

GRÓ·GEST 2023

YEAR IN REVIEW



GRÓ·GEST

Gender Equality Studies & Training Programme



UNIVERSITY
OF ICELAND

GEST 2023 cohort by Svínafellsjökull glacier in May 2023

The staff of GRÓ GEST, the Gender Equality Studies and Training programme at the University of Iceland, sends their best holiday greetings to the programme's alumni, partners, and collaborators. We wish you joy, peace, and good health for this festive season.

The GRÓ GEST programme and its staff wish to express their gratitude for the past year to all of our fellows, instructors, collaborators and other colleagues. As we come to the end of 2023, our hearts and minds are with our alumni who are prevented from enjoying the holidays in peace. We hope that a new year brings better times, allowing our alumni and collaborators to continue their challenging work of advancing gender equality and social justice.

With wishes for a Happy New Year!



GEST cohort of 2023 arrived in January in Iceland while the days are short

The 2023 GRÓ GEST Programme

The GEST team welcomed the 2023 cohort of fellows in early January. It was the 15th GEST cohort, consisting of 23 gender equality professionals, 16 women and 7 men, from 16 countries in Africa, Asia and the West Balkans. A new country was welcomed to the GEST family, as a fellow from Tanzania joined the programme for the first time.

After attending a few days of orientation and acclimatising, the fellows started the 20-week intense programme with the module *Theories and Concepts of Gender*. It was followed by *Project Development Tools*; *Gender, Violence and Security*; *Gender, Labor and Migration*; and *Gender, Environment and Climate Change*. Running throughout the semester was the *Final Assignment*, which this year commenced with supervisor assignments prior to the fellows' arrival in Iceland.



GEST 2023 cohort visiting Laugardalslaug pool



GEST 2023 cohort visiting Bjarkarhlíð



GEST 2023 fellows at Fjallsárlón during the annual field visit to the South East of Iceland

South-East Iceland Field Trip

The 2023 GEST cohort travelled around the south of Iceland in mid-May, celebrating the fellows' completion of all written assignments, and to learn about the impact of climate change in Iceland.

The first day was spent in the area from Reykjavík to Skaftafell, stopping at popular tourist attractions such as the waterfalls Seljalandsfoss, Gljúfrabúi, and Skógafoss, as well as the black sand beach Reynisfjara. In Skaftafell, the fellows were welcomed by the Park Manager who shared the history of this part of the Vatnajökull National Park and introduced the governance system of the Park. The second day was dedicated to the glaciers, and the glacier lagoons including Svínafellsjökull, Fjallsárlón and Breiðamerkurlón. In all of these locations, the impact of climate change is visible. The second part of the field trip was led by Dr. Þorvarður Árnason, director of the Hornafjörður Research Centre. Before heading to Hali Farm, where Dr. Árnason shared his work on the glaciers, including a documentary about the glaciers, the fellows visited Fellsfjara, commonly known as the Diamond Beach, due to the small icebergs scattered around the beach.

On the third day, the fellows attended presentations at Nýheimar, the knowledge center in the village Höfn, all dedicated to the glaciers and the impact of climate change. On the last morning, the fellows were awoken by heavy rain which was accompanied by low visibility, making it easier to leave the beauty of the glaciers of Vatnajökull.

To the left: GEST fellows enjoy the sun and sea at Fellsfjara (Diamond Beach) during their field visit.



To the right: Dr. Þorvarður Árnason from the Research Centre at Höfn with the GEST fellows looking at contribution of kindergarten students, reflecting on the exhibition Blámi (e. the blueness)





GEST 2023 fellows at graduation. Photo by: Kristinn Ingvarsson, photographer, University of Iceland

Graduation 2023

GRÓ GEST's graduation ceremony took place on 24 May. The 15th GEST cohort consisted of young gender equality experts from 16 countries; Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Kosovo, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. The cohort included gender equality practitioners from diverse backgrounds within government, activism, media, art, academia and more. With this year's cohort the total number of GEST alumni stands at 218.

The ceremony was attended by GEST fellows, supervisors, staff, and distinguished guests including the Rector of the University of Iceland, and Martin Eyjólfsson, Permanent Secretary of State of Iceland.

