

FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY PROGRESSIVE VOICES COLLECTIVE

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

December 2024

Since the adoption of a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) by Sweden in 2014, feminist approaches to foreign policy have been gaining momentum across Europe and other regions. The cohort of FFP-adopting states now includes numerous countries in Europe, the Americas and West Africa (Libya). Eighteen countries are members of the UN FFP+ group, which was created in 2021 to promote feminist and gender-transformative approaches within multilateralism and foreign policy.

While there is no single definition of FFP, the common understanding among FFP-adopting states is that traditional ways of doing foreign and security policy rooted in neo-colonialism, patriarchy and militarism have contributed to increased fragility, conflicts and inequalities across the globe and, therefore, need to be revised. FFP offers an alternative approach, whereby the rights of women, marginalised communities and those at the receiving end of foreign policy take centre stage to develop policies grounded in the principles of equality, human security, care and peace.

Keeping FFP high on the political agenda is not only a way of encouraging more countries to follow suit but also to make the ones already adhering to it accountable. With the escalating conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East; stalled talks on the humanitarian, climate and migration crises; the return of Trump to the White House; and the rapid wins of hard-right parties, the world we live in today is presenting us with some of the most dystopian scenarios for the future, not least for women's rights and other disadvantaged groups. This executive summary therefore offers a timely summary of recommendations urging policymakers at national and EU levels to enact foreign policy answers rooted in feminist principles.

The recommendations presented in this publication are based on the FEPS-FES Policy Brief Series on Feminist Foreign Policy. For further reading, the respective publications are linked in the corresponding sections.



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PAVING THE WAY FOR A FEMINIST APPROACH TO EU FOREIGN POLICY

Based on the Policy Brief “A European feminist foreign policy? The need for a progressive and transformative approach” by Laetitia Thissen and Aline Burni

Whereas the EU portrays itself as a leading actor on a values-based foreign policy, with gender equality as an explicit objective of its external action, emphasis needs to be placed on how these principles translate in practice. The EU is equipped with a solid policy framework, articulating how to pursue gender equality through domestic, foreign and development policies. The EU is also the second-largest donor in bilateral official development assistance (ODA) for gender-equality projects. Yet, in the face of Europe's declining influence in the multi-polar world, complex global challenges, conflicts at the EU's borders, and threats to the fragile gains made on women's rights internally and externally, the EU needs to mobilise even more, rather than less, efforts to integrate a feminist approach into its external action.

1. ADDRESS STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES AND POWER ASYMMETRIES

An ambitious FFP aims to tackle systemic inequalities; promote justice; and address intersecting forms of discrimination towards vulnerable and marginalised groups, including women, LGBTQIA+ communities, indigenous peoples and disabled people. **The EU should question its current approach to foreign policy centred around self-interest, especially economic and security interests by military means, which further exacerbates vulnerabilities and conflicts outside the EU and weakens the EU's normative power.** Moreover, a feminist approach to foreign policy requires the EU to acknowledge and address European colonial history and its impact on current power asymmetries, including in the context of multilateral organisations and in its relations with partner countries. The EU should reform its approach to partnerships with third countries, ensuring they are based on dialogue, values and principles rather than economic self-interests.

2. MAKE EU INSTITUTIONS MORE DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE

Structural reforms of EU institutions dealing with foreign affairs are necessary. Cultural and institutional changes aimed at a more balanced composition of decision-making bodies incentivise the presence of women and persons of different backgrounds in middle- and higher-management positions and in the EU's diplomatic missions. Such measures lead to the adoption of more participatory and inclusive processes of decision-making. **Enhancing diversity and inclusion in the European Commission, the European External Action Service and the EU Delegations should be a clear priority of the next Commission mandate to ensure that policies are not just the product of a privileged class, often white- and male-dominated, at least in its higher ranks.** Recruitment policies should aim at attracting staff with diverse backgrounds, experiences and perspectives, including those from underrepresented groups, minorities, people with disabilities and women. This approach not only fosters a more equitable and inclusive society but also enriches technical foresight processes with diverse perspectives and experiences.

