

## Annual human rights conference: Data-driven human rights research

Padova, 9-10 November 2020 (online Webinar on Zoom)

The 2020 human rights conference organised by the Human Rights Centre of the University of Padova develops a long-term reflection on the challenges for human rights normative systems stemming from diversity in human rights operationalisation. The overall goal is to promote research and stimulate thoughts about the normative/factual fault lines, the chasm between law and reality, not only in terms of compliance gaps but also as opportunities for expanding and attuning the legal, ethical and philosophical articulations of current human rights narratives.

*Because of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, the Conference is managed as a Webinar and Meeting event on Zoom.*

The 2020 programme conference tackles the challenge of "measuring" human rights and producing evidence-based and data-driven knowledge and research.

The idea of setting standards of human rights fulfilment and embed them in normative instruments implies a capacity to "value" and "weight" the rights and assess in quantitative terms the performance of states (and possibly of other actors, such as multinational enterprises) in implementing such standards.

In the last couple of decades, many institutions in the international machinery monitoring the states' compliance with human rights treaty provisions and standards have stressed the importance of setting indexes and quantitative indicators as necessary to achieve this task. The same trend is pervasive also in academia. This "quantitative shift" – driven mainly by the availability of large dataset and big data analytics – has broad implications. On the one hand, it has expanded the scope of human rights knowledge, both vertically (more

and more data can be collected and processed on a given topic) and horizontally (a broader set of determinants and issues are associated to the human rights discourse). On the other hand, however, the risk has surfaced of "fossilising" existing human rights configurations, by focusing on some indicators to the detriment of others; or of fostering a "digital activism" detached from the social and community phenomena it is supposed to interpret. Dealing with human rights-related data also requires acknowledging the limits that such approach has in times of digital divide and restricted access to some security-related information. Indeed, data, against which human rights are measured, and that steer evidence-based policies, are peculiar commons. Political and socio-cultural biases and attitudes condition their gathering and processing, and their adherence to the factual events and dynamics they are supposed to represent is problematic and context-specific. Interpretative stereotypes (based on gender, culture, class, ethnicity/race, etc.) preside over their achieving the status of digital data and their treatment as "evidence". Ethical considerations are of capital importance in determining which and for which purposes data can be treated. Last but not least, data have to be communicated and embedded in narratives for their presentation to the general public. Traditional and "new" media, including social media, are a crucial component in the flow of data from human rights facts, their "datafication" and transformation into news, policies, norms, habits.

The aim of the Conference is to frame the issue, adopting an interdisciplinary approach and a forward-looking attitude.

### Draft programme

#### November 9, 2020

Plenary 1 (10:30 – 12:30 CET)

Salutations and short introduction

Keynote speeches:

- *Human rights research methods and the 'quantitative shift' in perspective.* Attilio Pisanò, University of the Salento, Lecce;
- *Gathering and processing human rights data: technological and ethical issues.* Maria Green, Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, Lund

Panel session (three parallel panels. Round 1: 14:30-16:00; Round 2: 16:30- 18:00)

Panel A: Human rights violations – collecting data, accessing facts

Panel B: Computing and human rights: opportunities and challenges of using personal data

Panel C: Methods in human rights research – human rights in research methods

#### November 10, 2020

Plenary 2 (10:30 – 12:30 CET)

Keynote speeches:

- *Evidence-based human rights advice in the EU.* Jonas Grimheden (FRA programme manager, Vienna)
- *Data-driven activism: opportunities and challenges.* Edzia Carvalho (University of Dundee, UK)

Final debate and Conclusions