



The Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Vienna (Department of Development Studies) is looking to fill

1 PhD + 2 Postdoctoral Research Positions in History (ideal starting date: 1 September 2026)

within the ERC Starting Grant Project **“A Global Consensus? The Contested History of Structural Adjustment in the Age of Shock”** (ShockAge)

The Project:

ShockAge – “A Global Consensus? The Contested History of Structural Adjustment in the Age of Shock” is a five-year historical research project (February 2026 – January 2031), which is funded by a Starting Grant from the European Research Council and led by [Eva-Maria Muschik](#).

The Topic:

The history of the late 20th century international political economy – from the 1973 oil crisis to the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 – is often told as a succession of shocks. It has been argued that the resulting disorientation allowed for the global imposition of “structural adjustment”: policies favoring the removal of state regulations and subsidies, the privatization of public assets and services, and the liberalization of trade and foreign investment – “neoliberal globalization” to some. Others argue that there was simply no alternative to these policies because of economic constraints at the time. Accepting neither the imposition nor the no-alternative thesis, ShockAge posits that there were political choices in the South, East, and West within a constrained field of maneuver. The project rejects the narrative of a quasi-natural global takeover of neoliberal ideas and instead emphasizes the highly contested nature of the “neoliberal turn”. By going beyond the national or regional level and exploring transnational (dis)connections, it inquires how structural adjustment became a global phenomenon. In four subprojects, ShockAge will investigate the contestation of structural adjustment and explore the room for maneuver that different actors had and the alternatives they pursued: 1) at the international/intergovernmental level (focusing on the “Group of 77” of self-described developing countries), 2) at the level of international financial organizations (World Bank and International Monetary Fund), 3) at the national level (Bolivia, a key site of structural adjustment), and 4) at the transnational activist level (“anti-globalization” protests in divided Germany). ShockAge thus seeks to revise our understanding of a hinge moment in recent history and break new ground in the entangled histories of the North-South confrontation, neoliberalism, international organizations, and popular challenges to late 20th-century “globalization.”

The Setting:

The project is hosted by the Global History section of the Department of Development Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Vienna, which provides a vibrant research environment with approximately 7.700 academic staff members. The [Department of Development Studies](#) is committed to interdisciplinary cooperation in order to study global inequalities. In research and teaching, as well as a monthly colloquium series, it brings together scholars trained in political science, economics, sociology, cultural studies, history, geography, regional and gender studies and other disciplines. For many years, Vienna has consistently been ranked as the most livable city in the world in several [international rankings](#).

The 3 Positions and Sub-Projects:

We are looking for **three researchers at the PhD or postdoctoral level** to work on one of the following sub-projects:

1) “The Breakdown of the North-South Dialogue and the Turn towards Structural Adjustment” [Postdoctoral Project: “G77”]

This subproject will explore the contested politics of the Group of 77 and the Group of 7 in order to understand how and why the North-South dialogue of the late 1970s faltered and culminated in what M. Mazower has called the “real new international economic order” of structural adjustment. The project will examine discussions surrounding five central, yet underexamined episodes in this history: 1) the 1975 Paris “North-South conference”; 2) the 1977 “Brandt Commission”; 3) the 1981 Cancún “North-South Summit”; 4) the 1984 Latin American Economic Conference in Quito and 5) the 1986 South Commission. The subproject will be based on state and diplomatic records, as well as personal papers and correspondence related to these events and initiatives. Records of debates in the UN General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, and the Conference on Trade and Development – premier fora where the two groups met – and, if possible, oral history interviews with event and commission participants.

2) “The World Bank and the IMF’s Turn toward Structural Adjustment” [Postdoctoral Project: “IMF/World Bank”]

This subproject will approach the IMF and World Bank not as unchanging promoters of neoliberal policy advice, but as institutions in flux. It will explore how bureaucratic pressures, leading and mid-level personnel, intellectual trends, on-the-ground engagement, political pressures from different member states (related to the North-South conflict as well as the Cold War), and inter-agency competition and cooperation shaped policy-making within these institutions in the long 1980s. In order to do that, subproject 2 will examine how structural adjustment was contested within the IMF/World Bank’s Board of Directors, where member countries or constituencies of member countries are represented to discuss and decide Bank policy. Second, it will focus on IMF and Bank staff and experts at the Washington, D.C. headquarters and within country missions. Subproject 2 will be based mainly on the Bank’s and IMF’s archival records, but also personal papers of Bank/IMF staff, oral histories, contemporary media coverage and national records relating to the Bank’s/IMF’s Board of Directors, at, for example, the US national archives.