The fellows' address was delivered by Wevyn Helen Awiti Muganda from Kenya, wherein she recounted some of the personal struggles and joys, as well as academic highlights of the semester. She emphasized that the GEST programme enhances people's understanding of gender and brings about hope. She said:

"We know now that sustainable peace and development are not possible if we leave others behind. We understand that our positionalities and intersectional identities shape our experiences in the world. I commit to learning and re-learning everything I know about gender and gender equality ... Thank you for being there for us. Thank you for allowing us to experience a different world and to be inspired by it."

The Vigdís Finnbogadóttir award was presented for the best final assignments in two distinct categories: applied project, and research. Sana Salim Lokhandwala from Pakistan was awarded for her project proposal: "Period Fellowship: Towards Menstrual Justice in Pakistan" and Bijal Dipak Lal from Tanzania was awarded for her research titled "Sexual Autonomy Matters: Marginalization of Central Experiences for Women with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in Tanzania".



Wevyn Awiti GEST fellow delivered the fellows' address



From left: Giti Chandra, GEST Research Specialist and GEST fellow Sana Salim Lokhandwala



From left: Thomas Brorsen Smidt, Academic Coordinator, and GEST fellow Bijal Dipak Lal



NASA, images created by Jesse Allen, using data provided courtesy of NASA/GSFC/MEI/RSBDC/JACS, and US/Japan ASTER Science Team.

DECOLONISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Perspectives from Postcolonial Contexts

13 April 2023 15:00–17:00

The University Centre (Háskólatorg) HT-101

Dalea Bean	University of the West Indies, Jamaica
Jennifer Skulte-Ouaiss	Lebanese American University
Josephine Ahikire	Makerere University, Uganda
Sarah Ssali	Makerere University, Uganda
Moderator	Giti Chandra, GRÓ GEST



Erasmus+ Collaboration

The Erasmus+ grant scheme has been a major source of financing of fellows and visiting scholars for GRÓ GEST. Since 2017, the GRÓ GEST has welcomed 42 fellows from 13 partner universities who have all been co-financed by the Erasmus+. This year, the GRÓ GEST 2023 cohort included two Erasmus+ fellows, Bleona Kurteshi from University of Pristina, Kosovo, and Orlando Javon Pearce from University of West Indies, Jamaica.

In March and April, GRÓ GEST welcomed five visiting scholars. Dr. Linda Gusia of the University of Pristina visited GRÓ GEST in March; she met with fellows and staff and gave a public lecture. In April, GRÓ GEST welcomed four visiting scholars who presented at a roundtable event: *Decolonisation of Higher Education, Perspectives from Postcolonial Contexts*. The participants shared their own experiences within academia in what is often termed as the “Global South” and its relationship with the “Global North”, particularly with regard to curriculum-building, research, and pedagogies in their respective universities.

In June and July, GEST director and staff visited Erasmus+ partner universities in both Ghana and Palestine.



From left: Dr. Josephine Ahikire, Guðrún Eysteinsdóttir, Anna Guðrún Aradóttir, Dr. Dalea Bean, Dr. Jennifer Skulte-Ouaiss, Dr. Irma Erlingsdóttir, Dr. Sarah Ssali



Bleona Kurteshi from University of Pristina and Orlando Javon Pearce from University of West Indies



Left: Course participants and instructors of Gender, Climate Change and Sustainable Land Management at Camp Alatoo in Kyrgyzstan. Right: Course participants and instructors of Teaching Gender to youth in Northern Uganda

Short Courses in Partner Countries

The year 2023 was GEST's most active year in terms of short courses to date, with seven trainings implemented with a total of 255 participants in partner countries.

In January, two short training courses on *Teaching Gender to Youth* were implemented in Northern **Uganda**. The trainings were targeted at teachers and education administrators at primary school level and took place in two locations: the city of Gulu, and in Imvepi Refugee Settlement. The training courses are a result of a collaboration between GRÓ GEST and Pangea Educational Development, Uganda.

