

THREE FUNDED PHD POSITIONS IN THE DOMAIN OF TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Deadline for applications	April 5, 2025 (23:59 CET)
Foreseen starting date	September 1, 2025
Department	Faculty of Law and Criminology – Human Rights Center
Contract	48 months full time (on site presence required)
Degree requirements	MA, M.Sc or LLM in law, social sciences, anthropology or another relevant field, preferably with a focus on human rights and or transitional justice
Vacancy Type	Academic research

JOB DESCRIPTION

We are seeking to hire three fully funded PhD researchers as part of the new ERC project [“Innovation and documentation. Reconstructing the paradigm of transitional justice from the ground up”](#).

We are looking for three PhD candidates, ideally with experience as practitioners or as researchers on related topics.

The ideal candidates have an interdisciplinary profile, covering at least social & legal studies related to human rights and transitional justice. They are open to using or have experience with various relevant empirical research methods (quantitative or qualitative), and have good working knowledge of the various topics studied as part of this research project (see below).

The researchers will be based at the Human Rights Centre at the Faculty of Law and Criminology of Ghent University. On site presence is crucial given the highly collaborative nature of the project

The selected candidates will be offered a position of limited duration as PhD researchers (12 months initially, with 36 months extension upon passing the first year PhD requirements).

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 three candidates will be part of a broader research project on the role of documentation in contemporary transitional justice processes – including ones that are developed in contexts where no peace agreement was signed or no political transition took place (like struggles over historical injustice, transitional justice efforts in contexts of ongoing conflict, transitional justice initiatives dealing with ecological harm, etc).

The overall research project is a multi-disciplinary and multi-method study that seeks to theorize the role documentation processes play in the design of transitional justice initiatives. Documentation is crucial to almost every (institutional or grassroots) transitional justice initiative, but it is rarely the focus of transitional justice scholarship. Moreover, in contemporary transitional justice cases, where there may be no formal or institutional drive for transitional justice, it's often grassroots justice actors who are the engine behind these documentation efforts.

This project seeks to better understand how and why grassroots justice actors document harm, what their objectives are, and how this shapes the multitude of transitional justice responses that shape up in response to it.

The ambition is to move away from a pillar-based understanding of transitional justice, and to consciously start from the practices of those most affected by violence to rethink transitional justice as an eco-system in which documentation connects most of the initiatives.

Our overarching research question is: How can recentering the everyday justice efforts of grassroots actors help us rethink the transitional justice paradigm in ways that are more reflective of and responsive to realities on the ground, more future oriented, and that navigate some of the most pressing problems identified by critical transitional justice scholars and practitioners.

We will use a mixed-method actor-oriented approach to analyze the practices and ambitions of grassroots justice actors in 6 contemporary transitional justice cases. It requires close collaboration between the three new PhD researchers and the three senior researchers already working on the project.

There is room for the PhDs to bring in their own regional, topical and methodological expertise, as cases are not pre-defined, but the cases should meet the logic of the project as discussed above and [here](#). This means cases where (a) documentation efforts are central, (b) the language of transitional justice is used – notably in the absence of a peace agreement or political transition, and (c) grassroots actors are a driving force behind attempts at transitional justice.

DESCRIPTION OF YOUR SPECIFIC RESEARCH

Each PhD researcher will examine one case of contemporary and innovative transitional justice initiatives in the domain of documentation. They will be the lead researcher for that case, but will work in close collaboration with one of the three senior researchers, who will also study one case each, so as to ensure that cross-case comparisons become possible throughout the project.

While the individual PhD researcher has significant room to develop their own research project, the overall logic and focus should align with the focus of the project, given the project's need for cross-case analysis.

The overarching logic and focus have been defined in advance, but within these limits there is room for collective decision-making on exact research design, research questions, methods, deliverables, etc. The collective dimension of this decision-making is crucial: we envision for everyone to be able to bring in their own expertise, experience

and interest, but also to develop an overarching research approach that allows us to engage in mutual learning, forward thinking, and co-creation.

This is not an individual PhD project. There is a set research agenda and pre-established research focus. Please consider whether such a collective approach is the right fit for you before applying.

The selected candidates will be supervised by prof. dr. Tine Destrooper, dr Elke Evrard and dr. Brigitte Herremans, as well as having ample room for working together, and with the other members of the [Justice Visions team](#), the [Human Rights Centre](#), and the [Human Rights Research Network at UGent](#).

Within the first year of their PhD, candidates will be expected to actively contribute to the development and finetuning of the overall research design, and the research design of their case study within this broader framework. This includes reading the suggested readings and identifying further relevant reading for individual and collective purposes; joining team meetings on research design; identifying the most relevant methodological, theoretical and conceptual framework; writing the first drafts of the methodological, theoretical and conceptual chapters; enrolling in the doctoral schools training and taking relevant courses and summer schools; participating in activities of Justice Visions, the HRC and the Faculty, including team meetings. In following years, the candidates will be required to do fieldwork; start the data collection and analysis, embark upon the writing (chapters or articles); present at conferences and scientific meetings; assist with teaching (limited).

