

FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY IN PRACTICE

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF COUNTRY FRAMEWORKS

Since 2014, five countries have announced feminist approaches to foreign policy and/or international development. Additionally, the UK Labour party committed to a feminist international development platform while in opposition in 2018. Already this year, in addition to the launch of Mexico's feminist foreign policy, other countries, including Malaysia and Spain have pledged to adopt feminist foreign policies.



Snapshot of feminist approaches

While there is no single definition of a feminist foreign policy, there are many commonalities (and some key differences) between the various policies that have been adopted to date, specifically in relation to how each policy is framed, the stated goal and objectives of each policy, how they are applied and their implementation and reporting. All of the policies announced to date apply to both the external work of the relevant agencies as well as their internal policies and practices. All policies are framed in terms of human rights, and many make specific reference to international human rights commitments and treaties. Several policies make financial commitments to ODA, and/or set performance and spending targets for gender equality activities, the gold standard being Canada's commitment that 95% of its ODA will target or integrate gender equality.

	Framing	Goal	Objectives	Application	Implementation & reporting
Sweden (2014)	3 Rs (rights, representation, resources) Human rights, intersectionality Multilateral frameworks & agreements	"contribute to gender equality and all women's and girls' full enjoyment of human rights"	6 thematic objectives (rights, violence, WPS, political participation, WEE, SRHR)	Internal and external across all foreign policy. Links to domestic policy	Multiyear commitments with annual action plans, current three year cycle (2019 – 2022)
Canada (2017)	Transforming social norms and power relations Human rights, intersectionality, research, evidence and accountability SDG 5	"eradicate poverty and build a more peaceful, more inclusive and more prosperous world" via gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls	6 action areas: gender equality, human dignity, growth that works for everyone, environment and climate action, inclusive governance, peace and security	Internal and external across all foreign policy. Links to domestic policy (e.g. National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security)	Commitment to partner with local women's rights organisations Target that 95% of ODA will target or integrate gender equality Annual reporting to Parliament via the ODA Accountability Act

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UK Labour Party (2018)	Principles of gender justice, human rights, intersectionality, solidarity Achievement of the SDGs	Twin goal of reducing poverty and ending the global crisis of inequality “tackle the structural causes of gender inequality, transform gender norms and challenge patriarchy in everything that DFID does.	5 objectives: A fairer global economy, a global movement for public services, a feminist approach to development, building peace and preventing conflict, action for climate justice and ecology	Internal and external across all areas of foreign policy; connected to social justice policies in the UK	Fully implemented within 5 years. Includes commitments to triple DFID’s funding support to WROs; implement a gender transformative approach to DFID work; step up technical assistance and funding for gender mainstreaming
France (2019)	Multilateral frameworks & agreements and the SDGs. Human rights, intersectionality, gender mainstreaming	Gender equality, empowerment and equal rights of women and girls Bolster France’s action in favour of gender equality	Five areas of intervention: Lead by example, policy/advocacy interventions, ODA financing, communication and transparency, supporting civil society and sharing results. Supported by thematic priorities.	Internal and external application of international development policy. Connection to broader foreign policy commitments and approaches.	Five year strategy, which outlines baseline and targets, as well as accountability framework with specific outcomes, indicators, relevant stakeholders and time bound commitments.
Luxembourg (2019)¹	Women’s rights as human rights	Systematically defending the rights of women and girls	Core goal of “enhancing socio-economic integration of women and youth” and gender equality as a cross-cutting priority	Announcement indicates internal and external; cross reference to other commitments including NAP on WPS	Commitment of at least 0.7% of GNI to ODA (currently exceeding this target and spending 1%)
Mexico (2020)	Human rights Gender mainstreaming	“to reduce and eliminate structural differences, gender gaps and inequalities, in order to build a more just and prosperous society.”	5 principles: mainstreaming a feminist approach across all foreign policy; gender parity at all levels of the foreign ministry; combatting gender-based violence, including within the ministry; making equality visible; and intersectionality.	Internal and external across all areas of foreign policy	Responsibility for implementation lies with the Undersecretary for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights

¹ Commitment announced, but policies have yet to be updated

Country by country approaches to feminist foreign policy

SWEDEN

As the first country to adopt a feminist foreign policy, Sweden's approach has set a baseline for understandings of the concept. Sweden's definition, at essence, involves a commitment to gender equality as the central goal of foreign policy, as well as committing to apply a gender lens across all areas of their work and operations.¹ It is positioned in the context of relevant international agreements on human rights and gender equality, including the UDHR, CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action, International Conference on Population and Development, UN security council resolution 1325 on women peace and security, and the 2030 Agenda.

Sweden's policy is described through "The Three Rs":

- **Rights:** promoting all women's and girls' full enjoyment of human rights, and combating all forms of violence and discrimination that restrict their freedom of action.
- **Representation:** promoting women's participation and influence in decision making at all levels and in all areas, and dialogue with women representatives at all levels, including in civil society.
- **Resources:** working to ensure that resources are allocated to promote gender equality and equal opportunities for all women and girls to enjoy human rights. The Swedish Foreign Service shall also promote targeted measures for different target groups.

