

# Law for a Just and Resilient Planet

## LAW Group Strategic Chair Plan 2025-2030

### This plan

This strategic chair plan serves as roadmap for the LAW group, its staff, students, and all our partners, guiding the directions and approaches we adopt. It is a living document that defines our core objectives and ethics and our general approach in contributing to solving some of the key sustainability challenges the world is facing. The plan recognizes and accommodates continuously changing needs, priorities and considerations that shape our research, teaching, academic citizenship and social impact. We welcome continued engagement with, and reflection and feedback on, this plan.

### What we do

The strategic chair plan centres on the imperative to ensure a resilient and just planet. We recognize that the world is steeped in a polycrisis, with multiple, interlinked and multi-scalar crises of different types and magnitudes that collectively impact the ability of planet Earth and its socio-ecological systems to sustain present and future life in just ways. To be resilient is to have the capacity to withstand and to recover from disturbances, while continuously being able to adapt to change in more sustainable and just ways.

Law, as a social construct, has played and continues to play a profound role in exacerbating the drivers that negatively impact planetary resilience and justice. Conversely, law also offers valuable, and potentially very effective, opportunities to address these drivers with the aim of ensuring a resilient and just planet for everyone everywhere, now and in the future.

As a hub of legal expertise within Wageningen University and Research (WUR), the LAW group explores, interrogates and develops legal responses to the complex social dimensions and challenges related to ensuring a resilient and just planet. To this end, our work centres on WUR's six key themes (2025-2028): sustainable food systems, biodiversity and resilient ecosystems, global health, climate-proof futures, biobased and circular society, and sustainable water and land use. We focus on the role and contribution of law and legal science to innovate and implement strategies to enable conditions for a just and resilient planet insofar as they relate to these themes.

We are interested in the planetary legal dimensions of resilience and justice. This means that, as objects of inquiry, we are concerned with how law relates to and governs Earth's biophysical system and its sub-systems such as water and climatic systems; all living present and future human and non-human beings that reside on Earth; and the more-than-human environment, including the digital world. In an interconnected planetary context, law's methodologies, relevance and application reach beyond their traditional jurisdictional and disciplinary/scientific boundaries that do not neatly map onto planetary and/or territorial boundaries and the confines of established fields of knowledge. Geographically, the diverse challenges we focus on manifest globally, across state borders and jurisdictions, traversing a diverse range of legal systems, cultures and practices, while intersecting with social, political,

ecological, economic and justice concerns in and across local, domestic, regional and international levels and spaces. We therefore work in a distinct planetary context that embraces a transnational and interdisciplinary approach.

### **Our mission**

The LAW group's mission is threefold:

- To conduct cutting-edge research with a view to advancing knowledge, building capacity, and influencing social behaviour for a more resilient and just planet.
- To offer an engaged, responsive and comprehensive legal education programme that meaningfully equips students for professional life.
- To develop responsive, responsible and impactful legal solutions that go beyond theory and that society can practically apply.

### **Who we are**

The LAW group consists of a gender-balanced, multi-cultural, international team of legal experts specializing in a broad range of specialised areas related to WUR's six themes that are relevant for law and legal science to promote planetary resilience and justice. Our team is composed of members at different stages of the WUR tenure track system and Academic Career Framework (ACF), and includes the chair and professor, associate professors, assistant professors, lecturers, post-doctoral researchers, PhD researchers and international visitors. The group is supported by a specialised team of financial and administrative staff.

We embrace a set of core values that guide who we are, what we do and how we do it. These are: respect - for one another and for the planet; humility - recognising that we do not know everything, and that continuous co-learning is essential; our shared vulnerability - as humans, as scientists and students; fairness and consistency – in both processes and outcomes; and a deep sense of inter-relationality and co-dependence embedded in healthy relationships.

The LAW group has demonstrated expertise in several areas of specialisation, including: agricultural and environmental law; business, human rights and corporate accountability; human rights, gender justice and public health; national, European Union, international and comparative food law; intellectual property rights; law and circular systems; national, European and international environmental and climate law; law of the sea and marine governance; and earth system law.

The continuous growth of our expertise is a dynamic and responsive process and is guided by ever-evolving epistemic, pragmatic and social concerns and phenomena in society. United as we are around the studying and teaching of law and our collective efforts to facilitate and enhance the social impact of legal science, the LAW group actively embraces the ongoing challenge to flexibly and purposely craft meaningful legal responses to sustainability challenges, and to further develop expertise in newly emerging domains such as digital transformations and earth system law.

