MAKERERE UNIVERSITY • UGENT • MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON UNIVERSITY • NKUMBA UNIVERSITY • HOGENT UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES AND ARTS

VLIR-UOS TEAM Project — Ref. UG2026TEA613B125

Joint Call for PhD Scholarship Applications

Strengthening Community-Centered Mental Health and Psycho-social Support Systems for Refugee and Host Communities in Uganda

PLEASE NOTE: ***This is not an open public call. Eligibility is restricted to current staff of Mountains of the Moon University (MMU) or Nkumba University (NU), as set out in Section 3. Please read the eligibility criteria before preparing an application.***

1. About the Project

This call is issued jointly by Makerere University (MUK), HOGENT University of Applied Sciences and Arts (HOGENT), Ghent University (UGent), Mountains of the Moon University (MMU), and Nkumba University (NU), as partners in a five-year VLIR-UOS TEAM project (1 September 2026 – 31 August 2031) funded through the Flemish Interuniversity Council's Higher Education & Science for Sustainable Development (HES4SD) program. Selected candidates will be core team members of the VLIR project and are expected to participate in all project activities, apart from their PhD research.

The project strengthens Ugandan Higher Education Institutions' capacity to become long-term drivers of community-centered Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) for refugee and host communities in Uganda, through a participatory "Living Lab" model, joint research capacity-building, and coordinated curriculum development.

Flemish promoter	Dr. Sofie Vindevogel (Hogeschool Gent)
Partner promoters	Dr. Roscoe Kasujja (Makerere) · Dr. Hadijah Nansamba (MMU) ·Lydia Namugga(NU)
Team members	Moses Mukasa (MUK) · Linda Grace Alanyo (MMU) · · Prof. Dr. Ilse Derluyn (UGent)

2. The Two Positions on Offer

Two fully-funded PhD scholarships are available under this call — one hosted at Mountains of the Moon University, one at Nkumba University. Both follow the same sandwich-PhD structure:

Number of positions	2 (one per institution: MMU and NU)
Home institution	The candidate's own current employer — either MMU or NU
PhD enrolment	Jointly enrolled in the PhD program at Makerere University and Ghent University (sandwich model)
Supervision	North–South co-supervision, with an individual training and supervision plan agreed for each candidate

Mobility	Periods of mobility to Ghent University for joint supervision and training are foreseen and supported
Duration of doctoral trajectory	The position includes the opportunity to pursue a PhD within the framework of the project. Candidates will join the research team from the outset and participate fully in the research programme for the duration of the project (five years). Progression to formal doctoral enrolment is expected in the third year, following a successful preparatory phase and approval by the relevant doctoral bodies.

3. Eligibility Criteria

- Applicants must currently be a member of staff at Mountains of the Moon University or Nkumba University, or hold a documented contractual relationship with one of these institutions.
- One position is designated for an MMU-affiliated candidate and one for an NU-affiliated candidate; applicants should apply for the position tied to their own institution. This ensures institutional embeddedness and capacity building that extends beyond PhD and project lifecycles.
- Applicants must hold a Master's degree in a relevant field (e.g., psychology, public health, social work, social sciences, nursing, or a closely related discipline).
- Applicants must meet the admission requirements of the PhD programs at both Makerere University and Ghent University.
- A demonstrated interest in, and where possible prior experience with, community-centered, participatory, or mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) research is an advantage.

TO BE CONFIRMED: ***Additional institution-specific admission requirements (e.g. minimum grade thresholds, language requirements for Ghent University enrolment) will be communicated by the selection committee and should be confirmed directly with Makerere's and Ghent University's graduate schools.***

4. Research Focus

The successful candidates will conduct participatory research on community-centered MHPSS for refugee and host communities in Uganda, within a broad thematic scope covering:

- Lived experiences of refugee and host communities in relation to mental health and psychosocial wellbeing.
- Mapping of existing community-based MHPSS interventions.
- Intersectional analysis of how mental health needs, support-seeking, and access to MHPSS differ across social groups.
- How displacement- and environment-related stressors interact with mental health and psychosocial support needs.

NOTE ON SCOPE: *The specific research question and methodology for each PhD will be finalized jointly with communities, practitioners, and policymakers through the project's Living Lab process during the first year, rather than fixed at the point of application. Applicants are encouraged to express a thematic area of interest within the above scope, not a finished research proposal.*

5. What the Project Provides

- VLIR-UOS project provides financial support for PhD students to enroll at Makerere University and Ghent University and undertake research stays in Belgium, the host institutions are expected to support their staff financially while they fulfil their project-related duties and pursue their PhD.
- Release (deloading) from normal academic and/or administrative duties at the home institution (MMU or NU) for the duration of the study and research trajectory, to allow adequate time for the PhD.
- North–South co-supervision, with supervisors from Makerere University, Ghent University, HoGent, Mountains of the Moon University and Nkumba University.
- Targeted skills development, including research ethics, data management, and dissemination training.
- Support toward (re)integration into the home institution upon graduation, in line with the project's institutional capacity-strengthening goals.
- Funded mobility for supervision visits and training between Uganda and Belgium.

TO BE CONFIRMED: ***Specific stipend amounts, allowances, and the detailed scholarship package will be provided to shortlisted candidates in line with the VLIR-UOS Scholarship Framework, and are not yet finalized in this call.***

6. Selection Process

Under the terms of the project agreement, PhD scholarships in VLIR-UOS TEAM projects are awarded by VLIR-UOS. HOGENT holds the mandate to conduct the selection and management process, in concert with Makerere University, Ghent University, Mountains of the Moon University, and Nkumba University.

1. Applications are submitted by the deadline below.

2. Applications are screened for eligibility by the consortium promoters.

3. Shortlisted candidates are interviewed by a joint selection panel drawn from the five partner institutions.

4. Final selection is confirmed in concertation with Ghent University and Makerere University, and communicated to VLIR-UOS.

7. How to Apply

Applicants should submit the following:

- A curriculum vitae (CV).
- A motivation letter (max. 2 pages), indicating the thematic area of interest within the research focus described in Section 4, and confirming current employment or contractual relationship with MMU or NU, plus any relevant experience.
- Certified copies of academic transcripts and degree certificates.
- A letter of support from the applicant's Head of Department or equivalent, confirming institutional willingness to release the candidate from normal duties if selected.
- Contact details of two academic or professional referees.

8. Timeline

Call opens	***29th October 2026***
Application deadline	16th November 2026
Shortlisting	23rd/November/2026 Email notifications will be sent out to successful applicants
Interviews	*30th November (shortlisted candidates will be interviewed)*
Expected start date	*(To be communicated officially before the end of January 2027*

9. Contact

For questions regarding this call, applicants may contact the partner promoter at their home institution:

- Mountains of the Moon University applicants: Dr. Hadijah Nansamba
- Nkumba University applicants: Dr. Lydia Nammugga

Email your application to: rosco.kasujja@mak.ac.ug or rosokasug@gmail.com