

PRESS RELEASE

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Professor Thea Hilhorst receives prestigious European Grant for research with potential to transform humanitarian governance

On 19 March 2020, Thea Hilhorst, Professor in Humanitarian Studies at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, was awarded the prestigious Advanced Grant for research by the European Research Council (ERC). The ERC has awarded her a grant of 2.5 million Euro for a 5-year research project into how humanitarian governance is evolving, how civil society actors and crisis-affected people shape humanitarian governance, and how humanitarian studies can become more participatory and respectful of local research capacities.

This research will focus on the needs of crisis-affected people. These are vulnerable people – displaced or at home - and include more than 135 million refugees worldwide. Scientific research has shown that expanding climate- and pandemic- related disasters will multiply the challenges to meet the needs of these vulnerable people. The field of humanitarian governance aims to preserve the life of crisis-affected populations and to reduce human suffering. However, more and more people are at risk of being excluded from humanitarian aid because of changing definitions in aid of who deserves or needs aid most badly

"I find the present moment particularly ripe to engage in a bold research programme that ties together my intellectual interest in humanitarian governance and local-level dynamics with a commitment to contribute to transformations in humanitarian governance," says Thea Hilhorst. "Now is also the time to enable local voices to co-shape humanitarian reform by localizing humanitarian studies," she added.

According to the ERC evaluation committee, Professor Hilhorst's study is groundbreaking because it "focuses on how crisis-affected populations and civil society actors are positioning themselves in this new humanitarian landscape". The project aims to understand what patterns of governance emerge in different types of crises and in different contexts of state–society relations, government traditions, and styles of statehood.

The study focuses on Colombia, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In addition, it will study the international policies of climate-related displacement. The cases will help to understand how humanitarian governance is challenged through accountability and advocacy practices. The evaluation committee states that the research is unique as it proposes methodologies "to de-colonize humanitarian research and to develop a bottom-up perspective that has been largely missing to date."

Thea Hilhorst will implement the ERC project at the International Institute for Social Studies (ISS) in collaboration with a group of scientists working on conflict and peace studies. Three PhDs and a senior researcher will be recruited for the project. According to the evaluation committee, "the programme should produce a cohort of doctoral students with transformative power".

About Thea Hilhorst

Thea Hilhorst holds the Chair of Humanitarian Studies at Erasmus University Rotterdam at ISS. She leads the research programme "*When disaster meets conflict*", that studies disaster governance in high-conflict, low-conflict and post-conflict societies, financed by the Dutch Research Council (VICI programme). She is an expert in development in areas affected by disaster, conflict or fragility, with a special focus on aid-society relations, including Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Rwanda, South Sudan, and Sri Lanka. Professor Hilhorst also works on applied assignments and advice. She is president of the International Humanitarian Studies Association and a board member of the Core Humanitarian Standard Alliance.

About the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS)

Based in The Hague, ISS is an international graduate school of policy-oriented critical social science. It brings together students and teachers from the Global South and the North in a European environment. It employs a staff of 78 FTE, of whom 52 are professionally engaged in teaching, research and advisory work. Each year, approximately 150 Masters students complete a Masters in Development Studies. An additional, 150 PhDs add to the research capacity of the Institute.

ISS research focuses on global development and social justice, employing a critical approach to policy responses that are formulated to social, economic and political issues. The critical attitude is the result of a deeply felt need to analyse the way in which power differences among groups of people result in policies and practices that are highly beneficial to the powerful and detrimental to the powerless.

For more information, please contact:

Marketing & Communication ISS

Sandra Nijhof (sandra.nijhof@eur.nl) / Tel 06 51266151

www.iss.nl

www.dorotheahilhorst.nl