

VACANCY FOR 1 POSTDOC POSITION ON A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR NEW HUMAN RIGHTS DUTY-BEARERS

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Deadline for applications April 11, 2021

Foreseen starting date November 1, 2021

Law and Development Research Group, Faculty of Law, University of Antwerp

Contract Limited duration (4 years)

Degree requirements PhD in law

Occupancy rate 100%

Vacancy Type Research

JOB DESCRIPTION

We are seeking to fill one full-time 48-months fully-funded postdoc fellowship as part of the iBOF project “Future-proofing human right. Developing thicker forms of accountability” (see below). In addition, you will help coordinate project proposals in the field of human rights and contribute to attracting external funding, will fulfil a limited number of teaching activities, and will participate in the provision of academic services: you will represent the research group both internally and externally, help to coordinate service projects, and so on.

You will primarily be based at the Law and Development Research Group of the Faculty of Law of the University of Antwerp, but will (remotely) collaborate with colleagues at other Flemish universities.

We are looking for mature candidates who are able to work in an interdisciplinary environment, ideally with experience of doing research on the topic of human rights accountability/new duty-bearers in human rights law.

Our working language is English.

We encourage candidates from minority groups to apply and have a recruitment process aimed at ensuring inclusion and diversity.

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 will be working on a specific work package that looks beyond human rights law and asks how we can learn from other sub-fields of the law to thicken forms of accountability of non-state actors.

The focus of this postdoc project is on finding a more encompassing understanding of who is legally accountable, by zooming in on the specific question of *who* can be held legally accountable. The starting point for this track is the question, *what can we learn from neighboring legal fields to revisit our understanding of who is a human rights duty-bearer?*

The exclusive focus on states as human rights duty-bearers can be disempowering for rights-holders and victims of human rights violations and is out of sync with a reality in which states increasingly delegate certain powers and authorities to private actors; corporate actors amassed an unseen kind and amount of power; international and supranational organizations assume state functions; etc. In response to this, several – legal – initiatives have been taken, and several avenues explored, to identify ‘new’ human rights duty-bearers, with some seeking to reinforce the state and to strengthen state duties, while others seek to allocate obligations to other actors.

This WP will identify criteria for expanding the circle of human rights duty-bearers by learning from environmental law, international economic law, space law, and the field of business and human rights. Based on this analysis, different legal avenues for including new duty-bearers will be explored: the expansion of international human rights law through soft and hard law; the use of domestic law (tort law; criminal law) or other fields of international law (liability law, criminal law); and contractual approaches (‘partnerships’), as used for example in the aftermath of the Rana Plaza disaster. Proposals based on these avenues will be examined for empirical relevance in [WP2.2](#).

For more information, see WP2.1. in [this document](#).

PROFILE OF THE CANDIDATE

In order to be eligible, applicants must

- hold a PhD in law;
- 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 English as their primary working language and as their primary publication language;
- have research qualities in line with the faculty and [university research policies](#).
- be willing to spend longer periods of time abroad to participate in international conferences.

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

- excellent knowledge of human rights protection and accountability, new duty-bearers or related fields relevant to the project;
- excellent knowledge of and experience with legal research;
- experience with fieldwork, ideally in the Global South;
- 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;
- 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** (maximum 2 pages) outlining how your professional and/or research experience is relevant for this project and your motivation;
- a **detailed CV** (including publication list, presentation and other relevant experience);

- a transcript of your degree(s) and grades
 - If you have a foreign degree 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 wouter.vandenhole@uantwerpen.be with the subject line "Application iBOF postdoc". We may not be able to process applications that do not follow these formal requirements.

The deadline for submission is **April 11, 2021 (midnight, Brussels time)**.

The foreseen starting date is **November 1, 2021**.

For inquiries, please contact prof. dr. Wouter Vandenhole at wouter.vandenhole@uantwerpen.be.

EVALUATION PROCEDURE

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

This written assignment will take place in the second half of April. Candidates can indicate closer to the date which timeslot best suits their schedule, and will have to send in the assignment before an agreed upon deadline that same week. Candidates who need special facilities can indicate this, and we will try to accommodate their request.

On the basis of this assignment, shortlisted applicants will be invited for an interview in Antwerp 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. 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

Your gross monthly salary is calculated according to the [pay scale](#) for a principal research fellow in the contract research staff category (Dutch: *Bijzonder Academisch Personeel*, BAP). Several elements are factored into the calculation of the exact salary, including relevant prior experience and family situation.

The University also offers several social benefits to which the candidate has access, such as commuter allowances and access to university restaurants. Find out more about working at the University of Antwerp [here](#).

The position must result in several academic publications within the contract period.

The selected candidate will be based in Antwerp. In Antwerp, you will be part of a small but vibrant research team working on related topics. Beyond Antwerp, you will be part of a larger research team working on related topics. At the University of Antwerp, this team is embedded in the Law and Development Research Group of the Faculty of Law of the University of Antwerp (see below).

INSTITUTIONAL EMBEDDING

University of Antwerp

The [University of Antwerp](#) is a dynamic, forward-looking, European university. We offer an innovative academic education to more than 20 000 students, conduct pioneering scientific research and play an important service-providing role in society. We are one of the largest, most international and most

innovative employers in the region. With more than 6000 employees from 100 different countries, we are helping to build tomorrow's world every day. Through top scientific research, we push back boundaries and set a course for the future – a future that you can help to shape.

The University of Antwerp received the European Commission's [HR Excellence in Research Award](#) for its HR policy. We are a sustainable, family-friendly organisation which invests in its employees' growth. We encourage [diversity](#) and attach great importance to an inclusive working environment and equal opportunities, regardless of gender identity, disability, race, ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation or age. We encourage people from diverse backgrounds and with diverse characteristics to apply.

Faculty of Law

The Faculty of Law of the University of Antwerp is a thriving academic community of around 340 employees and 2000 students. Our faculty focuses on education, research and societal commitment, with a particular emphasis on sustainability, diversity and internationalisation.

The Faculty of Law is a truly metropolitan university. It maintains bilateral contracts with 66 partner Universities within Europe, and 18 partner Universities outside of Europe. The University of Antwerp, and the Law Faculty, is part of the Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE) initiative. This is one of seventeen university clusters that are striving to develop real future European universities across national borders, with funding from the European Union. Within YUFE, several law faculties have joined forces to develop common training programmes.

The research activities within the Faculty of Law of the University of Antwerp are thematically organized in five research groups and cover a wide range of legal domains. Interdisciplinary and intradisciplinary research is encouraged. The Faculty holds five research chairs. Faculty researchers are involved in two University-wide Centres of Excellence. The Faculty of Law hosts about 100 PhD researchers, approximately 40% of which are international researchers.

Students already holding their first law degree (BA, LL.B., JD or equivalent) can take the Master of Laws (LL.M.), taught in English. This two year pioneering problem-oriented programme defies traditional boundaries within the legal discipline and applies a law in context approach in its different modules.

Law and Development Research Group

The Law and Development research group unites researchers from across the globe who study the role of law in enhancing human dignity and global justice, between and within States in North and South. The group takes a critical approach to law, and seeks to investigate what law actually 'does' in society, amongst others through interdisciplinary and empirical research. The LDRG has strong links at both the national and international levels with counterparts undertaking Law and Development research. The Group runs annually a teaching programme on Sustainable Development and Global Justice (SUSTJUSTICE).

There are two research lines: *Human Rights and Global Justice* and *Law and Sustainable Development*. The postdoc position fits within the former.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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

For more information about the position, please write prof. dr. wouter.vandenhole@uantwerpen.be.

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