

DEFINING FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY:
A 2021 UPDATE



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IN 2014,

Sweden's Foreign Minister Margot Wallström announced the world's first explicitly "feminist" foreign policy (FFP). It was an effort that, by Wallström's own admission, was met with "giggles" and suspicion at the time (Wallström, 2016). It would be three years before another country would be brave enough to dip a toe in this water, with a considerably more narrowly focused Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) put forward by Canada in 2017. In late 2018, a coalition government was formed in Luxembourg that declared it would advance a feminist foreign policy. That same year, France updated its International Strategy on Gender Equality, referring to an approach deemed as "feminist diplomacy," and a year later in an op-ed penned on International Women's Day of 2019, explicitly declaring a feminist foreign policy. That fall, at the U.N. General Assembly, Mexico announced its intent to craft a feminist foreign policy, releasing it in January of 2020. And earlier this year, Spain and Libya announced their own feminist foreign policies.

The Netherlands, who was among the first to prioritize spending for gender equality and direct funding to women's rights organizations as part of its foreign assistance, is also rumored to be considering a feminist foreign policy. In the United Kingdom, one of the political parties has pledged to adopt a feminist foreign policy (Osamor, 2018), as is the case in Australia. The European Parliament in 2020 recommended a feminist foreign and security policy calling for gender mainstreaming, protecting women's rights, promoting women's equitable participation in conflict prevention and mediation, and proposing that 85% of official development assistance (ODA) go to programs with gender equality as a significant or main objective (European Parliament, 2020). Most recently, in November 2021, Germany committed to a feminist foreign policy in its latest coalition agreement. And in July of 2021, at the Generation

Equality Forum (GEF), the seven countries who have penned feminist foreign policies and 12 civil society organizations seeking to interrogate and advance them joined together to announce the Global Partner Network for Feminist Foreign Policy (ICRW, 2021). This new network will serve as a space to encourage learning and adoption of a shared framework for feminist foreign policy, discuss best practices for implementation, and propose accountability mechanisms.

Declaring foreign policy feminist is clearly a growing, global trend. But what makes a foreign policy feminist? In this updated paper, we analyze the policies that countries have put forward up until this point, and then offer from that analysis—informed by the scholarship of and consultation with feminist activists and academics around the world—a proposed definition of what constitutes feminist foreign policy.

A review of existing feminist foreign policies is limited to a small but growing sample, none of which explicitly defines what makes a foreign policy "feminist." When pressed about this, officials from these countries have deflected: why expect governments to define the term if feminists haven't? We take issue with this position, as an increasing number of feminist thinkers are trying to do just that. Perhaps it is fair to say that many of the policy proposals put forward by feminist theorists and feminist movements lack a single, cohesive, definition of what would constitute a feminist foreign policy. So instead, countries have focused on changing the existing paradigms to simply include women and gender in their theory and practice. Our goal in this paper is to present as comprehensive a view as possible of the current state of play for feminist foreign policy, and to pull from works by feminist thinkers in our attempt to construct a definition that can serve as a starting point for further dialogue.

THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS FOR FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

There are now seven countries who have adopted foreign policies they characterize as explicitly feminist: Sweden, Canada, Luxembourg, France, Mexico, Spain and Libya. In this section, we briefly review available information on each of these, which inform our proposed definition and recommendations.



SWEDEN: THE MOTHER OF FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

Sweden's feminist foreign policy is both the oldest and the most comprehensive, although all have roots in the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, U.N. Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, and other international agreements that focus on raising the status of women and mainstreaming gender.² The Swedish approach is the most thorough, extending to all domains of foreign policy and seeking to advance gender equality for its own sake, as well as in service to other foreign policy priorities. The Swedish framework encompasses "the three Rs": women's *Rights*, backed with *Resources* and supporting increased female *Representation*.

It bears noting that Sweden's feminist approach to policy is not limited to its foreign policy and includes a domestic arm as well, which distinguishes it from the other countries. No

surprise there: Sweden ranks fifth among the world's top performers for gender equality in domestic practice, notably closing 82.3 percent of its overall gender gap (World Economic Forum, 2021). Sweden's "Feminist Foreign Policy Handbook" states: "In pursuing our foreign policy, it is reassuring to have a solid ideological foundation for gender equality and the full support of the political leadership. This has provided us with sharper tools for pursuing gender equality issues in various forums" (Government of Sweden, 2019). This is an important approach that merits deeper exploration than we have scope to do in this review, but is a concept that we hope to explore further in future publications.

At this year's Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), Swedish Ambassador for Gender Equality and Coordinator of Feminist Foreign Policy Ann Bernes referenced the

need for a fourth “R,” *Reality*. Also highlighted in Sweden’s Handbook, *Reality* encourages the Foreign Service to study the context in which they’re working, engage with local actors, and commission research that is intended to contribute to strategic, efficient feminist foreign policy (ICRW, 2021; Government of Sweden, 2019).

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The Swedish feminist foreign policy framework covers three domains: 1) foreign and national security policies; 2) development cooperation; and 3) trade and promotion policy.³ The policy sees gender equality as both a priority objective in its own right as well as a tool to advance other foreign policy priorities (Government of Sweden, 2018). Its 2019-2022 Foreign Service action plan includes yearly updates and identifies six external objectives, including: 1) full enjoyment of human rights; 2) freedom from physical, psychological and sexual violence; 3) participation in preventing and resolving conflicts, and post-conflict peacebuilding; 4) political participation and influence in all areas of society; 5) economic rights and empowerment; and 6) sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). A seventh objective, first identified in 2017, also focuses on internal policies and practices of the Swedish Foreign Service. The 2021 plan also pledges to take into account the disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls, and the new challenges it poses to each of the aforementioned objectives (Government of Sweden, 2021).

To what extent does Sweden’s practice live up to its policy? Under the heading of rights, they have been criticized for a binary focus on *women* rather than the more inclusive *gender*. The policy largely ignores the rights and needs of LGBTQIA+ individuals, with the exception of LGBTQ sexual and reproductive health and rights being noted

in the health component of the agenda. It is our view that relegating LGBTQ people to be a special population in health interventions

but not part of their broad rights-based agenda is overly limiting and a missed opportunity for a feminist approach. Sweden has also faced criticism for their arms trade with Saudi Arabia, whose record on human rights generally and women’s rights in particular is notoriously poor (Vucetic, 2018). However, in light of this critique, Sweden did make a legislative change to arms sales regulations in 2017, which “imply that the democratic status of the receiving country shall be a central condition for assessing whether or not to grant permission” (Government of Sweden, 2018). Yet despite this, arms sales to Saudi Arabia still rose two percent in 2018 over the previous year (Nordström, 2018) and according to Svenska Freds, a Swedish NGO, over 20 percent of Swedish arms exports in 2020 were directed to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen (compared to 9.4 percent in 2019), an industry continually critiqued by feminists (Svenska Freds, 2021).

On representation, Sweden fares quite well: Sweden has a long history of female foreign ministers and robust representation in parliament, a value it also appears to model in its diplomatic engagements and foreign assistance priorities. Current levels of female/male representation at top levels of the Swedish Foreign Service are near parity.

On resources, too, the story is a good one: 84 percent of Sweden’s overseas development assistance (ODA) is earmarked for gender equality, either as a principal or significant objective (OECD, 2021). Between 2015-2016, Sweden increased its support to women’s rights organizations by 35 percent; in 2017, it committed 200 million Krona to SRHR while

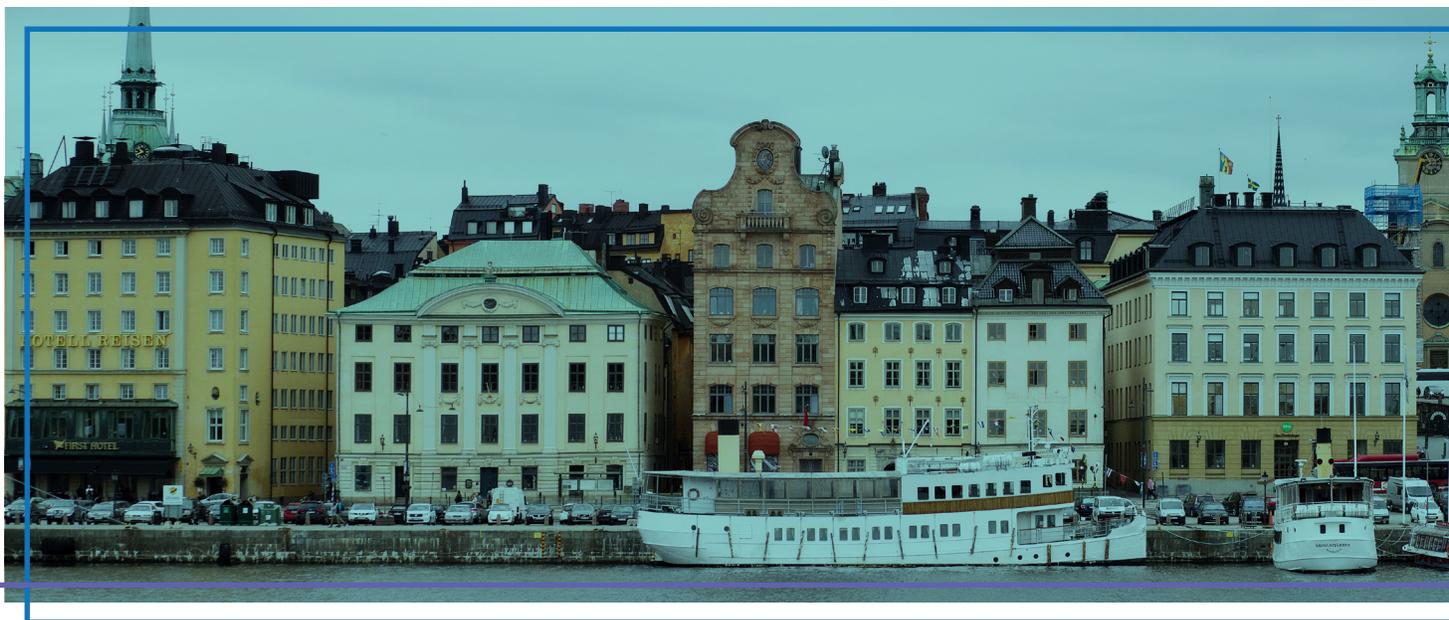
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co-founding the “She Decides” movement; and for the period of 2018-2022, it announced 1 billion Krona for a new strategy on global gender equality and women’s and girls’ rights (Government of Sweden, 2018). However, aside from a summary of objectives and overall strategy, tracking and implementation of the 1 billion Krona, which is administered by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), is difficult to find (Government of Sweden, 2018; Government of Sweden, 2018). According to the government, Sweden “works on gender budgeting, where resources must be analyzed with potential effects on women/men.”

