POLICY BRIEF
October 2025

FEPS
FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN PROGRESSIVE STUDIES

BEYOND VALUES: HOW FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY SERVES STRATEGIC INTERESTS

ABSTRACT

There are many normative reasons to adopt a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) such as building a more just and peaceful world, decreasing gender inequality, dismantling power hierarchies and fostering a stronger inclusion of civil society and marginalized expertise in policymaking. Broadly speaking, it is about the fundamental question: what – and whom – do we place at the heart of our foreign policy?

FFP, with its growing body of research and practice, has in recent years offered both a discursive frame and a material toolbox to advance this engagement. Yet, as the number of states officially pursuing FFP has increased, further motivations become visible that go beyond a purely normative logic and serve strategic interests. This paper turns to those logics – not to dismiss the normative case, but to examine the broader spectrum of reasons that make FFP politically attractive. It introduces four different strategic interests shaping state engagement with FFP: 1) **efficiency**, 2) **leadership**, 3) **reputation**, and 4) **alliances**.

By analyzing the benefits policymakers associate with FFP, it contributes to a broader debate on FFP at EU level. Filling a gap by exploring those strategic interests, it supports state actors in the implementation and provides FFP advocates and civil society actors with additional arguments. By offering different types of motives, the paper invites actors to explore what rationale – with both its opportunities and risks – prevails in their own approach, and how to draw on elements of the types less focused on. With that, the paper offers recommendations on how to pursue a comprehensive approach to FFP that makes full use of its potential. Finally, it cautions against not grounding the approaches in a strong normative fundament.

AUTHOR

LEONIE STAMM
Research Fellow at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP)

FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY PROGRESSIVE VOICES

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

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
@FEPS_Europe

FRIEDRICH-EBERT-STIFTUNG (FES)
EU Office Brussels
Rue du Taciturne 38, 1000 Brussels (Belgium)
www.brussels.fes.de
@FES_Europa

This Policy Brief was produced with the financial support of the European Parliament. It represents the view of the author, not those of the European Parliament, FEPS or FES. The responsibility of FEPS and the FES is limited to the publication inasmuch as it informs the work of the FFPPVC and, more generally, is considered worthy of attention by the global progressive movement.

Copyright 2025 by FEPS & FES EU Office Brussels

Front page photo: Shutterstock
Content editors: Agnes Mach, Policy Officer for Gender Justice, FES EU Office, and Laeticia Thissen, Senior Policy Analyst on Gender Equality, FEPS
Project coordination: Laeticia Thissen (Senior Policy Analyst on Gender Equality) and Julia Wild (Project Officer) for FEPS, and Agnes Mach (Policy Officer for Gender Justice) for FES EU Office
Copy editing: Rosalyne Cowie
Layout: Downtown

Legal deposit registration number: D/2025/15396./37
ISBN number: 978-2-39076-042-9 9782390760429

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The FFP landscape in the EU – from momentum to margins? 4

Understanding the drivers of FFPs 4

The motives: Efficiency; leadership; reputation; and alliances 4

- Motive 1: Efficiency 5
- Motive 2: Leadership 6
- Motive 3: Reputation 7
- Motive 4: Alliances 7

The European FFP landscape in flux 8

Conclusions and recommendations 9

- Motive 1: Efficiency 9
- Motive 2: Leadership 9
- Motive 3: Reputation 10
- Motive 4: Alliances 10
- Overview of all four motives: opportunities, risks, and recommendations 11

Endnotes 13

About the author 15

About FEPS and FES EU Office Brussels 16

THE FFP LANDSCAPE IN THE EU – FROM MOMENTUM TO MARGINS?

After Sweden started the trend in 2014 by introducing a feminist foreign policy (FFP), a number of countries followed suit. At its peak, over 15 states had officially declared an FFP – not including those countries that did not officially label their foreign policy as such but were aiming towards similar goals. Among the official FFP states were also seven EU member states: Sweden; Luxembourg; France; Spain; Germany; the Netherlands; and Slovenia. In the EU itself, there is no unity about the goals of an FFP. Nevertheless, the introduction of FFPs in some member states has encouraged feminist interventions in EU institutions and provided a "feminist moment" within foreign and security policy institutions.[1]

But has this feminist moment, at least in the EU, passed? Today, the majority of EU member states that once officially embraced an FFP – Sweden, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Germany – have scrapped their commitment, with only France, Spain and (theoretically) Slovenia remaining. This has to be seen in a European context, where a strong pushback against feminist concerns on the international, national and domestic levels can be witnessed. Conversations on how to strengthen feminist demands are becoming more difficult, while many countries from outside the EU, especially in the Global Majority, are increasing their commitment to FFP topics,[2] highlighting a divergence in FFP momentum between regions.

For EU policymakers, understanding the strategic logics behind FFP is crucial – both for those pursuing an FFP and for those advancing related goals under different labels. In an increasingly "realist" policy environment, recognising how normative approaches also serve strategic interests can help sustain feminist commitments and strengthen cooperation to foster those.