3. INCREASE DIALOGUE WITH CIVIL SOCIETY AND FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

A feminist approach to external action implies that the EU should listen to those at the receiving end of its foreign and security policies. Rather than providing standard solutions to complex problems, the EU must enhance its ability to listen to the stories and perspectives of women and traditionally marginalised groups. This allows for a contextualised approach that fits the needs of those directly impacted by the EU policies implemented in partner countries. One way to do this is, for instance, by **working closely with feminist and civil society organisations in the EU and its partner countries and by financing such organisations to integrate their perspectives and needs at the policy conceptualisation and implementation levels.**

4. ENSURE COHERENCE BETWEEN DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICY

A true FFP requires decisive action to address the domestic dimension of inequality. GAP III already mentions the need for the EU to lead by example. This means that the EU should first and foremost fight discrimination and promote gender equality, justice and inclusion internally in its societies, member states and institutions. For that, **the EU should not only set gender objectives for its joint external action, but also monitor member states' efforts to redress gender gaps through the implementation of equality commitments and directives.** The recent adoption of the first [EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) (2024) and the [European Care Strategy](#) (2022) represent two building blocks to address inequality and enhance the protection of women's rights within the EU. To mark the beginning of its new term, the European Commission must demonstrate its adherence to a “Union of Equality” by enshrining solid feminist principles in both its internal and external actions. FFP principles can thus act as a uniting factor, seeking to overcome ideological and political division among member states by bolstering unity around commonly shared values based on peace, solidarity, human rights and equality.



FEMINIST LEARNINGS FOR EU STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Based on the Policy Brief “[Embracing feminist foreign policy within EU strategic foresight capabilities: Bringing feminist futures to reality](#)” by Anastaesia Mondesir

The multiple crises the EU is facing call for a new European approach to foreign policy and, by extension, to conflicts and crises. Since 2008, the EU has muddled through a global financial crisis, a eurozone crisis, refugee crises, a pandemic and security crises spreading across the EU’s neighbourhood with inevitable ripple effects in the region. The [Political Guidelines for the next European Commission \(2024-2029\)](#), designed to guide the next term of the European Commission, call for the EU to be better prepared for crises and different kinds of threats, to ensure a more secure Europe. However, this crisis-focused mindset traps the EU in the present and prevents it from developing a clear vision of the future the EU wants to build. Reactive policy making has also hindered the EU’s ability to shape long-term transformations and tackle underlying causes of crises, including inequality in rights, opportunities and resources.

1. INITIATE A PARADIGM SHIFT, MOVING FROM CRISIS RESPONSE TO FUTURE PLANNING

The EU needs a paradigm shift, moving from reactive policy making to forward-looking policy making, from crisis response to future planning. Future studies and strategic foresight bridge the gap between short-term predictions and long-term aspirations, providing tools to shape our future. Through scenario planning and analysis of future trends, among others, these approaches enable us to consider alternative and more desirable futures and their potential impacts. Under the first von der Leyen Commission, strategic foresight gained momentum and became integral to policy planning and review processes, through better regulation guidelines and toolboxes, as well as through initiatives such as the Competence Center on Foresight and the EU-wide foresight network. This makes it all the more important to focus on the future we want, instead of reacting to current and future crises.

2. LEARN FROM FEMINIST STRATEGIES FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

Much remains to be done to ensure the EU’s approach to strategic foresight is also informed by the ambition to address the root causes of inequalities, transform power relations, and build more equal and resilient societies. Since the Cold War, feminist organisations like the [Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom](#) have pioneered new approaches to strategic foresight to imagine alternative and more desirable futures and challenge the inevitability of a nuclear war. For example, exploring future trends and their implications through a feminist lens, the [African Women’s Development Fund](#) envisioned four possible scenarios for Africa in 2030 focusing on six thematic areas, namely, economy, governance, demographics, health, education and technology. **These exercises allow us to reflect on the visions we have for the future, identify structural impediments that need to be changed, and develop alliances and strategies to achieve them.**

3. BUILD A ROBUST DATA FOUNDATION TO INFORM FOREIGN POLICY DECISIONS AND EMBED GENDER ANALYSIS IN FORESIGHT ACTIVITIES

A robust data foundation is fundamental to supporting feminist foresight. This includes generating evidence on the gendered impacts of crises and conflicts, collecting data and documenting practices on women’s contributions to peace and security efforts in conflict-affected regions, and implementing gender-responsive early warning systems to support informed decision-making. Such a data-driven approach not only ensures inclusivity but also enhances the effectiveness of foresight practices. In addition, **the EU should further embed feminist-oriented and gender-responsive questions into foresight methodologies and in the analysis of conflicts and crises.** The EU is already taking steps in this direction, for instance, with the planned gender-sensitive analysis of the security situation in Kosovo, which should guide both policy making and programming, but should further institutionalise these approaches with clear guidelines.

