as well as researchers using qualitative empirical methods, who share an interest in healthcare-related legal issues. We are particularly keen to build a research network that brings together empirical and methodological expertise across quantitative and qualitative approaches.

### What are your ambitions for the Working Group, and what activities can members look forward to in the coming months?

Our ambition is to build an interdisciplinary research network in empirical healthcare law. Through regular meetings, members can exchange ideas, discuss methodological approaches, and present work in progress. We also hope to develop collaborative research and conference activities. In the coming months, our particular focus will be on preparing an interdisciplinary expert panel on empirical healthcare law for the next ESELS Conference.

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## ESELS Community

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### Meet our ESELS Members



#### Dr. Pascal Langenbach

*Assistant professor of Law and Digitalisation at Erasmus School of Law, Rotterdam*

#### *What is your motivation to be a member and to present your work at our ESELS conferences?*

I have been working in Empirical Legal Studies for some time, and for many years there was no European association for researchers in the field. But the field has grown, and I have been very happy to see the emergence of ESELS, which brings together scholars applying different empirical approaches to law and the legal system. ESELS spans a wide range of empirical

traditions, including economics, social sciences, and computational research; and, importantly, attracts many legal scholars interested in empirical questions and methods.

At ESELS conferences, there is of course a common focus on empirical approaches to legal questions. But this is very broad. So there is so much diversity in topics and still a very broad range of methods employed. This makes these conferences inspiring events. It is also interesting to watch (and hopefully contribute to) the field growing and professionalizing in Europe.

#### *Could you tell us about the importance of using empirical methods in your daily work activities?*

Although I do doctrinal legal research and try to use existing behavioral insights in analyzing legal institutions, a considerable part of my work is genuinely empirical. Much of my research revolves around the behavioral assumptions underlying legal design questions and the behavioral consequences of legal institutions. In my empirical work, I mainly focus on experimental methods. Originally, my methodological background is in experimental economics. I started using laboratory

experiments during my doctoral studies. Over time, I have expanded the methodological toolkit. I now use different experimental paradigms. Empirical methods are therefore part of my everyday work. Designing experiments, collecting data, conducting statistical analyses, and interpreting the results are part of my daily routine.

*How do you see the role of LLMs in the future of empirical legal research?*

Making such predictions always comes with a lot of uncertainty. Yet I think LLMs might potentially play an important role. First, of course, they themselves are a great object of empirical legal research: How well can they apply the law? How do practitioners (and academics) use them in their work? What risks, but also what opportunities, come with LLMs being deployed in the legal system?

Second, they are promising tools for empirical legal research. Of course, we can use them to process and analyze large amounts of legal text. Concerning behavioral questions, we could, methodologically, try to use them to address empirical questions with agent-based simulations. The value of such simulations for studying human behavior (in particular, the professional behavior of judges or administrators) has, however, not yet been fully assessed.

But also in daily empirical work, they can be of great help: for example, they can help to explore hypotheses, run pre-tests of experimental designs, and they can assist with coding and data-processing. They will (and probably already do) lower the entry costs for many legal scholars to engage with empirical methods. So perhaps they will draw more people into empirical legal research.

*Soon you will be presenting in a panel at the SIAJUS 2026 Conference about Law & Technology, co-organized by our ESELS members Saylon Pereira and Luciana Romano Morilas. Could you tell us a bit more about this panel?*

Yes, that is a great opportunity. The organizers of SIAJUS 2026 were interested in having a panel on Law and Technology with empirical legal scholars from Europe. I will present current research on the human-AI fairness gap. We study how people perceive the use of algorithms in adjudication and public administration. Overall, our results suggest that people tend to prefer these decisions to be taken by human decision-makers rather than by machines. However, there seem to be several features in the implementation of algorithmic tools which make algorithmic or algorithm-supported decision-making much more acceptable to human observers. These include, for example, human-in-the-loop requirements as well as giving individualized reasons for decisions. I am very much looking forward to the panel and to discussing my research there.

