

VACANCY FOR 1 PHD POSITION

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

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| Deadline for applications | April 11, 2021 |
| Foreseen starting date | November 1, 2021 |
| Department | Faculty of Law and Criminology – Fundamental Rights Centre |
| Contract | Limited duration (4 years for a doctoral position) |
| Degree requirements | Master's degree in criminology or a relevant social science |
| Occupancy rate | 100% |
| Vacancy Type | Research |

JOB DESCRIPTION

We are seeking to fill one full-time research position as part of the iBOF project “Future-proofing human right. Developing thicker forms of accountability”.

To be eligible for the position as a PhD candidate, your highest degree must be a MA in **Criminology** and/or a relevant **Social Sciences** discipline.

The postholder will become a member of the **Fundamental Rights Centre and the Crime and Society Research Group at the Faculty of Law and Criminology of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel** and will collaborate with colleagues at **other Flemish Universities** (mostly remotely). In addition, there will be the opportunity to get involved in the activities of the **Chair in Surveillance Studies** - <https://survstudies.research.vub.be/en>.

Your task will be to investigate, as part of iBOF research team mentioned above and under the direction of Professor Rosamunde Van Brakel, how corporate actors are influencing accountability mechanisms of law enforcement in Belgium to deal with surveillance wrongs. You will do so by mapping best and worst practices in terms of legal and non-legal accountability mechanisms. The methodology for this endeavor is critical discourse analysis and uses NVivo software for analysis. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews and focus groups with law enforcement, oversight bodies and platform representatives, and desk research.

You will also attend academic conferences and participate in the dissemination of the findings of the research project.

Dutch and English will be your main languages of work.

We encourage candidates from minority groups to apply.

DESCRIPTION OF THE BROADER RESEARCH PROJECT

The position advertised here 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 overall project, the researcher selected for this vacancy will be working on work package (WP) 3.3., as described in the above section and in [this document](#).

PROFILE OF THE CANDIDATE

In order to be eligible, applicants must

- hold a master's degree in criminology or a relevant social science
- have obtained their degree at the time of application or demonstrate convincingly that they will have that degree in hand by November 1, 2021;
- be fluent in Dutch and English as primary working and publication language;
- be willing to spend period(s) of time abroad to participate in international conferences and summer schools.

Furthermore, applicants who meet the following conditions will be ranked higher during the assessment procedure if they can demonstrate that they have

- experience with qualitative research methods and more specifically doing interviews and using NVIVO software;

- interest in doing interdisciplinary research on the political economy of surveillance and police accountability
- interest in human rights

In addition to these project specific elements, candidates will be selected by reference to the following criteria:

- ability to work both independently and in a multi-disciplinary and international team;
- quality of academic writing/presentation skills;
- capacity and willingness to contribute to the well-being and well-functioning of the teams of which they are part;
- social media experience, or interest therein;
- meticulousness, organization skills and capacity to manage deadlines.

HOW TO APPLY

To apply, please send us:

- A **cover letter** (double-spaced, font 12, 4 pages maximum) outlining your motivation, your research proposal, and what you would bring to both your specific and the broader research projects;
- a **detailed CV** (including publications, if any);
- a **transcript of your degree(s) and grades**
 - 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.
- 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 rosamunde.van.brakel@vub.be with the subject line "Application - iBOF - WP3.3 (MBD)".

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 **November 1, 2021**.

For inquiries, please contact prof. dr. Rosamunde Van Brakel at rosamunde.van.brakel@vub.be

EVALUATION PROCEDURE

Selected applicants will be invited to complete a home-based written assignment. This will take place in the last week of April. Candidates who may require special facilities should indicate this in their application, and we will try to accommodate their request.

Applicants will be shortlisted for an interview on the basis of their assignment. Shortlisted applicants will be invited for a video conference interview, which is likely to take place between 20 and 28 May 2021. 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 Prof. Van Brakel, in collaboration with the project's steering group and the university's human resource department. Should we believe that your skills and expertise are better suited for one of the other vacancies on the project, we will be happy to pass this information along to the concerned PI. If you do not wish for your application to be considered for other positions, please indicate this explicitly in your cover letter.

CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

Several elements, including prior experience and family situation, will be factored into the calculation of the salary offered.

The University also offers several social benefits to which the candidate has access, such as commuter allowances, access to university restaurants. More information can be found [here](#).

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

The selected candidate will be expected to live in or near Brussels, except when travelling and spending periods of time elsewhere as required by their study.

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

INSTITUTIONAL EMBEDDING

Vrije Universiteit Brussel

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.

Fundamental Rights Centre

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 stimulating integrated human rights research projects.

Research Group Crime & Society (CRiS)

The Research Group Crime & Society (CRiS) is part of the Faculty of Law and Criminology of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. We undertake critical and multidisciplinary research in Youth Criminology, Penology, Urban Criminology, and Policing and Surveillance. CRiS scholarship focuses on the experiences and perceptions of crime control actors and of those subjected to crime control. Our researchers are committed to knowledge exchange with criminal justice practitioners, policy makers, and research subjects, to create collaborative, timely, and impactful research. We offer an intellectual and collegial academic environment to study crime control. Our research is frequently collaborative; undertaking comparative research projects with international visiting researchers

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. Rosamunde Van Brakel (rosamunde.van.brakel@vub.be)

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