4. INCORPORATE MARGINALISED VOICES TO ENRICH STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

The EU should aim to involve a broader range of voices to challenge traditional approaches and intrinsic biases in strategic foresight practices. It should involve young people, women and people from different marginalised communities to inject fresh perspectives and innovative ideas into foresight. Positive examples of this practice that should be furthered are initiatives like the European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS)’s Young Talent Network, the EU Climate Pact and the Conference on the Future of Europe. However, these efforts are not yet fully integrated into the strategic foresight policy and decision-making cycle.

FFP IN LATIN AMERICA: OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING AND SYNERGIES WITH THE EU

Based on the Policy Brief “[Feminist foreign policy in the EU and Latin America: Building bridges and sharing lessons learned](#)” by Daniela Sepúlveda, Evyn Papworth and Thainá Leite

FFPs are no longer exclusive to Global North countries. With Mexico (2020), Chile (2023) and Colombia (2024) leading the way, Latin America is emerging as a potential frontrunner in developing FFPs. This is further epitomised by the recent adoption of a [Declaration on feminist foreign policy for Latin America and the Caribbean](#), presented by Mexico in March 2024, co-sponsored by Chile and Colombia, and supported by Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic. This regional tide of countries subscribing to a feminist-principled foreign policy creates the conditions for further regional leadership of Latin America on these issues and opportunities for learning and cooperation with the EU. FFPs originating from both regions exhibit many common themes and priorities, but the Latin American FFPs also contribute new perspectives based on their own history, interpretation of feminism, and tradition of feminist activism in domestic and foreign policy.

1. EMBRACE PACIFISM AND ENGAGE WITH FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

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”. With the EU currently shifting towards hard security, Colombia’s focus on pacifism offers opportunities for reflection. **The EU should further consider whether a stronger defence posture, increased military spending, and the creation of a “Fortress Europe” through militarised control of borders and externalisation of migrant controls can indeed contribute to peace or instead further isolate and weaken the EU.** 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 in a 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.**

2. INCORPORATE GENDER IN TRADE AGREEMENTS

Chile was a pioneer in incorporating gender approaches in its trade agreements through the negotiation of the first Gender Chapter in the Free Trade Agreement between Chile and Uruguay in 2016. The [2024 EU-Chile Trade Agreement](#), with a dedicated chapter on trade and gender, illustrates how the parties could leverage the trade agreement to remove barriers to women’s participation in the economy and international trade, including improving opportunities for women to access the labour market and economic resources. Among the different commitments, they also pledge to collect sex-disaggregated data on the impact of trade policy instruments on women and men and share best practices and lessons learnt in different areas, including women’s access to financing and financial assistance. **With international trade being an exclusive EU competence, this provides an especially powerful example for the EU on how to further integrate feminist perspectives into its foreign policy.**

3. CREATING A FEMINIST CARE ECONOMY

The COVID-19 crisis highlighted the centrality of care to our social and economic life. The transition towards a care society requires measures to overcome the gendered division of labour between women and men, when it comes to both informal care work and care professions. The care society is central 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. **The emphasis on transitioning towards a care society illustrates Latin America’s application of feminist principles to both internal and external policy agendas.** The region’s contributions towards redefining care as a right and the adoption of corresponding measures and regulatory frameworks to centre care rights can inspire other countries and regions to follow suit. This should inform the EU’s efforts towards implementing the [European Care Strategy](#) and improving the conditions of care givers, both paid and unpaid, and care receivers.