UNDERSTANDING THE DRIVERS OF FFP

While research has often examined the normative foundations of an FFP, or the (lack of) success of its implementation, less attention has been paid to the strategic rationales underpinning its adoption. Yet these rationales exist – and they vary depending on the actor. This does not mean that normative commitments are absent. Instead, governments adopting FFPs usually do so out of a genuine belief that they contribute to a more just and inclusive world.

Yet alongside these normative motivations, additional interests are at play. Not only do they sometimes constrain the implementation of FFP, as Karin Aggestam, Annika Bergman Rosamond and Annica Kronsell write, and "may need to be balanced against commitments to an ethically informed feminist foreign policy",[3] but they can also be integral to the very decision to adopt an FFP in the first place. For both implementers and advocates, it is important to be aware of these strategic logics – as well as the opportunities they offer and the risks they entail. Only then can they be used constructively to advance feminist-informed policies.

THE MOTIVES: EFFICIENCY; LEADERSHIP; REPUTATION; AND ALLIANCES

In foreign policy, a long-standing debate revolves around whether values or interests should take precedence in policy making. Interests are mostly considered as material or state-centred, often focusing on security, economic power or geopolitical influence. Often, they reflect only the interests of a few, whereas values encompass principles that affect the majority's everyday lives at their core: rule of law; democracy; human rights; social justice; gender equality; and societal resilience.[4] Interests are typically treated as harder, more legitimate drivers of (foreign) policy, while values are relegated to the realm of idealism. In today's increasingly geopoliticised world, arguments framed around values tend to enjoy less credibility than those framed around interests. FFP is mostly perceived

firmly in the values corner – a fact that leaves it vulnerable to realist critiques.

But the implementation of FFP is not insulated from traditional interests. This policy brief examines how such interests are reflected in practice by identifying four distinct motives: (1) **efficiency**; (2) **leadership**; (3) **reputation**; and (4) **alliances**. Each motive has its own potential and vulnerabilities. While actors typically exhibit one dominant orientation, the motives inevitably overlap (and I will return later to how they *should* overlap).

Motive 1: Efficiency

Few arguments for gender equality have travelled as far as the promise of efficiency: equality is not only just, but also useful. It generates measurable benefits for peace processes, institutions, economies and societies. The evidence is well established. The following studies are often being quoted: In 2015, a McKinsey report showed how women's economic participation drives global growth.[5] Research has drawn links between women's inclusion and more durable peace agreements,[6] and the diminished risk of a country relapsing into civil war decreases when at least 35% of the legislatures is female.[7] Institutions such as NATO have also noted that operations function more effectively when gender perspectives are integrated, underscoring the institutional gains of equality.[8] In this framing, feminist approaches that aim at gender equality appear not (only) as a normative aspirations, but as performance enhancers that deliver better outputs across sectors.

This efficiency motive has also spilled over to the discourse on FFP. Besides the normative aspect of gender equality being the just, right thing to do, the "extrinsic-utilitarian aspect",[9] as Claudia Zilla calls it, highlights the positive impact equal participation can have. It is therefore not surprising that many of the official strategy papers on FFP mention this correlation.

Germany's former Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, Svenja Schulze, pointed towards this in her speech marking the publication of the strategy for feminist development policy, saying that it is not only a question of justice, but also "worthwhile to strengthen the rights, resources and representation of women and girls", as it would lead to less poverty, less hunger and more stability.[10]

Similarly, Spain's strategy paper on FFP mentions how "gender equality favours employment, economic growth, increased productivity, and improved social structures" and how "women's full participation in all phases of conflict resolution, including peace processes, has proven essential to their effectiveness, success and sustainability".[11]

The appeal is obvious. Efficiency arguments are measurable, actionable and communicable, which is why they usually resonate strongly with implementing bodies, such as ministries or development agencies. Benchmarks – the percentage of women in leadership positions, the presence of gender budgeting, the rate of female participation in peace talks – allow institutions to track progress and present "best practices" to domestic and international audiences.

In societies where feminism carries little public traction, the efficiency argument has proved to be an effective tool for broadening support, as it shows that engagement in FFP is useful and legitimate. Yet, only focusing on this line of argument risks narrowing the political scope of FFP. By framing FFP purely as gender equality – and gender equality mainly as a technocratic issue – it can inadvertently depoliticise its very subject.

While it might increase public acceptance of gender-equality measures, it is questionable if it can lead to a broader feminist impact on society. The focus on efficiency sidelines wider feminist concerns, which are not (or less) measurable, such as the transformation of power relations and structural inequalities, but also measures in concrete policy fields that go beyond strengthening gender equality, such as the focus on human security and a peace-oriented approach to security.

In short, while effective for implementation, this approach alone risks reducing FFP to a quantitative exercise, rather than pushing for deeper political and normative change. Nevertheless, it is an important pillar that can cater to a genuine interest: making policies effective and impactful.

