



# FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY IN THE EU AND LATIN AMERICA

## BUILDING BRIDGES AND SHARING LESSONS LEARNED

### ABSTRACT

Feminist foreign policies (FFPs) are no longer exclusive to Global North countries. The adherence of Mexico (2020), Chile (2023) and Colombia (2024) to this project illustrates that Latin America is a leading region in developing FFPs and opens new opportunities for collaboration with the EU. FFPs originating from both regions exhibit many common themes and priorities, but the Latin American FFPs also contribute new perspectives from the Global South based on their own history, interpretation of feminism, and tradition of feminist activism in domestic and foreign policy. In addition, taking stock of the development of FFPs in Latin America offers best practices and lessons learned, such as applying an intersectional perspective to global power dynamics and greater collaboration with local civil society.

This policy brief provides an overview of existing Latin American FFPs, including analysing innovative approaches and the main lessons from their development. It then focuses on identifying opportunities for partnership with the EU, including through working to create more feminist economic systems that involve incorporating gender perspectives into trade agreements and emphasising the care economy. This area offers many opportunities for strategic political collaboration with the EU and helps ensure greater alignment between internal and external policy.

By focusing on some of the critical considerations that Latin American FFPs are bringing to the multilateral stage, this policy brief asks the following questions: What are some of the best practices that can be shared between Latin America and the EU about the different approaches to developing FFPs? What opportunities are there for jointly advancing feminist principles in different policy areas? Therefore, rather than assuming a universal formula for designing FFPs, this policy brief analyses opportunities for trans-regional knowledge sharing.



### AUTHORS

**DANIELA SEPÚLVEDA**

Executive and Project Director  
of the Center Nueva Política Exterior

**EVYN PAPWORTH**

Policy Analyst for the WPS program  
at the International Peace Institute

**THAINÁ LEITE**

Project Management  
Coordinator at FEPS



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**THE FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN  
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES (FEPS)**

European Political Foundation - No 4 BE 896.230.213  
Avenue des Arts 46 1000 Brussels (Belgium)  
[www.feps-europe.eu](http://www.feps-europe.eu)  
@FEPS\_Europe



**FRIEDRICH-EBERT-STIFTUNG (FES)**

EU Office Brussels  
Rue du Taciturne 38, 1000 Brussels (Belgium)  
[www.brussels.fes.de](http://www.brussels.fes.de)  
@FES\_Europa



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Content editors: Giulia Pasquinelli, Researcher and Consultant on FFP, Agnes Mach, Policy Officer (FES EU Office) & Laetitia Thissen, Senior Policy Analyst on Gender Equality, FEPS

Project coordination: Laetitia Thissen (Senior Policy Analyst on Gender Equality), Julia Wild (Project Officer) and Euléane Omez (former Project Management Coordinator) for FEPS and Agnes Mach (Policy Officer) for FES EU Office

Copy editing: Rosalyne Cowie

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## INTRODUCTION

In the current global context, where gender equality is increasingly under attack, the expansion of feminist foreign policy (FFP), particularly in Latin America, is a cause for cautious optimism. So far, three countries in the region (Mexico, Chile, and Colombia) have adopted FFPs, and others have expressed interest in developing one. Furthermore, the recent adoption of a Declaration on Feminist Foreign Policy for Latin America and the Caribbean, presented by Mexico in March 2024, and co-sponsored by Chile and Colombia, paves the way for innovative regional leadership on these issues. The 2023 Feminist Foreign Policy Index, evaluating 48 countries on the integration of feminist commitments on seven key priority areas, such as peace and militarisation, gender equality, and climate, found that the top-ten spots were shared between countries in the EU and Latin America, encouraging closer collaboration between these two regions.<sup>1</sup>

In this vein, this policy brief aims to illustrate key elements and approaches of Latin American FFPs and identify areas for partnership and learning between the EU and Latin America. We first provide an overview of existing Latin American FFPs and their main tenets. Afterwards, we analyse lessons learned and opportunities for sharing best practices between the EU and Latin America on FFPs, looking specifically at civil society collaboration and approaches to addressing economic inequality through trade and care economy initiatives.

