



Gender Equality Fellowships

Report

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Abstract

The report on the Gender Equality Fellowships provides an in-depth overview of a core activity aiming to implement SHAPEDEM-EU's cross-cutting theme of gender equality. From Winter 2023 to Spring 2024, the SHAPEDEM-EU project hosted 6 one-month Gender Equality Fellowships (GEFs) in Brussels, Belgium to enable six individuals to meet with stakeholders in Brussels from EU institutions and civil-society organisations. The task was led by the Justus-Liebig-University Giessen, together with Carnegie Europe, Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and the al-Kawakabi Democracy Transition Center.

The GEFs conducted their fellowships from a working desk at Carnegie Europe, through which they were able to meet with stakeholders, research EU policies and approaches to gender equality in the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods. The fellows were compensated via scholarships funded by an in-kind contribution of the Justus-Liebig-University Giessen. At the conclusion of their fellowships, the GEFs each submitted individual country reports on the conditions and circumstances of gender equality in the countries of Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine in the Eastern Neighbourhood and Lebanon, Palestine and Tunisia in the EU's Southern Neighbourhood. The individual country reports and policy recommendations are available for download on the SHAPEDEM-EU website¹.

Introduction

The theme of gender equality is an essential element of the SHAPEDEM-EU project and embedded in its conceptual and working structures for elaborating a new policy toolkit for EU democracy support. To fully embed the issue, gender equality has been set as a cross-cutting theme with many related tasks and outputs throughout the project lifecycle. Deliverable 7.7 Report on the Gender Equality Fellowships provides an overview of a core activity facilitating the implementation of this cross-cutting theme. The Gender Equality Fellowships (GEF) within SHAPEDEM-EU were overseen by the Justus Liebig University Giessen and organised in cooperation between the Justus-Liebig-University and Carnegie Europe with support from the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and al-Kawakibi Democracy Transition Center.

The original aim of the GEFs was to host six fellows with roots in civil society or social activism from both Neighbourhoods in Brussels, Belgium. The concrete planning phase started in late September 2022 and was concluded with the start of the first fellowships in September 2023. Carnegie Europe hosted six fellows in total, representing Ukraine, Armenia and Georgia in September, October and November 2023 and Lebanon and Palestine in January, February and March 2024. The programme concluded with an extensive review process and finally the submission of all country reports by May 2024. The partners also conducted a digital presentation event to showcase the findings of the Gender Equality Fellows in July 2024.

While the focus of this deliverable is to report on the implementation of the Gender Equality Fellowships by the SHAPEDEM-EU partners, the Annex contains the six individual Gender Equality Fellowship reports (see page 21 – 132 of this deliverable for their full reports) which present their insights and findings gained throughout their fellowships in Brussels. The results and findings produced within this deliverable are based entirely on the reports of the GEFs and synthesise their insights.

The deliverable is structured as follows: following this introduction, the second section details the steps to implement the SHAPEDEM-EU Gender Equality Fellowships, including the recruitment process, Brussels residencies and final reporting phase. The third section provides an overview of

¹ See <https://shapedem-eu.eu/publications>.

findings from each of the Neighbourhoods, discussing the themes identified in the GEFs related to gender equality in both the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods. The later sections of the deliverable contain results, conclusions and deviations in the task's implementation. Finally, the Annex presents the submissions of the Gender Equality Fellows based on their residencies in Brussels.

1 Implementation of the Gender Equality Fellowships

In the scope of the SHAPEDEM-EU, the six Gender Equality Fellowships were conceptualised as a **crucial project instrument** to address the nexus between democracy support and gender equality in the EU's neighbourhoods in practice. Within project activities, gender equality is underlined as a vital cross-cutting issue for SHAPEDEM-EU's conceptual and empirical approach to democracy support, meriting special attention. The GEFs were conceived as an initiative funded via an **in-kind contribution from the Justus Liebig University of Giessen** to empower individuals from the countries SHAPEDEM-EU examines with the opportunity to participate in a short-term residency in Brussels, Belgium, meet and deliberate with EU stakeholders, and identify areas for future policy steps. These insights, in turn, would provide project partners with additional contextual Neighbourhood insights. **The aim of the fellowships** was outlined to address first, the significant degree of contestation, second, the required minimisation of risks in pursuing dialogue on the topic, and third, the maximisation of impact through direct dialogue with and amongst EU institutions and consequentially to foster the flow of information between EU institutions and civil society actors from both neighbourhoods in a safe and free environment. Moreover, the fellowships were intended to ensure the participation and inclusion of neighbourhood contributors at all stages of SHAPEDEM-EU's work along with other measures.