Motive 2: Leadership

While the efficiency argument speaks to the pragmatics of policy design and the public, a more subtle motivation for states to adopt an FFP is that of normative leadership and soft power. Sweden set the tone for this as the first country to implement an FFP. This allowed it to "brand" itself as a progressive nation, and as a global pioneer and norm entrepreneur in linking feminism and foreign policy.[12] To date, many FFP approaches are oriented towards the Swedish 3R model, focusing on rights, resources and representation.

This nation-branding enables "states to enhance their reputation and self-images beyond borders".[13] The first-mover advantage created a benchmark against which others were invited to measure themselves: every additional country adopting an FFP both validates the norm and raises the reputational costs of abstaining. FFP thus operates in a logic of diffusion: the more governments subscribe to it, the stronger the gravitational pull for others – otherwise, they could be seen as lagging behind in the competition to be a role model for gender equality.

At the same time, FFP offers a tool of demarcation. In the past, gender equality was largely relegated to the realm of domestic policy and did not have a geopolitical component. Today, however, it increasingly marks a geopolitical cleavage line – between, on one side, states that frame gender equality and the support of civil society as constitutive of democracy, and on the other side, those advancing anti-rights agendas in multilateral fora.

In this sense, FFP is not only a foreign policy framework but also a tool of (dis)alignment:[14] FFP states invoke it explicitly to underscore their democratic identity and multilateral vocation, thereby positioning themselves diametrically against authoritarian challengers. As Jennifer Thomson writes, "FFP largely acts to promote states' adherence and commitment to liberal international norms and the liberal international order".[15]

FFP can present part of a bigger narrative that the state wants to represent abroad. Johanna Möhring describes this for the case of France: "Abroad, with a FFP, France highlights its historic image as […] 'fatherland of human rights', stressing its role as an agent for progressive change, rather than a mere 'status quo power', permanent member of the UN Security Council".[16] In Spain, instead, it is contextualized with its strong social movements, while in Sweden, again, it describes the continuation of a "decades-long feminist state agenda".[17]

However, this approach is vulnerable to (accusations of) hypocrisy if domestic and foreign policies are not aligned. Promoting feminist values abroad while underfunding feminist civil society at home undermines credibility. The same is true if, for example, arms exports, trade agreements or bilateral relations with authoritarian states contradict feminist principles,[18] or if diplomatic positions in conflict – such as towards what many experts and human rights organizations characterise as a genocide in Gaza – do not align with them. Furthermore, this motive bears the risk of engaging in a "postcolonial logic",[19] as Ekatherina Zhukova writes, and risks fostering colonial discourses and practices, as well as exporting feminist frameworks without accounting for local contexts or diverse understandings of gender equality.[20]

Finally, while leadership can also be a powerful motive to advance the discourse around FFP, it is less easily measurable than efficiency arguments. This makes it harder to demonstrate success in concrete terms, especially to domestic audiences or sceptical stakeholders. Nevertheless, especially in the context of an increasingly geopoliticised world, this motive bears some weight.

Motive 3: Reputation

As shown, FFP is not only a matter of efficiency, but also of image building. Not only can states leverage this marker of progressiveness, but also individuals and political parties, speaking to their electorate and their international audience. It brands an individual politician or a party as a champion for gender equality and feminism.

Furthermore, FFP can again be used as a demarcation, this time against political competitors, or mark a departure from the previous government. In Germany, this was quite visible: after 16 years of Angela Merkel's chancellorship, the incoming coalition sought to mark a rupture. For the Greens, holding the Foreign Ministry for the first time since 2005, adopting a feminist framing signalled novelty and distinction. While former Foreign Minister Heiko Maas from the Social Democrats had already emphasised the importance of the women, peace and security agenda, the Greens needed to make their own imprint.

In these cases, FFP serves not only as policy but also as political branding – a way of narrating a new chapter. While it often comes along with an increase of women in leadership, as well as a generational shift,[21] it is not only branding based on the identity of the actors, but also signals a new political approach and different political practices, such as more inclusive policy making. Especially in contrast to the appearance of authoritarian strongmen in politics, as Karin Aggestam and Annika Bergman Rosamond write:

> *"The focus on feminist foreign policy leadership, [...] was contrasted to the hypermasculine leadership styles of an increasing number of populist political leaders such as Russian President Vladimir Putin, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, US President Donald Trump and the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan."*[22]

The potential of this motive is significant. Strong leadership from the top can give FFP external visibility and internal legitimacy, especially in the implementing bodies themselves, such as the foreign ministry, which might be sceptical. Furthermore, it politicises FFP and elevates it beyond technocratic management. Also, it creates space for wider societal debates. What should foreign policy be for? Who gets a voice in shaping it? By aligning personal and party reputations with FFP, leaders can anchor feminist questions at the heart of foreign policy discourse. Trailblazers are therefore indispensable for advancing FFP – or pro-gender norms in general – onto the agenda and into practice.[23]

But their prominence can also be the Achilles' heel. Person-driven strategies make the concept vulnerable to the success of individual leaders or their parties: they can propel it, but (electoral) turnover can just as quickly dismantle it.