Pangea's Director of Programmes, Brenda Apeta, a GEST alumna from 2020, led the implementation of the two trainings in Uganda, along with two teacher trainers from Pangea, Ibrahim Kadara and Edina Akello. Furthermore, GRÓ GEST consultants Þórður Kristinsson and María Hjálmtýsdóttir, who largely designed the course curriculum, contributed to the first training in Gulu.

The two courses were a great success, attended by 100 trainees. This led the course to be repeated twice in Imvepi Refugee Settlement later this same year, with an additional 83 attendees.

After a successful pilot in **Malawi** in November 2021, two short training courses on *Gender and Climate Change* were implemented in Nkhotakota and Mangochi districts in Malawi in November 2023. The short courses were developed in collaboration with Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR) which conducted the training with a team of experts from LUANAR and the Ministry for Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, led by Dr. Tasokwa Kakota, Professor at LUANAR. The team included Dr. Yananda Nana Madhlopa, a GEST alumna of 2014, and 2023 GEST alumna Ms. Lirani Hannah Kaluwa Katutu from the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare.

The objective of the training was to contribute to gender sensitive climate policies in Malawi through an increased awareness of the gender dimension of climate change. Each training attracted 30 participants, drawn from the gender and climate change sectors at district level in Malawi, including representatives from education, agriculture, health, fisheries, forestry, district council, Agriculture Extension Development Coordinators, lead farmers, civil society, relevant private actors, and the media.

In collaboration with GRÓ LRT, GRÓ GEST conducted a three-day training course at Camp Alatoo Foundation in **Kyrgyzstan** titled *Gender, Environment and Sustainable Land Management*. The course was tailored to the 16 staff of Camp Alatoo Foundation, a key partner of GRÓ-LRT in Kyrgyzstan, and was led by long-time lecturer and project supervisor at both GRÓ GEST and LRT Dr. Auður H. Ingólfssdóttir, and Védís Ólafsdóttir, project manager at the GRÓ GEST programme.



New MOOC on the edX Platform

On 9 February 2023, GRÓ GEST launched its third massive open online course, this time on ***Gender and Development: Critical Theories and Approaches***. Since 2019, GRÓ GEST has developed Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) on the edX® platform. The goal of GRÓ GEST's Free Online Courses in International Gender Studies is to provide aspiring development workers, young gender equality professionals, and policymakers around the world with a knowledge base they can use to change the world for the better.

The course introduces learners to some of the main critical theories and topics necessary for understanding a complicated and sometimes contradictory relationship between gender equality and international development initiatives. The course was produced with support from ERASMUS+ and expertise and guest lecturers from the London School of Economics, Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRiO), the University of Oslo and the University of Cape Town. GRÓ GEST will launch its fourth MOOC in 2024.



MOOC Launch Online Stream

GRÓ GEST hosted a launch event and celebration of the release of its Massive Open Online Courses in International Gender Studies on 17 November 2023, at the University of Iceland. The event, which was streamed live as it took place and is currently available to view on the GRÓ GEST website, featured live interviews and discussions with international experts and online course instructors including Marsha Henry, Associate Professor of Department of Gender Studies at the London School of Economics; Robert Morrell, internationally recognized masculinities historian and Senior Research Scholar at the University of Cape Town; Torunn Tryggestad, the Deputy Director of Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRiO); Giti Chandra, author, poet and Research Specialist at GRÓ GEST; and Inger Skjelsbæk, Professor and Director for the Centre for Gender Research at the University of Oslo. The contributors reflected on the importance of online learning in the context of international development and the women, peace, and security agenda. The event as well as the production of two of the four MOOCs was supported by ERASMUS+.



GRÓ GEST Online Alumni Seminar

- Roundtable Discussion -

15 December 2023

2-4 pm GMT

1st Session (2-3.00 pm GMT)

Decolonisation of Funding for Sustainable Development Goal#5 on Gender Equality

Moderator: Dr. Giti Chandra

Presenters: Imungu Kalevera (2021), Owusuwa Owusu-Brempong (2022), Tatiana Telles (2021), Willy Nkumbi (2015)



2nd Session (3.05-4 pm GMT)

Climate Finance: Ensuring Gender Sensitive Financing for Climate Change Measures

Moderator: Stella Tereka (2016)