And it’s not just the money that’s hard to follow: for the first seven years of the policy’s existence, we found no overarching mechanism to monitor the implementation of the policy’s goals, objectives or activities. Sweden updates its action plan with objectives and follow-up activities every year, but this falls short of a detailed, measurable monitoring and evaluation strategy or the robust, independent evaluation that we have recommended in an earlier version of this paper (Thompson and Clement, 2019).

However, Sweden appears to be responding to this criticism: the Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA), an independent evaluator, recently issued

a tender calling for “proposals for a study of the implementation of Sweden’s feminist foreign policy in countries where Sweden conducts development cooperation” (EBA, 2020). Until this call establishes a new monitoring and evaluation mechanism, there have only been specific metrics to track progress against many of the goals in the Feminist Foreign Policy under other instruments, such as its National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security for 2016-2020 or the Development Cooperation for Global Gender Equality and Women’s and Girls’ Rights for 2018-2022. The 2018 publication of the Feminist Foreign Policy Handbook highlights examples of the policy’s accomplishments, but was a voluntary and self-reported review of progress in the first four years and was disseminated just prior to presidential elections. We welcome Sweden’s most recent effort to publicly and independently document the impact of its FFP on its development assistance through the external tender, and encourage similar evaluations to be conducted in all streams of Swedish FFP, including trade policy, diplomatic engagements, and defense. Doing so would be an affirmation of the importance of an additional “R,” *Research*, that we propose to amend as a fifth “R” alongside *Rights, Representation, Resources and Reality*.





CANADA: FEMINIST INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE AS A FOUNDATION FOR FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

Fast forward to June 2017, when Canada launched the world's first Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP). This announcement came during the first term of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, himself a self-proclaimed feminist, who modeled representation by appointing the most diverse cabinet in Canadian history at that time, ensuring gender parity within the body.

Neglecting to include broader foreign policy domains of diplomacy, defense and trade, the FIAP outlined Canada's commitment to a feminist approach to development assistance. Subsequently, Canada has worked to articulate a larger approach to feminist foreign policy more broadly, which was anticipated to be published in a white paper in 2020 but has been indefinitely delayed. A Government of Canada web page dedicated to the FIAP contains a bullet point describing Canada's FFP as follows:

“Feminist foreign policy, which applies a feminist lens to all aspects of Canada's international engagement, including the Feminist International Assistance Policy; the Canadian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security; Canada's inclusive approach to trade; and the new defence strategy. Feminist foreign policy calls for policy, advocacy and program efforts to focus on addressing fundamental structural barriers that prevent gender equality, taking into account the needs of those most affected by multiple forms of discrimination.” (Government of Canada, 2021).

In lieu of the availability of the white paper to document the content, goals, and objectives of a Canadian FFP, the bulk of this review focuses on Canada's FIAP.

Like Sweden's FFP, the Canadian FIAP couched itself in a commitment to rights and married its launch to a budget proposal that put new resources on the table for ODA, passing the resources test by bringing overall aid levels up from a 50-year low—albeit not by much—and embracing a benchmark of committing 95 percent of its foreign assistance to gender equality as a principal or significant goal (as tracked by OECD-DAC data). This is a significant hike from just 2.4 percent from 2015-2016 and 6.5 percent from 2016-2017 on the gender as principal marker⁴ and 68 percent and 75 percent on gender as a significant marker for the same years. According to latest OECD data from 2018-2019, Canada committed 24 percent to gender as a principal marker and 68 percent to gender as a significant marker.⁵ With a total 92 percent of aid as gender-focused, Canada has overtaken Sweden as the world's leader in these OECD rankings, indicating the promising implementation of FIAP and accountability to the government's funding targets (OECD, 2021).⁶

Canada has also been on the forefront⁷ of an effort to direct more of those resources to women's rights organizations and feminist movements, which feminist civil society has applauded. This includes the launch of the Equality Fund, an independent feminist fund into which CAD\$300m of Canadian ODA was channeled in June of 2019 (Equality Fund, 2021). There was also a CAD\$150 million commitment to supporting local women's organizations, which then became the Women's Voice and Leadership Program. As of November 2020, the program—now at CAD\$182 million—supports 32 projects across 30 countries and regions (Government of Canada, 2020).

Unlike Sweden, however, the letter of Canada's FIAP does not promise to “disrupt” patriarchal power structures in its assistance, although it does include women's political participation and inclusive governance among its thematic priority areas.

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Rather, the Canadian approach often couches its prioritization of gender equality more traditionally, as in service of broader economic

and security goals. According to the Government of Canada, “promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in all their diversity is the right thing to do and the smart way to reduce poverty and inequality and build prosperity. Achieving gender equality and supporting women’s empowerment are ends in themselves and have a high impact on progress across all Sustainable Development Goals” (Government of Canada 2021).

The FIAP is organized thematically and includes six priority areas: 1) Gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment; 2) “human dignity,” which is an umbrella term that includes access to health care, education, nutrition, and the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance; 3) “growth that works for everyone,” focusing on women’s economic empowerment, entrepreneurship, farmers, and smallholders; 4) climate action; 5) inclusive governance; and 6) women, peace and security.

For monitoring and evaluation purposes, Canada has also done quite a bit: it developed key performance indicators on each of the FIAP’s six areas, against which Global Affairs Canada is required to collect data annually and make it publicly available—although we are not aware of independent evaluation efforts at this time. Beyond the FIAP, what evidence is there of a broader Canadian feminist foreign policy? For a few years following the launch of the FIAP, despite ongoing mentions by political leaders that Canada had a FFP, the extent of Canada’s explicitly “feminist” approach to foreign policy was limited

to its international assistance policy—at least in terms of any published articulation of policy. But behind the scenes, Canadian officials commenting on a draft of this paper pointed out that, during this time following the release of the FIAP, the government was building out elements of a larger feminist approach to foreign policy, including through a series of sectoral policies: Canada’s Trade Diversification Strategy, which contains an “inclusive approach to trade”; its Second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security and the appointment of the world’s first dedicated Ambassador for Women, Peace and Security; its new Defence Policy, “Strong, Secure, Engaged”; an internal guidance on implementing feminist foreign policy, which was issued to embassies and other government departments in early 2019; and, finally, a ministerial commitment to feminist foreign policy articulated in a 2021 mandate letter (Government of Canada, 2021). During this time, civil society organizations also continued to push for a fully-articulated, publicly-available policy document spelling out Canada’s approach and commitments.

In 2020, Canada’s former Minister of Foreign Affairs, François-Philippe Champagne, at last announced that he would collaborate with civil society to launch a white paper articulating just that (Global Affairs Canada, 2020). While an internal version of the white paper was completed in 2021, public release has been indefinitely delayed and a snap election was called in mid-August 2021, placing the fate of the FFP—and hopes of its publication—in political jeopardy.

This is regrettable: Global Affairs Canada had launched a robust consultative process, in which government officials solicited input from feminist activists, experts and academics, women’s rights organizations and a diverse constellation of stakeholders throughout Canada and the globe, through both in-person consultations and written contributions. As part of the Feminist Foreign Policy Working Group, civil society organizations and external experts organized engagement sessions and compiled recommendations. They summarized feedback received during the consultations and

proposed a set of core principles for Canada's FFP, including: an intersectional approach; promoting demilitarization, non-violence and peaceful conflict resolution; protecting the environment and sustainable development; and promoting accountability (FFP Working Group, 2021). Hopefully, these inputs will be seen to have shaped the design, implementation, and

tracking of Canada's FFP. While it was hoped that the paper would be released in 2021, Canada's federal snap election looms. If the incumbent party loses the election, the white paper may be withheld even further—if publicly released at all. This would deal a deep blow to Canada's prolonged and promising efforts to advance a feminist foreign policy.