Instead, as Kvinna til Kvinna has shown, "cross-party consolidation and parliamentary support"[24] is important to prevent "FFP becoming too person-driven". For FFP to endure, ownership must be broadened institutionally – across ministries, within foreign services and through parliament. Furthermore, individual image politics around FFP only works under certain societal conditions, namely, where feminism carries positive connotations and has electoral appeal, at least to the core clientele. In societies where feminism – or FFP – is contested or increasingly politicised, this strategy risks fragility and short-termism.

Motive 4: Alliances

A fourth added value of FFP lies in its alliance-building capacity. As more countries adopt FFPs, a new diplomatic dynamic has emerged: the creation of a club of like-minded states.[25] This club is visible in the FFP+ group at the UN, in regional coalitions and in the proliferation of high-profile gatherings – from ministerial conferences in Berlin, The Hague, Mexico City and Paris to the Female Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Ulaanbaatar or FFP sessions at the Munich Security Conference.

Here, numbers matter. Each additional country that joins strengthens the political weight of the network. Especially in times where multilateralism is declining, these alliances offer a helpful diplomatic tool, especially since they expand beyond the boundaries of old, traditional alliances, which have often been geographically or economically defined. Unsurprisingly, almost all national FFP strategies highlight alliance building as a central pillar. FFP and multilateralism are presented as strongly connected.

This coalition logic also serves geopolitical interests: FFP offers an opportunity to access the international arena and "increase political legitimacy for countries that hold less power in the global system".[26] It can therefore give countries more access to the inner circle of international politics – something that is often prevented by power structures inherent to already existing geographically and economically shaped alliances. For middle powers, this can be of interest, as Jennifer Thomson describes for the case of Sweden, which "as a middle power, [is] eager to work multilaterally and happy to be seen as a key player on development issues".[27]

But it is not a one-way street – for bigger states as well, FFP offers opportunities to extend cooperation with like-minded states that are not represented in traditional alliances. Finally, there is a personal benefit here as well – alliance building also works as a networking and trust-building tool among leaders. It strengthens the connection and has also been used as a women's network among female foreign ministers. Especially in the field of foreign policy and diplomacy, where a lot of professional cooperation hinges on interpersonal relationships, this can prove beneficial.

This coalition logic provides significant added value. In a world marked by increasing transactionalism and the erosion of established multilateral institutions, such partnerships offer an opportunity to strengthen partnerships while advancing a normative cause. Furthermore, they could provide the impetus for joint action in times of crisis and provide room for coordinated responses[28] – and in doing so build an ecosystem of response, rather than siloed answers that risk inefficiency.

As more countries from the Global Majority join, these alliances can also foster a diversification of feminisms, moving FFP beyond a Eurocentric paradigm, and thus, strengthening its legitimacy. Moreover, broader groupings, such as the FFP+ format, open the door to cooperation with countries that may not adopt the feminist label wholesale but pursue similar approaches in practice.

At the same time, this can come with a risk: when membership itself becomes valuable, there is a danger that the club becomes more attractive than the principles it claims to embody. A label without substance risks hollowing out any transformative aspect. Moreover, alliances must guard against self-isolation. If FFP coalitions limit themselves to curated, like-minded spaces, such as the FFP+ group, they risk creating comfortable feminist bubbles disconnected from the more contentious – and often more powerful – arenas of multilateralism where pushback is fiercest. FFP governments must therefore ensure coherence: their commitments to alternative forums must align with their engagement in traditional multilateral institutions.

THE EUROPEAN FFP LANDSCAPE IN FLUX

A few years ago, the number of EU countries committing to FFP was steadily growing. Today, several of them have withdrawn from their FFPs. The political environment has become increasingly focused on national interests rather than values, responding to the geopolitical situation with predominantly hard security measures, sidelining human security approaches. Civil society organisations face mounting pressure, both financially and politically. Progressive voices, particularly in multilateral forums, are in decline. In this context, it is all the more important to think strategically about how to advance feminist concerns.

Yet there are also positive developments: additional countries joining the FFP club; diversifying the geographical scope and content of FFPs globally; offering new opportunities for alliances beyond the

EU; and a growing body of research and civil society work on FFP.

In this fast-changing landscape, the motives for adopting FFPs are likely to shift. The International Women's Development Agency's report on "A decade of feminist foreign policy: Changing trajectories of adoption and accountability over time",[29] which discusses enabling factors for governments to adopt an FFP, shows how they have already done so in the past ten years.

