

A DECADE OF FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY:

**CHANGING TRAJECTORIES
OF ADOPTION AND
ACCOUNTABILITY OVER TIME
2024**

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ABOUT IWDA

IWDA is an Australia-based organisation, resourcing diverse women's rights organisations primarily in Asia and the Pacific and contributing to global feminist movements to advance gender equality for all. IWDA holds a strong commitment to translating research into action.^[1]

Building on the findings of the 2021 edition of this research, *From Seeds to Roots: Trajectories towards feminist foreign policy*, we established the Australian Feminist Foreign Policy Coalition (AFFPC) to collectively take forward the work of advancing discourse on FFP in Australia.

Since 2021 the AFFPC has grown to over 250 individual and organisational members, published 17 editions of the *AFFPC Issues Paper Series* to explore the practical challenges and opportunities of implementing FFP, provided submissions and advice to Australian Government consultations on foreign policy, and released our first podcast *F! It! Exploring feminist and First Nations approaches to foreign policy*.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:
[HTTPS://IWDA.ORG.AU/AUSTRALIAN-FEMINIST-FOREIGN-POLICY-COALITION/](https://iwda.org.au/australian-feminist-foreign-policy-coalition/)**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the world's first feminist foreign policy (FFP), declared by Sweden in October 2014. Since then, a further 14 governments have also declared – if not retained – a formal FFP, with gender equality as the central purpose and key goal^[iii].

In 2020–21, IWDA conducted a qualitative research project that explored how feminist foreign policies (FFPs) and feminist international assistance policies (FIAPs) declared by 4 countries, Sweden, Canada, Mexico and France, had come about. This research was conducted in response to calls from FFP scholars and advocates for more evidence about the key factors and conditions that enabled or undermined the declaration of these policies^[iii]. In response to the findings of this research, particularly regarding the role of civil society in creating an enabling environment for feminist foreign policy, IWDA established the Australian Feminist Foreign Policy Coalition (AFFPC).

In the three years since finalising the research, the FFP landscape has changed dramatically. Including Sweden, 15 governments have had commitments to formal FFPs – 10 more than at the time of our previous research project. Sweden, the first country to pursue FFP, has abandoned its commitment, as have the Netherlands and Argentina. Nearly half of all FFP commitments have now been made by Majority World countries,^[1] and recent geopolitical events, including the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and Israel’s war on Gaza, have influenced FFP trajectories and informed critical debates, questions and tensions about the scope, shape and implementation of FFP.

The purpose of this research project was to update the empirical evidence about the key factors that have influenced FFP trajectories, and whether and how these factors have changed since we last examined this issue in 2020–2021.

Drawing on analysis of interviews with 25 key stakeholders in civil society, academia and government across 14 countries, our research findings relate to 4 key stages of FFP trajectory:

1. Getting to declaration
2. From declaration to development
3. Institutionalisation
4. Future opportunities and pitfalls

Our research confirms that while some of the factors that we identified in 2021 still influence FFP trajectories, recent FFP trajectories have been mostly driven by *new* factors – for better or worse. This reflects evolutions in the FFP landscape as well as changing geopolitical dynamics. The increased numbers of formal FFP declarations, coupled with multilateral traction on FFP through mechanisms such as the FFP+ Group of United Nations, and the normalisation of ministerial-level dialogues

explicitly organised around FFP, has increased legitimacy of the approach. However, the meaningful implementation of FFP (or lack thereof) in the face of mounting crises, both domestic and international, has tempered momentum. It has also raised questions about the fidelity of the FFP approach to feminist underpinnings, particularly among feminist civil society, which remains a key enabler of FFP.

A key consideration in the 2021 research was whether the label ‘feminist’ was worth it. In 2021, many participants expressed the view that the content of foreign policy, not the label, is what matters. However, in our discussion of the findings, we argued that the label *enabled* the content: the political nature of the word ‘feminist’ was in fact critical to demonstrating the necessary political will to implement transformative policy that intentionally seeks to disrupt the status quo.

Research findings presented in this report show that we are yet to see the kind of transformative actions that the ‘FFP’ label promises. Instead, a separate discipline has been absorbed under the FFP label – that of ‘gender mainstreaming’, which broadly means assessing the implications for all genders of actions and policies.

While we had hoped to see greater maturation of the FFP concept, the fact that FFP is now more visible in its absence than in its practice can create confusion that may impede the maturation of FFP beyond the point of usefulness, unless urgent steps are taken.

The timing of this research is critical. In many countries, women’s rights are being aggressively rolled back, with scholars and gender experts calling the situation in Iran^[iv] and Afghanistan^[v] ‘gender apartheid’. Russia’s war on Ukraine is entering its third year, Israel’s war on Gaza has entered its second year and civil conflict is escalating in Sudan and elsewhere. Progressive coalitions are fragmenting and antisemitism and Islamophobia are on the rise, as are right-wing and authoritarian regimes (some in previously progressive countries).