## LATIN AMERICA AS A TRAILBLAZER ON FFPs

Latin America actively participates in global feminist governance. Most of its countries have adopted and ratified the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Convention and the Belém do Pará Convention and many have also published national action plans (NAPs) for the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda. Mexico adopted a NAP in 2021;<sup>2</sup> Colombia is currently designing its first NAP, with the active participation of knowledge communities, local advocates

and non-governmental organisations involved in implementing the 2016 Peace Agreement; and Chile is working on its third NAP.<sup>3</sup>

As part of an ongoing commitment to feminist principles in foreign policy, several countries in the region have either adopted or recently expressed interest in adopting FFPs. Mexico led the way, launching its FFP in 2020, and Chile and Colombia followed suit in 2023 and 2024, respectively.<sup>4</sup> At the third annual Ministerial Conference on FFP held in Mexico City in July 2024, Bolivia also announced that it would be developing a FFP, with a strong focus on decolonisation and depatriarchalisation.<sup>5</sup> Drawing on Bolivia's history of radical constitutional reform, this seems to be a natural evolution of existing commitments to Indigenous leadership and the recognition of Mother Earth.<sup>6</sup>

In January 2023, Argentina published a decree announcing its commitment to develop an FFP and went as far as appointing a Special Representative for FFP. Argentina had made significant advances in its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, such as the creation of a Division of Women and Gender Affairs and the publication of a resolution to officially use the feminine terms of "Ambassador" (in Spanish, "*Embajadora*"), "Minister", "Counsellor" and "Secretary".<sup>7</sup> However, the plans were dropped with the election of Javier Milei in October 2023. Although Argentina's FFP was never launched, the conversations to include a trans-feminist perspective were unique.<sup>8</sup>

Brazil has not yet adopted an FFP, but, in recent years, measures were adopted by its diplomatic service to align with gender policies and address the low percentage of women in diplomacy, including through the formation of the Brazilian Association of Women Diplomats and the introduction of the High Commissioner for Gender Issues in 2023.<sup>9</sup>

At the regional level, the 2024 Declaration on Feminist Foreign Policy for Latin America and the Caribbean, presented by Mexico, co-sponsored by Chile and Colombia and supported by Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic, illustrates strong regional leadership and a collective commitment to feminist engagement at the multilateral level.

With this declaration, Mexico and the countries in the region reaffirmed their commitment to conduct their foreign policy on the basis of gender equality, women's leadership and participation, and tackle the root causes of inequality through internal and external action, indicating that FFP is "an influential tool for building a more just and egalitarian world".<sup>10</sup>

Latin America is also a region with a long history of thriving feminist movements and activism. Feminist agendas in the region have centred around a number of critical issues, such as violence against women, reproductive health, corruption, environmental degradation and the rights of Indigenous people. Not least, feminists have also engaged with foreign policy, human rights and peacebuilding, long before the states started to develop FFPs. As highlighted by one expert, if FFPs in Latin America can build on these feminist movements, "they present an opportunity for non-Western feminisms to inform foreign policymaking and efforts to transform global politics".<sup>11</sup>

As a cohort of policies originating from the Global South, Latin America FFPs have challenged the dominant narratives around FFPs developed in the Global North. The Platform for Feminist Foreign Policy in Latin America (PEFAL) contributes to the international debate with perspectives from the Global South, offering specific analyses of the Latin American FFPs.<sup>12</sup> PEFAL highlights the need to understand these policies, not as an end in themselves or in an attempt to join the "bandwagon" of Global North policy agendas, but rather as an expression of the country-specific interpretations of feminism applied to foreign policy, rooted in their historical narratives.

