

World Congress on Adult Capacity 8-10 July 2026



The WCAC brings together international experts in the fields of legal protection and care for older persons and people with disabilities. The congress offers a multidisciplinary platform for lawyers, researchers, practitioners, policymakers and representatives of civil society to exchange knowledge and work collaboratively to strengthen the rights of adults in need of support.

Introduction

This programme booklet provides an overview of key information relating to the congress. In the following pages, you will find details on the **congress dates and venue**, an overview of the **plenary sessions**, and information about the **social programme**. The booklet also includes **hotel recommendations** and **practical information about Amsterdam**.

In addition, the programme booklet introduces the people behind the congress. It features a list of the **members of the Scientific Committee**, as well as an **overview of the members of the Organising Committee**.

We look forward to welcoming you to Amsterdam in July 2026!

Kees Blankman and Rieneke Stelma-Roorda
Convenors WCAC 2026

Congress dates and venue

The congress will take place from Wednesday 8 July to Friday 10 July 2026. The congress will be hosted by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and will be held on its main campus at the following address:

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
De Boelelaan 1105
1081 HV Amsterdam
The Netherlands

Located in the south of Amsterdam, the campus of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam is easily accessible by public transport. All congress activities will take place on campus, providing a central and accessible setting for plenary sessions, parallel meetings and informal interactions. More information about route description and accessibility can be found on the following webpage: <https://vu.nl/en/about-vu/more-about/route-description>

Plenary sessions

Day 1: Plenary 1 - Opening session

- Chair: **Rieneke Stelma-Roorda**, Co-Convenor WCAC 2026, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- **Jeroen Geurts**, Rector Magnificus Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- **Dineke de Groot**, President of the Supreme Court of the Netherlands
- **Rick Lawson**, Chair of the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights, the Netherlands
- **Kees Blankman**, Co-Convenor WCAC 2026, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- **Masha Antokolskaia**, Professor of Family Law at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands

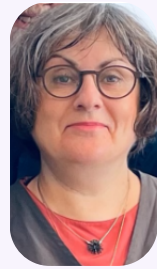
We will open the 8th World Congress on Adult Capacity with a festive and inspiring plenary session chaired by **Rieneke Stelma-Roorda** (Co-Convenor of the congress, and Assistant Professor of Family Law and the Law of Persons at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam).

Jeroen Geurts (Rector Magnificus of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) will deliver the welcome address on behalf of the Vrije Universiteit.

We are honoured to welcome **Dineke de Groot** (President of the Supreme Court of the Netherlands), and **Rick Lawson** (Chair of the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights and professor of European Human Rights Law at Leiden University, the Netherlands).

Kees Blankman (Co-Convenor of this congress, and Endowed Professor of Elder Law, at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) and **Masha Antokolskaia** (Professor of Private Law, specialised in Family Law and the Law of Persons at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) will contribute with reflections on developments in adult capacity law and safeguards.

Together, they will set the tone for three days of international exchange on autonomy, legal protection, and human rights for adults in need of support.



Day 1: Plenary 2 - Adult capacity and lived experiences

- Chair: **Dagmar Brosey**, University of Applied Sciences in Cologne, Germany
- **Gerda van Tongerloo**, Person living with dementia
- **Anne de Boer**, Team Lead for Advocacy at Alzheimer Nederland
- **Fiona Catterson**, Family carer of a person with dementia & **Sarah Prentice**, Solicitor and independent Safeguarder
- **Andreas Martin** & **Viola Jansen**, Projekt "Arbeitskreis Betreuungsrecht - Selbstvertreter*innen werden aktiv", University of Applied Sciences in Cologne, Germany
- **Jens-Christian Mohr**, expert by experience

This plenary, chaired by **Dagmar Brosey** (Professor of Social Law, Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, Cologne University of Applied Sciences, Germany), centres lived experiences. We will hear perspectives from:

- a person with dementia
- a family carer of a person with dementia
- a person with a learning disability

Personal stories that put a human face on law and policy.

Gerda van Tongerloo Person living with dementia

Anne de Boer Team Lead for Advocacy at Alzheimer Nederland

Anne will interview Gerda Van Tongerloo during the conference. Gerda has vascular dementia. As a lived-experience expert, she is active all across the country. For example, she is a co-researcher in the Brain Power research group and Vice Chair of the Working Group of People with Dementia at Alzheimer Europe. You may also know her from TV, as she took part in the programme Restaurant Misverstand.

During the interview, Gerda will share what it is like to live with dementia and the challenges she faces in daily life. Since Gerda developed dementia at a young age, the conversation will also reflect on the impact on her working life.