Presenters: Aarti Lila Ram (2022), Chinenye Anekwe (2018), Rosalia Pedro (2011), Shamim Nampijja (2020)



Alumni Online Seminar 2023

The GRÓ GEST online alumni seminar 2023 took place on 15 December. The alumni seminar is a platform for the GEST community to continue learning from each other, connecting alumni across cohorts and geographical regions. These connections are important and must be nurtured and strengthened to better enable alumni in supporting each other in working towards social justice. Twenty-five alumni submitted proposals to present within the given themes, of which eight were selected to present. The online seminar was well attended across all cohorts, despite an inconvenient timing in some time zones. The GRÓ GEST team hopes to host such seminars more frequently in the years to come.

Alumni Meetings

The GRÓ GEST family now consists of 218 alumni from 35 countries. The GRÓ GEST team seeks to engage with the GEST alumni during visits to partner countries. This year, the GRÓ GEST team visited Palestine, Ghana and Malawi.

In Palestine, GRÓ GEST project managers invited **Palestinian GEST alumni** (29) to gatherings in three locations: Ramallah, Bethlehem and Jerusalem. In Ghana, GRÓ GEST's director met with the **Ghanaian GEST alumni** (7) in Accra, and in Malawi, the Icelandic Embassy in Lilongwe hosted an alumni meeting with the GRÓ GEST director. The **Malawian GEST alumni** (32) were also invited to attend a joint event by UN Women and the Icelandic Embassy, where GEST alumna of 2020, Jessica Mandanda shared a presentation.



Yeshiwas Belay: GRÓ GEST PhD Fellow



Yeshiwas Degu Belay received a GRÓ GEST scholarship in 2021 to support his PhD programme. He is a GEST alumnus since 2017 and is now halfway through his PhD research, which is a joint degree programme of the University of Iceland and Erasmus University of Rotterdam.

Yeshi Belay's participation in the GEST programme in 2017 offered him important research skills and knowledge on gender and enabled him to connect with experienced academics and researchers. The programme also shaped his research trajectory by stimulating an interest in international peacekeeping and its gender dimensions. Under the supervision of his current PhD supervisor Dr. Valur Ingimundarson, Mr. Belay wrote a final assignment titled "Breaking Barricades and Making Peace: Women in Ethiopian Peacekeeping," which laid the basis for his doctoral research.

The PhD dissertation investigates Ethiopian experiences with international peacekeeping missions and the gender dimensions. The research also focuses on women's participation by integrating global, domestic, and mission-level factors into a multilevel analytical framework. Special attention is given to the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), to demonstrate how the introduction of global WPS agenda has shaped Ethiopian peacekeeping in a structural environment based on masculine norms. A gender lens is used to examine the gender underpinnings of country-specific peacekeeping – from historical and contemporary perspectives – to better understand power relations, roles and responsibilities, and gender policies, as well as representations of men and women in Ethiopian foreign policy making.

Yeshi Belay hopes to complete the PhD research within the next two years.

March 8 Fund Recipient

The third GRÓ GEST March 8 Alumni Fund grant was awarded in 2023 to Sonal Dhanani, GEST alumna of 2022 for the project *Women's Digital Financial Inclusion Advocacy Hub*. Ms. Dhanani is the founder of Parindey; a Karachi-based social enterprise working to build resilient communities through wellness, peace building and mental health programs in Pakistan.

Sonal Dhanani's project will work directly with 60 women workers and women-owned businesses in the District Thar of Sindh, mobilising them, forming them into functioning groups, and connecting them with a range of services and resources (access to finance, markets, skills development, and enterprise development etc). Capacity building along with technological tools will be provided to maintain a financial mobility that can establish links with relevant service providers and the private sector.



Parindey considers violence against women and girls (VAWG) an economic issue, as it has cost implications on individuals, households, businesses and society. The close linkage between women's economic empowerment and ending violence against women is therefore of strategic importance in all Parindey programming. Women's economic independence and increased decision-making ability reduces the risk of violence as their financial status improves and they are empowered to directly address the violence inflicted on them, particularly domestic violence.