The LAW group does not operate in a vacuum. We are part of the department of Social Sciences (SSG). Together with the chair groups Environmental Policy (ENP) and Public Administration and Policy (PAP), the group forms the section “Sustainability Governance”. The Section, together with the Forest and Nature Conservation Policy group (FNP), created the Sustainability Governance Hub (SGH) in 2025. This collaboration combines chair groups from the social and environmental science departments and studies the design, functioning and implications of sustainable governance arrangements related to the six core themes of WUR. Within both the section and the SGH, the LAW group takes the lead on the analysis of legal rules, processes, institutions and actors, and how these relate to planetary resilience and justice.

### **Our research**

Our research focuses on contemporary legal issues related to planetary resilience and justice within the outlines of WUR’s six key themes. Much of our research is socio-legal in nature and we co-create in a distinctly interdisciplinary space while actively collaborating with knowledge partners within and outside WUR. We pursue research excellence by leading and participating in collaborative research projects, individual projects, and as partners in influential global epistemic networks. The group is able to flexibly focus attention on and respond to newly emerging research areas such as digital transformations and earth system law.

Our comprehensive Ph.D. programme is at the heart of our research strategy. Many of our post-graduate students have a background in disciplines other than law and we aim at enabling them and all other students to meaningfully engage with law and policies. All Ph.D. candidates and post-doctoral researchers are integral and active members of and participants in the group, and make a crucial contribution to the research output, impact and quality of the group’s research, as well as to our teaching programme.

We also host visiting scholars with whom we actively collaborate and co-create. Our international visitor programme is a key component of the group and its research activities and aims to increase and enrich our international visibility and footprint, build networks, and enrich our research, education and outreach activities.

### **Our teaching**

Our teaching repertoire focuses on legal aspects connected to planetary resilience and justice, and more specifically to WUR’s six key themes. Our courses are designed to transfer knowledge, build capacity and nurture key legal analytical, writing, reading and other skills.

Our educational approach is adaptable, relevant and topical and responds to ever-evolving realities, broader societal and specific student circumstances and needs. The education programme has been designed, and is regularly updated, to allow students with a range of backgrounds and ambitions to develop a sufficient understanding of, and skills to engage with, the legal realities related to their fields, to act as proficient users of the law, and as knowledge partners for society, legal actors and institutions.

Much of the law revolves on questions of interpretation and argumentation, which makes it vital to ensure an innovative, supportive, interdisciplinary co-learning environment where students with different backgrounds and views learn to engage constructively, but critically, with complex societal and sustainability questions. Our courses are tailor-made to also cater for students who might not have a prior legal background.

In order to successfully prepare our students for professional life and make the most of their time at WUR, our teaching incorporates substantive legal material, legal theory and design, legal skills training, and the application of legal knowledge to solve real-life scenarios. In mastering these skills, every opportunity is provided to students to shape their education experience to their own needs.

### **Our social relevance and impact**

As rules governing human behaviour, as a social phenomenon, and as a scientific discipline, law has been and continues to be a foundational element of social life. Law can shape societies in positive and negative ways depending, among others, on the socio-political landscape, the law-making process, the actors involved, law's content, and the objectives of law. Through our work, the LAW group actively seeks to make a meaningful contribution to society by translating the knowledge we co-create in an interdisciplinary space in practical terms that can influence broader social, economic, political, ethical and other related debates.

Our impact is achieved through research, teaching, and collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, globally. Raising awareness among other disciplines of the role of law in their fields and the potential of law to solve societal challenges, and training students to be legally articulate and knowledgeable, are some of the main methods through which the group facilitates social impact and relevance. We continuously strive to amplify our social impact and relevance through close collaboration and partnerships with civil society, the media, and governments, among many other partners. In our engagement with these partners, the impartiality of our research is paramount and external funding and projects are pursued on that basis.

### **Our Alumni**

Our ongoing strength, relevance and impact also depend on the strength of our alumni network and the continued meaningful role this important network plays in shaping and enhancing our education, research and social outreach activities. We therefore significantly rely on the expertise, contributions and energy of alumni, whom we closely involve on an ongoing basis as life-long partners in developing our work. We continue to build and further expand this network.