LUXEMBOURG: RIGHTS AND REPRESENTATION FOR WOMEN AND LGBTI PEOPLE ACROSS THE “3DS”

In late 2018, the Government of Luxembourg announced in its Coalition Agreement that it would implement a feminist foreign policy (Government of Luxembourg, 2018). A paragraph outlining this approach spells out a few thematic priorities that Luxembourg will promote through diplomatic dialogue in Europe and around the world, including:

- Social and political representation of women
- Women’s equal opportunities, particularly in education, employment, social services, health, and land and property rights
- Women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people (Government of Luxembourg 2018).

Additional detail on Luxembourg’s efforts was announced at the Generation Equality Forum in June of 2021, where the government pledged

to establish an Action Plan on Feminist Foreign Policy to mainstream gender equality throughout all activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This Action Plan, per commitment language provided by the Government of Luxembourg, will emphasize the work of the Ambassador for Human Rights and Gender Equality, and align with Luxembourg’s 2018-2023 Coalition Agreement and priorities for the 2022-2024 U.N. Human Rights Council term. The Luxembourg GEF commitment on its FFP also includes the launch of its new gender development cooperation strategy, goals around gender mainstreaming and adoption of a zero-tolerance policy for sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (“SEAH”).

When asked in August of 2021 to elaborate on the content and implementation of its feminist foreign policy for this paper, the Government of Luxembourg provided ICRW with an overview of its approach as follows:

The feminist foreign policy applies across Luxembourg’s defense, diplomacy and development efforts, and involves three thematic priorities:

1. The protection and promotion of human rights of women and girls, [including, but not limited to] human dignity, security, right to integrity, education, socio-economic integration (property rights, microfinance), sexual and reproductive health and rights (maternal health, fight against female genital mutilation), fight against violence perpetuated against women (sexual abuse as a weapon of war, sexual exploitation)
2. The representation and participation of women, [including, but not limited to] representation of women in multilateral fora participation in civil and electoral observation missions, education, reinforcing women’s autonomy, gender equality in recruitment, and
3. The promotion of gender equality within the structures of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MFEA), [including, but not limited to, its] national action plan, recruitment policies (competency based), work-life balance, language (use of feminine declinations when appropriate), trainings [and] legal framework (Government of Luxembourg, 2021).

Like the other countries, Luxembourg frames its feminist foreign policy as building on other relevant frameworks including its National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (also adopted in 2018), commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (particularly Goals 5 and 16), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Equal Rights Coalition, which seeks to advance the rights of LGBTI people. Luxembourg's Development Cooperation strategy (the latest version, which was adopted in 2018) has an emphasis on gender equality as one of three goals, which also includes environmental sustainability and human rights. Thematic priorities for gender within Luxembourg's Development Cooperation strategy include the "right to freely decide on one's emotional and sexual life and the guarantee of sexual and reproductive health and rights" (Government of Luxembourg, 2018). In 2021, as part of its Development Cooperation strategy and FFP, Luxembourg adopted a Gender Strategy. According to comments provided by the government, "Luxembourg's Development Cooperation aims to systematically establish the link between gender, environment and development in all Cooperation operations" and its Gender Strategy aims to "strengthen Luxembourg's multidimensional and intersectional approach to sustainable development, leaving no one behind."

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In terms of the impact of its feminist foreign policy's implementation, the Government of Luxembourg points to a few achievements with regard to resources—its ranking as one of the top 20 donors to U.N. Women, support for the U.N. Special Rapporteur on violence against women—and, on representation, to its recruitment of 60% female candidates to its Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs in the

year 2020 (Government of Luxembourg 2021).

We found limited available literature on the Luxembourg FFP through which to provide any external critique. Taking the government as our sole authority on the content and impact of the policy, then, our review finds a key strength of Luxembourg's approach to be its embrace of a feminist foreign policy across all streams of defense, diplomacy, and development (although we are interested in more specific information on how this approach has impacted diplomatic and defense priorities so far). Nothing, however, is mentioned with regard to application of its feminist approach to related streams of foreign policy such as trade or immigration—although these are admittedly subject to the larger policies of the EU bloc. Thematically, Luxembourg's emphasis on women's land and property rights is unique, and we are pleased to see an equal emphasis on the rights of women, girls and LGBTI people. The co-equal emphasis of Luxembourg's Development Cooperation strategy on gender equality, human rights, and environmental sustainability is also a strength that could be extended across the whole of its approach to feminist foreign policy, as climate/environment is not mentioned there.

Documentation provided by the Government of Luxembourg was short on detail or specifics with regard to any benchmarks its feminist foreign policy

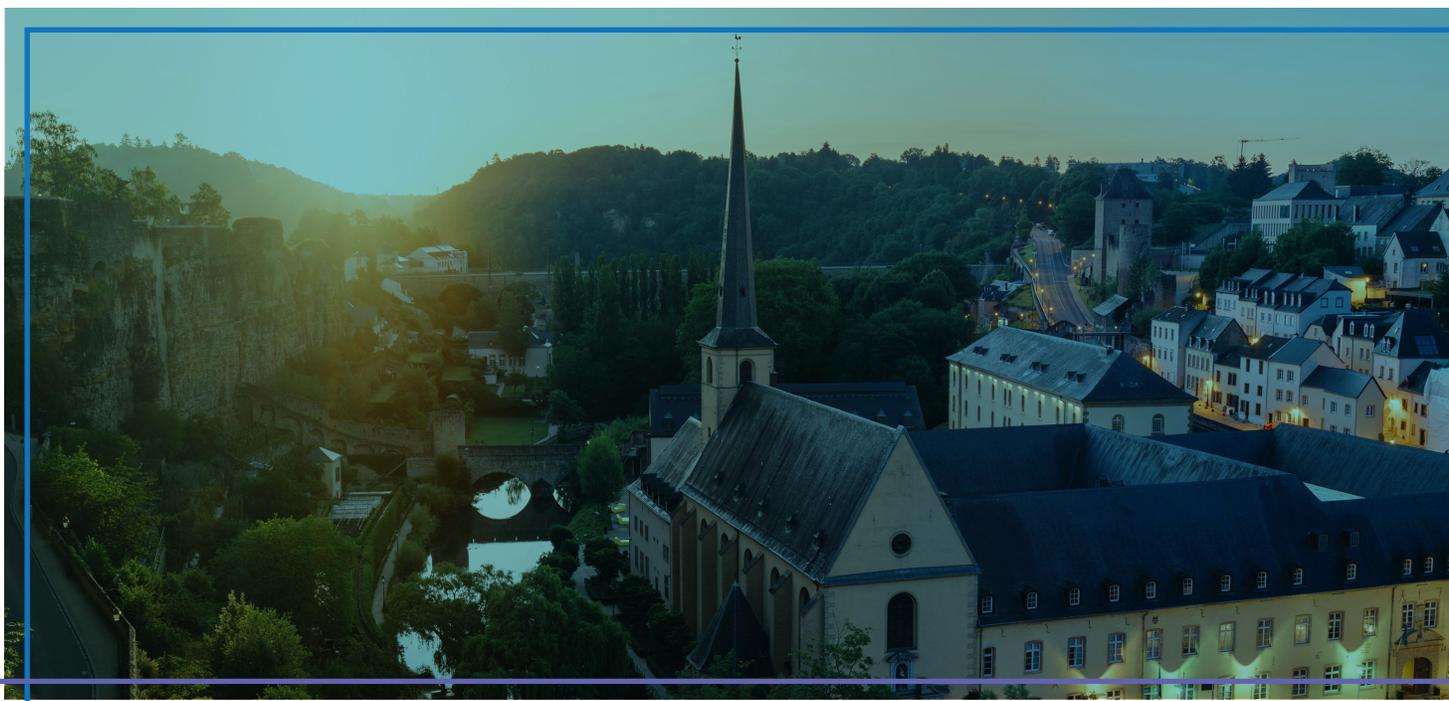
intends to achieve in a specific timeline; persons responsible for implementation; or intent to monitor, evaluate or publish information on its progress achieving the goals and advancing the priorities it has articulated. On resourcing, according to the OECD's latest analysis, 46 percent of Luxembourg's ODA is gender-focused (less than 8 percent as a principal objective, and over 38 percent as a significant objective) (OECD, 2021). We also did not find evidence

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of Luxembourg's efforts to consult civil society or increase collaboration with and support for feminist and women's rights organizations as part of its implementation of a feminist foreign policy. Action on each of these areas is recommended as Luxembourg moves forward with implementation of its feminist approach, and as it establishes the Action Plan on FFP as outlined in its GEF commitments.

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Cedric Letschn/Unsplash





FRANCE: A “FEMINIST DIPLOMACY”

Then, there is France’s feminist foreign policy, which has been discussed in a number of global fora but, so far, has not been published in any publicly available documentation or articulation of policy. The closest proxy we have been able to review is France’s 2018 International Strategy on Gender Equality, which deals only with French foreign assistance.⁸ Until the March 2019 op-ed, the French policy was not explicitly defined as feminist, although the word is used once, in reference to a French mandate to support women’s rights and feminist civil societies as a way of defending France’s values. However, the French approach has consistently been referred to by French officials as France’s “feminist diplomacy,” and after the March 8th op-ed, as feminist foreign policy, all of which is similarly undefined (Le Drian and Schiappa, 2019). This represented a significant shift in messaging: at the time of the update, France referred to its approach as “feminist diplomacy,” but had not embraced the FFP handle (Schiappa, 2018). The reason for the shift in title if not substance has not been explained, but presumably is linked to pressure from advocates pushing for a FFP as France took the helm of the G7 in 2019 and agreed to co-host the Beijing+25 celebrations, known as the Generation Equality Forum.