Fiona Catterson Care partner and dementia advocate

Sarah Prentice Solicitor and independent Safeguarder

Sarah will interview Fiona Catterson during the conference. Fiona is the wife of Ian (70), who was diagnosed with a rare, degenerative brain condition in 2020 and later with dementia in 2022. As his attorney, Fiona has extensive experience in advocating on his behalf, navigating complex decisions around power of attorney, guardianship, and mental health legislation. She previously also held Power of Attorney for her mother, who had dementia.

With a background in teaching, Fiona has dedicated her retirement to improving her husband's quality of life and supporting others in similar situations. She is an active member of the National Dementia Carers Action Network for Scotland, where she works to drive change for carers.

During the interview, Fiona will share her lived experience as a care partner, reflecting on the practical and emotional challenges of using legal instruments such as Power of Attorney and guardianship. The conversation will highlight the realities carers face and explore how systems can better support them.

Andreas Martin works at the University of Applied Sciences in Cologne, Germany, where he teaches seminars. He has a record of 32 years of "rechtliche Betreuung". "Rechtliche Betreuung" is a court-appointed measure of civil law, which offers support in exercising legal capacity including representation if necessary. Andreas will share some of his experiences he made along the way. He will be interviewed by **Viola Jansen**.



Day 2: Plenary 3 - Adult capacity and a UN Convention for Older Persons

- Chair: **Frederik Swennen**, Professor of the law of persons and family law at the University of Antwerp, Belgium
- **Claudia Mahler**, Senior researcher at the German Institute for Human Rights and former UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons
- **Rosie Harding**, Professor of Law and Society at the University of Birmingham, UK
- **Maria Isolina Dabove**, Buenos Aires University (Conicet/UBA), and Director of the Elder Law Research Centre, Argentina
- **Yvonne Donders**, Professor International Human Rights at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands and member of the UN Human Rights Committee
- **Inmaculada Placencia Porrero**, Senior expert on Disability at the European Commission and member of the UN Committee on the rights of persons with disabilities

This plenary, chaired by **Frederik Swennen** (Professor the law of persons and family law at the University of Antwerp, Belgium), brings together leading international scholars and human rights experts to reflect on ageing, autonomy, and legal protection.

Rosie Harding (Professor of Law and Society, Birmingham Law School) will discuss how the right to legal capacity under Article 12 CRPD has driven global legal reforms and why legal capacity should be understood as a relational concept — requiring support, safeguards, and recognition of interdependence rather than assumptions of incapacity.

“Legal Capacity as a Relational Cornerstone of Older Persons’ Rights”

In my contribution, I will outline how the right to enjoy legal capacity under Article 12 CRPD became a source of extensive debate as well as a catalyst for significant law reforms around the world. I will argue that we need to both learn the lessons from some of the challenges of implementing the right to enjoy legal capacity under the CRPD, whilst continuing to contest ageist and ableist stereotypes of older people and disabled people as incapable of organising their own affairs, making their own choices or enjoying their legal capacity. Legal capacity is a multifaceted concept, drawing together complex and contested understandings of legal personhood, autonomy, decision-making ability, support and safeguards. As a consequence, generating consensus on definitional aspects of legal capacity are particularly important as we work towards a new Convention on the Rights of Older Persons. I will argue, drawing on my empirical research on implementing legal capacity for intellectually disabled adults, that one way to do this is to articulate and agree on the inherent relationality of the right to enjoy legal capacity.

Maria Isolina D’Above (Professor of Legal Philosophy at the National University of Rosario and the National University of Buenos Aires Province, and Director of the Elder Law Research Center, Argentina) will deliver a keynote which reimagines a triadic framework for understanding autonomy, care, and justice in later life, examining each dimension through the interaction of normative principles and institutions, social

practices, and juridical criteria of justice.

“Autonomy, Care, and Justice: Reimagining a Triadic Framework for the Rights of Older Persons”

Treating autonomy and care as triadically constituted realities—each with normative, social, and value-laden layers—the presentation exposes the structural tensions that arise when autonomy is framed as absolute self-determination and care as total dependency. These tensions produce injustices that current legal capacity regimes cannot resolve. Drawing on the pioneering experience of the Inter-American Human Rights System, the keynote argues for a renewed normative architecture in which autonomy is understood as relational, care as socially and institutionally mediated, and justice as the dynamic harmonization of these interdependent spheres. This triadic reconstruction provides a deeper conceptual foundation for rethinking rights, safeguards, and support systems in contemporary debates on adult legal capacity.