Thereby, the fellows will ensure that the Democracy Learning Loop pursued throughout the project does not overlook gender equality issues as the flow of information takes place directly between stakeholder groups. This important contribution develops a throughline for the SHAPEDEM-EU partners to address the gender dimension and its connection to democracy support through the entirety of the project duration by implementing these fellowships at different intervals.

The project anticipated, that **potential cultural clashes** related to SHAPEDEM-EU's cross-cutting challenge on gender equality might occur in the consortium's work, which could pose a barrier to the participation of local actors in this process of mutual democratic learning. The Gender Equality Fellowships were designed to bridge possible gaps by granting six local gender-equality entrepreneurs the possibility to interface with EU stakeholders in Brussels and share their perspectives on gender equality support, the work that the EU is already doing in this regard in their countries and provide recommendations on how to improve this work for it to be more aware of local peculiarities. This follows the overarching aim of fostering a **mutual learning process** that benefits the European Union in the same way as it benefits the local societies by developing more locally sensitive approaches and thereby increasing their chances of success.

Finally, the GEFs were foreseen as part of the project's **dissemination strategy** to allow the fellows to share their insights with EU policymakers and with their home community. By connecting Neighbourhood civil society representatives with EU staffers, SHAPEDEM-EU aimed to provide a direct channel between the consortium, the EU, and Neighbourhoods' citizenry.

2.1 Application and Selection Phase

The Gender Equality Fellowships Call for Applications was drafted by JLU, Carnegie Europe, EaP-CSF and KADEM and was first published online on the website of the Project-Coordination chair as well as

social media profiles on the **13 of February 2023**² and described the Fellowship, Candidate Profile and Offering as follows:

Our Gender Equality Fellowships (GEF) contribute to the project's aim of rethinking, reshape and reviewing the Union's democracy support policies in its Neighbourhood countries by amplifying the voices of civil society representatives from Lebanon, Palestine, Tunisia, Ukraine, Georgia & Armenia, providing safe environments & forums of open exchange with EU actors & allowing for greater representation in SHAPEDEM-EU's research activities. The GEFs foresee a 1-month stay in Brussels during either September, October, or November 2023. We offer a 2,000€ scholarship per person as well as a working desk at the Carnegie Europe offices in Brussels (additional accommodation or travel costs will not be reimbursed, & therefore matching funds may need to be found individually by the fellows).

Candidate Profile:

- Extensive on-the-ground-experience in & knowledge of **one (or more)** of the following countries acquired through professional or academic experience: **Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Tunisia, Palestine, Lebanon**
- A minimum of 2-years' experience in the on-the-ground-civil society (volunteering, activism, traineeships, professional experience) and/or academic background (ideally completed master's degree) in one (or more) of the 6 countries
- Demonstrable knowledge of & interest in gender equality policies in 1 or more of the 6 countries of the EU's Eastern or Southern Neighbourhood listed above & in the EU's support practices
- Excellent command of English language (both writing & speaking)

Offering:

- Exchange & dialogue with Brussels-based EU institutions & think tanks on your working experience in a gender-related non-governmental organisation in one of the 6 countries
- A 1-month stay in Brussels as a full-time Gender Equality Fellow (renumerated with 2,000€) & with a working desk at Carnegie Europe
- Active participation in Brussels or digital events to collect & share knowledge of local democratic practices on gender equality with our SHAPEDEM-EU partners & Brussels-based institutions as well as active networking
- Cooperating with our extensive SHAPEDEM-EU consortium members (12 institutions & 10 countries) engaged in policy analysis, research, & civil society activities on EU support for democratic politics in the Eastern & Southern Neighbourhood
- Contribution to a report on Gender Equality & Democracy Support in the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood (contribution on one of the case countries and overall picture)

Invitation for visa application (upon request)

Figure 1 Call for Applications no.1

² <https://www.uni-giessen.de/de/fbz/fb03/institutefb03/ifp/ueber-uns/aktuelles/termine/archiv/genderequality-shapedem>

The call was shared with the consortium partners for further dissemination to their contacts and networks in both Neighbourhoods. Moreover, it was shared by the JLU team with their respective networks and mailing lists, including German political party foundations present in the case countries.

