

Ayushi Rastogi receives 2026 Heineken Young Scientists Award for Natural Sciences



Ayushi Rastogi
Photo: Bram Belloni

Amsterdam, 9 June 2026 – Software is intricately intertwined with virtually every aspect of our lives, from paying by card at the supermarket to checking in to board a train. When software fails, it can disrupt the daily lives of millions of people. Ayushi Rastogi (1989), assistant professor of software engineering at the University of Groningen, investigates how software can be developed to be reliable and future-proof – especially in light of the ever-increasing role claimed by AI. For her research, which affects both academia and industry, she is receiving the Heineken Young Scientists Award for Natural Sciences 2026.

In a highly digitised country like the Netherlands, even minor software errors can have major consequences, ranging from public transport system failures to disruptions in healthcare. Rastogi’s research focuses on the human side of software development: how do behaviour, collaboration, and social factors influence the way software is built and evolves over time? She examines practices such as code reviews, team coordination, and the use of AI in software development. For that purpose, she combines large-scale data analysis with surveys and in-depth interviews.

Ayushi Rastogi: “I want to contribute to software systems that society can rely on every day.”

What sets her approach apart is that she works with real-life software systems rather than in a lab. This offers a unique behind-the-scenes perspective on how software companies operate. “I study large-scale software systems in which thousands of developers (and increasingly AI) are constantly adapting and redeveloping software.” She translates the insights she gains into concrete guidelines for developers and organisations worldwide.

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Diversity in development teams

Diversity within development teams also plays a key role in Rastogi's research. A lack of representation can lead to software working less well for certain user groups. A well-known example is facial recognition, which is less accurate for darker skin tones. In her opinion, it is therefore important not only to train with diverse data but also to ensure that the teams themselves are diverse.

Jury praises bridge between science and practice

According to the jury, chaired by Hester den Ruijter (professor at UMC Utrecht), Rastogi is highly effective at connecting fundamental scientific research with practical applications. Her work receives international recognition and is high-profile in academia and industry. In addition, the jury appreciates her commitment to a more inclusive sector. "In doing so, she contributes to a digital world that not only functions well, but is also accessible to a wider group of people," says Den Ruijter.

Future research

As AI takes over more and more software development tasks, the role of the developer is also shifting. Rastogi: "The challenge is to ensure that AI accelerates coding and routine tasks, while developers retain the overview and final responsibility." In the next few years, Rastogi wants to further investigate how humans and AI can effectively collaborate in building the next generation of software systems.

About the Heineken Young Scientists Awards

Every two years, the Heineken Young Scientists Awards recognise and encourage highly promising researchers affiliated with Dutch universities or research institutes. Established in 2010 by Charlene de Carvalho-Heineken, the awards are presented by the Alfred Heineken Fondsen Foundation in the domains of Medical/Biomedical Sciences, Humanities, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences. The award consists of an unrestricted cash prize of €15,000 and a specially commissioned artwork designed by Karel Martens.

The awards ceremony will take place on Thursday, 1 October 2026, at the ARTIS Amsterdam Royal Zoo. Joining Rastogi, the following laureates will receive an award:

Miguel Leung – Heineken Young Scientists Award for Medical/Biomedical Sciences

Yusuf Çelik – Heineken Young Scientists Award for Humanities

Anne Urai – Heineken Young Scientists Award for Social Sciences

In previous editions, the Heineken Young Scientists Award for Natural Sciences was awarded to Casper van der Kooi (2024), Jordi Tura i Brugués (2022) and Freddy Rabouw (2020), among others.

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About the Heineken Prizes

The Heineken Young Scientists Awards are part of the Heineken Prizes, Netherlands' most prestigious international prizes in science and the arts. This honour has been conferred since 1964.

Every two years, a Heineken Young Scientists Award is presented to four researchers affiliated with a Dutch university or research institute. Their outstanding research and innovative insights offer an inspiring example for other young researchers. The laureates are selected by an independent jury, which is responsible for the nomination and selection process.

More information: HeinekenPrizes.org.