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## European Empirical Legal Literature Highlights

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### ELS Book Q&A – Interview with Dr. Jan Zgliniski (LSE Law School)



Yes, and it has been building for over a decade. What used to be a fairly traditional doctrinal discipline has increasingly opened itself up to quantitative and qualitative methods borrowed from the social sciences. We have seen the creation of multi-user databases for CJEU jurisprudence, interview projects involving key institutional actors, ambitious large N-studies testing some of the grand theories of European integration, and, more broadly, a growing willingness to investigate EU law ‘in action’ rather than only ‘in the books’. Our volume tries to capture this moment: it brings together scholars who have been building the field – often initially in relative isolation from one another – under one roof, spanning foundational questions, data and methods, and substantive applications across different themes. What makes it feel like a genuine ‘turn’ rather than a passing trend is the institutional infrastructure now forming around it: dedicated networks (like ESELS itself), shared data infrastructure, and a critical mass of scholars trained in these methods. That said, the book is also candid about how uneven this turn is – some corners of EU law have been thoroughly empiricised, others barely touched.

***What could readers interested in empirical methods learn from your publication?***

The book is deliberately designed to serve both newcomers and specialists. Part I lays the groundwork: why conduct empirical legal research on EU law at all, how to incorporate legal phenomena into political science work, and what impact to expect from the ELS movement. Part II focuses on methodological aspects, with chapters ranging from sourcing data, to building databases, conceptualising, coding as well as more specific questions surrounding large language models, qualitative interviews, and experimental designs – written by scholars who have done this type of research and can speak about its promises and pitfalls. Part III then shows the methods in action, presenting the most important substantive themes that have emerged in empirical legal research on EU law to date. This includes judicial behaviour at the CJEU, the reception of EU law by domestic courts, alongside patterns of litigation, trends in enforcement, and discussions about policy impact. A reader could therefore use the volume as a handbook (finding chapters on a method or area of interest), a manifesto (reflecting on why to even conduct empirical research), or a critical companion (many chapters flag the limitations and blind spots of existing scholarship).

***How do you envision the development of ELS in the practice of EU law over the next 5–10 years?***

Prediction is famously a fool’s game, but it is becoming increasingly clear under which conditions ELS can thrive in the EU law context. The first – internal – is community. There needs to be a sufficiently large number of researchers who conduct, consume, and critique empirical research. Research is a collaborative endeavour. This is true in a long-term sense: progress in our understanding of a certain area, theoretical puzzle, or legal order can only be made if many actors work towards advancing that understanding. It is, in the case of ELS, also true in a more direct, short-term sense: empirical legal research often, and more so than doctrinal research, requires scholars with different expertise to team up to produce well-grounded results or the infrastructure allowing for such results to be produced.

The second – external – is impact. ELS will only be able to sustain itself if it can make a meaningful difference to EU law debates, by generating insightful, relevant findings into research questions old and new. That will require greater sophistication with regard to methods, not an easy task in a fast-moving space such as the general social sciences (think AI, credibility revolution, formal modelling etc.), but also greater ambition when it comes to challenging and adding to the theorising of European law and integration. The same goes for policy debates, where much untapped potential remains. Here, the US branch of empirical legal studies can provide inspiration for how to engage with legislative and regulatory processes. The proof will, ultimately, be in the pudding: is this a stream of scholarship that publishes original, high-quality research that will leave a mark on how we think, implement, perhaps even make EU law?

*How do you see the implementation of ELS methods as part of the formal training of EU lawyers?*

Training is an area where significant challenges remain. A growing number of PhD programmes and summer schools now offer modules on quantitative text analysis, database construction, or interview methods, and events such as ESELS's own workshops have done a great deal to fill the gap. However, most law faculties still do not build empirical methods into the standard curriculum in the way that political science departments, for example, train students in research design as a matter of course. The result is a generation of EU lawyers who are curious about empirical work but often self-taught, assembling skills from short courses and borrowed code rather than receiving a coherent methodological education. This is improving, but slowly and asymmetrically across institutions and countries.

*Finally, what would you say to those not yet convinced of the importance of conducting empirical research in EU law?*

As for those not yet convinced: the best advertisement for empirical legal research is the research itself: Studies that force us to reconsider how we thought about a certain problem, put new topics on our academic agendas, and sometimes even shift the boundaries of what we thought should be studied as part of EU law. There is an abundance of examples: empirical legal work has exposed the great variation between and underlying causes for national judges making preliminary references, turned our focus on the role of informal actors like lawyers in shaping EU law, and challenged inherited wisdom whereby negative integration dominates European governance. Of course, not everyone may find these findings equally intriguing. But let us be very clear. The days of being able to simply make empirical assumptions – the CJEU is activist, worker protection is weak, domestic apex courts don't cooperate, and so on – without providing empirical evidence, a hallmark of much traditional EU law scholarship, are over. ELS has provided us with the much-needed tools to test intuitions, deepen knowledge, and improve our understanding of these aspects of European legal integration.

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Thanks for reading!



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