The implications of the op-ed’s recasting of France’s foreign policy as “feminist,” seemingly without having altered either policy or practice, are unclear and merit further discussion.⁹ However, at the 65th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in March of 2021, France announced its intentions to develop a handbook outlining the guidelines and principles of its FFP—akin to those developed by Sweden and Spain—that would clarify the policy’s goals, objectives, and approach. Officials have suggested that this will be published sometime in 2022, in line with France’s presidency of the EU and the renewal of the International Strategy on Gender Equality.

In a comment ahead of publication of this paper, French officials posited that the re-frame “has changed France’s level of ambition in its external action (the G7 2019 and its deliverables on gender equality, the co-organization of the Generation Equality Forum, etc) and the evaluation of the MoFA strategy by the High Council for Gender Equality.” Officials also pointed to a joint statement that was published in 2020 with like-minded countries to take gender issues and SRHR into consideration for the COVID-19 pandemic response; the French government’s leadership of the Generation Equality Forum and its Action Coalition on Bodily Autonomy and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights; and an increasingly gendered approach to France’s actions and funds for global health—including GAVI, UNITAID, and Global Fund—as evidence of its feminist foreign policy.

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As for the International Strategy on Gender Equality (first promulgated in 2007, the current version covers 2018-2022), it articulates a number of gender-related priorities for the French government to address through its foreign assistance. According to the Strategy, “... gender equality is a top priority of the president’s mandate. It will be a principle and cross-cutting theme; it will underpin all of France’s external action and specific measures will be undertaken to promote it” (Directorate-General for Global Affairs, 2018). Its updated website also recognizes “a worrying international context,” acknowledging the COVID-19 pandemic, attacks on sexual and reproductive health and rights, and sexual violence being used as a weapon of war (France Diplomacy, 2021).

France's strategy sets out to increase bilateral and programmable ODA that contributes to gender equality from a baseline of 30 percent in 2018 to a total of 50 percent in 2022, with benchmark targets for each year. Just this year, French lawmakers passed the country's new law on international development, allocating 0.7 percent of gross national income to ODA by 2025. Gender equality is a cross-cutting theme across the law's three objectives, which enacts targets of 75 percent of ODA spending on gender as a significant objective and principal objective, and 20 percent as a principal objective, by 2025 (Legifrance.gouv 2021). There has also been a four-year increase in the amount of ODA invested in the advancement of sexual and reproductive health and rights within that.

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The Strategy contains five sectoral priorities and three guiding principles. The priorities include access to: 1) social services like education and sexual and reproductive health; 2) productive and economic

resources, and decent work; 3) rights, justice and protection from all forms of violence; 4) meaningful participation in economic, political and social decision-making; and 5) equal participation in peace and security processes. The stated aim is to mainstream gender in all external actions and to place women's empowerment and gender equality at the heart of their international agenda (French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2018).

As for the idea of "feminist diplomacy," the

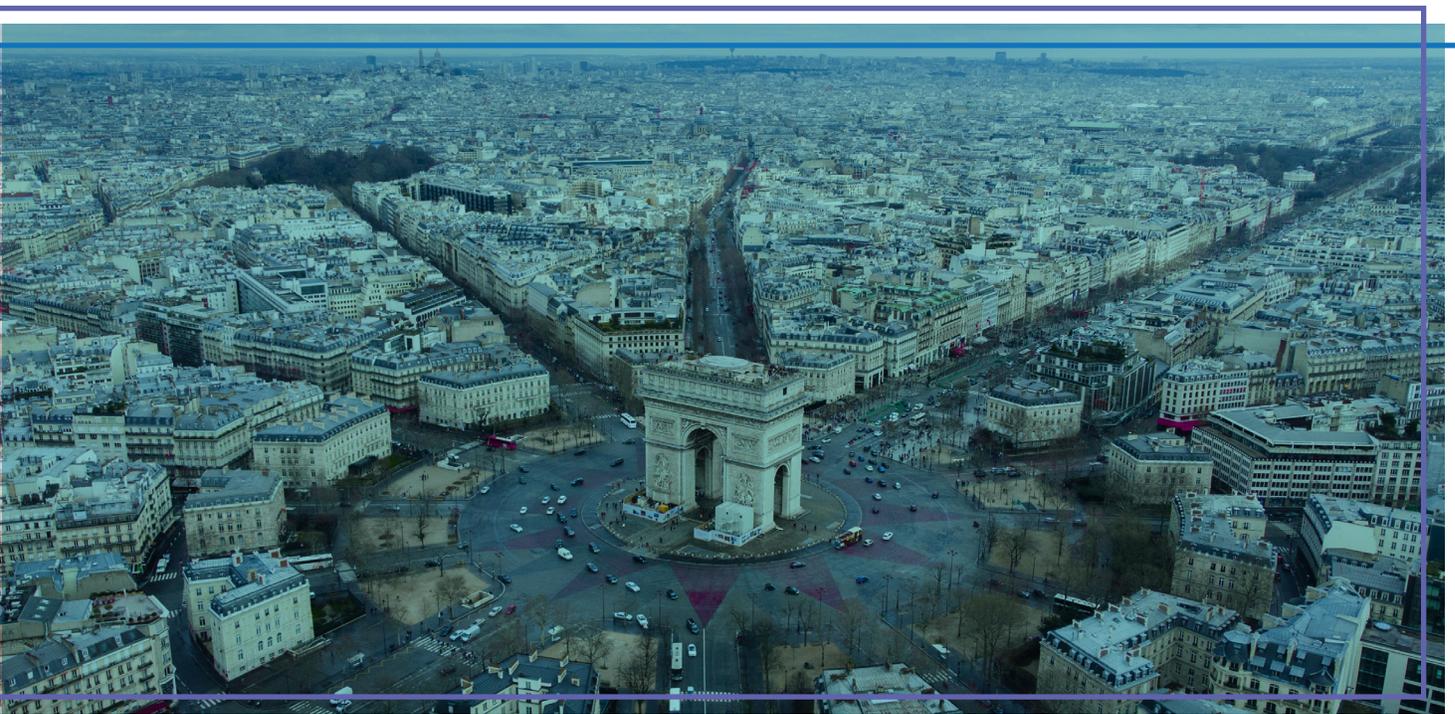
French policy describes an approach that identifies French priorities according to three principles: 1) comprehensive, 2) rights-based, and 3) gender-based, pledging to include gender "in all French diplomatic priorities and all political, economic, soft diplomacy, cultural, educational and development cooperation actions." France's "comprehensive approach" is the closest the country comes to extending the scope of its policy to apply more broadly than to development. Here, the policy explicitly highlights that gender should be included in diplomatic priorities, including a commitment to gender parity within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development. The second principle, a rights-based approach, ensures that human rights principles, norms, and rules are integrated into humanitarian and development policies and policies regarding violence against women. The third principle, a gender-based approach (also referred to as gender mainstreaming), attempts to ensure that "a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy making." (French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2018). The French government has asked all members of its diplomatic network abroad (such as embassies, consulates, economic missions, and cultural centers) and departments in Paris to design and report on a gender action plan each year. While this aims to promote government "ownership" of the issue, it is unclear how it affects ambition and cohesiveness across the system (ICRW, 2021). On the multilateral front, the second objective of the Strategy directs increased action on gender equality within different fora such as the U.N., the EU, G7, and the G20. This, in sum, is France's "feminist diplomacy."

Unlike most other countries, France's Strategy is accompanied by an accountability framework against which to track progress. Not only does it have stated objectives and metrics, but also mandates biennial, public evaluation of progress against the strategy. More encouraging still, France has set up a High Council for Gender Equality, an independent body of gender experts,

to advise it on its implementation of foreign and domestic policymaking and implementation on gender. The Council's work is funded by the government but described as "entirely independent." In November 2020, the Council submitted its first monitoring and evaluation report on France's feminist diplomacy to the Minister Delegate for Gender Equality, Diversity and Equal Opportunities and the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs. The report offers a mid-term review of implementation, and proposes 19 recommendations for improvement (ICRW, 2021; French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2020).

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While the goals and metrics for measurement could be more ambitious, it is notable that the French government has embraced the concept of transparency and accountability with a regular, public reporting requirement, and provided funding for an independent Advisory Council to work with them on the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of their efforts. This summer's embrace of the ambitious 20 percent target for gender as a principal objective within French ODA as part of France's new international development law is also laudable. The primary weakness of the French approach to date has been its failure to articulate, with the same level of transparency and pride, the contents of its feminist foreign policy. All eyes are eagerly looking ahead to the unveiling of its handbook in 2022.





MEXICO: THE FIRST FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

In his speech to the 74th U.N. General Assembly in September 2019, Mexico's Foreign Secretary Marcelo Ebrard pledged the country's intentions to draft a feminist foreign policy. In January 2020, at the 31st Annual Meeting of Ambassadors and Consuls (REC2020), Mexico became the first country in Latin America and the Global South to officially announce a feminist foreign policy. According to the Government of Mexico, its feminist foreign policy is a "hallmark policy" of its Foreign Minister; it aligns with the country's "ambitious multilateral policy, and reinforces the Mexican government's commitment to the agenda of gender equality and non-discrimination" (Government of Mexico, 2020; Delgado, 2020).