The geopolitical world is rapidly changing, and the sense amongst FFP stakeholders, including those who participated in the research, is that the FFP movement is at a tipping point. The findings, implications and considerations of this report can help strengthen discourse and action on FFP to connect more distinctly with feminist underpinnings and rebalance future trajectories towards the transformative.

1 <https://www.philanthropy.org.au/news-and-stories/the-majority-world-whats-in-a-phrase>

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FFP RELATED ADVOCACY

RESEARCH FINDING

SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS

THEME 1. GETTING TO DECLARATION: FROM STANDING OUT TO FITTING IN

THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE IS NO LONGER A KEY FACTOR

Declarations of FFP are more intentional, come alongside a policy process, signal membership to the ‘FFP club’ and/or a response to anti-rights movements or a need to look proactive on gender equality. Advocates should point out the opportunity to join a like-minded group of countries, rather than characterise FFP as a point of differentiation.

REGIONALLY DEFINED APPROACHES TO FFP AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL SUPPORT FOR ADOPTION (NEW FACTOR)

Advocates should develop and explore regional conceptualisations of FFP and promote opportunities to join regional ‘FFP clubs’, to help enable FFP to be contextually defined in consultation and alignment with local feminist and women’s rights movements.

VALUES-ALIGNMENT OF POLITICAL LEADERS REMAINS CRITICAL; DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFT A NEW ENABLING PATHWAY

Fear of missing out – on belonging to a global or regionally defined FFP collective – rather than personal legacy, may now be the best motivator for political leaders who consider themselves leaders on gender equality.

FFP POSITIONED AS A NEW WAY OF ARTICULATING EXISTING VALUES AND COMMITMENTS; PRAGMATIC DRIVERS STILL RELEVANT IN SOME CONTEXTS (NEW FACTOR)

FFP advocates should emphasise the continuity of FFP with existing practice (as governments that are doing nothing on gender equality are unlikely to be good candidates for adopting FFP in any event) while also emphasising that it is not enough to just do what has always been done, and that FFP requires the ‘ratcheting up’ of ambition.

INSIDER/OUTSIDER FEMINISTS SOFTEN THE GROUND FOR FEMINIST POLICY ANNOUNCEMENTS

FFP advocates should continue to amplify efforts to hold existing FFP governments accountable if they fail to make meaningful changes in their approach. (The risk, otherwise, is a gradual hollowing out of the concept.)

THEME 2. FROM DECLARATION TO DEVELOPMENT: EMERGING GOOD PRACTICE LEAVES EARLY ADOPTERS BEHIND

NEW FFP ADOPTERS PRIORITISE EVIDENCE AND CONSULTATION-INFORMED POLICY DEVELOPMENT

FFP advocates inside and outside government should work to normalise consultation culture across new areas of policy that have been harder to access (such as defence, trade and security).

EARLY ADOPTERS LAGGING BEHIND ON POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Recommendations for best-practice consultation include:

- timebound and transparent policy development processes
- broad consultation, appropriately resourced, across multiple and diverse stakeholder groups
- consultation across all areas of foreign policy (not just international development)
- reporting back to consultation stakeholders on what was heard, and what did and didn’t end up in the final policy
- building in regular formal and informal touchpoints with internal and external stakeholders.

CHALLENGES AND CRITICISMS INCLUDE PRIVILEGING OF INTERNATIONAL OVER LOCAL ORGANISATIONS, VARYING DEGREES OF CONSULTATION ACROSS FOREIGN POLICY FIELDS)

THE EXTENT TO WHICH CONSULTATION INFLUENCES POLICY DEVELOPMENT

FFP advocates in government and civil society (especially in the Minority World) should continue to critically reflect on the types of power they hold and how they are using their power to advocate for transformational shifts in FFP development.

RESEARCH FINDING

SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS

THEME 3. INSTITUTIONALISATION: DEBATES INCREASING, PROGRESS LIMITED**TOP-DOWN AND BOTTOM-UP APPROACHES BOTH CRITICAL FOR INSTITUTIONALISATION OF FFP**

Governments need to invest in long-term, substantive top-down inputs (such as focal points, trainings, guidance, accountability and incentives) as well as engage with bottom-up inputs and advocacy from feminist civil society (such as calls for robust accountability measures and proof of institutionalisation and implementation).

RISKS TO EFFECTIVE INSTITUTIONALISATION: INCENTIVE, POWER, RESOURCING AND THE EXPECTATION-REALITY GAP

Governments can establish robust accountability systems to drive improvements in practice. FFP advocates in civil society need to hold governments accountable for both incremental and transformative shifts.

GREATER FOCUS ON ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS NEEDED TO SUPPORT ONGOING INSTITUTIONALISATION

FFP advocates should focus on pushing for accountability both in areas where government action is furthest away from a transformative feminist approach as well as in areas where it may be possible to make incremental progress.

Feminists inside and outside government need to think critically about the power they hold in balancing the joint imperatives of increasing support for FFP implementation and demanding accountability for (lack of) progress.