One strategic debate that continuously surfaces during conversations is whether the term *feminism* itself still carries added value in such a polarised environment. Some argue that the label can be traded off to safeguard at least the substance of FFP. Yet examples such as Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany suggest that when the term disappears, so do financial commitments, institutional mechanisms and the space for feminist civil society. At the same time, feminism is also highly contextual – while in some environments, it may resonate and mobilise; in others, it may trigger rejection. What all agree on, however, is that this well-funded, highly strategised anti-gender backlash that we currently witness will most likely not be halted by abandoning the word *feminism*.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While debates on FFP have often revolved around values and norms, this policy brief discussed four additional motives that drove states to adopt and implement such an approach: efficiency; leadership; reputation; and alliances. It has aimed to disentangle these types – showing the content of each, the potential they carry and the side effects that can arise, especially when pursued in isolation.

The dominating motive depends often on context: the image of feminism within a country, its size and geopolitical position; or even the role of actors – whether as diplomats, politicians or representatives of an implementing institution. While one motive often prevails, this policy brief argues for embracing a comprehensive approach: a solid scientific foundation is nothing if nobody knows about it. A good branding exercise doesn't work if there are no partners to work with. And partnerships are nothing if you have no clue what the effects of your efforts are. The following recommendations are therefore aimed at helping to both diversify the motives and to set the course to successfully shape them while taking into account the risks.

Motive 1: Efficiency

Efficiency arguments make gender equality and FFP seem both just and useful, linking them to peace, growth and stability. Yet, focusing only on measurable gains risks turning FFP into a technocratic tool instead of a driver of real structural change.

- **Invest in evidence**: fund studies, research and evaluations to provide up-to-date data and commission studies specifically focused on the broader impacts of FFP. Use those numbers strategically and quote reliable, current statistics to strengthen credibility.

- **Institutional reform and capacity building**: restructure and reform ministries accordingly to ensure internal coherence and external credibility.[30] Provide internal training for diplomats and staff to integrate these approaches into practice.

- **Combine the numbers with broader feminist explanations**: explain, for example, why it is that peace processes are more sustainable when women are included – and prevent reducing those numbers to gender-essentialist arguments.

Motive 2: Leadership

Beyond efficiency, adopting FFP can be used to project normative leadership and soft power, and to brand it as progressive and committed to liberal international norms. Yet, this strategy risks accusations of hypocrisy if words and actions

diverge, or if feminist values are promoted abroad but not upheld at home.

- **Deepen partnerships with civil society**: engage systematically with feminist actors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and grassroots movements – both domestically and internationally – to anchor FFP in societal legitimacy and to avoid imposition.

- **Put your own house in order first**: look at the domestic-foreign policy nexus. Align feminist commitments across all ministries, not just the foreign office, to create a genuinely holistic FFP.

- **Address your (post)colonial past and present**[31]: integrate historical accountability into FFP to enhance credibility and trust, especially with Global Majority partners.

Motive 3: Reputation

FFP can also serve as a tool for political branding, allowing leaders and parties to signal progressiveness, mark change and distinguish themselves from rivals. Yet, when tied too closely to individual figures or partisan agendas, FFP becomes fragile.

- **Invest in strategic media work and raise public awareness**: build visibility through sustained public relations, press engagement and storytelling that links FFP to broader societal concerns.[32]

- **Highlight effectiveness with values**: showcase concrete results and efficiency gains to reinforce the perception that FFP is not symbolic branding but effective policy.

- **Consolidate across parties**: anchor commitments beyond individual leaders by fostering cross-party support and embedding FFP in parliamentary debates. Bring FFP into regular parliamentary discussions and hearings to secure democratic legitimacy and long-term continuity.

Motive 4: Alliances

FFP strengthens alliance building by creating networks of like-minded states, expanding diplomatic influence, and has the potential to foster collaboration across crises and sectors. Yet, these coalitions risk becoming symbolic clubs if principles are sidelined, or isolated bubbles if they disengage from broader multilateral arenas.

- **Use alliances for action, not only symbolism**: alliances should serve as vehicles for coordinated responses, joint initiatives and shared messaging – not just as forums for declarations. Membership of the FFP club should come with active contributions.[33]

- **Expand alliances beyond states**: enable civil society to play a meaningful role and support alliance building between civil society actors. Each FFP gathering should integrate an institutionalised civil society component to ensure accountability, fresh ideas and legitimacy.

- **Strengthen regional clusters**: beyond the global FFP+ alliance, regional groupings can play a crucial role. Also within the EU, establish a dedicated platform of state actors to exchange on context-specific challenges and strategies, such as pushback, and to coordinate how FFP can be advanced at the EU level.