In its focus on reforming and improving the country's foreign ministry, including the goal of parity within the ministry, Mexico's feminist foreign policy shows similarities to France's "feminist diplomacy." To be implemented between 2020-2024, Mexico's FFP has five main principles: (1) integrating a gender perspective and feminist agenda throughout all aspects of Mexico's foreign policy; (2) achieving gender parity within the Foreign Ministry, and instituting organizational reforms in support of gender equality in the workplace; (3) combating all forms of gender-based violence, including within the Foreign Ministry; (4) ensuring that feminist leadership and women's contributions—especially women from Indigenous, Afro-descendant and other historically excluded groups—to the development of Mexico's foreign policy are visible; and (5) following an intersectional feminist approach in all foreign policy actions (Mexican Observatory, 2020; Government of Mexico, 2020; Delgado, 2020).

In terms of how Mexico will translate the letter of its feminist foreign policy into praxis, Mexico's strategy commits to specific, time-bound actions across each of the five areas, including the development of trainings, workshops, working groups, and manuals within the first year

(Thompson, 2020). It includes the presentation of the Manual of Foreign Policy Principles, and certifications of labor equality and non-discrimination (Government of Mexico, 2020). Mexico's Senate has also been working on a comprehensive amendment on gender equality and non-discrimination to the country's foreign service law, which is intended to reinforce and promote these principles (ICRW, 2021). Mexico's FFP aims to "reduce and eliminate structural differences, gender gaps and inequalities" (Government of Mexico, 2020). According to Mexico's Vice Minister for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights Martha Delgado, whose office is tasked with coordinating the FFP, "Structural gender inequality requires a radical solution."

Mexico's FFP aims to "reduce and eliminate structural differences, gender gaps and inequalities" (Government of Mexico, 2020).

Mexico's FFP focuses on historical and contextual vulnerabilities that are holding women and girls back from enjoying their full rights and potential (Delgado, 2020). It recognizes and advances the rights of LGBT communities and other vulnerable groups, as well as broader social and economic justice initiatives, sexual and reproductive health and rights and climate change (Thompson, 2020). Mexico's feminist foreign policy, like Spain's, has a stated focus on structural change, which consequently demands a higher standard: will attention to structural differences be limited to government reform and promoting women's leadership, or will it effectively challenge both underlying sources of gender inequality and the discriminatory policies, systems and structures holding women and girls back?

Vice Minister Delgado writes that "Mexico's feminist foreign policy has both domestic implications—that is, for the societal and governmental structure—and international

implications, which affect our bilateral and multilateral commitments with other countries around the world” (Delgado, 2020). She cites Mexico’s hosting of the Generation Equality Forum, its partnership with the Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls, its support for non-discrimination treaties at the Organization of American States (OAS), and its leadership on gender equality and climate change at the 2019 Conference of the Parties (COP25) among examples of Mexico’s demonstrated commitments on the international stage (Delgado, 2020). Mexico has also tied its FFP to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As Vice Minister Delgado writes, “To be effective, in addition to SDG 5 on gender equality, the agenda for the protection of women and girls needs to cut across all the SDGs and all spheres of government and society, reason why Mexico has revised its foreign policy from a feminist perspective...” (Delgado, 2020).

While these steps are encouraging, feminists have pointed out “the incongruency between the country’s aspirations and leadership on the world stage and the actual state of gender relations in the country” (Deslandes, 2020). The strategy identifies the eradication of gender-based violence as one of its top priorities, but domestic women’s rights activists have criticized government inaction and lack of recognition of domestic violence, state violence, and femicide (Deslandes, 2020). In Mexico, at least 10 women are murdered every day, and, as in most countries, violence increased during the COVID-19 pandemic (Amnesty International, 2021). However, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has been described as “considerably

unsympathetic to calls for government action on violence against women” (Deslandes, 2020). In March 2020, the country’s emergency call centers received over 26,000 reports of violence against women, but President López Obrador suggested that a vast majority of them were “fake,” akin to prank calls, and claimed that the issue of femicide has been “manipulated by the media” (Kitroeff, 2020).

That the Mexican FFP has been a priority of the foreign ministry—and not necessarily of the presidency—is clear, and consistent with trends for the preceding countries: most of the time, this is an initiative of the foreign ministry or gender ministry and not necessarily a core priority of the executive. While governments can adopt progressive policies on the world stage, their efforts must also match policy-making and support for gender equality domestically. In the case of Mexico, feminists have been quick to point out the mismatch—pushing the government to go further, and to do better.

Responding to this critique, representatives of the Mexican foreign ministry provided the following written comments to ICRW:

In Mexico, at least

10 women

are murdered every day, and, as in most countries, violence increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“It would not be coherent to promote such a foreign policy if gender gaps and inequalities continue at the domestic level.

That is why we are interested in international cooperation with countries with a feminist foreign policy. From their experiences, we can learn how to advance the construction of egalitarian and more inclusive societies. With the adoption of a feminist foreign policy, we also seek to address the international recommendations on the human rights of women and girls that various international agencies have made to Mexico.

Mexico believes that attention to these recommendations would be made to progress in the harmonization of effective national legislation. As well as improving an effective systems and administration of justice with a gender perspective...

[With regard to gender-based violence and femicide in the country], “It is a structural problem that is being eradicated, we would like it to be solved quickly but there are many structures that need to change. In this sense, it is a risk to call a policy “feminist,” but we consider it necessary to move forward in eradicating the problem....

Mexican Feminist Foreign Policy should be constructed with all the possible voices, so the criticism is valid and needed. Indeed, [the] Mexican Ministry for Foreign Affairs launched and will launch some meetings with civil society organizations to listen to all their important opinions and points of view.

Is also important to point out that Mexican FFP aims to mainstream the highest international standards in the country with the collaboration of different Mexican institutions. Thus, this will reinforce our national policy that has, of course, challenges, as all the countries in the world.”

This sentiment—that by advancing a feminist foreign policy via the foreign ministry, the Government of Mexico is increasingly obligated to advance and articulate a stronger women’s rights agenda at home—is the hope of feminist activists, including those at the Mexican Observatory on Mexico’s Feminist Foreign Policy, who are using Mexico’s commitments under its FFP to push for similar attention to gender equality at home (Mexican Observatory, 2020). In addition to calling for government attention to violence against women at home, the Observatory is also calling for structural change to end impunity and corruption, and

for budgets and planning to reflect a gender perspective, address a range of inequalities, and allocate adequate resources for the policy to be successfully implemented (Mexican Observatory, 2020). These and other voices of feminist civil society experts and advocates—in Mexico and around the world—are precisely the stakeholders that the government should be hearing from as it continues to conduct the above-mentioned civil society consultations on the FFP’s implementation. The government’s stated intent to use the commitments under Mexico’s feminist foreign policy to incorporate and advance international women’s human

rights standards at home—including through the launch of the U.N.’s Spotlight Initiative on ending gender-based violence—is a promising indication of potential change to come.

Mexico’s actions over the next several years will determine whether its FFP stands the test of time. Recent developments, including the landmark Supreme Court decision to decriminalize abortion nationwide—a key demand of women’s rights groups—and gender parity in the law with equal representation of female congressional leaders, are promising domestic actions that will hopefully reinforce the trend toward feminist approaches to policymaking and implementation in both domestic and foreign policy. And while Mexico’s feminist foreign policy is one of the world’s newest and has not had sufficient time to be evaluated, it does lay out specific, measurable, and time-bound benchmarks that are to be

achieved under each of its five objectives for the period 2020-2024. This is a laudable and important factor for accountability, and will permit regular monitoring, evaluation, and learning over the next few years, assuming that the government does track and report progress against them. After a few years, Mexico should commission a rigorous, external evaluation by an independent party and publicly share the results alongside its own internal record-keeping. Vice Minister Delgado writes, “Mexico is willing to learn from other countries with more experience, share its benefits, and lead the nations of our region to adopt this foreign policy” (Delgado, 2020). A feminist foreign policy is meant to be transformative, collaborative and changemaking; if Mexican government officials, feminist activists and civil society work together in pursuit of effective reform as outlined in the FFP, the Mexican case could be a study for many countries to follow.





SPAIN: PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH EXTERNAL ACTION

In March of 2021, Spain became the sixth country to adopt a feminist foreign policy, publishing its Guide to Feminist Foreign Policy. According to the government, the Guide is a framework for the practical implementation of a feminist public policy to align both national and foreign policies and actions to strengthen Spain's commitment to women and girls.

Feminist diplomacy and multilateral policies are outlined as key areas of Spain's FFP, which are to

be advanced through "a two-pronged approach, strengthening the priority lines of work of the Foreign Service, while mainstreaming the gender perspective into all phases of foreign policy as well as into all its actions." (Politica Exterior Feminista, 2021)

According to the Guide, Spain's feminist foreign policy will be led by five principles that will govern external action across different areas:

1. Structural reform to change work practices and institutional culture within the Foreign Service, ensuring that a gender perspective is systematically mainstreamed in every action through a "transformational approach" that seeks to ensure coherence across all areas of external action."
2. Strong leadership across Foreign Service to develop the foreign policy framework and to ensure that the Framework is incorporated in management and budget processes.
3. Setting up coordination mechanisms to enhance ownership and implementation of the feminist foreign policy among different stakeholders.
4. Strengthening participation and alliance building to unite state efforts toward gender equality. This includes reaching consensus on the policy with civil society and other relevant stakeholders such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Equality and the European Union.
5. Finally, similar to Mexico, the Spanish policy has a focus on intersectionality and diversity as part of its feminist approach to mainstreaming gender in foreign policy. According to the Guide, this focus encompasses gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, economic status, religious belief as well as disability and place of origin.