4. PUSHING THE MULTILATERAL AGENDA ON FFP

The EU and Latin America can jointly advance feminist principles in foreign policy through collaboration at the multilateral level, including the UN. The FFP+ Group, first chaired by Germany and Chile and currently by Mexico and Spain, is composed of a cohort of UN member states that have already adopted or are interested in developing 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. **These platforms can encourage an exchange on diverse approaches to feminist policy making and can help to reshape multilateral power dynamics by de-centring the Global North and incorporating previously marginalised perspectives within policy discourses.**



FEMINIST CONSIDERATIONS FOR EU SECURITY AND DEFENCE

Based on the Policy Brief “A feminist foreign policy approach to EU security and defence: A contradiction in terms?” by Dr Annika Bergman Rosamond

Civil society actors tend to warn against the positioning of defence and military policy within feminist frameworks, while EU FFP states see no real contradiction in such an approach. Common to all EU initiatives, whether military-orientated or not, and FFP strategies of EU member states, is a tendency to avoid the feminist question of whether militarism and feminism can be fruitfully combined and for what purpose. The broad Common Security and Defence Policy framework lacks meaningful sensitivity to gender and intersectionality and tackling root causes of conflict, but rather prioritises militarised responses to war and armed conflict. This militarised tendency is likely to become more pronounced, given the ongoing wars in Ukraine, the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, and demands that the EU enhances its defence and civilian crisis management strategies and capabilities. That pressure will increase if Trump decides to cut back on US funding of NATO and Ukraine’s war efforts. Against the backdrop of these geopolitical developments, it is even more important to integrate feminist considerations and practices into the reshaping of the EU’s foreign and security policy.

1. FIND A COMMON UNDERSTANDING ON FFP AND SECURITY AND DEFENCE

Admittedly, the EU is not on the brink of adopting a feminist stance on military policy, defence and war. However, if the member states were to decide to do so, they would need to ponder on what feminist principles they should adhere to. Should they opt for a feminist platform that sees no contradiction in furthering overtly militarised policies or a feminism that leans towards pacifism and non-use of force? What can be learnt from already existing FFPs across the member states in this regard given their tendency to assume that there is no such inconsistency?

2. REFLECT ON THE EU’S ROLE IN THE WORLD

Any attempt to advance a feminist stance on the EU’s external relations, including military and defence policies, should be defined by open and frank dialogue on what this means for the Union at large and the rest of the world. Thus, it is important to involve multiple stakeholders in such conversations, including feminist and LGBTIQ+ advocacy groups, as well as the UN, NATO and international partners.

3. LISTEN TO LOCAL VOICES

Relatedly, a feminist approach to security, defence and the military would need to very closely consider the distinct needs and wants of local stakeholders; what feminist measures would benefit their sense of security and well-being? This involves working towards sustainable and gender-sensitive peace agreements and forms of conflict resolution.

4. CAREFUL USE OF TERMS

The EU institutions should, if possible, avoid using concepts such as gender analysis, gender advisor, gender mainstreaming and intersectional analysis in key documents without accounting for their distinct meanings and how they are employed in relation to EU external relations, not least in the context of security and defence. A progressive feminist approach to security and defence cannot rest on “fluffy” uses of key feminist concepts, since this risks hollowing out the transformative potential of new policy initiatives.

5. CONSIDER ALL ASPECTS OF STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES

All CFSP and CSDP initiatives should be undergirded by sensitivity to intersectionality, that is, the interlocking power relations that prevail in global politics. GAP III is undergirded by such ambition and could provide a starting point for a more ambitious approach to the implementation of intersectionality across the full spectrum of the EU’s external relations, including security, defence and the military.

6. LEARN FROM FEMINIST TRANSFORMATIVE STRATEGIES

The EU institutions and the member states could make more productive use of progressive feminist insights, derived from feminist movements and scholarship, to address the root causes and gendered drivers that underpin global crises and armed conflict, as well as the gendered harms emerging from them, so as to ensure that the Union’s military and civilian crisis management capacities evolve in line with long-standing feminist knowledge.

MORE AND BETTER FUNDING FOR FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS

Based on the Policy Brief “[From talking to walking: Using feminist foreign policy to fund feminist organising](#)” by Benedicta Aloakinnou, Marinke van Riet, Lucie Daniel and Maria Malomalo

Feminist movements play a critical role in protecting and strengthening democracies. Financing them with long-term and flexible funding becomes an indispensable condition, particularly in the context of growing attacks on women’s and LGBTQ+ rights worldwide, that risks undoing decades of progress. Yet, despite strong government commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals, data shows that less than 1% of gender-equality ODA goes to supporting women’s rights organisations and feminist movements.