Upon the deadline expiration on 15th of March 2023, **SHAPEDEM-EU received a total of 71 applications for Gender Equality Fellowships**. These included 9 applications for Tunisia, 3 applications for Lebanon, 12 applications for Palestine, as well as 4 applications for other Southern Neighbourhood countries; in addition, SHAPEDEM-EU received 22 applications for Georgia, 12 applications for Armenia, and 9 applications for Ukraine. The discrepancy in the number of applications received from experts on the six countries is notable and may be attributed to a variety of factors, including differences in outreach and resonance of the call among different network groups. The selection criteria were determined among the participating consortium partners and a first selection, based on the received written applications and CVs, was made during a meeting in late March. The criteria comprised relevant experience in civil societies related to gender equality in one or more of the indicated six countries, alongside relevant professional or academic experience related to gender equality as well as a specific motivation and personal objectives associated with the fellowship. Several candidates (2-4) for each country were invited to digital interviews conducted on the 20th and 27th of April with another digital selection meeting taking place shortly after. After clarification with the JLU administration, the final letters of acceptance were sent to the selected fellows in March 2023 and further administrative steps were taken to finalise the fellowship agreements.

The selected **candidates for Palestine and Lebanon dropped out in late August 2023** due to personal capacity considerations, particularly those related to the difficulty in attaining a visa to travel and commence their residencies in Brussels. A new call for applications for both case countries was published on 26th of September 2023 on the project website³, social media, chair website, and was again sent to the consortium to share with their local networks. By the 1st of November 2023, SHAPEDEM-EU received an additional 3 applications for Lebanon, 2 for Palestine, and 2 for both/either. Another selection meeting was held in early November to identify and schedule digital interviews with the candidates. The digital interviews were conducted in mid-November and the two selected candidates for Lebanon and Palestine accepted the positions at the end of November.

Table 1 Gender Equality Fellow Residencies

Gender Equality Fellow	Country of Focus	Month of Brussels Residency
Liliia Antoniuk	Ukraine	September 2023
Lilit Hakobyan	Armenia	October 2023
Ekaterine Skhiladze	Georgia	November 2023
Claudia Saba	Palestine	January 2024
Khouloud Ben Mansour	Tunisia	February 2024

³ <https://shapedem-eu.eu/news/become-a-part-of-shapedem-eu>

2.2 The Brussels Residencies

The fellows were provided with information on how to find accommodation in Brussels and asked to provide short introductions of themselves in July 2023 for a virtual introductory meeting conducted on 20 July 2023 and to discuss their plans for the duration of their fellowships. During this process, Carnegie Europe, represented by Elena Ventura, was in frequent contact with the fellows to support them in planning their stay, including providing suggestions for how to locate appropriate housing in Brussels. Given the difficulty of identifying short-term accommodations, the GEFs were also supported by the EaP CSF and Kristina Pitalskaya.

Upon their arrival in Brussels, **the GEFs were welcomed to the Carnegie Europe offices** and hosted by the consortium partner. While digital support was provided by JLU, the main planning of the fellowship programme was implemented by Carnegie Europe. In addition, the aforementioned SHAPEDEM-EU partners as well as other consortium members provided support in planning their time in Brussels. During each of their residencies, the fellows met digitally with consortium members to discuss their priorities and ambitions of their duration in Brussels. This allowed for them to identify key stakeholders for interviews and develop a calendar of events to attend in person. Moreover, exchange with the consortium partners was realised by connecting the fellows to consortium partners working on their respective areas.



Figure 2 SHAPEDEM-EU Gender Equality Fellowship Spotlight at the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium

The Brussels stay was accompanied digitally with a post on the SHAPEDEM-EU Website⁴ as well as interviews with all the fellows conducted by Carnegie Europe in context of the “Gender Equality Fellowship Spotlight”⁵. On 13 October the Gender Equality Fellows Liliia Antoniuk, Lilit Hakobyan and Khouloud Ben Mansour participated in a panel discussion at College of Europe on gender equality in Armenia, Ukraine and Tunisia in Bruges, Belgium, with the later joining digitally.⁶

Finally, Lilit Hakobyan virtually attended the SHAPEDEM-EU 2nd Annual Progress Meeting on 9 October 2023 and gave a brief presentation on the findings of the fellowship on Armenia. The three Gender Equality Fellows focusing on the Southern Neighbourhood, Claudia Saba, Khouloud Ben Mansour and Amira Elmasry, completed their residencies in Brussels between January and March 2024. Their terms in Brussels were dedicated to stakeholder meetings and did not include additional public speaking events.

