



IN BRIEF



# FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICIES: AN INTRODUCTION

## Feminist foreign policies: a growing trend

In 2014, Sweden adopted the world's first feminist foreign policy. Since then, more than a dozen countries and political parties have followed suit or have announced their intention of developing a feminist foreign policy.

While there is no agreed definition of what constitutes a feminist foreign policy, the number of countries embracing this banner keeps growing. By October 2022, this list includes Sweden (2014), Canada (2017), France (2019), Mexico (2020), Spain (2021), Luxembourg (2021), Germany (2022), Chile (2022), Colombia (2022) and Liberia (2022). In the UK, three different political parties have pledged that they will pursue this if in power. In the United States, a resolution expressing support for this idea has been brought to the House of Representatives. In 2021, the first female foreign minister of Libya announced her intention of pursuing a feminist foreign policy at the Generation Equality Forum in 2021, but this was not followed up by any steps or institutional commitments. In January 2022, the Swedish Foreign Minister announced a Feminist Foreign Policy Plus Group that currently includes sixteen countries.

This trend has attracted considerable interest as an alternative approach to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women in external action. While many of its goals overlap with longstanding commitments on women, peace and security or gender equality in development and humanitarian assistance, feminist foreign policies can, at the very least, provide a unifying political framework for the disparate strands of gender-related strategies being implemented by governments, improve coordination and effectiveness and the involvement of the highest levels of leadership, and

become a clear and visible brand that makes it easier for the public, civil society, or journalists to hold governments accountable to their commitments to advance gender equality or women's rights. In its most ambitious expression, this movement should aspire to transforming the practice of foreign policy to the greater benefit of women and girls everywhere, impacting a country's diplomacy, defense and security cooperation, aid, trade, climate security, and even immigration policies.

## Common themes and differences

There is no standard blueprint for how to develop these policies, and there are some differences among the existing ones, but some common themes too.

Several of the countries with feminist foreign policies have elaborated handbooks to specify in greater detail the goals and means of feminist foreign policy or set up advisory bodies to guide the government in how to implement it. Not all of them have published their plan or an articulation of the policy. France has developed a comprehensive accountability framework with timelines, indicators, and responsible stakeholders. Spain appointed a Special Envoy on its feminist foreign policy and will present annual reports to its parliament. Sweden has been publishing yearly updates. All these countries have a national action plan on women, peace and security already. Some countries that have not adopted a feminist foreign policy have both a national action plan on women, peace and security and a foreign policy gender strategy, such as Norway or Australia.

Most of these policies cover similar themes. They vow to mainstream a gender perspective in all foreign policy actions and agencies, advocate for progress in gender equality in their bilateral relations and in regional and

adequate resources to gender equality as part of their development and humanitarian aid. Mexico, for example, has committed to reaching full employment parity, equal pay, and the application of a gender lens to every foreign policy position, resolution, and mandate by 2024. France has committed to reach 50 percent of gender-focused aid by 2022, up from a baseline of 30 percent in 2018. Canada has committed to ensuring that no less than 95 percent of bilateral international development assistance initiatives will target or integrate gender equality by 2022 and they are well on their way to meeting this goal. Spain has the highest percentage of official development assistance devoted to programmes that advance gender equality as a principal objective (24 percent). The original formulation of Sweden's feminist foreign policy, emulated by others, asks three foundational questions about rights (whether women and girls have the same rights as men and boys), representation (whether women are represented at all levels of government), and resources (whether adequate resources are being used to rectifying women and girls' disadvantages).

Their priority actions cover a very broad range of issues, many of them already well established in women, peace and security frameworks, such as strengthening women's meaningful participation in preventing conflict and violent extremism or increasing the number of women in peacekeeping. Several of them place great emphasis on women's economic rights and empowerment, from women's rights to land, inheritance, and ownership, to access to decent work, markets, capital, technology, or basic social services, to addressing the unpaid care burden. Sweden has developed a feminist trade policy and both Sweden and Canada have advocated for the integration of gender equality in trade agreement negotiations in recent years. These policies promote women's rights, including reproductive rights, and inclusive governance and seek to prevent gender-based violence in all its forms. In some cases, they address climate security. Canada has committed to creating opportunities for women in the renewable energy sector, the transition to a low-carbon economy, and climate-smart food production. Finally, these policies contain provisions on how to engage with civil society or the private sector. For example, Sweden has developed certification for private security companies on their conduct in conflict areas. Several have established new funds to channel resources to women's organizations. Most of them were developed in consultation with civil society, and a Global Partner Network for Feminist Foreign Policy, established in July 2021, brings together these governments and a dozen civil society organizations.

## Future directions

Several civil society organizations, journalists, and academic centers and think tanks have commented on the emergence of feminist foreign policies, provided guidance for their further development and implementation, and criticized governments when they do

not live up to the ambition denoted by its name.

Countries implementing a feminist foreign policy can pursue a deeper reflection on the militarism-trade nexus, harmful economic or trade policies, including the role of extractive industries, and their migration and asylum policies, to name a few. Some advocates of feminist foreign policies have discussed whether increases in military spending can be justified under these policies, or question specific military exports to countries with a poor record on women's rights and the best ways of dealing with authoritarian actors that oppress women. Some of these debates, including on sanctions or the use of military force, are far from settled. The impact of emerging technologies on women and girls, from artificial intelligence to surveillance or the development of autonomous weapons, remains under-explored and unaddressed. Several feminist organizations are engaging with these governments to ensure that this trend influences real change in foreign policy practice.

## KEY RESOURCES

### Published policies or handbooks

1. [Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy](#)
2. [France's International Strategy on Gender Equality \(2018-2022\)](#)
3. [Mexico's Feminist Foreign Policy](#)
4. [Spain's Feminist Foreign Policy: Promoting Gender Equality in Spain's External Action](#)
5. [Handbook: Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy](#)
6. [Luxembourg's Foreign Policy Address](#)

### Other resources:

Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy. *Feminist Foreign Policy*, available at <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/feminist-foreign-policy>

Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (updated December 2020). *The Feminist Foreign Policy Reading List*, available at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57cd7cd9d482e9784e4ccc34/t/5fd0b6fc75f5e5048577fe98/1607513858720/The+Feminist+Foreign+Policy+Reading+List+-+2020.pdf>

International Women's Development Agency (2020). *Feminist Foreign Policy in Practice: Comparative Analysis of Country Frameworks*, available at <https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/Comparative-analysis-of-feminist-foreign-policies.pdf>

Thompson, L. (2020). *Feminist Foreign Policy: A Framework*. Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women, available at [https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/FFP\\_Framework\\_EN\\_June2021update.pdf](https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/FFP_Framework_EN_June2021update.pdf)