3) “Choosing and Confronting Radical Structural Adjustment in Bolivia” [PhD Project: “Bolivia”]

Bolivia was one of the first planned recipients of an official structural adjustment loan in 1980, and became (in)famous internationally in 1985, for choosing the so-called shock-therapy approach to structural adjustment: the single-stroke implementation of a comprehensive set of neoliberal policies designed to stop an out-of-control hyperinflation. Economist John Williamson, who later coined the term “Washington Consensus” for a decalogue of neoliberal policy advice, described Bolivia’s choice as a “big bang moment” in a larger campaign to bring structural adjustment to the entire globe. While recent research has shed light on the country’s (post)revolutionary period from different angles, we know comparatively little

about its “neoliberal turn” during the long 1980s. The aim of this subproject is to explore how Bolivians – from government officials to various sections of the public – navigated the acute sense of crisis leading up to the 1985 reforms and the politics of structural adjustment in their aftermath and how Bolivia was turned into a global success story of neoliberal reform. The subproject will be based on government records, newspaper and magazine collections, personal papers, and cultural products (television productions, fiction, etc.) from the period. Oral histories and reports dispatched by foreign embassies (e.g., the US) or country missions of international organizations (e.g., the UN) will provide additional insights.

Job Description:

- You will be responsible for one of the three sub-projects discussed above and expected to complete a PhD thesis or, if you are a postdoctoral researcher, a book manuscript or journal articles – based on original archival research – on the topic.
- As a predoctoral researcher, you will enroll in the Vienna Doctoral School of Social Sciences (ViDSS), sign a doctoral thesis agreement within 6-9 months of arriving in Vienna, and complete the required PhD coursework.
- In consultation with the project team led by the principal investigator Eva-Maria Muschik, you will work on discussing and disseminating your research findings.
- You will regularly participate in and contribute to activities and events of the project and the Department (team meetings, reading group, guest lectures, conferences, joint publications, etc.).

What We Offer:

- a three-year contract (ideal starting date is 1 September 2026) with the possibility of extension, corresponding to 75% of a full-time position (30 h)
- a monthly gross salary for a 75% FTE/30h position of 2.832,10 EUR for predoctoral researchers and 3760,73 EUR for postdoctoral researchers (overpayment and crediting of previous work experience are possible; please also consult the [collective bargaining agreement for university staff](#) of Austrian universities and the [Austrian take-home pay calculator](#))
- benefits: 13th and 14th salary payment (holiday pay), paid annual leave, social insurance (incl. healthcare, pension), flexible working hours, and teleworking arrangements
- a fully equipped workspace at the Department of Development Studies
- funding for research-related purposes (travel, workshop or guest lecture organization, publishing-related costs etc.)
- access to the University of Vienna’s infrastructure, including the library system, university support units, and human resources development courses
- supportive mentorship focused on your professional development
- a dynamic and inspiring research environment within a team setting + a larger research community in Vienna and beyond
- the possibility to teach at the M.A. level, which will be compensated separately by the University
- for postdoctoral researchers: the possibility to supervise M.A. theses in global history/development studies

Your profile:

- A Master’s/postgraduate degree (for the PhD position)/a doctoral degree (for the postdoctoral positions) in history, development studies, or a related discipline completed by September 2026
- Excellent grades in undergraduate and postgraduate study, especially on research-related assessments (e.g. master’s/bachelor’s thesis)

- Experience with archival research is expected; research experience in archival collections relevant to the sub-projects is a plus
- Experience with conducting oral history interviews is a plus
- Experience – appropriate to career level – with presenting and publishing research
- Strong research interest and ideally, familiarity with histories of the North-South conflict, neoliberalism, international organizations, and popular challenges to late 20th-century globalization + the specific historiography relevant to the respective sub-projects
- Strong communication and social skills, ability to integrate in and contribute to team work, high reliability, attention to detail, eagerness to learn, pro-active attitude, intellectual independence
- Excellent command of English (knowledge of German is welcome, but not necessary); for subproject 3, command of Spanish is required; for subproject 1, command of Spanish and French is expected
- A commitment to move to or near Vienna (i.e. within commuting distance)
- A commitment to the necessary research- and dissemination-related travels
- A commitment to team work

Application:

Applications should consist of the following documents compiled into a single PDF file:

- **Cover letter** (incl. discussion of your relevant skills and experiences)
- **One to two-page project sketch** related to one of the above-mentioned sub-projects
- **Curriculum vitae** (incl. list of academic presentations and publications if applicable)
- **Contact details** of two potential referees who can testify to your academic skills and suitability for the job (we may contact them in May via email and ask for a phone/online conversation)
- **Transcripts of record** from undergraduate and postgraduate study
- **An academic writing sample**
- **Language certificates**

The one-file application should be sent via e-mail to **shockage.ie@univie.ac.at** by **19 April 2026**.

Please use the **e-mail subject line** “**Application ShockAge – Subproject** [*insert relevant number + short title (see project description above)*].”

We plan to invite shortlisted candidates for online interviews by the 10th of May 2026. We plan to conduct **interviews on the 21st and 22nd of May 2026**.

The University of Vienna pursues an anti-discriminatory employment policy and values equal opportunities and [diversity](#). We seek to enhance representation of historically marginalized groups among the university staff and therefore expressly encourage qualified candidates from such communities to apply. Given equal qualifications, preference will be given to candidates from groups that are underrepresented.



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