

VACANCY FOR 1 PHD POSITION

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Deadline for applications	April 11, 2021
Foreseen starting date	November 1, 2021
Department Center	VUB, Faculty of Law and Criminology – Fundamental Human Rights Center
Contract	Limited duration (4 years)
Degree requirements	Master's degree in law
Occupancy rate	100%
Vacancy Type	Research

JOB DESCRIPTION

We are seeking to fill one full-time 48-months fully-funded PhD fellowships as part of the iBOF project “Future-proofing human right. Developing thicker forms of accountability” (see below).

You will be based at the Fundamental Rights Center at the Vrije Universiteit Brussels’ Faculty of Law and Criminology, but will (remotely) collaborate with colleagues at other Flemish Universities.

We are looking for mature PhD candidates, ideally with a research degree; and/or experience of doing fieldwork or research on the topic of human rights accountability.

Our working language is English. We encourage candidates from minority groups to apply and have a recruitment process aimed at ensuring inclusion and diversion.

DESCRIPTION OF THE BROADER RESEARCH PROJECT

The position is one of seven research positions that we are currently seeking to fill in the context of a new research project on accountability for human rights.

For more information about the other positions (including at other universities), please see [this page](#).

The overall research project is a multi-disciplinary and multi-method study that seeks to identify a variety of avenues for achieving better human rights protection that can provide the basis for a thicker conceptualization of the notion of (human rights) accountability.

It seeks to strengthen human rights law by identifying means or mechanisms that ensure a thicker form of accountability. This project proposes to further develop the concept of accountability so that it can face up to current social challenges, such as COVID-19, corporate abuse or surveillance dilemmas. Our particular concern is with the disconnect between the formal legal system and the lived experiences of those who suffer harms that could logically be – but are not yet - understood as a human rights violation.

Our overarching research question is: How can thicker accountability for human rights violations be achieved, so as to ensure better human rights protection in line with the everyday experience of rights holders? This question breaks down into three sub-questions:

1. What counts/should count, as a human rights violation, i.e. what types of substantive wrongs (do not) trigger accountability in practice?
2. Who can/should be held accountable (i.e. who is a duty-bearer), but now slips through the net?
3. How can the human rights framework be altered to accommodate this, i.e. what are good practices?

Within this project, the candidate for this position would be working on a specific work package that looks beyond the law and asks how we can learn from other disciplines and from practice to thicken forms of accountability. See work package (WP) 3.3. in [this document](#).

The PhD will reflect on how legally binding fundamental rights standards can be protected in an era of Artificial Intelligence and surveillance through existing data protection law and privacy. The question is timely, since right protection has been built since the late eighteenth century on the idea of an antinomial relationship between the “public” and the “private”. However, the political economy of informational capitalism or surveillance capitalism has become one of the key drivers of the expansion of the use of surveillance technologies in society (Zuboff, Cohen). These developments have led to new substantive wrongs and put into question traditional accountability mechanisms in the governance of surveillance. Under the influence of technology companies, the interpretation and understanding of human rights may be shifting

The focus of this PhD project is to focus on theory of rights (using Raz as a possible starting point) and use two rights (privacy and data protection) as a case study. How do rights function? Is their intended protection selective and if so, on what basis? How to ensure that AI is compliant with fundamental rights, including but also going beyond the right to protection of personal data? To what extent can privacy and data protection requirements address other fundamental rights? Are PIA (privacy impact assessments) and DPIAs (data protection impact assessments) effective to address rights beyond data protection? Why was accountability introduced in these legal areas in the first place? (Neyland’s idea of parasitic accountability). What substantive wrongs of surveillance and AI driven practices (*do not*) *trigger accountability in practice*? What can human rights law learn from the accountability mechanisms in data protection law and what useful novel accountability ideas or alternatives are proposed in literature to address shortcomings of privacy and data protection law.

PROFILE OF THE CANDIDATE

In order to be eligible, applicants must

- hold a European Union master's degree in law; proven interests in theory of human rights law and in political science understandings of law and human rights
- have obtained their degree at the time of application or demonstrate convincingly that they will have that degree in hand by July 1, 2021;
- be fluent in English as their primary working language and as their primary publication language,
- participate in international conferences.

Furthermore, applicants who meet the following conditions will be ranked higher during the assessment procedure

- good knowledge of human rights protection at the level of the Council of Europe and the European Union
- aptitude to explore theories on human rights and on accountability.
- good knowledge and experience with data protection law.
- Knowledge of and experience with legal research.
- pre-existing networks relevant to the research.

In addition to these project specific elements, we expect candidates to

- have the ability to work independently and in a multi-disciplinary and international team;
- able to cooperate with the other VUB-FRC more criminology oriented researcher on the iBOF project "Future-proofing human right"
- have excellent academic writing/presentation skills.
- contribute towards the general well-functioning of the team and project.
- have some social media experience, or interest therein.
- work in a meticulous way and be able to manage deadlines.