## Overview of Latin American FFPs

The emergence of FFPs in Mexico (2020), Chile (2023) and Colombia (2024), and recent commitments by other countries in the region, puts Latin America at the centre of global efforts to redefine a feminist approach to policy making in the area of foreign policy. This section provides a brief overview of the key tenets of the current Latin

American FFPs, examining the political context and the unique contributions of each policy, and reflects on the main learnings from FFP development emerging from the region.

### **Mexico**

Mexico was the first Latin American and Global South country to publish an FFP in 2020.<sup>13</sup> Mexico has traditionally been a strong advocate for gender equality at the multilateral level and recently elected Claudia Sheinbaum as its first female president.<sup>14</sup> Mexico's FFP identifies five main principles: (1) integrating a gender perspective and feminist agenda throughout all aspects of its foreign policy; (2) achieving gender parity within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and instituting organisational reforms in support of gender equality in the workplace; (3) combatting all forms of gender-based violence, including within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; (4) ensuring that feminist leadership and women's contributions to Mexico's foreign policy are visible; and (5) following an intersectional feminist approach in all foreign policy actions.

While Mexico has shown early leadership on FFP in the region, encouraging fellow governments to join multilateral efforts on these issues, it has come under criticism from local feminist civil society for its lack of coherence with domestic policy, in particular in relation to institutional responses to high rates of femicide, internal militarisation, and other pressing social and economic concerns. This lack of civil society involvement in the development of the FFP and in its monitoring are opportunities to go further in prioritising collaboration at the grassroots level moving forward.<sup>15</sup>

### **Chile**

Chile launched a comprehensive FFP in 2023,<sup>16</sup> as a result of many years of commitments to gender equality at the national and international levels. Among these, Chile was the first country in Latin America to adopt a NAP on the WPS agenda in 2009 and is developing its third NAP, which is due to be published in the coming months. Chile's FFP, which is described as a "living document", is rooted

in the principles of inclusiveness, participation and intersectionality. It commits to activities in both internal and external affairs based on eight priority themes: (1) human rights and strengthening democracy with a focus on gender equality; (2) eradicating and eliminating gender-based violence; (3) empowerment and greater representation of women; (4) WPS agenda; (5) trade and gender; (6) climate change and gender; (7) digital, science, technology and innovation agenda; and (8) a comprehensive care system.

As part of its FFP commitments, Chile has been leading the way in the incorporation of gender clauses and chapters into trade agreements. In particular, the Chilean FFP describes how it intends to increase the participation of women in all trade treaty negotiations and promote inclusive trade criteria in global economic forums. This aspect is further analysed below.

## **Colombia**

In September 2022, Colombia announced that it would adopt an FFP. Although Colombia's full FFP is not yet publicly available, the policy was launched during the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2024.<sup>17</sup> The Colombian FFP, which is centred on the three core values of pacifism, participation and intersectionality, is composed of five pillars: (1) social justice; (2) environmental justice; (3) total peace consolidation; (4) education, science and culture; and (5) social transformation and institutional strengthening.

Colombia's FFP is unique in that it embraces pacifism as a central pillar, in connection with the 2016 Peace Agreement between the Colombian government and the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* (FARC) and the 2022 plan for "Total Peace". The Peace Agreement is internationally renowned for its contributions from women's civil society organisations and the inclusion of a gender perspective, making the FFP a natural continuation of these peacebuilding efforts.<sup>18</sup> While it remains to be seen how the policy will be implemented, Colombia's focus on pacifism is a marked contrast to trends of increasing military spending in the Global North.<sup>19</sup>