The five principles are to be applied across several priority areas including trade, defense, climate action, and economic justice, as well as the human rights of women and girls.

As for implementation, the Guide suggests that the Spanish Foreign Service will aim to advance the five principles by prioritizing action to achieve the following goals:

1. **Gender will be mainstreamed across all foreign policy instruments and actions:** Mainstreaming gender will be a priority across strategic areas including climate change, Spain's bilateral relations, and all aspects of foreign policy development.
2. **Promote gender equality through regional initiatives:** Strengthen ties with alliances, partners, and civil society through the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and Development (AECID) and other initiatives. The Spanish FFP will also aim to advance women's leadership and political participation in the peace and security agenda.
3. Spain will continue to **promote and enhance its position as a gender equality advocate** within the European Union (EU) by promoting gender equality instruments, advocating for women's human rights, and developing and implementing the E.U.'s Action Plan on Women.
4. **Multilateral Diplomacy:** Spain will aim to deepen its existing commitments by supporting initiatives and agendas on gender equality, improve collaboration with international organizations including the United Nations and Council of Europe, and encourage women's leadership and participation across international agencies and organizations.

Finally, the Spanish feminist foreign policy mandates structural changes within the Foreign Service that will align internal practices with principles of equity and equal opportunity, including embedding a gender lens across initiatives and action plans articulated in the Spanish Development Cooperation's Joint COVID Response Strategy (Government of Spain, 2021).

While domestic plans and policies are not outlined in detail in the *Política Exterior Feminista*, the importance of domestic-foreign policy congruence on women's rights is mentioned. Spain's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Arancha González Laya, has emphasized that "the feminist diplomacy mirrors the necessary coherence between national policy and the external action of the State" (*Política Exterior Feminista*, 2021). Noteworthy progress in this area includes the ratification of the International Labor Organization's (ILO) Convention 190 (C190) to recognize the rights of all workers and prevent gender-based violence and harassment in the country, as well as efforts to increase women's parliamentary and ministerial representation (Global Gender Gap Report, 2020). This

momentum on the national stage could bolster efforts to increase women's representation in foreign service, where women still make up a little less than one third (28 percent) of all Spanish diplomats. The number of female ambassadors is also low.

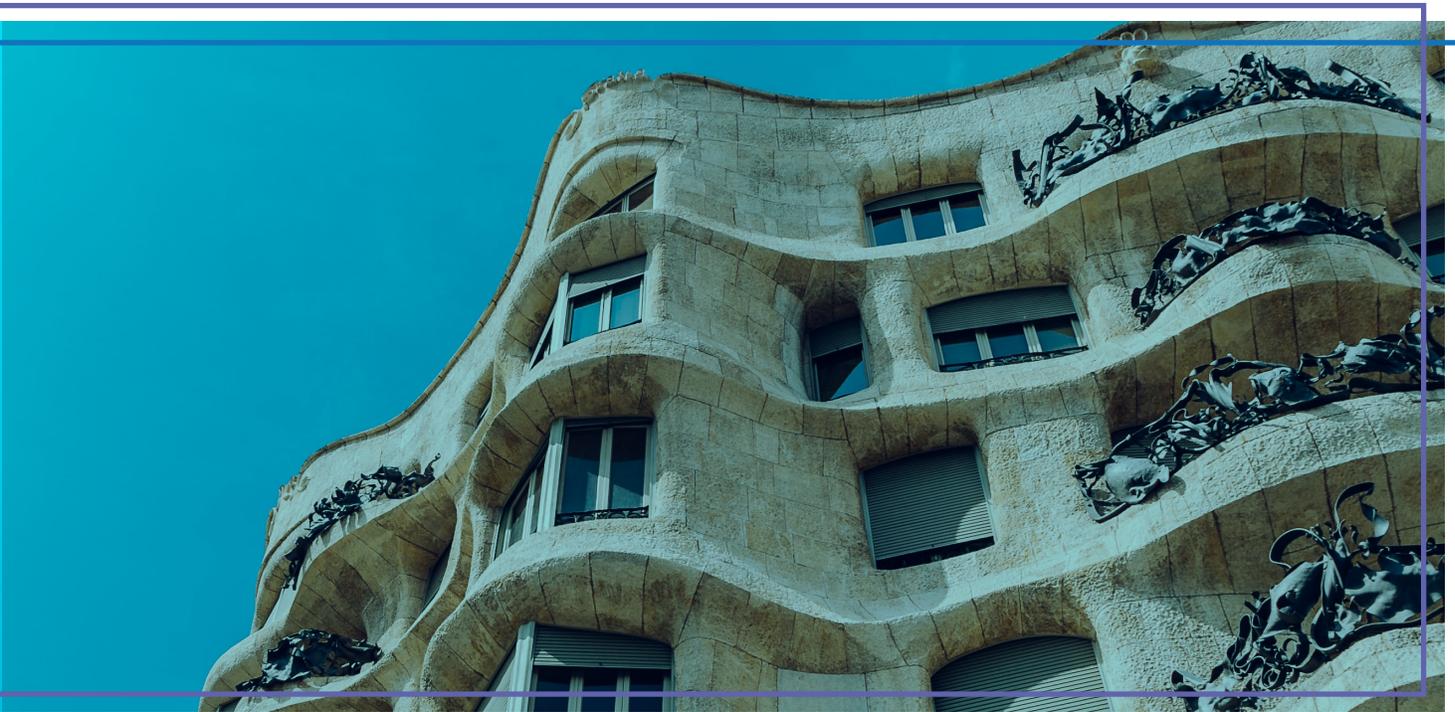
On accountability, Spain's feminist foreign policy mandates annual, public reporting on implementation progress, which must "be presented to the Parliament and discussed with stakeholders and civil society." Another encouraging attribute in this area is the creation of a high-level Advisory Group to shape future priorities and action, and a commitment to strengthening the collection of disaggregated data, with

15% of Spain's 2019 ODA spending targeted gender as a principal goal—a respectable sum that outranks the OECD-DAC average.

additional resources earmarked to strengthen monitoring.

With regard to development assistance, 15 percent of Spain's 2019 ODA spending targeted gender as a principal goal—a respectable sum that outranks the OECD-DAC average—although its principal or significant spend at 41 percent is much less than Canada, Sweden, France and

other leaders. The Spanish FFP could stand to increase the level of ambition on the latter—but with its focus on structural transformation and intersectionality, firm commitment to consultation with civil society, and annual, public progress reporting—is otherwise well-positioned to move toward 'real and effective change' as declared by President Pedro Sanchez.



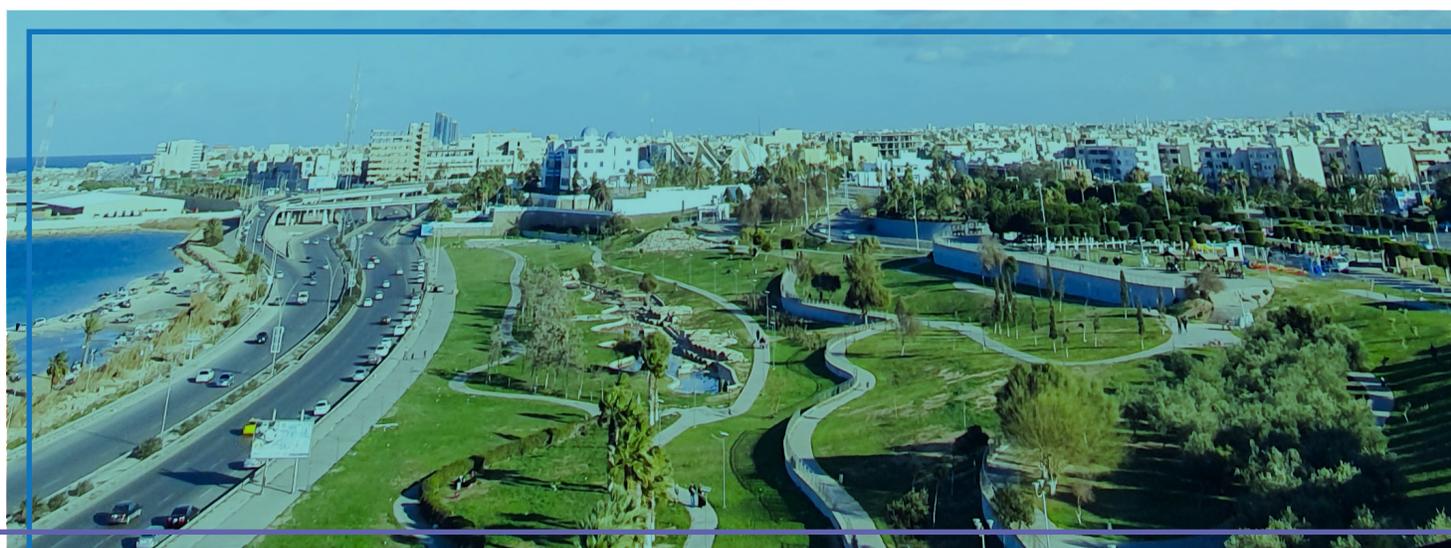


LIBYA: FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA (MENA)

At this year's Generation Equality Forum (GEF) in Paris, Libya's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Najla Mangoush—the first woman to hold this role—announced a commitment of adopting a feminist foreign policy, the first African nation to do so. In making the case for a feminist foreign policy, Minister Mangoush focused on the country's security and economic challenges, and ongoing struggles with conflict—a considerably different context for embracing a feminist foreign policy than Libya's predecessors. In her comments, Mangoush cited the roots of this approach in the women, peace and security agenda, pointing to the Libyan Stabilization Initiative as an example of a policy promoting a comprehensive, integrated approach to addressing the root causes of conflict in Libya that would be emblematic of Libya's approach to FFP. The Initiative supports several key issues, including: free, fair and transparent elections; combating the flow of arms and presence of foreign fighters; countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism; ending forced migration and displacement; implementing the women, peace and security agenda and developing its international action plan; creating a responsibility sharing model that places people at the center of decision-making processes; and supporting a human-rights based approach and rule of law (ICRW, 2021).