Despite offering some added value, FFP that orients itself only around strategic interests risks losing sight of its original purpose: challenging, transforming and dismantling unequal power structures while informing foreign policy. Without a grounding in a strong normative value base, FFP becomes vulnerable to a neoliberal logic of usefulness. This leaves those who are advocating for FFP in a position that must be balanced: fostering argumentation lines that focus on the inherent values and preventing them from being dismissed from the agenda, but, at the same time, outlining the strategic benefits to reach their audience in the first place.[34]

Civil society thus faces playing a dual role: acting as watchdogs against the hollowing out of FFP's normative core, while at the same time strategically recognising the usefulness of added-value arguments in certain contexts. This policy brief aims to contribute to that balancing act – not to (de) legitimise pragmatic motivations, but to clarify their limits and ensure they remain the means and not the ends of the implementation of FFP.

Overview of all four motives: opportunities, risks, and recommendations:

Motive	Description	Recommendation
Efficiency	**Opportunities**: - measurable; therefore, this also resonates well with implementing bodies and institutions - easy to highlight success, which can be an effective tool for broadening support	• **Invest in evidence**: fund studies, research and evaluations to provide up-to-date data, and commission studies specifically focused on the broader impacts of FFP. Use these numbers strategically and quote reliable, current statistics to strengthen credibility • **Institutional reform and capacity building**: restructure and reform ministries accordingly to ensure internal coherence and external credibility.[35] Provide internal training for diplomats and staff to integrate these approaches into practice • **Combine the numbers with broader feminist explanations**: explain, for example, why it is that peace processes are more sustainable when women are included – and prevent reducing these numbers to gender-essentialist arguments
	Risks: - very technocratic motive, risks depoliticising the topic - very focused on a measurable gender-equality agenda, risks sidelining less measurable goals of FFP	
Leadership	**Opportunities**: - normative leadership and soft power, branding a state as progressive and committed to liberal international norms	• **Deepen partnerships with civil society**: engage systematically with feminist actors, NGOs and grassroots movements – both domestically and internationally – to anchor FFP in societal legitimacy and avoid imposition • **Put your own house in order first**: look at the domestic-foreign policy nexus. Align feminist commitments across all ministries, not just the foreign office, to create a genuinely holistic FFP • **Address your (post)colonial past and presence**: integrate historical accountability into FFP to enhance credibility and trust, especially with Global Majority partners
	Risks: - accusations of hypocrisy if words and actions diverge, or if feminist values are promoted abroad but not upheld at home	

Reputation	**Opportunities**: - tool for individual or party branding to signal progressiveness or mark a change - trailblazers can push FFP successfully on the agenda **Risks:** - makes it vulnerable to the rise and fall of the individual/party - less successful where societies reject feminism or FFP	• **Invest in strategic media work and raise public awareness**: build visibility through sustained public relations, press engagement and storytelling that links FFP to broader societal concerns[36] • **Highlight effectiveness with values**: showcase concrete results and efficiency gains to reinforce the perception that FFP is not symbolic branding but effective policy • **Consolidate across parties**: anchor commitments beyond individual leaders by fostering cross-party support and embedding FFP in parliamentary debates. Bring FFP into regular parliamentary discussions and hearings to secure democratic legitimacy and long-term continuity
Alliances	**Opportunities:** - creates networks of like-minded states, expanding diplomatic influence - can drive joint action in times of crisis and create space for coordinated responses - diversification of FFP and feminism **Risks**: - if membership becomes more valued than the goals themselves, implementation suffers - risk of remaining within comfortable feminist „bubbles“, rather than engaging in traditional, more influential multilateral forums	• **Use alliances for action, not only symbolism**: alliances should serve as vehicles for coordinated responses, joint initiatives and shared messaging – not just as forums for declarations. Membership of the “FFP club” must come with visible contributions • **Expand alliances beyond states**: enable civil society to play a meaningful role and support alliance building between civil society actors. Each FFP gathering should integrate an institutionalised civil society component to ensure accountability, fresh ideas and legitimacy • **Strengthen regional clusters**: beyond the global FFP+ alliance, regional groupings can play a crucial role. Also within the EU, establish a dedicated platform to exchange information on context-specific challenges and strategies, such as pushback, and to coordinate how FFP can be advanced at the EU level

Endnotes

1 Guerrina, R., T. Haastrup and K. A. M Wright (2023) "Contesting feminist power Europe: Is feminist foreign policy possible for the EU". European Security, 3(32): 485-507; here p. 486. DOI: 10.1080/09662839.2023.2233080

2 See, for example: D. Sepúlveda, E. Papworth and T. Leite (2024) "Feminist foreign policy in the EU and Latin America: Building bridges and sharing lessons learned". Policy brief. FEPS and FES, October.

3 Aggestam, K., A. Bergman Rosamond and A. Kronsell (2018) "Theorising feminist foreign policy". *International Relations*, 1(33): 23-39. DOI: 10.1177/0047117818811892

4 Stamm, L. (2024) "How feminist foreign policy can help overcome outdated dichotomies". *International Politik Quarterly*, 4: 30 January.

5 Woetzel, L., A. Madgavkar, K. Ellingrud et al. (2015) "The power of parity: How advancing women's equality can add $12 trillion to global growth". MacKinsey Global Institute, 1 September.

