

# Transatlantic **INCLUSION LEADERS** Network

April 14–20, 2024 in Brussels, Belgium

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IDEAS **LEADERSHIP** HOPE



## Introduction

Launched in 2012 by the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF), the US Department of State, and the US Helsinki Commission, the Transatlantic Inclusion Leaders Network (TILN) is a program designed to connect and inspire emerging leaders to excel in leadership roles across all sectors, to advance inclusive-leadership skill development, and to engage with transatlantic policymakers. Participants comprise a diverse group of leaders under 35 years old from the United States and Europe who have proved their commitment to fostering community, diversity, and inclusion.

As the United States and Europe face common political challenges, such as polarization, intolerance, misinformation, disinformation, and eroding trust in democratic institutions, GMF strongly believes TILN can address these issues by empowering a new generation of leaders driven by empathy and resilience. The program provides these leaders with tools and mentorship to strengthen their distributive and restorative decision-making on local, national, and global issues, and advance their communities and the transatlantic relationship. Through TILN, GMF provides a unique opportunity for leaders to meet 21st-century leadership requirements so that institutions reflect the diversity of societies across the Atlantic and foster equity, inclusion, and belonging.

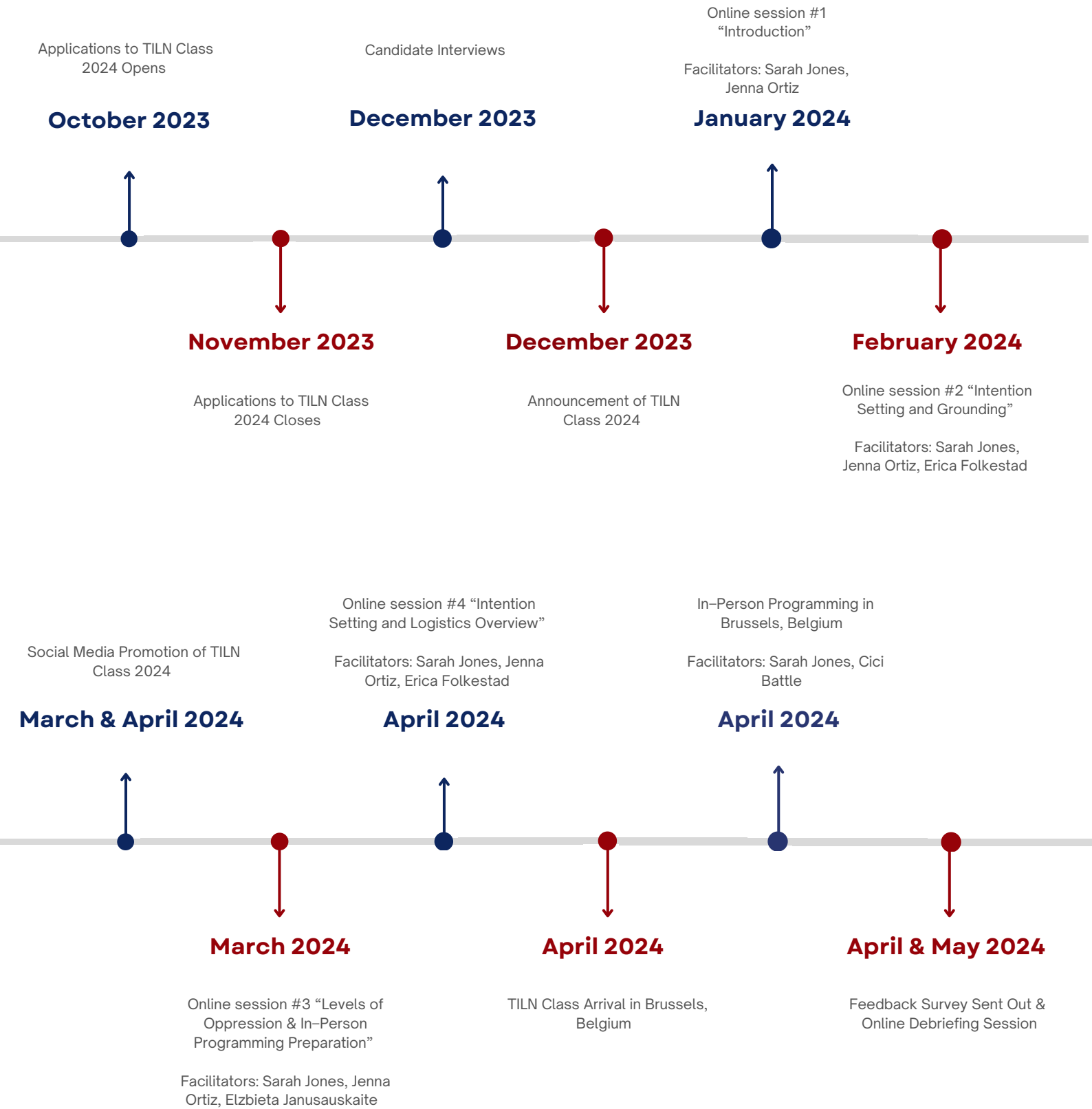
Since its inception, TILN has been focused particularly on the political inclusion of underrepresented ethnic and racial populations, and on initiatives and opportunities for diverse youth in public life in the United States and Europe. TILN has an alumni network of more than 220 leaders from 34 European countries, including Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) and the Balkans, as well as from 22 US states. Alumni hold elected office in bodies such as the US Congress, the European Parliament, and national and local governments, or hold senior corporate and civil society roles.