Colombia's FFP is also notable for its emphasis on a participatory approach and the substantive involvement of local feminist civil society in its development. Women-led organisations in Colombia were able to collectively engage with the Vice-Ministry of Foreign Affairs through an alliance called "*Encuentro Internacional de Diplomacia Feminista por La Paz* (International Meeting of Feminist Diplomacy for Peace)".<sup>20</sup> Several women's organisations and LGBTQIA+ representatives, along with a collective of women scientists, women athletes and members of the Feminist Diplomacy for Peace Alliance, have also participated in national dialogue with the government centred on the co-creation of the policy. This collaboration between government and women-led civil society organisations has collectively defined goals, themes, outcomes and actions of the FFP, and perhaps most importantly, progressed to the design of a participatory mechanism for implementation and monitoring co-owned by government and civil society.<sup>21</sup>

## **Key lessons**

At the theoretical level, Latin American FFPs have brought unique approaches to the conversation on what FFPs should aspire to be. For instance, while a focus on intersectionality is not exclusive to Latin America, all three countries have emphasised an intersectional approach, bringing a feminist Global South perspective to multilateral engagement. This perspective has extended to questioning entrenched power dynamics in other areas, such as Colombia's commitment to disrupt militarisation by making pacifism a priority.

As FFPs in Latin America continue to evolve, the importance of civil society consultations and collaboration has also come to the fore as a key lesson. The Colombian example provides a template for a diverse, intersectional and inclusive co-creation process for foreign policy development through dialogue between government and women-led civil society organisations, successfully reconciling different perspectives.<sup>22</sup> The creation of a space for listening to and involving women-led civil society organisations by the Colombian Vice-Ministry of Foreign Affairs stands as an example of good

practice that could be used in other countries and regions.

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR POLICY SYNERGIES BETWEEN LATIN AMERICA AND THE EU**

Sweden became the first country in the world to adopt an FFP in 2014. Although Sweden revoked their policy in 2022, following a political transition, many countries within the EU have since adopted FFPs, including France (2019), Germany (announced in 2021 and officially published in 2023), Luxembourg (2021), Spain (2021) and Slovenia (2023). The Netherlands and Belgium are currently in the process of developing their respective FFPs, proving that EU member states continue to be strongly committed to the implementation of a feminist approach to their foreign policies.<sup>23</sup>

The EU has progressively stepped up its efforts to integrate a gender approach into its external action.<sup>24</sup> These are reflected in the EU Council Conclusions on WPS (2018), which endorse the EU Strategic Approach to WPS (2019-2024), which were the first documents adopted following UNSCR 1325 on WPS. The EU's focus on gender mainstreaming and development cooperation is also exemplified by Gender Action Plans (GAPs) I (2010-2015), II (2015-2020) and III (2021-2027). The third GAP, which adopts an intersectional and gender-transformative approach, for the first time, also includes the WPS agenda, paving the way for increased consistency in the EU's external action.

GAP III is also complementary to the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025, ensuring greater integration and alignment between EU domestic and external policies, something that FFPs are also trying to address, although to different extents. At the regional level, GAP III is a conduit for increased partnership and cooperation between the EU and regional actors on gender-related issues, for example, in support of the Montevideo Strategy in Latin America.

Most recently, the Declaration of the EU-CELAC Summit of 18 July 2023, which seeks to renew the

partnership between the two regions, mentioned the commitment at the highest level to combat multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and gender-based violence and the need to reform cooperation and coordination on issues of common interest, including human rights, climate change, energy security, migration and digitalisation. This declaration is significant because it illustrates that collaboration on and the promotion of feminist principles should go beyond traditional “gender issues” and extend to a broad range of policy areas.

### **Engaging with feminist movements**

One area in particular where both regions can learn from each other is through collaboration with international and local feminist movements. As illustrated in the previous section, some FFP-adopting countries have established consultation mechanisms with feminist movements and civil society to inform their policy development. In the EU, GAP III was originally designed to “forge strong partnerships and dialogue with local actors, civil society and local communities”,<sup>25</sup> including through the adoption of country-level implementation plans. The 2023 mid-term evaluation of GAP III found that, while dialogue and cooperation with civil society groups has proven to be a strong vehicle for pursuing GAP III objectives in countries where the level of government interest is low, the EU could do more to establish clear partnerships with local women-led civil society organisations.<sup>26</sup> The practice of local and global consultations, as well as the establishment of advisory boards with representatives of diverse civil society actors can be better utilised to ensure that these policies are anchored in the knowledge and practice of feminist movements, especially those at the receiving end of these policies.