Carefully designed funding mechanisms anchored in feminist principles – inclusion, participation, representation, intersectionality, solidarity and the commitment to address entrenched power dynamics – can yield positive results. By reversing traditional centralised decision-making, which often penalises women’s organisations, they ensure that recipient organisations can contribute to the funding mechanism’s design, implementation and monitoring, so that it’s tailored to the needs and nature of women’s organisations. Lighter eligibility and reporting requirements and re-granting opportunities help reduce the administrative burden of women’s organisations, which can prevent them from applying to traditional grant-making schemes. While there is always room for improvement, the funding models from France and the Netherlands can be used as inspiration for funders subscribing to feminist and FFP principles and looking to adopt more feminist funding modalities.

1. ALLOCATE SUBSTANTIAL, FLEXIBLE AND LONG-TERM FUNDING TO FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS AND FUNDS WORLDWIDE, ESPECIALLY IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

The bilateral allocable ODA dedicated to women’s rights organisations and feminist movements should be significantly increased from currently 1% of gender-equality ODA to at least 10% over five years. In parallel, the administrative and accountability procedures associated with feminist funding should be reduced to open up to new audiences and smaller organisations. Existing mechanisms to fund feminist movements and women’s rights organisations should be harmonised and improved. OECD Development Assistance Committee members that are part of the FFP+ coalition should mobilise internal stakeholders, such as civil servants from other departments within the relevant ministries; other states; donors and UN agencies to increase the total funds available for feminist movements and women’s rights organisations and funds.

2. ADHERE TO “NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US” BY SUPPORTING INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST MOVEMENTS LED BY THE RIGHTSHOLDERS THEY INTEND TO SERVE

It is essential to provide financial and political support for the meaningful participation of intersectional feminist organisations across all decision-making bodies and multilateral spaces, such as the Financing for Development Process. In addition, collective learning can be enhanced through a cross-country and cross-mechanism linking and learning process led by feminists themselves. Through extensive networks and lighter eligibility and reporting criteria of the Dutch feminist funding mechanism Leading from the South (LFS), its intermediary funds were able to reach smaller and non-registered organisations, which received funding for the first time, as they are often overlooked by mainstream donors. Accessing donor funding is particularly important for

LGBTQ+ groups without a strong and long (auditing) track record. Empowering and giving voice and agency to those who claim a seat at the table, rather than being on the menu, should be a key principle of any FFP.

3. FOSTER TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST ACTION AND SOLIDARITY

Dedicated funding is an essential criterion to enable actors to organise at the international level, and thus, supporting transnational feminist networks and consortia (such as the Association for Women in Development, Prospera, the Alliance for Feminist Movements and FEMNET). Within the Dutch LFS and the French *Fonds de Soutien aux organisations Féministes*, deliberate efforts are made to facilitate linking and learning at the organisational level, as well as at cross-country and cross-regional levels. This forms an important component of feminist funding practices. This approach is distinct from – yet complementary to – more conventional and rigid “monitoring and evaluation” frameworks. It entails the sharing of experiences and lessons, learning from mistakes and exploring alternative solutions that may require people to get out of their comfort zone. To complete the feedback loop, the learnings are incorporated into the organisations’ strategies and implementation.



THE FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY PROGRESSIVE VOICES COLLECTIVE (FFPPVC)

A COLLECTIVE TO PROMOTE A FEMINIST AND PROGRESSIVE APPROACH TO FOREIGN POLICY

FEPS, in collaboration with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) EU Office Brussels and supported by an active network of dedicated partners, launched the **Feminist Foreign Policy Progressive Voices Collective (FFPPVC)**. This project aims to gather a community of feminist experts from across the globe and create a platform for them to exchange ideas, policy approaches, and practices in feminist foreign policy.

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Ann Linde, former Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs, and **Machris Cabrer**os, Co-Chair of the network and Global Coordinator at Progressive Alliance.

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