GMF is proud to share this report on the TILN 2024 programming made possible by generous support of our partners, Open Society Foundations, the Archery Foundation, and the Kresge Foundation.



*TILN cohort at Brussels Forum*

# Timeline of Activities



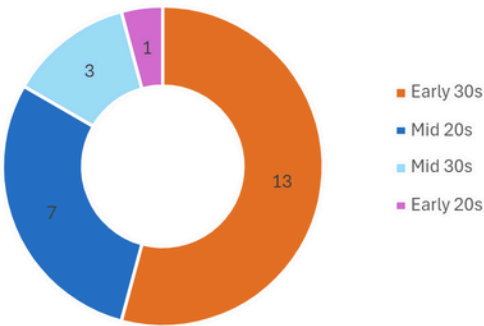
# Our Fellows

The final 24-person cohort was comprised of nine men, 14 women, and one non-binary participant. Most of the fellows were between 25 and 30 years old. For more information on our fellows, please see the announcement page: [Transatlantic Inclusion Leaders Network 2024 Fellows](#).

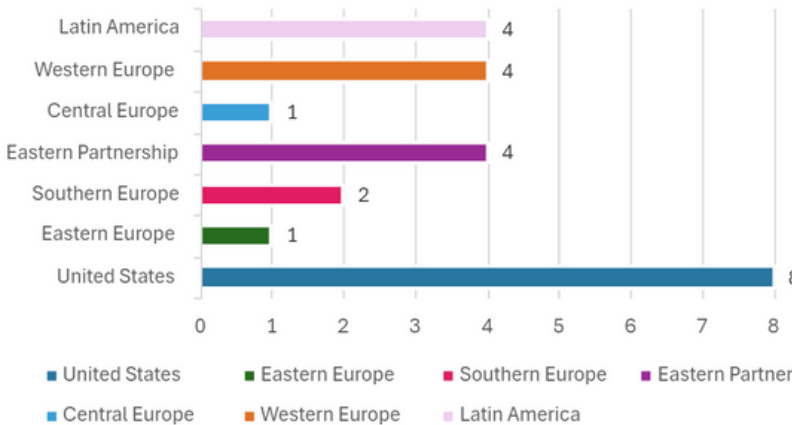
There were 16 fellows representing 14 European and Eastern Partnership countries—Albania, Armenia, Belgium, Cyprus, Finland, France, Georgia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom—and eight fellows representing eight US states—California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Oregon, and Rhode Island.

Some fellows hold dual nationality, while others are permanent residents of countries of which they are not citizens.