While this announcement is only a couple of months old and Libya has not yet publicly articulated what its FFP will entail, Mangoush emphasized that the approach will be rooted in understanding the perspective of marginalized parties in Libyan foreign policy design and decision-making; improving standard of living for those communities; and upholding human security, dignity and digital security. She identified different pathways for potential reform, including security sector reform, economic reform, and policy reform (ICRW, 2021).

Finally, Minister Mangoush indicated aspirations for the Libyan FFP to carry broader regional and multilateral benefits: "Our launching a feminist foreign policy would not only help Libya in achieving its stabilization, but would also stabilize our region." Libyan women have been advocating for greater rights, representation, and participation in decision-making for years. Minister Mangoush's appointment and her announcement of a forthcoming Libyan FFP represent welcome progress and a signal that these issues will gain increasing salience for the government moving forward; all eyes are on Libya to see what the policy will entail and its implications for the country and region (Reuters, 2021).



TOWARD A GLOBAL GOLD STANDARD FOR FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

In just the last few years, a tremendous amount of progress and momentum has been building as more nations announce feminist foreign policies and feminists inside and outside of government work together to advance an ever more ambitious and intersectional approach to this growing discipline. With the launch of policies by Mexico and Libya, the early notion of feminist foreign policy as an exclusive tool of wealthy or western nations has been disrupted, liberating the concept from traditional aid or assistance relationships, which have their own issues tied to postcolonialism and political economy interests. The application of a feminist approach to all of foreign policy—not simply to development assistance—opens important opportunities for it to not be purely an exercise of Northern governments; rather, all global cooperation could be feminist: North-North, North-South, South-North and South-South alike.

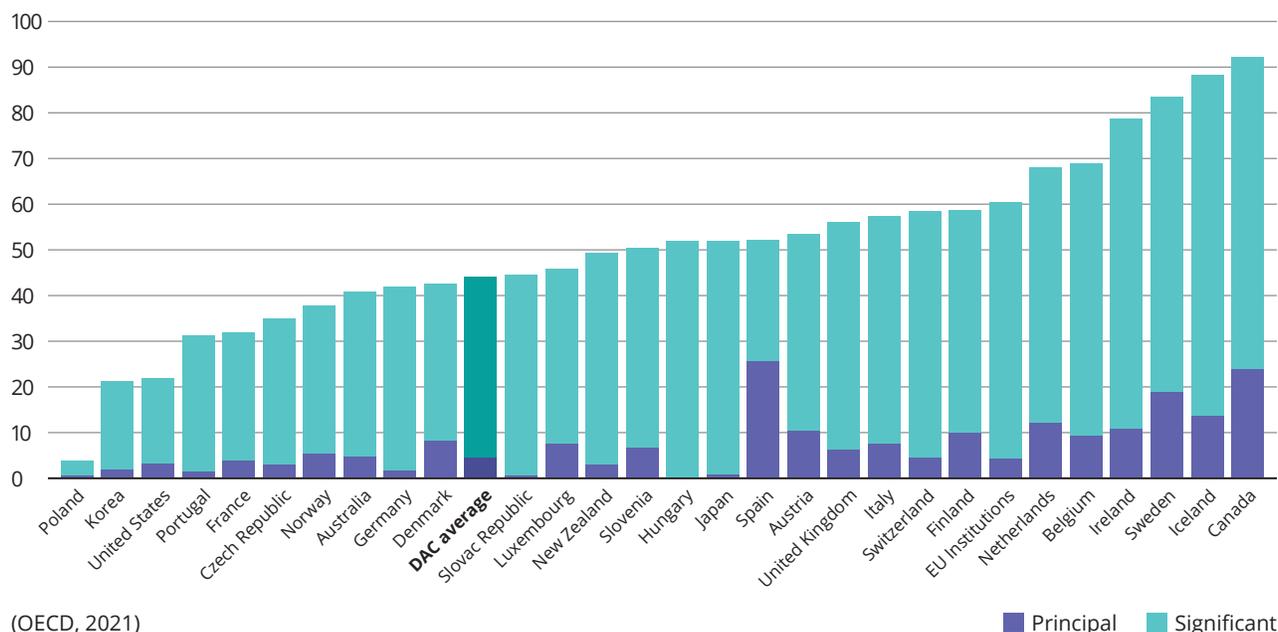
This of course is not to suggest that foreign assistance can't take a feminist approach;

indeed, donors can and should make important contributions to combat climate change, to support movements for women's and LGBTQIA+ people's rights, to prevent violence and promote peace and to improve sexual and reproductive health and rights, to name a few pressing issues.

Further, foreign assistance spending is one of the few indicators we have for evaluating the degree to which countries are committing resources to their feminist foreign and/or feminist foreign assistance policies. The OECD analysis of gender spending—the “gender marker”—is an imperfect metric for the resourcing element of feminist foreign policy, but it is the one most readily available. Most analysis focuses on countries' spending on gender equality as either a principal or significant objective. In looking at the average share of ODA for gender equality for 2018 and 2019, where gender equality is the principal or significant objective, Canada leads the world at 92 percent, with Sweden behind at 84 percent, while France was at 32 percent

SHARE OF ODA (%) FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY DAC MEMBER

Average per year 2018-19



(OECD, 2021)

(OECD, 2021). (Canada is pledging to reach 95 percent and France to reach 50 percent, both by the year 2022.) However, we propose that moving forward, a better indicator might be countries' spending on gender equality as a principal objective, which is considerably lower. For the same years, Canada comes in at about 24 percent, Sweden at just north of 18 percent, and France at around 4 percent. The average hovers at under 5 percent globally, while 56 percent of aid globally remains completely gender blind (OECD, 2021).

Our initial analysis of the world's few existing "feminist" approaches to foreign policy and assistance reveal a number of promising practices and approaches, which can serve as a foundation that can be built upon as we shape future policies. We have already pointed to three: pushing countries to apply a feminist approach across all elements of foreign policy (aid, trade, defense, diplomacy and increasingly, immigration policy); to increase their investments in gender equality as a principal and funded goal, and allocating more funding within that envelope to feminist and women's rights organizations and movements; and to adopt a more rigorous and independent practice for monitoring, evaluation, research and learning tied to policies' intended outcomes.

One area for consideration is to use the word "feminist" when they refer to a policy that focuses overwhelmingly on "women and girls." This practice reinforces the binary and undermines work to overcome white, ethnocentric/western-centric and cisgender presentations of feminism. Even when policies focus on gender equality, and not simply women's empowerment, critiques point to a lack of attention to intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization based on race, ethnicity, disability, class or refugee status, among others.

Historical legacies of military intervention and colonization cannot be ignored either: Sweden, France and Spain were all colonizers, while some of the practices from the 19th and 20th centuries

to "assimilate" native populations in Canada have been described as "cultural genocide" by modern Indigenous groups (Zalcman, 2015). Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has since acknowledged the genocide, and issued a formal apology after hundreds of unmarked graves of Indigenous students were found at a former boarding school (Alhimdi, 2021; DW News, 2021). But Canada has a long way to go in supporting its Indigenous communities, and the discovery of more mass graves further shows the country's grim history (NPR, 2021). Canada has also come under fire for its financial support for Canadian private-sector extractives companies, whose work has decimated local ecosystems, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities, including reports of targeting women's rights defenders (Oxfam Canada, 2018).

To put it more directly: some question whether feminist foreign policies are just the latest postcolonial export of northern countries, well-intentioned perhaps but ultimately equally uninformed by the perspectives of those on the receiving end and removed even from the realities of their own domestic policies.

This is particularly true for development assistance. "Postcolonial feminists are also cautious in their interpretation of feminist universalisms because they argue that such accounts of moral duty undermine the distinct experiences and stories told by non-western women," argues Rosamond, a Docent at Lund University in Sweden (Rosamond, 2013). In other words, "Nothing about us, without us," as the adage, rooted in the disability rights movement, holds—a sentiment often not implemented in practice (Charlton, 1998). Often, even in progressive human rights discussions, women and particularly women of multiply-marginalized identities have not been included in the discourse that developed and shaped policies about them. While well-intentioned, such approaches can perpetuate, rather than dismantle, inequalities and systems of oppression.