### **Pushing the multilateral agenda on FFPs**

Another way in which the EU and Latin America can jointly advance feminist principles in foreign policy is through collaboration at the United Nations (UN) level. The Feminist Foreign Policy Plus (FFP+) Group, first chaired by Germany and Chile and now by Mexico and Spain, is composed of a cohort of

UN member states that have already adopted or are interested in developing an FFP. The group is designed as a platform to champion gender equality and human rights in key UN dialogues, building strong inter-regional partnerships around core values. This illustrates the strong potential for co-leadership of Latin America and EU member states within multilateral spaces on FFP. In collaboration with civil society, these platforms can encourage the valuation of diverse engagement in feminist policymaking and can help to reshape multilateral power dynamics by de-centring the Global North and incorporating previously marginalised perspectives within policy discourses.

## **BUILDING BRIDGES THROUGH ECONOMIC INITIATIVES**

Latin American FFPs have been particularly innovative in the economic space, encompassing both trade policy and the care economy. All three FFP-adopting countries in Latin America are contributing to redefining care as a human right<sup>27</sup> and have placed an emphasis on it in their approach to FFP. This is the result of a broader movement towards questioning established economic structures and addressing historic inequalities, an area in which Latin America is contributing through trade initiatives and the shift to a care-focused economy. This is also an area in which the EU and Latin America have already begun to collaborate, and in which there are many opportunities to continue building these bridges. This section provides a quick dive into Latin American FFP approaches to trade and the care economy, as well as opportunities for cooperation with the EU.

### **Incorporating a gender perspective into trade**

Chile was a pioneer in incorporating gender approaches into its trade agreements through the negotiation of the first gender chapter in the Free Trade Agreement at the bilateral level (Chile-Uruguay in 2016).<sup>28</sup> Since then, this initiative has not only been replicated bilaterally but was also promoted in the updated agreements between Latin American countries and the EU (such as the case

of Chile-EU in 2024) or with regional platforms, such as the Pacific Alliance. Gender chapters have been a valuable initiative to improve and increase women's participation in the economy because they create bridges between the public and private spheres, facilitating actions for the development of networks and leadership of women in heavily male-dominated areas, such as medicine, science, technology, startups, artificial intelligence and high-scale export markets. With trade being an exclusive EU competence (because of economic integration and the common market, EU member states cannot negotiate their own trade agreements), this provides an especially powerful example for the EU on how to further integrate feminist perspectives into its foreign policy.

### **Creating a feminist care economy**

The COVID-19 crisis led to a significant withdrawal of women from the workforce in Latin America and other regions. The transition towards a care society requires measures to overcome the gendered division of labour between women and men and to organise a fair and sustainable allocation of care work. The care society is mentioned in both Chile and Colombia's FFPs and has been a key multilateral agenda item for Mexico, including at the Third Ministerial Conference on FFP hosted in Mexico City in July 2024.<sup>29</sup> Argentina's initial ambitious document on FFP also featured the care society as one of its priority axes and included plans to promote international regulatory frameworks on care. However, Argentina's FFP never came to life. Colombia's FFP references unpaid work under the pillar of social justice and notes that the FFP allows for recognising care as a right. Finally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico held a forum in May 2024 on "Moving Towards a Care Society", in which the Foreign Secretary shared that, "in light of its feminist foreign policy", Mexico had recently promoted the adoption of three resolutions focused on care in various UN bodies.<sup>30</sup>

The emphasis on transitioning towards a care economy illustrates Latin America's application of feminist principles to both internal and external policy agendas. The commitment was also reaffirmed



at the 2023 Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, organised by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).<sup>31</sup> The region's contributions towards redefining care as a right and promoting the adoption of measures and regulatory frameworks to centre care rights can inspire other countries and regions to follow suit.