Age Overview



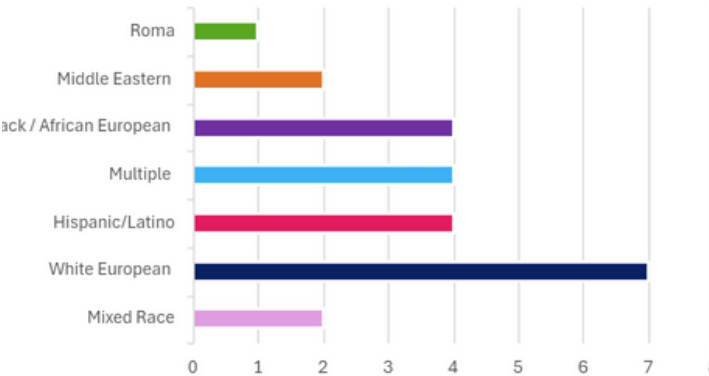
Region of Origin



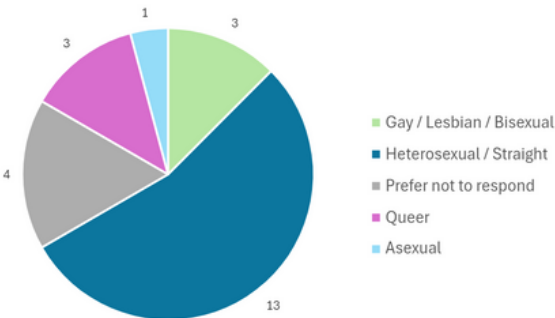
Each cohort is selected through a competitive process that looks at applicants’ leadership potential, and personal and professional experience with equitable and inclusive initiatives. Each TILN cohort comprises fellows from historically marginalized backgrounds, including those related to race and ethnicity, socio-economic status, immigration status, disability, sexual orientation, and gender.

The following other optional demographic data was collected:

Ethnicity and Race



Sexual Orientation



## The TILN Program

### Objective

TILN continuously seeks to provide a space for courageous participants to better understand what it means to be an inclusive leader in their personal and professional lives. The program allows them to reflect on their leadership trajectory, develop new skills, and learn to apply them widely in their networks. Our fellows acquire a strong understanding of the allyship and tension in the transatlantic relationship as it relates to equity and inclusion.

The program is anchored by the following principles:

- History: understanding the historical context and systemic issues that have contributed to current inequities and injustice
- Humanity: being authentic, treating everyone with empathy and grace, valuing the unique experiences and perspectives of others, and acknowledging that multiple truths can exist
- Honesty: being aware of one's own biases and shortcomings, holding oneself accountable, and taking steps to improve
- Humility: recognizing that one does not have all the answers and that there is always more to learn, remaining humble, and being receptive to feedback

## Distance Learning

TILN's long-distance learning component this year comprised four online sessions. They focused on relational culture theory; exercises to highlight the fellows' relationships to their countries of origin and local communities; social identities; and identifying key components of inclusive leadership. The sessions also reflected on how systems of oppression impact intentions and leadership approaches and prepared fellows for the program's in-person component in Brussels, Belgium, in part through a review of the agenda and logistics.

Long-distance sessions allowed participants to consider their expectations for TILN and Brussels Forum, GMF's annual flagship conference, and share their excitement.

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**I am hopeful to be inspired by an encouraging American perspective.**

**I want to show up authentically and stay true to myself and my work.**

**I am excited to learn about how DEI [diversity, equity, and inclusion] practices are perceived in the European Union and in Europe as a whole.**

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## In-Person Programming

The TILN 2024 cohort convened in Brussels, Belgium, on April 14–20, 2024, for the program’s in-person component.

### Programming

This year’s overarching theme was “Inclusive Leadership toward Collective Liberation”. Throughout the first three full days of the week, participants engaged in workshops, meetings with program alumni, and external activities that encouraged fellows to reflect on the theme.

Through collaborative learning, empathetic engagement, and inclusive action, participants cultivated new ways to champion and uplift marginalized voices. Acknowledging that effective leadership extends beyond individual aspirations, the program urged fellows to reflect on how belonging and collective liberation are rooted in connections among social groups. By sharing examples from their own work and leadership trajectories, participants could also connect the skills they had gained during the program with Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) practices in government and the nonprofit and private sectors. Lastly, by approaching the program’s theme through a transatlantic lens, participants learned strategies to stimulate distributive and restorative decision-making in their personal and work lives.

