Hertie School’s Centre for Fundamental Rights awarded Volkswagen Foundation “Challenges for Europe” research grant

Cathryn Costello, Professor of Fundamental Rights and Co-director of the Centre for Fundamental Rights to lead research project on Algorithmic Fairness for Asylum-Seekers and Refugees (AFAR).

The Hertie School’s Centre for Fundamental Rights has been awarded 1.5 M Euro from the Volkswagen Foundation through its “Challenges for Europe” funding programme. Cathryn Costello, Professor of Fundamental Rights and Co-director of the Centre, will work alongside colleagues at the European University Institute, University of Copenhagen, University of Oxford and the University of Zagreb to investigate new technology in asylum and migration decision-making.

Costello and a team of researchers at the Centre will lead the joint research project on Algorithmic Fairness for Asylum-Seekers and Refugees (AFAR) to address two of the most significant challenges facing Europe: first, how to reform migration and asylum governance to avoid another ‘refugee/migration crisis’ and second, how to regulate new technologies, in particular automated decision-making.

“With the AFAR research project, we aim to make a ground-breaking contribution to the understanding of ‘fairness’ in migration and asylum procedures, taking into account the perspectives of policy makers, the general public and of course asylum seekers and refugees” says Costello.

Although automated decision-making offers improvement over human decision makers in terms of speed and consistency, unless designed with fairness in mind, it risks replicating and even exacerbating discriminatory and exclusionary practices.

“This project brings together an extraordinary interdisciplinary team of scholars, builds on the collaborators’ deep expertise, and aims to increase knowledge and understanding of the risks and potential of new technologies in this field” Costello adds.

The project will be conducted in close collaboration with five partner institutions and principal investigators:

Cathryn Costello, Professor of Fundamental Rights, Co-Director of Centre for Fundamental Rights, Hertie School

Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen, Professor with special responsibilities in migration and refugee law, iCourts Center for Excellence on International Courts, Faculty of Law, University of Copenhagen

Iris Goldner Lang, Jean Monnet Professor of EU Law and UNESCO Chairholder, University of Zagreb
Derya Ozkul, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford

Martin Ruhs, Professor of Migration Studies, Deputy Director of the Migration Policy Centre, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute

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The Hertie School in Berlin prepares exceptional students for leadership positions in government, business, and civil society. The school offers master’s programmes, executive education and doctoral programmes, distinguished by interdisciplinary and practice-oriented teaching, as well as outstanding research. Its extensive international network positions it as an ambassador of good governance, characterised by public debate and engagement. The school was founded in 2004 by the Hertie Foundation, which remains its major funder. The Hertie School is accredited by the state and the German Science Council.

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AFAR Research Project