⁴ <https://shapedem-eu.eu/news/shapedem-eu-commences-gender-equality-fellowships>

⁵ <https://shapedem-eu.eu/interviews/gender-equality-fellowship-spotlight>

⁶ https://x.com/SHAPEDEM_EU/status/1714283399937225064

2.3 Follow-up and Reporting

Prior to their respective stays in Brussels, the fellows received a detailed draft template for their country reports and were invited to inaugural digital meetings to discuss any open questions related to their fellowships and the contents of the envisioned reports. While the template included an outline and a catalogue of possible questions to address, a key ambition of the report was to grant the fellows the freedom to identify their own objectives in the conduct of their residencies. Following the overall philosophy of SHAPEDem-EU, the GEF structure did not provide fixed definitions, concepts or issues of gender (in)equality so as to avoid influencing their perspective and maximise insights gained from their local and civil society expertise. However, the fellows were consulted in the drafting of Deliverable D 1.2 “Working Paper on Gender Equality” which includes working definitions on gender equality (support) and provided some feedback. The Gender Equality Fellowship Reports, found in this Deliverable’s Annex, aim to provide essential knowledge related to the state of gender equality as perceived by the GEFs, its connection to issues pertaining to democracy and the EU’s support for it, as well as broader contextual factors. Importantly, these GEF Reports also include policy recommendations for EU stakeholders with steps to improve gender equality conditions in each of the countries.

During their stays in Brussels, the fellows embarked on their reports with desk research and interviews and were provided feedback by JLU and Carnegie in the preparation of draft versions. By the end of March 2024, the fellows for the Eastern Neighbourhood, who had all conducted their fellowships in 2023, submitted the final versions of their GEF Reports after receiving feedback in the context of a joint digital meeting at the end of February and via email. The language editing and final formatting was conducted by JLU. The Southern Neighbourhood fellows provided drafts by the end of April 2024. Unfortunately, a suitable date for a digital meeting could not be identified where all fellows would be able to participate, and were instead given the opportunity to arrange 1-1 meetings. The Southern Neighbourhood fellows have submitted their final report versions by the end of June 2024.

2 The Gender Equality as a Process of Mutual Learning: Reflecting on the Gender Equality Fellowships

The Gender Equality Fellowships are an important function of the SHAPEDem-EU project, intended to provide crucial contextual and empirical insights on the state of gender equality in the case countries of Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine in the EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood as well as in Lebanon, Palestine and Tunisia in the EU’s Southern Neighbourhood. The full-length reports provided in this deliverable’s Annex (see pages 20-134) cover a wide range of issues in each of the countries related to gender equality. This section reflects on the insights offered by the individual reports and provides summaries of their policy recommendations in a synthesised form. The following sub-section presents an overview of the insights from the Eastern Neighbourhood fellows in the form of their condensed policy recommendations. The individual policy recommendations from each country are then accompanied by synthesised by recommendations for the Eastern Neighbourhood. The subsequent section provides a similar overview of the recommendations submitted by the Southern Neighbourhood fellows.