Sweden operationalises and reports on its progress via multiyear commitments and annual action plans that provide more detail on how the commitments are being operationalised.² Currently, the objectives in the 2019–2022 action plan are organised thematically around enjoyment of human rights, freedom from violence, women peace and security, political participation and influence, economic rights and empowerment, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

CANADA

Like Sweden, Canada's international assistance policy puts gender equality at the heart of their work. They state their vision for feminist international assistance as one "that seeks to eradicate poverty and build a more peaceful, more inclusive and more prosperous world", and that "Canada firmly believes that promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls is the most effective approach to achieving this goal."³

Canada's feminist approach to international assistance is framed as one that aims to promote gender equality and empower women by transforming social norms and power relations. To achieve this, Canada's policy commits to partnering with women's rights organisations and engaging men and boys, and is supported by principles including human rights-based, inclusive, strategic, transformative, evidence-based and accountable.

The policy is operationalised through six action areas (gender equality and women's empowerment (core), human dignity, inclusive growth, environment and climate action, inclusive governance, peace & security). It is underpinned by a commitment that "95 percent of Canada's bilateral international development assistance initiatives will target or integrate gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls by 2021-22" (measured against the OECD DAC marker and including 80% to programs with gender equality as a secondary objective, and 15% to programs with gender equality as a primary objective). Progress against the policy is reported to parliament annually via the ODA Accountability Act, the Departmental Results Report, and via the International Aid Transparency Initiative.

UK LABOUR PARTY

In March 2018, the UK Labour party adopted a feminist international development policy.⁴ The policy is framed around the achievement of the SDGs, and proposes to amend the purpose of international development to reduce both poverty and inequality. The policy identifies 5 priorities:

1. **A fairer global economy**, including action on UK trade, taxation and debt policy and support to developing countries on tax avoidance; prioritising people over profit; reform of global economic governance institutions.
2. **A global movement for public services**, including increasing ODA to health and education, ending support for PPPs that privatise public services, and investment in public health research.
3. **A feminist approach to development**, including tripling DFID's support to grassroots women's rights organisations, implementing gender transformative approaches, investing in disaggregated

data, expanding feminist approaches to foreign policy & trade, action on gender-based violence, championing sexual, reproductive health and rights and protecting women human rights defenders.

- 4. Building peace and preventing conflict**, including increased humanitarian funding for prevention, replacing securitised approaches with human rights based funding mechanisms, and engaging through the UN Security Council.
- 5. Action for climate justice and ecology**, including divesting from all fossil fuel related projects, investing in publically owned renewable energy, meeting UK commitments to the Paris Agreement, influencing multilateral banks to divest from fossil fuels and testing alternative economic models such as the circular economy.

The policy affirms the commitment to dedicate 0.7% of GNI to ODA, and commits to development effectiveness principles and evidenced-based policy. It includes commitments to new funding mechanisms that provide direct support to activists in the global south, and action to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector. It also commits to new forms of accountability that promote local ownership, and aid communications that “move away from a narrative of aid and charity and towards one of rights and international social justice.”

24 specific, time-bound steps outline these commitments and how Labour would implement these plans in government; together they represent a new approach to doing development differently.

FRANCE

France has evolved its policy approach over several years, from an international development policy focused on gender equality, to “feminist diplomacy”, to an explicit commitment to “feminist foreign policy,” which encompasses international development and diplomacy.⁵ France practices feminist diplomacy by advocating for gender equality in international forums, and included a strong focus on gender equality as part of its 2019 hosting of the G7.⁶

France’s approach to feminist international development is outlined in its international strategy for gender equality (2018-2022). The approach makes reference to relevant international frameworks including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, International Conference on Population and Development, Aid Effectiveness statements, CEDAW and the SDGs. It also connects the policy to domestic legislation and policies on gender equality. The approach is guided by three principles: comprehensive, rights based and gender based.

The goal of the strategy is to “bolster France’s action in favour of gender equality” to be pursued through five “areas of intervention”:

- 1. Lead by example**, including commitments to increasing the number of women in senior departmental and ambassadorial roles, gender training for all staff, and systematic inclusion of gender equality in Ministry strategies.
- 2. Bolstering political support for gender issues**, including mainstreaming gender across all areas of international development and foreign policy.
- 3. Better financing for actions for equality**, including a commitment that 50% of ODA will be dedicated to projects that include an objective to reduce gender equality.
- 4. Making action for equality more visible**, including guidance to Ministry and agency staff on language use, and establishing indicators to measure progress.
- 5. Supporting civil society and sharing results**, aiming to develop discussion and feedback between NGOs, private sector, research and public authorities.

Additionally, the strategy outlines 5 thematic priorities for action towards equality for women and girls: access to services (including education and SRHR); access to economic resources and decent work; access to rights and justice and protection from violence; participation in economic, political and social decision-making forums; and equal participation in peace and security.

Baseline data supports these commitments and actions for improvement, as well as an accountability framework with specific outcomes, indicators, relevant stakeholders and time bound commitments.

