

VACANCY FOR A PHD OR POSTDOC IN HUMAN RIGHTS

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Deadline for applications	March 14, 2021
Foreseen starting date	November 1, 2021
Department	Faculty of Law and Criminology – Human Rights Center
Contract	PhD: limited duration, full-time, 4 years Postdoc: full-time or part-time, 2 years (based on 1.0 FTE)
Degree requirements	PhD: MA degree in SPS, law, anthropology or a related discipline Postdoc: PhD in human rights or other relevant field
Vacancy Type	Academic research

JOB DESCRIPTION

We are seeking a researcher for a fully-funded PhD or postdoctoral fellowship as part of the iBOF project “Future-proofing human rights. Developing thicker forms of accountability” (see below).

The selected candidate will examine the empirical relevance of new human rights duty-bearer concepts in a specific geographical and thematic context, which they can propose themselves.

The project’s research design requires the researcher to engage in fieldwork (including participant observation, interviews, document collection, focus groups etc) in the Global South for approximately 2-3 months per year.

The selected candidate will be supervised by prof. dr. Tine Destrooper and will primarily be based at the Human Rights Centre at the Faculty of Law and Criminology of Ghent University, but will (remotely) collaborate with colleagues at other Flemish Universities.

We are looking for a mature PhD candidate or established postdoctoral researcher. PhD candidates who apply should ideally have a research degree and/or experience of doing fieldwork or research on the topic of human rights accountability. Postdoctoral researchers should hold a PhD in human rights or other relevant fields and have a proven track record of working on related topics. Only one candidate will be selected for this position.

If the selected candidate is at the pre-doctoral level, they will be offered a full-time, fully-funded PhD fellowship (4 years). If the selected candidate is at the postdoctoral level, they will be offered a full-time or part-time employment contract of limited duration (2 years, based on 1.0 FTE – employment percentage is open to negotiation). All candidates for this position will be evaluated jointly (see details below).

We encourage candidates who self-identify as belonging to a minority group 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?

DESCRIPTION OF THE YOUR SPECIFIC RESEARCH PROJECT

Within this broader project, the candidate will be working on a specific work package that looks beyond the law and asks how we can learn from other disciplines and from human rights practice to thicken accountability. To do this, the candidate collaborates closely with a postdoc who examines what we can we learn from neighboring fields to revisit our understanding of who is a human rights duty-bearer? They examine the relevance of these legal and theoretical proposals in an empirical manner.

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 research consists of an empirical analysis of how rights-holders themselves understand who can be held legally accountable and how relevant proposed solutions are thought to be in their lived experience. The geographic scope of the case study can be determined by the PhD and PI.

For more information, see WP2.2. in [this document](#).

PROFILE OF THE PHD CANDIDATE

In order to be eligible, applicants must

- hold a (research) master's degree in social and political sciences, law, anthropology or a related discipline;
- have obtained their degree at the time of application or demonstrate convincingly that they will have that degree in hand by August 1, 2021;
- be fluent in English as their primary working language and as their primary publication language, and be fluent in the official language of the case study they propose;
- be willing to spend longer periods of time abroad for fieldwork and to 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 and accountability, new duty-bearers or related fields relevant to the project;
- experience with fieldwork, ideally in the Global South, or specifically in the case study proposed;
- experience with qualitative research methods (such as participant-observation, interpretive research design)
- knowledge of and experience with legal research and/or quantitative research is an added value;
- pre-existing networks relevant to the research and fieldwork.

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.

PROFILE OF THE POSTDOCTORAL CANDIDATE

In addition to the above requirements, postdoctoral researchers must also meet the following minimum requirements:

- hold a PhD in human rights or other relevant field at the time of application or demonstrate that you will have the degree in hand by August 1, 2021;
- have a proven track record (including through publications) on the protection of ESC rights

Postdoctoral researchers who meet several of the following desired qualities will be ranked higher during the assessment procedure:

- have multidisciplinary training (e.g. as demonstrated through multiple degrees) and/or a proven track record in multidisciplinary research, as relevant to the iBOF research project;
- have a proven track record (including publications) in the domain of the WP;
- have demonstrable expertise with socio-legal or legal anthropological fieldwork, especially in the Global South;
- have demonstrable expertise in human rights accountability;
- have demonstrable expertise in or familiarity with actor-oriented perspectives and/or users' perspectives on human rights;
- have experience with taking on a proactive and coordinating role within a collaborative research project and to take up a supportive role towards junior team members;
- be fluent in at least one other language, in addition to English (notably a language dominant in the proposed case study).