3.1 Insights from the Eastern Neighbourhood Fellows

Table 2 GEF Eastern Neighbourhood Policy Recommendations

Recommendations for Armenia ⁷	Recommendations for Georgia ⁸	Recommendations for Ukraine ⁹
Lilit Hakobyan	Ekaterine Skhiladze	Liliia Antoniuk
Holistic Approach: Address gender injustice as a political issue tied to local and global dynamics, ensuring EU global politics align with its gender equality values. Recognise Armenia's unique historical, cultural, and political context, including Russian influence and conflict implications.	Legislation and Policy: Foster EU-Georgia cooperation to adopt effective EU legislative and policy practices, focusing on marginalised groups and gender equality. Support Georgia in integrating gender-sensitive education and civic awareness initiatives.	Mainstreaming Gender Equality: Integrate gender equality and women's rights throughout all chapters of the Ukrainian EU accession process and related documents, ensuring their prominence in negotiations and policies.
Bottom-Up Approach: Prioritise local CSO insights and directly fund rural organisations. Encourage first-time applicants with mentorship and create flexible funding to adapt to crises and shifting priorities.	Cooperation: Build strong partnerships with Georgian institutions and stakeholders to craft culturally informed, inclusive policies promoting gender equality and democracy.	Engaging Civil Society: Actively involve Ukrainian CSOs and gender equality experts in European integration policymaking through a transparent selection process based on competence and experience.
Systemic Issues Focus: Collaborate with state institutions to tackle systemic problems like unpaid care work and gender pay gaps. Shift from neoliberal women's economic empowerment to gender-sensitive socio-economic policies, and adopt comprehensive domestic violence prevention strategies.	Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish continuous monitoring systems for EU-funded projects in Georgia, ensuring adaptability to address evolving challenges and enhance policy impact.	Support and Collaboration: Provide financial and technical assistance to Ukraine's government and CSOs for gender equality initiatives, while establishing platforms for ongoing cooperation and knowledge exchange between Ukrainian and EU stakeholders.
Division of Labour: Reassess hierarchies in EU-funded programmes, promoting mutual learning and valuing local	Community Engagement: Support Georgian civil society with funding, capacity-building, and collaboration, amplifying	Advocacy and Visibility: Ensure EU officials regularly visit Ukraine, address gender equality in public statements,

⁷ Hakobyan, Lilit. Gender Equality and Democracy Support in Armenia. SHAPEDEM-EU Publications, 2025, p.21. https://shapedem-eu.eu/user/pages/06.publications/SHAPEDEM-EU_Publication_11_Gender_Equality_and_Democracy_Support_in_Armenia.pdf.

⁸ Skhiladze, Ekaterine. Gender Equality and Democracy Support in Georgia: A Spotlight on LGBTQI+. SHAPEDEM-EU Publications, 2025, p.37. https://shapedem-eu.eu/user/pages/06.publications/SHAPEDEM-EU_Publication_12_Gender_Equality_and_Democracy_Support_in_Georgia.pdf.

⁹ Antoniuk, Liliia. The Role of the European Union in Gender Equality Support in Ukraine". SHAPEDEM-EU Publications, 2025, p.99. https://shapedem-eu.eu/user/pages/06.publications/SHAPEDEM-EU_Publication_13_Gender_Equality_and_Democracy_Support_in_Ukraine.pdf.

knowledge to design effective gender equality initiatives.	grassroots efforts and fostering knowledge exchange to replicate successful models.	and engage in dialogue with Ukrainian authorities and CSOs to maintain visibility and leverage for policy implementation.
Feminist Approach: Integrate feminist frameworks in EU-funded programmes, collaborating with local feminist groups to drive collective societal transformation.	Resource Allocation: Encourage Georgia to prioritise resources for education and community engagement, emphasizing gender sensitivity and democratic values in curricula and local initiatives.	Monitoring and Scaling Programmes: Implement transparent mechanisms to assess EU-funded gender equality programs, prioritise country-level initiatives tailored to local needs, and support the sustainability of CSOs through targeted organisational aid.

The recommendations provided by the Gender Equality Fellows focusing on the Eastern Neighbourhood countries of Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine provide a comprehensive array of policy suggestions. In order to implement a foreign policy agenda to address these issues would require numerous actors in EU institutions, member states and civil society. The provided recommendations would also require individual, tailored approaches to address the particularities of each of three Neighbourhood societies and institutions. This tailored approach is in large part also necessary because of the distinct policy framework for interaction in each of these countries.

In the Eastern Neighbourhood, Georgia and Ukraine both signed Association Agreements implementing Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements, which afford the EU and the two countries more capacities to enact policies. Ukraine's new candidate status and accession process further affords it greater access to institutional cooperation. Georgia, on the other hand, is more limited in this regard and the ruling Georgian Dream government's political will to enact gender equality policies may regress. While Armenia has a different level of cooperation with the EU through its own Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, there are instruments for the implementation of a gender equality agenda. Moreover, the present Armenian government's ambition to deepen its relations with the EU can present an opportunity for further gender equality related initiatives. Based on the findings of the three Gender Equality Fellows from these countries, there are identifiable avenues for more EU action.

The Gender Equality Fellowships have identified five broad areas for policy recommendations:

1. Holistic and contextual approaches

Tailor gender equality strategies to the unique historical, cultural, and political contexts of each country, such as addressing geopolitical influences in Armenia, fostering legislative alignment in Georgia, and mainstreaming gender equality across Ukraine's EU accession process.

