

Call for Applications

PhD Research Opportunity in Forest Ecology and Climate-Resilient Forest Management

Ilia State University announces a competitive call for candidates interested in undertaking a PhD research project within the framework of the proposed cooperation between **Ilia State University and ETH Zurich**, with the practical involvement of **GIZ ECO.Georgia**.

The selected PhD candidate will work under a joint supervision arrangement involving Georgian and Swiss supervisors. The research will contribute to the development of sustainable and climate-resilient forest management in Georgia and the Caucasus.

Research Topics

Applicants must select **one** of the following three proposed research topics:

1. Tree-Line Patterns and Drivers in the Caucasus Ecoregion

The research will investigate the position, structure, species composition, regeneration, and dynamics of tree lines in the Caucasus. Particular attention may be given to climatic conditions, elevation, topography, grazing, historical land use, human disturbance, and climate-change impacts.

2. Forest Structure Analysis Using Terrestrial Laser Scanning

The research will use terrestrial laser scanning and complementary field measurements to assess the structural complexity of Georgian forests. Potential research components include

tree and stand characteristics, biomass and volume estimation, canopy structure, regeneration capacity, competition, forest resilience, habitat quality, and biodiversity-related structural indicators.

3. Species Distribution Modelling for Climate-Adaptive Forest Management (CAFM)

The research will model the current and potential future distribution of important Georgian tree species. The study may integrate species-occurrence records, climate, soil and topographic variables, remote-sensing data, ecological niche models, and future climate scenarios to identify vulnerable populations, climatic refugia, potential distribution shifts, and priorities for restoration and climate-adaptive forest management.

These three topics correspond to the main research areas identified in the project proposal.

Eligible Applicants

The call is intended for applicants with academic backgrounds in:

- Forestry;
- Forest ecology;
- Ecology;
- Environmental sciences;
- Natural resource management;
- Geography, biology, remote sensing, or another closely related discipline.
- Agriculture.

Applicants should demonstrate:

- Good foundational knowledge of forest ecology and forest management;
- Strong motivation to conduct advanced scientific research;
- An interest in field research, data analysis, remote sensing, GIS, statistical modelling, or ecological modelling, depending on the selected topic;
- Sufficient English-language proficiency to participate in an international research and co-supervision environment.

The project proposal identifies forestry, ecology, environmental sciences, and related fields as the main relevant backgrounds and emphasizes competence in field measurements, data analysis, ecological modelling, and English.

Application Documents

Applicants must send the following documents:

1. **Curriculum Vitae in English;**
2. **A research proposal of 5 pages in English** based on one of the three topics listed above.

The research proposal must contain the following sections:

1. Proposed title

Applicants should provide a clear and focused preliminary title for the selected PhD research topic.

2. Introduction and scientific background

The introduction should demonstrate the applicant's knowledge of the selected topic. It should:

- Explain the scientific and practical importance of the problem;
- Summarize the relevant scientific background;
- Identify the main research gap;
- Present the overall research aim and principal research questions or hypotheses.

3. Methodology

The applicant should describe the proposed methodological approach, including, where relevant:

- Study area and sampling design;
- Field-data collection;

- Remote-sensing or terrestrial laser-scanning data;
- Species-occurrence and environmental datasets;
- Laboratory procedures;
- Statistical, spatial, or ecological modelling;
- Data validation and quality control.

The proposed methodology should be scientifically realistic and achievable within the available project period, budget, equipment, and institutional support.

4. Planned scientific publications

The proposal must identify topics for **at least two scientific articles** intended for submission to international peer-reviewed journals.

For each planned publication, applicants should provide:

- A preliminary article title;
- The principal research question;
- The expected dataset and methodological approach;
- The expected scientific contribution;
- One or more potential target journals.

The proposed target journals must be peer-reviewed and have a **Clarivate Journal Impact Factor of at least 0.5** at the time of submission.

5. Expected results

Applicants should describe the main expected scientific and practical results, including their relevance to forest ecology, climate-change adaptation, biodiversity conservation, forest monitoring, or sustainable forest management.