6 Krause, J., W. Krause and P. Bränfors (2018) "Women's participation in peace negotiations and the durability of peace". *International Interactions*, 6(44): 985-1016. DOI: 10.1080/03050629.2018.1492386

7 Demeritt, J., A. Nichols and E. Kelly (2014) "Female participation and civil war relapse". *Civil Wars*, 3(16): 346-368. DOI: 10.1080/13698249.2014.966427

8 Prudhoe, K., G. Hillerby, A. P. Kyle et al. (eds) (2024) "Military voices on the gender perspective: A NATO anthology". NATO, June.

9 Zilla, C. (2023) "Foreign policy reorientation: Feminist foreign and development policy in ministerial documents and debates". SWP Comment, C 22; p. 3. DOI: 10.18449/2023C22

10 Speech by Svenja Schulze to open the conference on "Feminist development policy – transforming international cooperation": "Rede von Entwicklungsministerin Svenja Schulze zur Eröffnung der Konferenz 'Feminist development policy – transforming international cooperation'". Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, 27 September 2022.

11 "Spain's feminist foreign policy: Promoting gender equality in Spain's external action". Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación, p. 6.

12 See Aggestam, K., A. Bergman Rosamond and E. Hedling (2024) *The Politics of Feminist Foreign Policy and Digital Diplomacy* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan). DOI: 10.1007/978-3-031-63697-4; K. Jezierska and A. Towns (2018) "Taming feminism? The place of gender equality in the 'Progressive Sweden' brand". *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 14: 55-63. DOI: 10.1057/s41254-017-0091-5

13 Aggestam, K., A. Bergman Rosamond and E. Hedling (2024) *The Politics of Feminist Foreign Policy and Digital Diplomacy*, p. 54.

14 Ridge, A., L. Gill-Atkinson and J. Pradela (2024) "A decade of feminist foreign policy: Changing trajectories of adoption and accountability over time". International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), p. 12.

15 Färber, K. and J. Thomson (2025) "Interrogating the 'feminist' in feminist foreign policy", in J. Joachim, A. Kronsell and N. Dalmer (eds) *Gender and Security: Persistent and New Security Issues* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar), p. 81.

16 Möhring, J. (2025) "Feminist foreign policy in contested times: French, German, and Franco-German perspectives". Women in International Security France and Heinrich Böll Stiftung Paris.

17 Achilleos-Sarll, C., J. Thomson, T. Haastrup et al. (2023) "The past, present, and future(s) of feminist foreign policy". *International Studies Review*, 1(25): viac068; p. 3. DOI: 10.1093/isr/viac068; corrigendum: *International Studies Review*, 1(25): viad001. DOI: 10.1093/isr/viad001

18 Aggestam, K. and A. Bergman-Rosamond (2016) "Swedish feminist foreign policy in the making: Ethics, politics, and gender". *Ethics & International Affairs*, 3(30): 323-334. DOI: 10.1017/S0892679416000241; E. Zhukova (2021) "Postcolonial logic and silences in strategic narratives: Sweden's feminist foreign policy in conflict-affected states". *Global Society*, 1(37): 1–22. DOI: 10.1080/13600826.2021.2010664

19 Ibid.

20 Zilla, C. (2022) "Feminist foreign policy: Concepts, core components and controversies". SWP Comment, 48.

21 Ridge, A., L. Gill-Atkinson and J. Pradela (2024) "A decade of feminist foreign policy: Changing trajectories of adoption and accountability over time", p. 15.

22 Aggestam, K., A. Bergman Rosamond and E. Hedling (2024) *The Politics of Feminist Foreign Policy and Digital Diplomacy*, p. 38.

23 Ibid, p. 34.

24 "Making feminist foreign policy a reality: Experiences and lessons learned from one of Sweden's largest women's rights organisations". Policy brief. The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, 2023.

25 Stamm, L. (2023) "Mongolia leans in to feminist foreign policy". *The Diplomat*, 3 July.

26 Ridge, A., L. Gill-Atkinson and J. Pradela (2024) "A decade of feminist foreign policy: Changing trajectories of adoption and accountability over time", p. 13.

27 Färber, K. and J. Thomson (2025) "Interrogating the 'feminist' in feminist foreign policy", p. 12.

28 Stamm, L. (2023) "Mongolia leans in to feminist foreign policy".

29 Ridge, A., L. Gill-Atkinson and J. Pradela (2024) "A decade of feminist foreign policy: Changing trajectories of adoption and accountability over time".

30 See: K. Färber (2025) "Diversifying the Federal Foreign Office: The German foreign policy discourse on credibility". *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 2(21): oraf013. DOI: 10.1093/fpa/oraf013

31 Färber, K. and Standke-Erdmann, M. "Claiming Historical Responsibility? The Persistence of Coloniality in German Feminist Foreign Policy". *Politics & Gender*. Published online 2025:1-29. DOI: 10.1017/S1743923X25100184.