For both Sweden and Canada, one of the loudest

critiques of efforts to promulgate feminist foreign policies has been their simultaneous arms trade with non-democratic countries famous for the promotion of women's human rights abuses. Sweden continues to provide arms to non-democratic countries accused of extensive human rights abuses, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan and Brazil (Svenska Freds 2021; SIPRI, 2020). Canada weathered the same criticism for its arms deals with Saudi Arabia following the publication of its Feminist International Assistance Policy (Vucetic, 2018). In France, parliamentarians and feminists alike have questioned President Macron's military support for a dictator in Chad, and in Mexico, advocates have resisted their government's declaration of "feminist" policymaking in light of increased cases of gender-based violence and government inaction to institute reform or acknowledge femicide (Deslandes, 2020). For those countries with more established FFPs, there are also larger questions around how the policy has changed how money is spent, how issues are approached, and how staff and officials evaluate scenarios and make policy and program choices.

These are all important critiques, and, as documented throughout this paper, they tend to impel government action in response—part of the feminist exercise of critiquing power and inviting progressive change. However, it is equally important to document and celebrate progress, providing reinforcement where efforts do seem to be successful. Otherwise, the very concept may become extinct as progressive governments navigate backlash from both the right and the left.

A case in point: In 2018, Canadian officials admitted they had confronted backlash and were moderating the use of the word "feminist" ahead of the country's elections (Thompson and Asquith, 2018). The reelection of the government then enabled them to take on a deeper exploration of how the FIAP might be expanded to a full FFP—yet history seems to be repeating itself as the current government's long-anticipated white paper has been months

delayed and seems unlikely to be released ahead of snap elections. Similarly, the fate of Sweden's policy is in question. Following a vote of no confidence, the Prime Minister is currently overseeing a caretaker government, which makes decisions primarily on urgent matters (Government of Sweden, 2021). This is a political reality that must be addressed head-on, or there will be little incentive for governments to endure and improve or new governments to step up to the plate if the very concept is pilloried by the left and the right (Gill-Atkinson et al, 2021).



DEFINING FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

Against this backdrop, feminists inside and outside of government are seeking to distill a global gold standard for feminist foreign policies, and have articulated a few key principles and approaches thereto.

Acknowledging that foreign policy has largely been written and executed by male-dominated structures that perpetuate traditional, patriarchal systems of power—especially when it comes to defense and diplomacy—and therefore that existing definitions are unlikely to be well-suited to this exercise, we nonetheless started with the dictionary.

According to Merriam-Webster, foreign policy is: **“The policy of a sovereign state in its interaction with other sovereign states”** (Merriam Webster’s Dictionary, 2018). The concept of sovereignty is central in this definition, which has been a challenge for the concept of universal human rights from the very beginning. The United States, for instance, has consistently refused to ratify the international women’s rights treaty, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), citing sovereignty concerns, putting it in an ignominious minority of only six other holdouts, such as Iran, Somalia and Sudan.

That’s *foreign policy*. Surprisingly, the dictionary also had something to say about feminist: **“the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes,”** and **“organized activity on behalf of women’s rights and interests.”**

As such, a composite definition of the two concepts taken together could be: **“Feminist foreign policy: The policy of a sovereign state in its interaction with other sovereign states based on the theory of political, economic and social equality of the sexes, delivered to advance women’s rights and interests.”**

That’s a starting point for debate, but hardly responsive to our interests in anchoring our definition in a focus not just on women, but on power relations and gender equality more broadly, and utilizing an explicitly rights-based and intersectional understanding of feminism. This construction also affirms an outdated concept of a global order that is explicitly state-based, in an era where a growing number of state interactions now contend not just with other governments, but also with movements, multinational companies, and other non-state actors.

In our consultations to date, the number-one term that has emerged as an essential ingredient to any definition of feminist foreign policy has been “intersectional.” Kimberle Crenshaw has described intersectionality as “a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects;” the paper she wrote nearly 30 years ago used this lens to expose the intersecting thrusts of discrimination and marginalization that Black women face due to both racism and sexism (Crenshaw, 1989). This is a particularly appropriate concept to include in our definition, both because foreign policy has so often throughout history been manifested by men inserting themselves in other lands, typically in communities of color, and plundering the women and riches they found there. It allows a broader focus on *power* as it manifests between and among any number of groups, as feminist analysis does.

We also acknowledge that Sweden’s *Rights, Resources and Representation* framework is, both as the first and most ambitious example to date, often regarded as definitional. We consider the 3 “Rs” framework useful, although not necessarily radical—reducing a policy to these three, vague components says nothing that is explicitly feminist and does not assert the commitment to intersectionality that we seek. It is, nonetheless, important to include and a useful framework upon which to build.

And build they have: Feminists from within the various governments that have penned FFPs and activists advocating for them on the outside have collaboratively expanded Sweden's starting framework to propose the following, expanded list of "Rs": Rights, Resources, Representation, Research and Reporting, and Reach. The additional "Rs" encourage monitoring and evaluation, as well as gender-responsiveness and coherence across all policies and programs (Thompson 2020).

Meanwhile, the following definition has emerged that seeks to acknowledge and correct for the racist, colonialist, patriarchal and male-dominated structures that have traditionally underpinned foreign policy, advancing an intersectional approach to feminism for the discipline:

"Feminist foreign policy is the policy of a state that defines its interactions with other states, as well as movements and other non-state actors, in a manner that prioritizes peace, gender equality and environmental integrity; enshrines, promotes, and protects the human rights of all; seeks to disrupt colonial, racist, patriarchal and male-dominated power structures; and allocates significant resources, including research, to achieve that vision. Feminist foreign policy is coherent in its approach across all of its levers of influence, anchored by the exercise of those values at home and co-created with feminist activists, groups and movements, at home and abroad" (Thompson, Patel, Kripke, O'Donnell, 2020).

This means foreign policy that is not only by women or for women, but goes further, taking a nonbinary, gendered lens that recognizes and seeks to correct for historical patriarchal and often racist and/or neocolonialist imbalances of power as they play out on the world stage. Further, our vision of feminist foreign policy is not limited to a single lever of international relations—"feminist diplomacy" or "feminist international assistance" or the like—nor, certainly, is any single assistance program or initiative a feminist foreign policy. Rather, **feminist foreign policy is a complete, consistent and coherent approach to a body of work encompassing all auspices of foreign policy and international relations.** If done right, the approach will include (but not be limited to) aid, trade, defense and immigration, in addition to diplomacy, using all the tools in the foreign policy toolbox to advance a more equitable world. And most importantly, it will be informed by and amplifying the voices of the rights-holders it seeks to celebrate and support.

This is good news for people of all genders: feminism is an agenda everyone can promote, an agenda that seeks equity for all, not the dominance of one over another.

ENDNOTES

- 1 This is an update to the “Defining Feminist Foreign Policy” paper published in 2019, authored by Lyric Thompson and Rachel Clement.
- 2 Following in the footsteps of the Netherlands’ FLOW and other mechanisms. The Council of Europe defines gender mainstreaming as: “The (re)organization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making.” (Council of Europe, 1998).
- 3 Sweden’s definition of trade promotion includes the promotion of both Swedish economic interests and Sweden’s image abroad, which they state that they hope will increase both exports and imports.
- 4 To qualify assistance as advancing gender equality as a principal or significant objective as per the OECD-DAC gender marker, countries self-report on whether individual aid activities targets gender equality as one of its policy objectives. A full definition and eligibility criteria is available at: www.oecd.org/dac/stats/gender
- 5 In Canada’s 2019-2020 International Assistance Report (presented to Canadian parliament), these figures are 14% and 83% respectively. The discrepancy between country reporting and OECD-DAC measures is a challenge that we do not have scope to examine in this paper, but see as germane to global efforts to evolve the highest standard and practice of accountable, inclusive, transformative and feminist foreign policy.
- 6 Although the scope of our review focuses primarily on foreign policy, it merits noting that, in a welcome coherence of feminist principles across both foreign and domestic efforts, Canada’s (domestic) Budget 2021 calls for an “inclusive, sustainable, feminist, and resilient economy.” It includes, but is not limited to, \$30 billion for early learning and child care, \$601.3 million towards a new National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, an additional \$2.2 billion to support Indigenous women’s rights and \$45 million for community-based organizations working on sexual and reproductive health care (Government of Canada, 2021). Regarding the government’s support for Indigenous women’s rights, advocates welcomed funding but criticized the government for not promoting a larger “paradigm shift,” instead focusing on programming and temporary measures, and lament that the budget does not include the word “genocide,” arguing that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is shirking the responsibility that comes with his public acknowledgment of the country’s genocidal history (Stefanovich, 2021).
- 7 Following in the footsteps of the Netherlands’ FLOW and other mechanisms.
- 8 Although in its statement of principles, the foreign assistance strategy does indicate that at least with regard to human resources, gender priorities are meant to apply to all external action (including trainings, recruitment, Ambassadorial nominations, etc.).
- 9 On March 8, International Women’s Day, Jean-Yves Le Drian, the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs and Marlène Schiappa, the Minister of State for Gender Equality and the Fight against Discrimination, wrote an op-ed published in *Libération* declaring France to have a “genuine feminist foreign policy. They also committed 120 million euros to the effort (Schiappa, 2019).

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