6. Three-year work plan and schedule

The proposal must include a realistic schedule covering three years, for example:

- **Year 1:** literature review, detailed study design, methodological preparation, site selection, preliminary data collection, and preparation of the doctoral prospectus;
- **Year 2:** principal fieldwork, laboratory or remote-sensing analysis, data processing, statistical analysis, and preparation of the first scientific article;
- **Year 3:** completion of analyses, preparation of the second scientific article, synthesis of results, and preparation of the dissertation.

The overall project proposal foresees field research, data analysis, scientific publications, dissertation preparation, and joint supervision by ISU and ETH Zurich.

Submission Procedure

Applications must be sent electronically to:

vasil.metreveli.1@iliauni.edu.ge

zurab.javakhishvili.1@iliauni.edu.ge

Email subject:

PhD Application – Applicant’s Full Name – Selected Topic

The application email must include the applicant’s CV and research proposal as attachments.

Application Deadline

5 August 2026, 23:59 Georgian time

Incomplete applications or applications received after the deadline may not be considered.

Selection Process

Stage 1: Evaluation of applications

Submitted CVs and research proposals will be evaluated according to:

- Academic background and relevant experience;
- Knowledge of the selected research topic;
- Scientific quality and originality of the proposal;
- Appropriateness and feasibility of the methodology;
- Quality and feasibility of the publication plan;
- Realism of the expected results and three-year schedule;
- English-language proficiency and motivation.

Stage 2: First interview

Shortlisted candidates will be invited to an interview (in English) on:

7 August 2026

The interview will focus on the applicant's academic experience, motivation, understanding of the proposed research topic, methodological competence, and ability to complete the planned research and publications.

After successfully passing the first selection stage, applicants will continue with the necessary procedures for admission to the PhD program.

<https://iliauni.edu.ge/ge/study/phd/mige-ba-doqtoranturashi/gamocxadda-2026-2027-saswavlo-wlistvis-mige-ba-sabunebismetyvelo-mecnierebe-bisa-da-medicinis-fakultetis-sadoqtoro-programebze.page>

Stage 3: English-language examination

Candidates who successfully complete the first interview will proceed to preparation for and participation in the relevant **English-language examination at Ilia State University**.

Stage 4: Interview with Swiss co-supervisor

Candidates who successfully complete the English-language requirement will be invited to a second interview with the participating Swiss co-supervisor, who is expected to contribute to the future co-supervision of the selected candidate.

Stage 5: Final selection

Following the complete selection process, only **one candidate** will be selected for the PhD research position.

Financial and Research Support

The selected PhD candidate will receive financial and research support for the three-year doctoral research period, subject to final approval of the project and availability of funds.

The support will include:

- **PhD candidate salary/stipend: approximately 120,000 GEL for three years.**
- **Up to approximately 60,000 GEL for research equipment.**
- **Approximately 7,000 GEL for one research visit to ETH Zurich, covering:**
 - A return flight between Tbilisi and Zurich;
 - Accommodation for five nights;
 - A five-day per diem.
- Access to relevant research facilities, equipment, datasets, workshops, field activities, and academic supervision.
- Joint academic supervision involving Ilia State University and Swiss research colleagues.

The **salary/stipend will be allocated directly to the PhD candidate for their work during the three-year project period.** Research equipment and travel funds are separate project expenses and will be used exclusively for the implementation of the approved doctoral research.

The precise payment schedule, taxation arrangements, employment status, eligible expenses, and financial reporting requirements will be determined according to the donor's regulations and the administrative procedures of Ilia State University.

Important Notice

Participation in this competition does not automatically constitute admission to the doctoral program. Final selection and financial support will be conditional upon:

- Successful completion of the selection stages;
- Fulfilment of Ilia State University's doctoral admission requirements;
- Successful completion of the required English-language examination;
- Final confirmation of the Swiss co-supervision arrangement;
- Final approval and availability of project funding.

Contact

For questions about the research topics or application procedure, please contact:

Vasil Metreveli

Mobile: +995598600112

Email: vasil.metreveli.1@iliauni.edu.ge