

Call for Applications: Graduate Applications International Network (GAIN)

By Bless Rachael Adzahli, Kobbina Awuah, Abdoulaye Cissé, Claudio Mlamka, and [Frank Odhiambo](#)

Note: This is a guest post by the Graduate Applications International Network (GAIN).

African scholars are strongly under-represented in economics research globally. At the same time, potentially excellent graduate school candidates from Africa face information and economic constraints that may hinder their possibilities of being admitted to graduate programs.

To address this issue, the Graduate Applications International Network (GAIN) was founded in 2019 to support prospective African graduate students with applications to high-ranked programs, both at the Master's and the PhD level, in economics and related fields.

In particular, our current program consists of the following elements:

- First, we recruit and select promising applicants from across Africa and offer them a **series of informative webinars**, during which we explain in detail different aspects of an application process, including standardized test preparation, selection of schools to apply to, letters of recommendation, motivational statements, scholarships. At this stage, we invite different professionals to make presentations on each particular topic in the application process and allow participants to ask questions. Participants are also given tasks to complete in the process towards the application, for which they then receive feedback, and which also qualify them for the second phase of the program.
- After successful completion of the webinar series, successful applicants receive **individualized mentorship** from faculty and doctoral candidates who themselves were successful applicants at the time. The program also subsidizes application-related costs to selected students, including testing fees and application fees, in order to relax any financial constraints that the applicants may face.

- After the admission outcomes, admitted students receive guidance and support to choose a program, negotiate with universities, and have optimal preparation. In addition, we facilitate **peer-to-peer** exchange and support within the GAIN network.

GAIN is led by a small coordination team and a number of volunteers from Africa, Europe, and the US. In the last two years, GAIN implemented two pilot cycles with students from Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda. Eight applicants received offers for Master's or PhD programs from excellent universities including Harvard, ETH Zurich, Michigan, John Hopkins, and Barcelona GSE.

In 2021 we are planning to expand our reach to participants from other African countries and institutions. Going forward, we plan to continue broadening our reach and extend our network to different African students' associations, local and international research associations and universities, to continue the promotion of African economics experts from the African continent. **The call for applications for the 2021 cycle of the GAIN Program is now open, with the deadline coming up on May 11th: www.gain-network.net/apply.**

We hope this initiative can make a small contribution to fight the egregious under-representation of Africans in the economics profession, together with many other initiatives that are currently working towards a similar end.

We will soon recruit new mentors as well. **Faculty members, post-docs, or PhD students who are interested in serving as a volunteer mentor can apply through gain-network.net/mentors.**

We also call on Universities to do their part to reduce barriers to entry. One key factor is the waiving of application fees for applicants from low-income countries. As students have to apply to multiple programs to increase their chances at a successful application process, application fees alone can amount to over \$1000 USD, a sum that is out of reach for many African applicants.

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