32 For the connection between (social) media and FFP, see: K. Aggestam, A. Bergman Rosamond and E. Hedling (2024) *The Politics of Feminist Foreign Policy and Digital Diplomacy*.

33 See also: Ridge, A., L. Gill-Atkinson and J. Pradela (2024) "A decade of feminist foreign policy: Changing trajectories of adoption and accountability over time", p. 35.

34 See also: ibid, p. 24.

35 See K. Färber (2025) "Diversifying the Federal Foreign Office: The German foreign policy discourse on credibility".

36 For the connection between (social) media and FFP, see: K. Aggestam, A. Bergman Rosamond and E. Hedling (2024) *The Politics of Feminist Foreign Policy and Digital Diplomacy*.

About the author

Copyright: Zsófia Pölöske

LEONIE STAMM

Leonie Stamm has been a research fellow at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) in Berlin since 2021. Her work focuses on gender in and feminist approaches to foreign and security policy, including the Women, Peace and Security agenda and Feminist Foreign and Development Policy. Furthermore, she coordinates the DGAP study groups on strategic issues, European policy, and global challenges. These groups bring together members of the German Bundestag, ministry officials, and representatives of the foreign policy community for confidential discussions. Their aim is to foster debate on strategic questions of German and European positions and to develop concrete policy options. Previously, Stamm worked at the Schwarzkopf Foundation and Körber Foundation in the department of international affairs. In her M.A., she focused on the interplay of gender and foreign and security policy; and conducted research on the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda, in particular its implementation in Lebanon.

ABOUT THE FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN PROGRESSIVE STUDIES (FEPS)

The Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) is the think tank of the progressive political family at EU level. Its mission is to develop innovative research, policy advice, training and debates to inspire and inform progressive politics and policies across Europe.

FEPS works in close partnership with its 76 members and other partners – including renowned universities, scholars, policymakers and activists – forging connections among stakeholders from the world of politics, academia and civil society at local, regional, national, European and global levels.

FEPS
FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN PROGRESSIVE STUDIES

Avenue des Arts 46, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium
+32 2 234 69 00
info@feps-europe.eu
www.feps-europe.eu
@FEPS_Europe

ABOUT THE FRIEDRICH-EBERT-STIFTUNG (FES) EU OFFICE

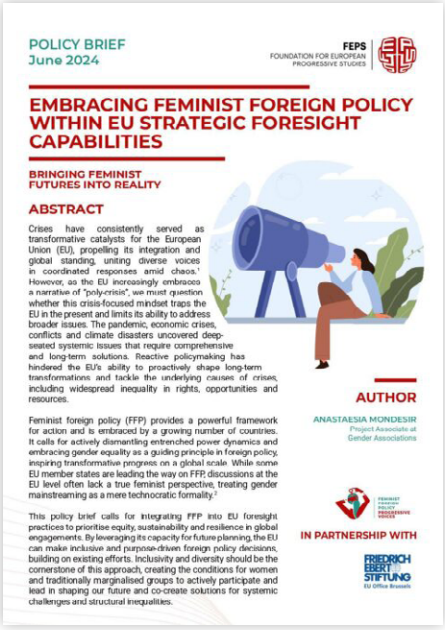
The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is a non-profit German foundation funded by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, and headquartered in Bonn and Berlin. It was founded in 1925 and is named after Germany's first democratically elected President, Friedrich Ebert. FES is committed to the advancement of both socio-political and economic development in the spirit of social democracy, through civic education, research, and international cooperation. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is the oldest political foundation in Germany.

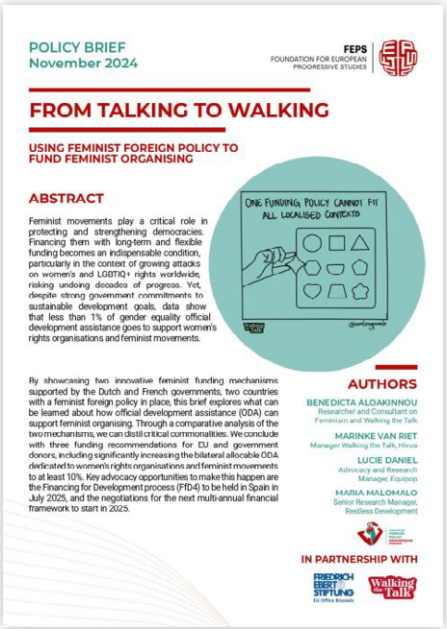
The EU Office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung was established in 1973. It participates in the European integration process, backs and accompanies the interests of the Federal Republic of Germany in Europe and contributes to shaping the external relations of the European Union.

Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

FES EU Office
Rue du Taciturne 38, 1000 Brussels (Belgium)
+32 (0)2 234 62 90
https://brussels.fes.de/
@FES_Europa

ON SIMILAR TOPICS





Scan and read

Beyond Values: How Feminist Foreign Policy Serves Strategic Interests