2. Empowering civil society

Prioritise engagement with local CSOs in all three countries by supporting grassroots initiatives, providing funding, mentorship, and capacity-building opportunities, and ensuring transparent collaboration processes.

3. Systemic and inclusive policies

Focus on addressing systemic gender issues through institutional collaboration, such as tackling unpaid care work and domestic violence in Armenia, promoting inclusive policies in Georgia, and fostering Ukraine's alignment with EU gender equality standards.

4. Resource allocation and knowledge-sharing

Enhance resource allocation for education, community engagement, and technical assistance across the three countries. Establish platforms for continuous cooperation and knowledge exchange between local and EU stakeholders to replicate and scale best practices.

5. Monitoring and advocacy

Implement robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for EU-funded gender initiatives, ensure visibility of gender equality issues through active advocacy, and maintain accountability by reassessing and adapting programs based on local needs and effectiveness.

3.2 Insights from the Southern Neighbourhood Fellows

Table 3 GEF Southern Neighbourhood Policy Recommendations

Recommendations for Lebanon ¹⁰	Recommendations for Palestine ¹¹	Recommendations for Tunisia ¹²
Amira Elmasry	Claudia Saba	Khouloud Ben Mansour
Policy Advocacy and Diplomacy: The EU should leverage its diplomatic influence to advocate for Lebanese legislation protecting refugee women, ensuring their rights to safety, healthcare, education, and integration while promoting democratic, rights-based processes.	Urgent Actions: Halt arms sales to Israel and ensure humanitarian aid reaches Gaza, prioritizing protection for all Palestinians, including men, amid genocide allegations.	Integrate Gender in Climate Policy: Embed gender-responsive approaches in all stages of climate policies and programs in Tunisia and North Africa to support women and vulnerable communities effectively.
Targeted Financial Support: Provide funding for grassroots initiatives that assist refugee women with essential needs, including health, education,	Medium-Term Measures: End EU funding for Israel's military industry, halt arms sales, review the EU-Israel Association Agreement, and apply sanctions	Empower Women and Marginalised Groups: Provide training, resources, and leadership opportunities to enhance their participation in

¹⁰ Elmasry, Amira. The EU's approach to Gender Equality and Democracy Support for Refugee Women in Lebanon: Recognising the needs of refugee women and amplifying their voices. SHAPEDEM-EU Publications, 2025, p.56. [https://shapedem-eu.eu/user/pages/06.publications/SHAPEDEM-EU Publication 14 Gender Equality and Democracy Support in Lebanon.pdf](https://shapedem-eu.eu/user/pages/06.publications/SHAPEDEM-EU%20Publication%2014%20Gender%20Equality%20and%20Democracy%20Support%20in%20Lebanon.pdf).

¹¹ Saba, Claudia. Gender Equality and Democracy Support in Palestine. SHAPEDEM-EU Publications, 2025, p.72. [https://shapedem-eu.eu/user/pages/06.publications/SHAPEDEM-EU Publication 15 Gender Equality and Democracy Support in Palestine.pdf](https://shapedem-eu.eu/user/pages/06.publications/SHAPEDEM-EU%20Publication%2015%20Gender%20Equality%20and%20Democracy%20Support%20in%20Palestine.pdf).

¹² Baghour, Khouloud. Climate Change as a Cross-Cutting Issue to Gender Equality with Perspectives from the North African Region. SHAPEDEM-EU Publications, 2025, p.89. [https://shapedem-eu.eu/user/pages/06.publications/SHAPEDEM-EU Publication 16 Gender Equality and Democracy Support in Tunisia.pdf](https://shapedem-eu.eu/user/pages/06.publications/SHAPEDEM-EU%20Publication%2016%20Gender%20Equality%20and%20Democracy%20Support%20in%20Tunisia.pdf).