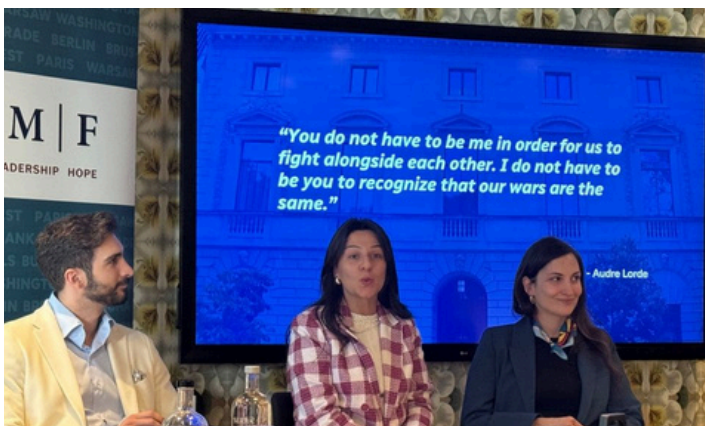
Fellows spent the program’s final two full days at Brussels Forum, where they could attend panels, side sessions, receptions, and evening discussions. Afterwards, the fellows provided valuable feedback on the event and insight into the meaning of their participation.

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**It is imperative that discussions on DEI be more fully embedded in Brussels Forum, with civil society actors and NGOs more present in the panels, and among the participants.**

**I felt like I was breaking barriers for people like me, who are undocumented and living in the US, because those spaces have not been made for us.**

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TILN alumni, Salome Mgeladze, Miranda Tkabladze and Georgios Plevris, meeting with TILN fellows



TILN cohort and GMF staff at NATO headquarters

### **Intentionality of Engaging Other People**

The 2024 TILN cohort was one of the most diverse in the history of GMF's leadership programs. Therefore, GMF focused on creating an agenda that reflected this diversity and expanded it by bringing in other voices.

Eight TILN alumni facilitated or participated as speakers. They shared their knowledge, TILN experiences, and insights into navigating Brussels Forum.

A visit to NATO headquarters aimed to take fellows out of their comfort zones. The military alliance is in its infancy in terms of implementing DEI policies and connecting those across the organization who work on inclusive policies. The experience exposed the fellows to a range of perspectives outside their group's and inspired them to effect change in spaces where DEIB policies are new.

A reception at The Nine, Belgium's first female-focused club, brought together about 50 participants, including alumni, speakers, and funders, and former TILN staff and facilitators. It was a wonderful networking exercise that introduced the fellows to one of Brussels' safe spaces and to individuals interested in their work.

This year, for the first time in its history, Brussels Forum highlighted the work of GMF's leadership programs. Our fellows took the stage for the event's concluding session and had an opportunity to broaden and strengthen their transatlantic networks, speak with policy experts, and meet program alumni.

## **Feedback**

There were several moments during and after the program for fellows to reflect and provide feedback on their experiences. Through a post-program feedback survey, social media, and a WhatsApp group, fellows could share their favorite moments and lessons learned. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

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**I came into TILN with big aspirations. I was hoping for a life-changing, perspective-altering experience. TILN met and exceeded those aspirations.**