They will be joined by **Claudia Mahler** (Former UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons), who will deliver a keynote titled: *‘A timely and global conversation on the future of older persons’ rights’* and **Yvonne Donders** (professor International Human Rights at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands and member of the UN Human Rights Committee). Finally, **Inmaculada Placencia Porrero** (senior expert on Disability at the European Commission and member of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) will give a presentation about the significance of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for older persons.

Yvonne Donders is Professor of International Human Rights at the Department of International and European Law at the University of Amsterdam. She is one of the Principal Investigators (PI) of the UvA's Research Priority Area Shaping Interfaces Between Science and the Public. She is also elected member of the UN Human Rights Committee.

The Convention on the Rights of Older Persons: Necessary or Nice-to-Have?

States within the United Nations are currently discussing and drafting several new treaties, dealing with new objects (the right to development), new actors (business) and new beneficiaries (older persons). To what extent is such a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons (UNCROP) necessary and desirable? What could be its added value considering the already existing human rights treaties?



Day 2: Plenary 4 - Managing the risk of (financial) abuse and undue influence

- Chair: **Masha Antokolskaia**, Professor of Family Law and the Law of Persons at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- **Pamela Teaster**, Director of the Centre for Gerontology and Professor at Virginia Tech, USA
- **Katrine Kjærheim Fredwall**, University of Oslo, Norway
- **Petra Knoppers**, Solicitor and Mediator at SmeetsGijbels Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- **Zvezdan Pirtošek**, Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons and professor of Neurology at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia.

This plenary, chaired by **Masha Antokolskaia** (Professor of Private Law, specialised in Family Law and the Law of Persons at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), brings together distinguished international experts who examine how adults at risk of financial abuse and undue influence can be protected without undermining their autonomy, approaching the issue from complementary perspectives.

Pamela Teaster (Director of the Center for Gerontology and Professor at Virginia Tech), will explore global characterisations of elder abuse, its underlying principles and worldwide impact, and highlight innovative intervention and prevention strategies developed across different jurisdictions.

“Peering Into the Worldwide Face of Elder Abuse”

This keynote on elder abuse will involve outstanding and novel intervention and prevention strategies around the world as well as characterizations of, principles affecting, and global impacts of elder abuse.

Katrine Kjærheim Fredwall (Professor at the Department of Private Law, Faculty of Law, University of Oslo), will speak on how private law can complement public regulation to foster age-friendly societies.

“Developing an age-friendly private law”

Many states face an increasingly ageing populations alongside struggling healthcare systems and societies where older adults are expected to live independently with minimal support. Legal frameworks like the CRPD emphasize the need for autonomy and protection, yet gaps remain. This keynote explores how private law can complement public regulations to foster age-friendly environments. Private law shapes daily conditions affecting accessibility, inclusion and protection, with private actors playing key roles. Integrating age-friendly principles and age-sensitive regulation into private law offers a path to more inclusive, equitable ageing societies.

In her contribution, **‘Justified or outrageous?’**, **Petra Knoppers** (Lawyer at SmeetsGijbels in the Netherlands) will talk about the various forms of financial abuse of

older persons and undue influence in the Netherlands, drawing on her experience in legal practice. She will address the limited possibilities for preventing such situations in advance, identifying them at an early stage, and effectively bringing them to an end.

Our final speaker in this plenary session is **Zvezdan Pirtošek** (Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons and professor of Neurology at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia), who will address the issue of financial abuse and undue influence from the perspective of the rights of older persons.



Day 3: Plenary 5 - Closing session

- Chair: **Kees Blankman**, Co-convenor WCAC 2026, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
- **Wayne Martin**, University of Essex, and Director of the Essex Autonomy Project - *Wrap up: 'Concluding Observations on WCAC Amsterdam: What have we learned and where might we be heading?'*
- **Rieneke Stelma-Roorda**, Co-convenor WCAC 2026, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam - *Closing words: Adult Capacity in a Changing World*
- **Passing the globe, connecting the Congresses**
- **Joseph Maria Solé Chavero**, Support Girona Catalonia - *Invitation to the next congress*

This final plenary is chaired by **Kees Blankman** (Co-Convenor of this congress, and Endowed Professor of Elder Law at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam). Together with **Rieneke Stelma-Roorda** (Co-Convenor of WCAC2026 and assistant Professor of Family Law and the Law of Persons at VU Amsterdam), **Wayne Martin** (Professor of Philosophy at the University of Essex and Director of the Essex Autonomy Project in the United Kingdom), and **Pep Solé i Chavero** (Lawyer and executive director of Support Girona) from **Support Girona** (host of WCAC 2028) the session will reflect on key insights from the congress and explore future directions for research, policy, and practice.