psychological support, economic empowerment, and civic participation.	to end occupation and apartheid practices.	climate resilience and adaptation efforts.
Capacity Building and Training: Equip local organisations and service providers with tools and training to support refugee women, focusing on leveraging their existing skills and addressing needs in education, healthcare, and legal assistance.	EU Council Recommendations: Enforce the EU Arms Export Control policy, educate members on Israeli apartheid using credible reports, and pause the EU-Israel Association Agreement pending ICJ findings.	Improve Access to Finance: Develop tailored financial tools and support for women-led climate initiatives and sustainable livelihoods, removing financial barriers to their participation.
Creating an Enabling Environment: Advocate for a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for refugee women by collaborating with Lebanese authorities to implement legislative reforms and partnering with grassroots organisations to protect their legal, economic, and social rights.	EEAS Recommendations: Align EU foreign policy, ensure the Commission President avoids actions encouraging war crimes, and propose sanctions on Israel.	Enhance Partnerships: Collaborate with governments, civil society, academia, and the private sector to co-create impactful gender and climate programs.
Gender-Inclusive Participation and Monitoring: Integrate refugee women's voices in decision-making processes through consultations and establish robust monitoring systems to assess the impact of EU programs, ensuring they address the unique challenges refugee women face.	Commission Actions: Cease Horizon Europe military funding to Israel, empower staff to propose solutions, promote human rights awareness, and increase support for Palestinian civil society and gender-focused initiatives.	Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation: Implement robust mechanisms to assess program outcomes, using disaggregated data and stakeholder feedback to improve accountability and effectiveness.

The recommendations provided by the Gender Equality Fellows focusing on the Southern Neighbourhood countries of Lebanon, Palestine and Tunisia provide a comprehensive array of policy suggestions. In order to implement a foreign policy agenda to address these issues would require numerous actors in the EU institutions, member states and civil society. The provided recommendations would also require individual, tailored approaches to address the particularities of each of three Neighbourhood societies and institutions.

The EU's institutional capacity to implement gender equality programmes in the Southern Neighbourhood more limited when compared to the Eastern Neighbourhood. The framework of relations, in particular the lack of policy instruments afforded by the AA or CEPA in the Eastern Neighbourhood, places a ceiling on the limits of EU action. Moreover, the Fellows focusing on Lebanon and Palestine have stressed the monumental challenge posed by displacement, violence, and war in the region. Albeit less immediately threatened, Tunisia is also not immune from similar dynamics with climate change and migration posing significant challenges to a gender equality agenda.

Despite these distinctions, across these three states, five major themes can be identified and the Gender Equality Fellowships have provided the following recommendations:

1. Advocacy for rights and policy change

Promote legislative reforms and rights-based approaches tailored to local contexts, such as protecting refugee women in Lebanon, halting EU support for Israel's military practices in Palestine, and integrating gender-responsive strategies into Tunisia's climate policies.

2. Targeted financial and technical support

Provide funding and tailored financial tools for grassroots initiatives and women-led projects, focusing on health, education, economic empowerment, and climate resilience across all three regions.

3. Capacity building and empowerment

Strengthen local organisations and individuals through training, leadership opportunities, and resources to enhance their ability to address challenges like refugee rights in Lebanon, Palestinian civil society advocacy, and climate adaptation in Tunisia.

4. Inclusive participation and collaboration

Foster gender-inclusive decision-making by integrating marginalised voices, collaborating with governments, civil society, academia, and private sectors, and ensuring local stakeholder involvement in program design and implementation.

5. Monitoring, evaluation and accountability

Implement mechanisms to monitor and evaluate program effectiveness, use data to assess impact, and ensure programs are adaptive and aligned with human rights and gender equality principles.

4 Results and Reflections on the GEF Format

Gender Equality, as a cross-cutting challenge for the EU's democracy support, is a dynamic aspect of EU-Neighbourhood relations. As demonstrated by the results of the GEF, the countries face their own challenges. Armenia, Georgia, Lebanon, Palestine, Tunisia and Ukraine currently face their own obstacles, and while many of these are superficially similar and adversely encumber a gender equality agenda including a lack of political participation migration, poverty, and war, the consequences of these obstacles are distinct in each of the country contexts. Importantly, their unique contexts shape the types of policy recommendations which the GEFs have provided.

The European Union's ability to address these issues varies across the Neighbourhoods and even within the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods themselves. Their cultural, geographic and political distinctiveness provide unique contexts that require disparate policy approaches.

In some ways, the EU's Neighbourhood-approach can overlook the individual obstacles faced by each of the countries. However, despite these clear distinctions, there are key thematic areas where the EU can adopt a unified agenda that dictates the EU's policy approach to the Neighbourhoods as a whole.

To effectively promote gender equality across the EU's Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods, the SHAPEDEM-EU Gender Equality Fellowships have the following common recommendations:

1. Policy tools that factor in country specificities

Design gender equality strategies that respect each country's unique historical, cultural, and political context, ensuring policies are relevant and effective. The developed policies must acknowledge the distinctive local society and the individual needs of the particular Neighbourhood country.