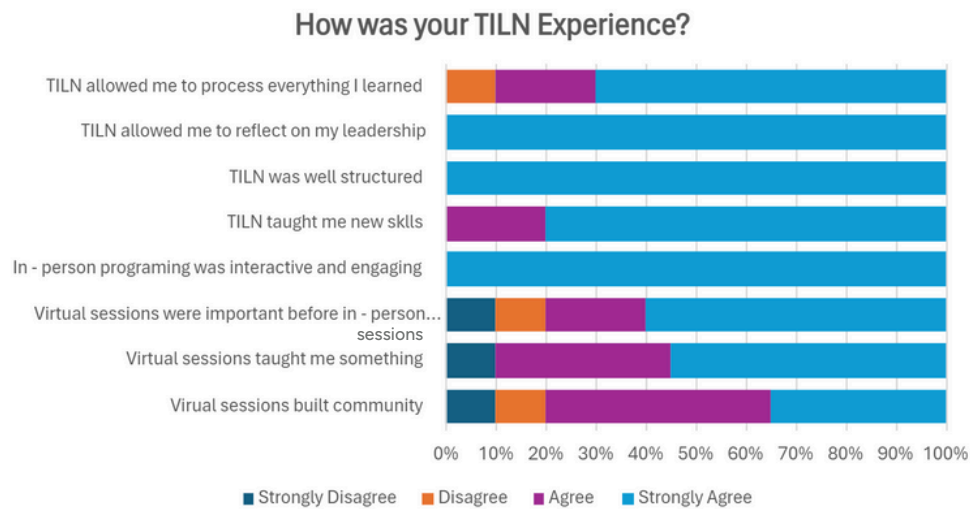
**My TILN experience was an empowering and reflective journey of growth, where I gained invaluable insights, thought-provoking discussions, and lifelong connections with inspiring leaders from diverse backgrounds.**

**For the transatlantic community to thrive in the 21st century, it will need to become more inclusive. TILN serves as an invaluable platform to initiate and address these necessary changes.**

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## TILN Programming Evaluation

Most participants (80%) agreed that the virtual sessions were important to help build community among the cohort. All participants saw the in-person programming as interactive, engaging, well structured, and helpful for allowing them to reflect on their approaches to leadership.



Among all sessions, the fellows named two as their favorites. They were the “Unapologetically Great Workshop” led by Cici Battle and the “Inclusive Leadership Skill—Building Workshop” led by Sarah Jones. Fellows reported that these sessions allowed them to connect with their own values, privileges, and biases. They also said that the sessions strengthened their understanding of GMF as a nonpartisan organization and of their roles as future leaders in transatlantic affairs.

The briefings at NATO were the most controversial part of TILN programming. Several noted their conflicting perceptions of the institution and the experience.



**Although the feeling of being inside the NATO headquarters was undeniably important for me, I wished [the briefings] would have been more structured and organized when it came to our work and what we bring to the table. Things felt rushed, and we weren't given the importance we deserve when it came to our lived experiences and work expertise.**



Another disputed activity was Brussels Forum. While a strong majority perceived it as a valuable experience, many were disappointed with the lack of diversity among the speakers. Despite that, panel discussions on Ukraine and artificial intelligence were perceived as insightful, and the fellows were grateful for opportunities to network with other participants and speakers working in foreign policy.

Overall, the fellows appreciated the intentional decision-making to balance the program between heavy reflection and lightheartedness, and between internal discussions and external engagement. The fellows expressed positive views of the TILN program and valued their cohort's extensive diversity.



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**My experience with the TILN fellowship has been transformative, significantly enhancing my inclusive leadership skills, enriching my understanding of transatlantic relations, current challenges, and future prospects, as well as expanding my network with esteemed international professionals and leaders. It has prompted both personal and professional reflection, helping me to better define my career aspirations to make a meaningful contribution in addressing current and emerging challenges.**

**I was challenged to understand my values, strengths and limitations, and center my humanity in my work and daily life. The TILN program left a profound, positive impact on me personally and professionally.**

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## Impact

The TILN fellowship strengthens the policy and advocacy work of its fellows, forges new professional networks of diverse inclusive leaders, and provides the necessary mentoring and tools for young leaders to institute and foster inclusive change on the local, national, regional, and global level.

Since 2012, the program has attracted accomplished and ambitious leaders from different sectors and provided them with opportunities to interact with policymakers and key stakeholders. TILN alumni have since run parliamentary and congressional campaigns, assumed ministerial positions, founded civil society organizations, and supported inclusive societies and governance through their respective offices and roles.

TILN continues to be a unique fellowship program in the sphere of transatlantic affairs and DEIB. By bridging these fields, it creates a space for young professionals to interact with one another, network with those furthering social change and inclusion, and make their own lasting contributions to that same effort.

*This program is made possible by the generous support of Open Society Foundations, the Archery Foundation, and the Kresge Foundation.*

## GMF TILN Staff