HOW TO APPLY

To apply, please send us:

- A **cover letter** (maximum 500 words) 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 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;
 - a 'Certificate of equivalence' is required for diplomas awarded outside the European Union (This can be requested via www.naricvlaanderen.be/en).
- Two academic **letters of recommendation** (e.g. from your MA supervisor); and
- a **writing sample** on a related topic (10.000 words maximum, in English, ideally an academic or research paper or MA dissertation).

Applicants should submit these documents as **one pdf file** via **email** to tine.destrooper@ugent.be with the subject line "Application iBOF WP2.2". We may not be able to process applications that do not follow these formal requirements.

The deadline for submission is **March 14, 2021**.

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

For inquiries, please contact prof. dr. Tine Destrooper at tine.destrooper@ugent.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 normally take place in the second half of March. 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 Ghent or through video conference, most likely in the week of April 19. 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. 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.

WHAT WE OFFER

A vibrant, inter-university and multidisciplinary research environment, stretching across four Flemish universities, in which you conduct your research as part of a broader cutting-edge research project. The selected candidate will be based in Ghent, where they will be part of a small research team working on related topics. Beyond Ghent, you will be part of a larger research team working on related topics. At Ghent University, this team is embedded in the Human Rights Center of the Faculty of Law and Criminology of Ghent University (see below).

For pre-doctoral candidates: concerted supervision of your doctoral research by a dedicated and committed supervisor (prof. dr. Tine Destrooper) with an established academic track record on conflicts between human rights and balancing. The position must result in a PhD thesis within the contract period.

For post-doctoral candidates: freedom to, in consultation with prof. dr. Stijn Smet, set out your own research agenda within the confines of the research project and work package.

For pre-doctoral candidates: an indicative starting salary of EUR 2,170 net per month (salary scale PhD candidates Flemish Universities). Several elements are factored into the calculation of the exact salary, including relevant prior experience and family situation.

For post-doctoral candidates: an indicative starting salary of EUR 4,488 gross per month, based on a full-time position and four years of academic experience (ie. starting immediately after PhD). Several elements are factored into the calculation of the exact salary, including other relevant prior experience and family situation.

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 selected candidate can enroll in relevant courses at the University of Ghent and beyond.

INSTITUTIONAL EMBEDDING

Ghent University

[Ghent University](#) is a top 100 university and one of the major universities in Belgium. Our 11 faculties offer a wide range of courses and conduct in-depth research within a wide range of scientific domains. Ghent University occupies a specific position among the Flemish universities. We are a socially committed and pluralistic university that is open to all students, regardless of their ideological, political, cultural or social background.

In its mission statement, Ghent University identifies itself as a socially committed university. This implies that the institution reflects about the positive impact that its activities can have upon society, and that it attempts to optimize that impact. It also implies the reflection about the potential negative impact of activities upon society, and the attempt of minimizing such impact.

Over the course of its 200 year history Ghent University has built up a strong scientific reputation. Ghent University invests both in fundamental, high risk science as in applied research. The university is known for its scientific expertise in life sciences and medicine, materials and agricultural science, veterinary medicine, psychology and history, and many more.

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 3 faculty departments encompassing all possible disciplines within the fields of law and criminological sciences.

Human Rights Center

The Human Rights Centre at the Faculty of Law and Criminology at Ghent University is an academic center specialized in human rights law. We are proud of our dynamic international team, counting many young researchers and of our broad research and teaching expertise, covering international, regional, national and comparative law of human rights. Human Rights Centre members work on a range of thematic issues, including legal pluralism, freedom of expression, gender, indigenous peoples' rights, and the European Court of Human Rights. Members also actively engage with human rights practice by supervising clinical projects and submitting third-party interventions to the European Court of Human Rights.

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 who self-identify as 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 [prof. dr. Tine Destrooper](#).

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