2. Empowerment of civil society

Engage and support local feminist civil society organisations through funding, mentorship, and capacity-building initiatives to strengthen grassroots movements and community-based solutions.

3. Systemic and inclusive policy implementation

Address systemic gender issues by collaborating with institutions to develop inclusive policies that tackle challenges such as unpaid care work, domestic violence, and economic disparities.

4. Resource allocation and knowledge sharing

Allocate resources for education, community engagement, and technical assistance, and establish platforms for continuous cooperation and knowledge exchange between local and international stakeholders.

5. Monitoring, evaluation and advocacy

Implement thorough monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for gender initiatives, maintain visibility of gender equality issues through active advocacy, and adapt programs based on local needs and effectiveness.

As initially conceived, the GEF framework was intended to grant young activists and scholars from the EU's Neighbourhood an opportunity to meet and exchange with a fellow from another Neighbourhood country. In practice, this project activity was a challenging, enriching and insightful undertaking. On the one hand, the implementation of the Gender Equality Fellowships yielded dramatically different insights, producing contrasting recommendations for the EU and its stakeholders. Much of these points of distinction can be attributed to the policy frameworks for relations with the Eastern Neighbourhood, which are absent or less impactful in the Southern Neighbourhood. Another factor lies in the vastly different backgrounds and research areas of the fellows. This endeavour prioritised the inclusion of different perspectives over the homogeneity of research approaches. Hence, synthesising their content-related findings is challenging.

Despite these limitations, the programme of Gender Equality Fellowships as conducted by the SHAPED-EM-EU project were realised for both neighbourhoods. These also came with certain caveats, which demand attention. Firstly, **current events in the region are detrimental to the issue of gender equality, democracy support and in many instances the very integrity of individuals**. The populations in the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood are facing economic hardship, political oppression and war. Under these circumstances, gender equality can appear to take a backseat in terms of policy priorities of many stakeholders. However, at such times, it remains paramount to remain focused on such an issue, despite the frequently shifting nature of political imperatives. Thus, Gender Equality Fellowships ought to play an important role, even when it may appear less relevant.

Secondly, the current **structural constraints of a short-term fellowship in Brussels proved to be challenging**. In the matter of the Eastern Neighbourhood fellows, the visa and work conditions were much more relaxed. This meant that finding suitable applicants with an ability to reside in Brussels for the duration of the GEFs was much easier for those individuals researching Armenia, Georgia and

Ukraine than for those working of Lebanon, Palestine and Tunisia. In addition, the high cost of living in Brussels meant that the scholarships provided through the JLU's in-kind contribution offered less flexibility to fellows seeking accommodation. This frequently limited the amount of time the fellows could physically spend in the EU capital. This frequently required the selected candidates to have existing networks or contacts on the ground in Brussels, disadvantaging those fellows who are already less likely to be contributing to discourses on gender equality in the respective EU neighbourhood policies, which partially undermines the initial aim of the fellowships. Due to these factors, a more robust scholarship fund would enable future individuals to participate in a more dynamic fellowship experience.

Finally, the **impact of the Gender Equality Fellowships and their reports hinges upon the knowledge of affected stakeholders**. Certain stakeholders may have knowledge and practical experience with gender equality issues yet lack the local experience to affect change in these areas. Thus, connecting future GEFs with a broader range of experts and stakeholders could generate useful insights and, crucially, bridge gaps of understanding between actors in different policy fields, areas of focus and level of experience.

5 Conclusion

The ensuing Annex of this Deliverable 7.7 Report on the Gender Equality Fellowships detail the circumstances and conditions for gender equality support in the EU's Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods, presenting the individual country reports on Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine as well as Lebanon, Palestine and Tunisia. While the contents of this report provided an overview of the workflow and activities of the fellowship format, the Annex offers extensive details for each of the countries. The policy recommendations found in this report are condensed and summarised versions of the full-length submissions included in the subsequent sections.

The SHAPED-EM-EU Gender Equality Fellowships conducted between September 2023 and March 2024 were of an immense value to the project partners and demonstrate the centrality of the issue of gender equality for the project's ambitions. As a core task and output of SHAPED-EM-EU Work Package 7 "Academic Synthesis and Policy Recommendations", this D7.8 submits a wealth of knowledge essential for the EU's democracy support agenda in its Neighbourhoods.