The agreements from the 2023 Regional Conference also encouraged the advancement of a “bioregional compact for care” between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean, “with a view to promoting cooperation among the countries of both regions on comprehensive care policies and systems with a gender perspective, in the framework of the implementation of the Buenos Aires Commitment and the European Care Strategy”.<sup>32</sup> This is especially relevant given the calls by civil society organisations, such as the European Women's Lobby, and progressive groups in the European Parliament for an EU Care Deal in the new mandate of the European Commission.

## CONCLUSIONS

There is a great opportunity to learn from recent developments in FFP in Latin America. FFP need not be just another policy imported from the Global North and can be translated and contextualised into priorities that resonate with national history and approaches to feminism. Also, FFPs should be a conduit to advance feminist principles in different policy areas, from trade to social policies, as well as to bring foreign and domestic policies closer together. Key lessons from the Latin American experience include the use of an intersectional perspective to address global power imbalances and the importance of collaborating with diverse civil society and feminist movements. Latin America's leadership in this realm has also opened up new avenues of collaboration and strategic bridge building with the EU. In particular, FFPs can be used to jointly work towards more feminist economic systems through prioritising gender perspectives in trade deals and establishing an economy that recognises the centrality of care work. While FFPs should be grounded in their local context and are not

“one size fits all”, the EU can build upon the lessons from Latin America, including in the following ways:

- 1) Ensure **meaningful and participatory state-civil society consultations with a diverse range of stakeholders** throughout the development, implementation and monitoring processes for any FFP.
  - a) Specifically, the EU can learn from the case of Colombia in developing a consultative mechanism that includes a diverse range of civil society in each stage of policy development, monitoring and implementation.
- 2) Examine not only how gender equality intersects with different policy areas, but also how **feminist values can facilitate a transformative approach to these areas**, including:
  - a) examine structural inequalities within the global economic system, such as through debt, aid relationships and inclusive trade mechanisms; and
  - b) recognise the contribution of unpaid care work to society, and regulate and implement comprehensive care systems.
- 3) Work to **better align feminist approaches between domestic and external policies**.
  - a) Initiatives such as collaborating with local feminist civil society and listening to their priorities at the local and national levels can help ensure foreign policies are in line with and build on domestic policy priorities.
- 4) Create **solid institutional roots to avoid future setbacks**. For some experts, the most significant danger to the FFP project is the potential onslaught from future conservative governments, which can quickly erase all the work. To help mitigate this, the EU can:

- a) strengthen competent units within the European Commission and the European External Action Service responsible for the development of feminist approaches to foreign, security, development and trade policies, in line with the commitments of GAP III; and
- b) appoint staff with relevant expertise in EU Delegations in third countries to coordinate the implementation of GAP III and ensure adequate support from senior management.

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## About the authors



### DANIELA SEPÚLVEDA (CHILE):

#### **Executive and Project Director of the Center *Nueva Política Exterior***

Daniela Sepúlveda is the Executive and Project Director of the Center *Nueva Política Exterior*. She is in charge of the Platform for Feminist Foreign Policy in Latin America (PEFAL), and she was its co-founder. She has been a Fulbright scholar and doctoral researcher in the political science program at the University of Minnesota since 2020. Previously, she served as an international relations analyst at the Undersecretariat of Defense of Chile (2010-2014) and was in charge of the Department of South America, Central and the Caribbean of said subsecretariat (2015-2020). She has performed specialisations in the Center for International Humanitarian Law and Rights Humans of the Armed Forces of Peru, the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies in the US and the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in the US. She is a member of the Latin American Network of Women in Political Science (*Red de Politólogas*).



