

Call for Peruvian scientists for a Ph.D. vacancy in vaginal microbiome research within the project Laura 2.0 "Improving women's health in Peru with the support of higher education institutions, women, and local authorities"

Globally, women's sexual and reproductive health has not received sufficient attention. Similarly to many other parts of the world, in Peru, women's reproductive tract infections are highly prevalent, and discussing vaginal health is still taboo. It prevents women from seeking help when they suffer from vaginal infections or conditions, consequently affecting their health at the individual and societal levels. Noteworthy, a balanced vaginal microbiome is needed for a healthy pregnancy and a good start to life, as suggested by recent studies. Moreover, a healthy vaginal microbiome also reduces the risk some sexually transmitted diseases.

Inspired by the UAntwerp citizen-science project Isala (<https://isala.be/en/>), the Laura project was launched in 2021 in Peru (<https://isala.be/es/>). Laura's aimed to map the vaginal microbiome in healthy women as well as to increase representation of Latin American women (citizens and scientists) in microbiome research. The current Laura 2.0 (2022-2027) established an international and local Peruvian research network (UNAP, UNSA, and UPCH) investigating the vaginal health of Peruvian women from multiple regions. The Ph.D. project aims to study the vaginal microbiome in a multicenter, longitudinal study through a citizen science approach in Peru and assess the factors associated with the microbiome composition. The predoctoral researcher will also support capacity-building activities in Peru and disseminate the project's results to expert and general audiences, empowering women by providing information about their vaginal health.

Position

- This Ph.D. is embedded within Laura 2.0 project (VLIR-UOS TEAM). You will work with researchers from UNAP, UNSA, UPCH, and UAntwerp.
- You will investigate the vaginal microbiome composition (longitudinal study) using microbiology and molecular biology techniques (lab and data analysis).
- You will apply epidemiological methods to identify the factors associated with the microbiome composition.
- You will write and defend a Ph.D. thesis in English, publish scientific articles, and actively support the development progress reports for the funding agency in coordination with the project coordinator.
- You will also present Laura's results at scientific conferences at the national and international level
- You will be enrolled at UAntwerp and appointed at UNAP (Iquitos, Loreto).
- Field and lab activities will be carried on in Peru with the possibility of training at UAntwerp (Belgium).
- This project involves several research areas, such as microbiome, microbiology, molecular biology, epidemiology, female health, and public health.

Your profile

- You are a motivated, open-minded, enthusiastic person holding a master's degree in biomedical sciences, public health, epidemiology, or health-related areas.
- You will perform field work in remote communities with integrity and respect for cultural diversity.
- You have hands-on experience in microbiology and molecular biology techniques (a regular university course is not considered) and preferably hands-on experience in sequencing.
- You are interested in interdisciplinary research focusing on microbiome research, epidemiology, and data analysis.
- You act with attention to quality, integrity, creativity, and cooperation, with excellent communication skills.
- You are open to communicating science on the vaginal microbiome to the expert and general public in an inclusive and respectful tone of voice.
- You are proficient in Spanish and English (written and spoken).
- You act with attention to quality, integrity, creativity, and cooperation.
- You are eager to learn, respect rules and arrangements, are punctual, and work independently.
- You share Isala and Laura's project core values, i.e. support women in science, consideration for women's health in an inclusive way, and support women's rights and health.

Our offer

- We offer a full-time doctoral scholarship for an initial period of 1 year. Following a positive evaluation, the scholarship can be renewed. You will also pass a mid-term evaluation after 2 years of Ph.D.
- The planned start date is May 2023
- You will do most of the field and lab work in Iquitos (Loreto), and you will be in constant interaction with international partners.

Want to apply?

Send the following documents (merged in one pdf file) to sandra.condori@uantwerpen.be

- Motivation letter (in English)
- Academic CV
- Master diploma
- Language proficiency
 - By submitting your results on a language test, with the following minimum scores:
 - Paper-based TOEFL: minimum 550
 - Internet-based TOEFL: minimum 80
 - Computer-based TOEFL: minimum 213
 - IELTS: minimum overall score of 6.5 and a minimum score of 6.0 for each individual component
 - Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): minimum B2
- Recommendation letter(s)

The deadline for application is March 31st. Selected candidates for an interview will be contacted in mid-April. Interviews will be held in English and scheduled during the last week of April.

Female researchers are encouraged to apply!

If you have further questions, please contact sandra.condori@uantwerpen.be