

The Department of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies of the University of Bern (Switzerland) is inviting applications for

Two PhD positions

for the duration of four years, based at the Institute of Social Anthropology, starting preferably September 1st 2026.

Both PhD positions are part of the European Research Council (ERC) Starting Grant Project

“Legal Governmentality - governing climate activism through criminal law and human rights in Europe (LeGo)” (2026 – 2031, [ERC project link](#))

ERC Project description

Climate activism through civil disobedience has become a key tactic of the European climate movement to denounce climate inaction by states and corporations. Governments increasingly respond with repression, securitization and criminalization of climate civil disobedience, while NGOs, activists, social movements, and transnational institutions such as UN special rapporteurs defend it. Repression, securitization, criminalization and defense of civil disobedience highlight a growing tension between state efforts to restrict and suppress political protests (at times by treating protests as a matter of security), and movement, civil society and transnational efforts to legitimize protests (usually treating them as a matter of rights).

Situated in the context of growing repression of social movements, the rise of authoritarian politics, and the erosion of rule of law and fundamental rights in Europe, the project examines how the use of security frames, criminal law and human rights discourses and legal defenses of climate civil disobedience shapes the legal consciousness and conduct of individual climate activists and movement collectives in UK and in Germany. LeGo thus advances our understanding of how environmental activism is governed through the uses of law and rights.

At the intersection of political and legal anthropology, geography, and ecology, social movements and mobilization studies, and critical legal studies and criminology, the project will study criminal trials against climate activists who engaged in civil disobedience; state efforts to pass new laws and mobilize criminal codes and security frames to prosecute activists; efforts of transnational actors, institutions, and movement collectives to counter criminalization; and climate activists' perceptions of and responses to repression, securitization, criminalization and rights-based defense of climate civil disobedience.

The project is led by Prof. Dr. Jevgeniy Bluwstein, follows ethical standards in anthropological research, prioritizes participant safety and agency, and involves equitable partnerships through a transdisciplinary research design and methodology.

1. PhD theme: Legal governmentality of climate activism in UK
2. PhD theme: Legal governmentality of climate activism in Germany

The PhD candidates are expected to

- design and implement an independent doctoral research project and PhD dissertation within the scope of the ERC project in UK (PhD 1) or Germany (PhD 2), including desk research and around a year of ethnographic fieldwork.
- participate in comparative analysis across different jurisdictions in collaboration with the ERC Project team and partners.
- support the team with organizational, administrative, and public outreach tasks within the scope of the ERC project, including events, database and website management.
- contribute to academic publications.
- contribute to academic life at the Department of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies, and the Institute of Social Anthropology.
- be based at the University of Bern (Switzerland), except during periods of fieldwork and international research stays in project partner universities (UK, Germany).

Required qualifications

- Masters degree (MA/MSc) or equivalent in social sciences (anthropology, human geography, sociology, criminology, political ecology or related disciplines), and/or legal studies
- Familiarity with and interest in critical theory, social movements, climate politics, and critical perspectives on law and human rights
- Solid training in social science theory, qualitative methods and textual analysis
- Good knowledge of domestic and international law, legal norms and principles
- Good knowledge of discourses and practices around repression, criminalization, and human rights in the study country
- Solid analytical skills and ability to engage critically with debates across the social and legal sciences
- Interest in interdisciplinary research across the law and social science divide
- Excellent writing skills in English (for the candidate working in the UK)
- Excellent writing skills in English and German (for the candidate working in Germany)
- Very good organisational and communication skills
- Openness to interdisciplinary team-work

What we offer

- A fully funded PhD position for four years.
- The possibility to write a PhD thesis within the scope of a timely research project, and a dynamic, interdisciplinary academic environment at the [Institute](#) and the [Department](#).
- The opportunity to collaborate in international research networks, including short-term visits at partner Universities in UK (PhD 1) and Germany (PhD 2).

Employment conditions

The salary corresponds to University of Bern regulations for PhD students (between CHF 50'042 and CHF 53'263 per year). Funding for IT equipment, travel and fieldwork expenses is available.

Application should include the following documents as individual pdf files

1. Motivation letter (max. 2 pages)
2. CV
3. List of publications (if available)
4. University degrees and certificates (merge into a single pdf if several documents)
5. Referees (contact details of two to three academic referees)
6. Writing sample (Master thesis, academic article or similar)

All pdf files should be submitted **by March 27 2026** here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/request/Xerkfl7mOajn5t9513D8>

Prospective timeline

- 27.3.2026: deadline for submission of PhD application
- 7.4.2026: longlisted candidates are invited to submit a research proposal (2 pages) and writing samples
- 17.4.2026: deadline for submission of research proposal
- 24.4.2026: shortlisted candidates are invited for an interview
- 18-19.5.2026: interviews online
- 1.6.2026: hiring decision
- 1.9.2026: PhD start

For more information contact Prof. Dr. Jevgeniy Bluwstein (jevgeniy.bluwstein@unibe.ch).

A note on AI: you are strongly encouraged to draft your application personally and use your own voice. Reliance on AI – even for language editing - may call into question the authenticity of your application and your ability to research and write independently.