HOW TO APPLY

To apply, please send us:

- A **cover letter** outlining how your professional and/or research experience is relevant for this project, your motivation, and which case study you would want to examine;
- a **detailed CV** (including publication list, presentation and fieldwork experience if available);
- a transcript of your degree(s) and grade
 - If you have a foreign diploma in a language other than Belgium's national languages (Dutch, French or German) or English, please add a translation in one of the mentioned languages;
 - a 'Certificate of equivalence' is required for diplomas awarded outside the European Union (This can be requested via www.naricvlaanderen.be/en).
- two **letters of recommendation**, and
- a **writing sample** on a related topic (10.000 words maximum, in English, ideally an academic or research paper).

Applicants should submit these documents as **one pdf file** via **email** to paul.de.hert@vub.be with the subject line "Application iBOF PhD". We may not be able to process applications that do not follow these formal requirements

The deadline for submission is **April 11, 2021**.

The foreseen starting date is **October 1, 2021**, or soon after.

For inquiries, please contact Prof. dr. Paul De Hert at paul.de.hert@vub.be

EVALUATION PROCEDURE

A longlist of applicants selected on the basis of the submitted dossier will be invited for a home-based written assignment.

This written assignment will take place in the second half of April. Candidates can indicate which timeslot best suits their schedule, and will have to send in the assignment before an agreed upon deadline that same week.

On the basis of this assignment, shortlisted applicants will be invited for an interview in Ghent or through video conference, most likely in the week of May 15. Video conferencing will be available for international applicants or those who prefer to use this option. During this interview, we will assess the relevance of your experience for this project, and gauge whether you meet all the requirements.

The evaluation will be carried out by the principal investigator, in collaboration with the project's steering group and the university's human resource department.

CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

The indicative starting salary is € 2165 net per month (salary scale PhD candidates Flemish Universities) in the first year, based on a full-time position. Several elements are factored into the calculation of the exact salary, including relevant prior experience and family situation.

The position must result in a PhD thesis within the contract period.

The selected candidate will be based in Brussels. Beyond Brussels, you will be part of a larger research team working on related topics. At the Vrije Universiteit Brussels, this team is embedded in the Fundamental Rights Center of the Faculty of Law and Criminology (see below).

The selected candidate can enroll in relevant courses at the Vrije Universiteit Brussels and beyond.

INSTITUTIONAL EMBEDDING

Vrije Universiteit Brussels (VUB)

For almost 50 years, the Vrije Universiteit Brussel has stood for freedom, equality and connectedness. These values are strongly present on our campuses, in our students as well as our staff. At the VUB, you'll find a diverse collection of personalities: pure innovators, but especially people who are 100% their authentic selves. With about 3,500 employees, we are the largest Flemish-speaking employer in Brussels, an international city with which we are all too happy to be affiliated and around which our four campuses are located.

Our education and research are grounded in the principles of free research with an eye on human progress. We disapprove of every purely authoritative argument and guarantee the free formation of judgement that is necessary for this basic principle to be incorporated in the community.

The VUB is autonomous and managed democratically. As such, we guarantee fundamental freedoms within our university, as well as the right of the university community to be involved in making and checking university policy.

The mission of the university includes:

- the development, the transfer and the application of high-standing academic education and scientific research, free from any prejudice;
 - community integration of this in a spirit of social compassion;
 - critical development of everyone in light of the responsibilities borne in the community.

The Vrije Universiteit Brussel has been a leading player in the Flemish Higher Education landscape for 40 years. The University numbers 10.000 students and together with its hospital - UZ Brussel – employs more than 5.500 people. The Vrije Universiteit Brussel is the largest Dutch speaking employer in the capital.

VUB Faculty of Law and Criminology

The Faculty provides academic teaching and services based on innovative scientific research. The education within these programmes is supported by the innovative scientific research performed within the 4 faculty departments encompassing all possible disciplines within the fields of law and criminological sciences.

Fundamental Rights Center

The Fundamental Rights Research Centre (FRC) at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel coordinates and centralizes the many human-rights linked research projects within the university. Both theory of human rights, national human rights law (constitutional law, criminal law, civil law, ...) and international human rights law are brought together with the objective of engendering and

In addition to the fundamental rights expertise of its members, the FRC has also coordinated and centralised many European and national research projects that offer practical applications.

DIVERSITY

We ensure equal opportunities, equal treatment and equal access to the vacancies for all who apply. We ensure an objective and non-biased assessment procedure. Origin, ethnicity, gender, age, employment disability, sexual orientation and other identity factors will not be a factor in assessing the competences. Candidates belonging to vulnerable or minority groups are strongly encouraged to apply.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information about the project, please click [here](#)

For more information about the position, please write to Prof. Dr. Paul De Hert

Paul.de.hert@vub.be

For more information about the other vacancies in this project, please click [here](#).