### EVYN PAPWORTH (USA):

#### **Policy Analyst for the WPS program at the International Peace Institute**

Eryn Papworth is a Policy Analyst for the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) program at the International Peace Institute. She received her MSc in women, peace and security from the London School of Economics and was awarded a prize for Best Overall Performance in her cohort. Her dissertation focused on reproductive violence against women combatants and reparations law in Colombia. Before joining IPI, she was a Program Associate at Creative Associates International, working on projects based in Central America. Her previous experience also includes assisting with research at IPI as a former WPS intern and consultant. Her research interests include gender and peacekeeping; feminist foreign policy; and applications of a WPS lens to issues such as environmental peacebuilding, gang violence, and DDR. Eryn completed her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science at Colorado College in 2018.



## THAINÁ LEITE (BRAZIL/BELGIUM):

### **Project Management Coordinator at FEPS**

Thainá Leite is a Project Management Coordinator at the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and is one of the project coordinators within FEPS' International Affairs Department. She holds a double master's degree in European studies from Europa-Universität Flensburg (EUF) and the University of Southern Denmark (SDU). Prior to joining FEPS, she worked for 2.5 years at the Permanent Representation of Malta to the European Union, where, alongside the Antici team, she was responsible for the preparation and organisation of COREPER II, Ministerial Council and European Council meetings. Between 2016 and 2018, she worked as Programme Manager at Women Political Leaders (WPL), a global network of female politicians, where she managed two advocacy activities: the #Girl2Leader Campaign and the Women European Leaders Community. Additionally, she has previous professional experience at two Brazilian leading think tanks: the Brazilian Center for International Relations (CEBRI) and the Igarapé Institute.

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Avenue des Arts 46, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium +32 2 234 69 00  
info@fepe-europe.eu  
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EU Office  
Rue du Taciturne 38, 1000 Brussels (Belgium)  
<https://brussels.fes.de/>  
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**ABSTRACT**

The application of a feminist approach to international relations has gained significant ground across the globe since the original decision by the Swedish Social Democratic and Green coalition in 2014 at the time to explicitly adopt a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP). While it is excellent news that FFP is becoming more 'normalized' in the public debate and increasingly gaining the attention of government actors, the development of a more ambitious concept, policy, and action should be a continued effort. A more ambitious, progressive, and transformative approach must be continuously advocated by feminists, civil society organisations, and policymakers alike. In particular, the European Union (EU) should be more determined to adopt and put into practice feminist principles in its external action. Given its supranational and inter-governmental nature, an explicit feminist foreign policy approach at the EU level represents the opportunity to amplify the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of marginalised groups globally. As Europe finds itself in the most severe security crisis since the end of World War II, there is momentum to transform its external action. Amid what can be considered a 'feminist turn in foreign policy', this policy brief reflects on the opportunities and challenges of more clearly linking the external action and (gender) equality agendas into a European feminist foreign policy and put forth some policy recommendations to contribute to current debates.

**AUTHORS**

ALINE BURNI  
Advisor, Politics and Policy,  
Terry Blair Institute for Global Change

LAETICIA THISSEN  
FFPS Senior Policy Analyst  
on Gender Equality

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**EMBRACING FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY WITHIN EU STRATEGIC FORESIGHT CAPABILITIES**

**BRINGING FEMINIST FUTURES INTO REALITY**

**ABSTRACT**

Crises have consistently served as transformative catalysts for the European Union (EU), propelling its integration and global standing, uniting diverse voices in coordinated responses amid chaos. However, as the EU increasingly embraces a narrative of 'poly-crisis', we must question whether this crisis-focused mindset traps the EU in the present and limits its ability to address broader issues. The pandemic, economic crises, conflicts and climate disasters uncovered deep-seated systemic issues that require comprehensive and long-term solutions. Reactive policymaking has hindered the EU's ability to proactively shape long-term transformations and tackle the underlying causes of crises, including widespread inequality in rights, opportunities and resources.

**AUTHOR**

ANASTAESIA MONDESIR  
Project Associate at Gender Associations

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