How do we move forward in strengthening autonomy, safeguards, and rights for adults in need of support? This session looks beyond WCAC 2026 and towards the next decade of international collaboration.



Social programme

As part of the congress, we are pleased to offer two social activities that provide opportunities for informal exchange and for experiencing the city of Amsterdam.

On **9 July**, a **congress dinner** will take place at **Restaurant de Bosbaan** in the **Amsterdam Forest**. This dinner offers a relaxed setting for participants to meet, continue conversations from the congress sessions, and connect with other delegates.

On **10 July**, participants are invited to join a **2-hour canal cruise** through the historic canals of Amsterdam. During the cruise, refreshments will be served, and a professional tour guide will introduce participants to the history, architecture and character of the city.

Registration for these social activities is possible during the congress registration process. Further practical information about timing and participation will be provided in due course. We hope these events will contribute to an enjoyable and memorable congress experience.

Hotel recommendations

For your stay in Amsterdam during the congress, we are pleased to suggest a number of hotels located in Amsterdam South, close to the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and easily accessible by public transport.

Please note that the congress does not have special rates or agreements with these hotels. The recommendations are provided solely on the basis of their location, accessibility and price–quality ratio.

The following hotels are recommended:

- **Ibis budget Amsterdam City South**
- **Adagio Amsterdam City South**
- **Holiday Inn Express Amsterdam South**
- **Crowne Plaza Amsterdam South**

Practical information about Amsterdam

Amsterdam is a compact, international city that is easy to navigate for visitors from around the world. The city is served by **Amsterdam Airport Schiphol**, an international hub with direct **train** connections to Amsterdam and other European cities. The city can be reached from the airport in approximately **10-20 minutes** by train.

Amsterdam has an **extensive public transport network**, including trams, buses, and metro. Public transport can be accessed using **contactless debit or credit cards**, as well as day or multi-day travel passes. The city is also **highly walkable**, and cycling is common, though visitors are advised to be mindful of busy bike lanes.

The official language is **Dutch**, but **English is widely spoken**, particularly in hotels, restaurants and public transport.

In July, the weather is **generally warm**, though it can be **changeable**. Participants are advised to bring light but layered clothing and a light rain jacket.

We hope this information helps you prepare for your stay and enjoy your time in Amsterdam alongside the congress.

Scientific committee

Dagmar Brosey Professor of Social Law, Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, Cologne University of Applied Sciences (Germany)

Volker Lipp Professor of Civil Law, Civil Procedure, Medical Law and Comparative Law, Faculty of Law, University of Göttingen (Germany)

Frederik Swennen Professor of the Law of Persons and Family Law, University of Antwerp (Belgium)

Tim Wuyts Professor of Civil Law and Family Law, Hasselt University (Belgium)

Wayne Martin Professor of Philosophy, University of Essex, and Director of the Essex Autonomy Project (England)

Adrian Ward Solicitor and recognised national and international expert in adult incapacity law (Scotland)

Isolina D'Above Professor of Legal Philosophy, National University of Rosario and National University of Buenos Aires Province, and Director of the Elder Law Research Center, University of Buenos Aires (Argentina)

Katrine Kjærheim Fredwall Professor, Department of Private Law, Faculty of Law, University of Oslo (Norway)

Petra Knoppers Solicitor, Mediator and Martner at SmeetsGijbels Amsterdam (the Netherlands)

Madeleine Hillen Partner at Notarieel Bureau and External Legal Advisor for the Royal Dutch Association of Notaries (the Netherlands)

Organising committee



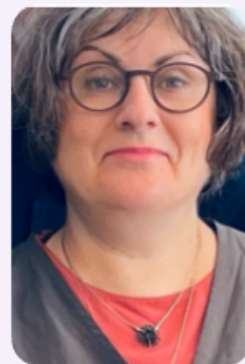
Kees Blankman

Co-Convenor of this congress,
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Elder Law



Rieneke Stelma-Roorda

Co-Convenor of this congress,
and Assistant Professor of
Family Law and the Law of
Persons



Masha Antokolskaia

Professor of Private Law,
specialising in Family Law and
the Law of Persons



Freya Augusteijn

Postdoctoral researcher



Ruben de Jong

Lecturer and PhD Candidate



Geeske Ruitenberg

Associate Professor of Family
Law and the Law of Persons