PROFILE OF THE CANDIDATE

In order to be eligible, applicants must

- hold a MA, MSc or LLM 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 September 1, 2025;
- be fluent in English as their primary working language and as their primary publication language, be fluent in the language spoken by actors in the case study they wish to examine.

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

- have demonstrable familiarity with transitional justice practice and or research, and the interdisciplinary study thereof (e.g. through dissertation work, professional experience, educational curriculum, prior research experience, consulting, volunteering, etc);
- have a multidisciplinary training (e.g. as demonstrated through multiple degrees) and/or a proven track record in multidisciplinary research;
- have experience with legal research, quantitative, or qualitative socio-legal research methods (such as participant-observation, interpretive research design) and/or a demonstrable interest in deepening and applying skills across various methods;

- have in-depth knowledge of the case studies they propose and pre-existing networks that can facilitate fieldwork;
- have demonstrable expertise in or familiarity with actor-oriented perspectives and/or users' perspectives on human rights and transitional justice;

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

- have the ability to work independently and pro-actively but as part of a multi-disciplinary and international team;
- have experience in working in complex (research) projects that require collaboration;
- have good (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;
- move to Belgium.

HOW TO APPLY

Apply online by submitting **all the required documents below as one PDF** via mail (justicevisions@ugent.be) before April 5, (23:59CET). We cannot accept late applications, applications submitted to other addresses, or applications with more than one PDF attachment.

Your application must include the following documents:

- your **cover letter**, outlining your motivation for applying (max 500 words);
- a **detailed CV** (including publication list, presentations and other relevant experience if available);
- a transcript of the required degree (if already in your possession). 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. You will be required to present a certificate of equivalence if you have a degree from outside the European Union.
- One academic **letter of recommendation specific to this role** (e.g. from your dissertation supervisor, please make sure the letter includes contact details);
- A **writing sample** on a related topic (10.000 words maximum, in English, ideally an academic paper, your MA thesis, etc).
- A **research statement**: this is a crucial component of the application, that will allow us to assess project fit. Please limit this document to 1.000 words max. Topics you may discuss in the research statement are:
 - Which case you would want to focus on for your PhD as part of this broader project;

- Why, in your opinion, this case is relevant to examine in a project on innovative practices in the realm of documentation;
- Where you see TJ language of practices being used in this case;
- What your relationship to this case is (e.g. have you worked on it as a practitioner, studied it for your dissertation, did research there, etc);
- Which methodological skills you have that you could leverage to study this case (please be as specific as possible (e.g. not just quant or qual): which precise methods, where have you learnt these when and where have you used these, etc);
- If there are alternative cases that you might want to suggest, feel free to do so.

This statement should not be an thoroughly developed research proposal, but reading more about your interest and skills will help us assess the fit with our project.

!! Please combine all these documents into one PDF file, and send it to us on the address listed below

As Ghent University maintains an equal opportunities and diversity policy, everyone is encouraged to apply for this position.

The foreseen starting date is **September 1, 2025**.

For inquiries, please contact us at justicevisions@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.

Longlisted candidates will be informed by April 25, when they will also receive the written assignment. The **written assignment will take place between April 25 and May 5, 2025**. Candidates who need special facilities in order to be able to carry out a written assignment, 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. Shortlisted candidates will be invited by May 12, for an **interview which will most likely take place on 18 or 19 May**. 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 the candidate's experience for this project, and gauge whether the candidate meets all the requirements.

The evaluation will be carried out by the principal investigator and the two senior researchers working on the project. If a suitable candidate is identified, we aim to extend an offer in the last week of May 2025 for an envisioned start in September 2025 (negotiable).

WHAT WE OFFER

Justice Visions is a vibrant and supportive multi-disciplinary research group of - currently - about 10 researchers working on topics related to transitional justice. Our substantive focus has been on transitional justice and arts, social movements, paradigmatic transitional justice, victim engagement, methodological innovation, and research impact. Within Justice Visions, you collaborate intensively with the 6 people working on the documentation project, in which you conduct your research as part of a broader cutting-edge ERC-funded research project. You will also be part of the Human Rights Centre and the human rights Research Network at UGent, to expand your community of relevant colleagues.

A four-year scholarship (12+36 months) based on a full-time position is offered.

The University also offers several social benefits to which candidates have access, such as commuter allowances, access to university restaurants, etc. 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. Its members include senior experts as well as many young researchers, covering a broad research and teaching expertise, which includes 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](#).

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