LUXEMBOURG

Luxembourg publically committed to develop a feminist foreign policy approach in March 2019, following on from the coalition agreement formed between the three governing coalition members (Democratic Party, Luxembourg Socialist Workers’ Party, Green Party) following an election in 2018.⁷ The announcement by

the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs defines feminist foreign policy as one that acknowledges women's rights as human rights, and systematically defends the rights of women and girls (with specific reference to policy and economic rights and the right to sexual self-determination). It also references strengthening the representation and participation of women within foreign policy and defence establishments, and implementing the women peace and security agenda (via Luxembourg's National Action Plan on WPS).

Luxembourg has not yet updated its Development Cooperation Strategy since the announcement of its commitment to a feminist foreign policy approach; however, the existing strategy includes "enhancing socio-economic integration of women and youth" as one of its four goals, and includes gender equality as a cross-cutting priority along with human rights and environmental sustainability.

Luxembourg is one of the few countries to commit to allocating 0.7% of GNI to ODA, and since 2009 has exceeded that target, allocating 1% of its GNI to ODA.

MEXICO

In 2020 Mexico became the latest country to launch a feminist foreign policy approach (following its announcement in 2019), but the first in the global south to do so. Its policy is framed around human rights and commits to applying a gender perspective across all areas of work.⁸

Mexico's policy has five principles:

1. Conducting all aspects of foreign policy with the intent to advance gender equality and a feminist agenda;
2. Achieving gender parity at all levels of staff in the foreign ministry;
3. Combatting all forms of gender-based violence, including within the ministry;
4. Making equality visible; and
5. Practicing intersectional feminism, which is to say, an approach that values not only women's rights but also other intersecting social, economic, and environmental justice issues.

Additionally, Mexico's policy commits to go beyond the advancement of women, and explicitly aims to fulfil the rights of LGBT people, and prioritise the "issues that others are not prioritizing such as sexual and reproductive health and rights and climate change."⁹ Mexico's Undersecretary for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights will be responsible for overseeing the policy, while implementation will fall on various entities in the Foreign Ministry.¹⁰

ENDNOTES

¹ Government of Sweden, “Handbook: Sweden’s Feminist Foreign Policy,” 2018, <https://www.government.se/reports/2018/08/handbook-swedens-feminist-foreign-policy/>.

² Government of Sweden, “The Swedish Foreign Service Action Plan for Feminist Foreign Policy 2019–2022, Including Direction and Measures for 2020,” 2019, <https://www.government.se/493d0d/contentassets/2b694599415943ebb466af0f838da1fc/the-swedish-foreign-service-action-plan-for-feminist-foreign-policy-20192022-including-direction-and-measures-for-2020.pdf>.

³ Government of Canada, “Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy,” 2017, <https://international.gc.ca/world-monde/assets/pdfs/iap2-eng.pdf>.

⁴ Kate Osamor, “A World for the Many Not for the Few: The Labour Party’s Vision for International Development” (UK Labour Party, 2018), https://www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/uploads/editor/files/World_For_The_Many.pdf.

⁵ Lyric Thompson and Rachel Clement, “Defining Feminist Foreign Policy” (Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women, 2019), https://n2r4h9b5.stackpathcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/ICRW_DefiningFeministForeignPolicy_Brief_Revised_v5_WebReady.pdf.

⁶ France Diplomatie, “Feminist Diplomacy” (Republique Francaise), accessed March 29, 2020, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/feminist-diplomacy/>. Jean-Yves Le Drian and Marlène Schiappa, “Feminist Foreign Policy: Joint Article by M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, and Mrs. Marlène Schiappa, Minister of State for Gender Equality and the Fight against Discrimination, in the Daily Newspaper Libération, Paris, 8 March 2019,” 2019, <https://onu.delegfrance.org/Feminist-foreign-policy>.

⁷ Jean Asselborn, “Foreign Policy Address Presented by Mr Jean Asselborn Minister of Foreign and European Affairs to the Luxembourg Parliament on 13 March 2019” (Le Gouvernement du Grand-Duche de Luxembourg, March 13, 2019), https://maee.gouvernement.lu/content/dam/gouv_mae/minist%C3%A8re/d%C3%A9clarations-de-politique-%C3%A9trang%C3%A8re/2019/EN-Declaration-de-politique-etrangere-2019.pdf.

⁸ Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, “Mexico Adopts Feminist Foreign Policy. Press Release 15.” (Gobierno de México, September 1, 2020), <https://www.gob.mx/sre/prensa/mexico-adopts-feminist-foreign-policy?idiom=en>.

⁹ This commitment draws the International Centre for Research on Women’s Global Framework for Feminist Foreign Policy. Lyric Thompson, “Mexican Diplomacy Has Gone Feminist,” *Foreign Policy* (blog), January 14, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/01/14/mexican-diplomacy-feminist-foreign-policy/>; Lyric Thompson, “Feminist Foreign Policy: A Framework” (Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women, 2020), https://n2r4h9b5.stackpathcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/FFPFramework_d12-spreads.pdf.

¹⁰ Teresa Welsh, “Mexico Releases Latin America’s First Feminist Foreign Policy,” *Devex* (blog), January 15, 2020, <https://www.devex.com/news/mexico-releases-latin-america-s-first-feminist-foreign-policy-96363>.