Participants in the international week at Birzeit University, Palestine

Erasmus+ Partner Collaborations

GRÓ GEST was invited to attend the international staff week at **Birzeit University, Palestine**, during the week 5-9 June 2023. The visit was a part of the ERASMUS+ staff mobility, facilitated by the International Office at the University of Iceland, and funded by the European Union. The GEST programme has collaborated with Birzeit University through the ERASMUS+ scheme since 2017 and has until now received nine MA students from Birzeit to the GEST postgraduate diploma programme. Parallel to participating in the international week at Birzeit University, GRÓ GEST's project managers visited civil society organisations influential in advancing gender equality and women's rights in Palestine, such as the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), Juzoor and Women's Studies Centre.

As a part of the ERASMUS+ collaboration, the director of GRÓ GEST visited the Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy (CEGENSA) at the University of Ghana in Accra. The director gave a presentation for CEGENSA students and met with representatives of CEGENSA where they discussed further collaboration. During the visit in Accra, the director also had a meeting with representatives of the Ghana National Commission for UNESCO and relevant NGOs within the field of gender equality in Ghana.



The director of GRÓ GEST with colleagues and students at CEGENSA



The director of GRÓ GEST gave a presentation at the University of Ghana



The director of GRÓ GEST with the team of experts and participants at the short course on Gender & Climate Change in Mangochi, Malawi

The Director of GRÓ GEST visits Malawi

The director of GRÓ GEST visited Malawi in November. The GEST programme has collaborated with institutions and associations in Malawi for eleven years, with 34 fellows having graduated from the programme since 2013. The main purpose of the director's visit was to attend and contribute to the second five-day course on gender and climate change conducted in Malawi this year, but also to visit and meet with the GEST alumni and current and potential partners.

In Mangochi district, Dr. Erlingsdóttir visited *Lilja's Fistula and One Stop Center*, which provides assistance to survivors of sexual violence. The Lilja's Centre was opened in December last year, 2022, and is named in honour of the late Lilja Dóra Kolbeinsdóttir, a former Head of Mission at the Embassy of Iceland in Lilongwe, Malawi, and a former project manager of the GEST Programme.

In addition to the director's visit to Mangochi, she met with three universities, LUANAR, the University of Malawi and MUST, a technical university. The GRÓ GEST director also had a meeting with the Honourable Jean Sendeza, Minister of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, where six GEST alumni were named for their outstanding achievements in their respective fields. A similar acknowledgment of the work done by former GEST students was made in a meeting with representatives from the Malawi Human Rights Commission.

During the visit, Dr. Erlingsdóttir participated in a UN Women event in collaboration with the Icelandic Embassy in Malawi, addressing gender-based violence. In her presentation, she elaborated on the history of Icelandic women's activism.

The visit strengthened GRÓ GEST's cooperation with partner institutions in Malawi, where former GEST students are making real progress in promoting gender equality rights.



OPEN CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Deadline: 8 March 2024

GEST Fellowship Spring Term 2025



Open Call for Nominations

The call for nominations for the GEST postgraduate diploma programme 2025 opened on 1 December 2023. The deadline for nominations through the open call is 8 March 2023. All nominations need to be submitted via the GRÓ GEST website.

GRÓ GEST Welcomes the 2024 Cohort

After a lengthy selection process during March-July 2023, as the GEST selection panel reviewed nearly 400 nominations from almost 50 countries, 23 selected candidates from 14 countries will be attending the 2024 GEST academic programme. The candidates were required to submit a comprehensive application, including a short proposal for a final assignment, and shortlisted candidates were also interviewed by members of the selection panel. All the selected candidates fulfilled GEST's prerequisites and requirements, and demonstrated a strong dedication to advancing gender equality in their home communities and/or their professional fields.

The selected group of candidates for the 2024 GEST programme represents local NGOs and CSOs, federal and local governments, universities, and research institutions. Furthermore, the cohort consists of individuals of different genders and abilities. The diverse group of fellows, from different countries, regions, and professions, enables transnational knowledge sharing and enhances learning within the classroom.

Eighteen fellows will each receive a full GRÓ scholarship to attend the programme while five fellows, who are enrolled in postgraduate programmes at GEST's partner universities, will receive joint Erasmus+ and GRÓ scholarships.