TO WHAT EXTENT IS FFP INFLUENCING ACTION?

Feminists both inside and outside government need to think critically about the power they hold in balancing the joint imperatives of increasing support for FFP implementation, and demanding accountability for (lack of) progress.

THEME 4. FUTURE TRAJECTORIES: HAS FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY PEAKED?**FAR-RIGHT GOVERNMENTS POSE THE GREATEST RISK TO FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION OF FFPS**

The current trajectory of FFP as a field of government practice is towards a mix of erosion by election cycle, policy evaporation and ongoing hollowing out of the concept. This could lead to a smaller group of countries using the label, without meaningful shifts towards feminist practice in foreign policy.

CHALLENGES TO FFP LEGITIMACY IN THE CONTEXT OF POLYCRISIS, AND THE LIMITS OF INSIDER/OUTSIDER COLLABORATION

FFP advocates will need to be consistent, targeted and specific in demonstrating *how and why* FFP is a necessary response to polycrisis – how it can be used to make existing global power structures visible, and to problematise, question and ultimately transform them.

QUALITY OVER QUANTITY – BUT WHO DEFINES ‘QUALITY’?

FFP advocates should be cautious of pushing for – or rewarding – the adoption of FFP in name by governments that are unable to demonstrate any appetite for transformative changes in practice. Governments need to develop robust accountability systems to drive improvements in practice.

INTRODUCTION

Since Sweden first declared a feminist foreign policy (FFP) 10 years ago, 14 other governments have also declared – if not retained – a formal FFP. During this time, IWDA has been working to develop an understanding of FFP through research, advocacy and strategic collaborations. In early 2020, we identified a gap in evidence about factors that influence the adoption and declaration of FFPs. At that time, only a small portion of FFP literature examined how and why different countries had come to adopt feminist foreign and/or international development policies, and there was little evidence about the factors that might enable or constrain others from doing so.

FINDINGS OF THE 2021 RESEARCH, FROM SEEDS TO ROOTS

To better improve our understanding of this issue, in 2020–21 we conducted a qualitative research project to contribute empirical data about the trajectories towards declaration, development and institutionalisation of the FFPs and feminist international development policies declared to date. Specifically, these were the policies declared by Sweden, Canada, France, Mexico and the UK Labour Party (in opposition at the time, but which had committed to a feminist international development policy if elected).^[vi]

From Seeds to Roots: Trajectories towards feminist foreign policy reported key findings and implications across 4 themes, summarised below.

GETTING TO DECLARATION

The 2021 research identified 5 critical factors in the declaration of FFPs by the first wave of countries:

1. Announcements of FFP tended to come as a surprise, with political leaders ‘asking for forgiveness, not for permission’ to set a bold, feminist direction for foreign policy.
2. The personal values of political leaders were crucial, with previous efforts at progressive policy reform common among leaders committing to FFP.
3. The commitments were often made in response to a political need for an ‘announceable’ in the area of gender equality – particularly as the #MeToo movement shone light on women’s experience of sexual harassment and violence across various sectors.
4. FFPs were often announced as part of an opportunity for a country to stand out on the world stage, such as when hosting the G7 or Generation Equality Forum.
5. While there was little to no consultation or coordination on the announcement with civil society, decades of advocacy by feminist civil society and women’s rights organisations was critical to creating an enabling environment for these declarations.

The research highlighted the implications of these 5 factors for advocates of FFP adoption and accountability, emphasising the importance of building relationships with progressive political leaders (and potential future leaders) and focusing messaging on the opportunity of FFP for a country to stand out as a global leader on gender equality.

DECLARATION TO DEVELOPMENT

The 2021 research highlighted the role of civil society, including domestic and international actors, in getting from declaration of FFP to policy development. While little progress had been made at that time on policy development, the research findings emphasised the importance of civil society being ready to demand consultation. They also highlighted the potential for tensions between domestic feminist movements, which often saw FFP as hypocritical when commensurate action was not being taken on gender equality issues at home, and international advocates, who were eager to see great adoption of FFP.

Additionally, the importance of government strategies to facilitate ownership of FFP was explored, with a focus on exploring ways to increase institutionalisation across government and ensuring FFP could have longevity beyond the tenure of a particular leader.

FUTURE FFP TRAJECTORIES

The 2021 research also considered potential future trajectories of FFP. Those interviewed expressed mixed views about whether existing FFP commitments were likely to be maintained, and whether new countries would adopt FFPs. This was particularly pertinent in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic: many worried that FFP would be seen as something to do only ‘when the sun is shining’.

DEBATES AND CONTESTED QUESTIONS

The research also surfaced debates and contested questions in FFP discourse at the time. A particular focus was the differing definitions and understandings of FFP between government and civil society, with defence policy and militarisation emerging as the area of greatest difference between these stakeholders. Underpinning this entire project was the critical question: does it matter if you call your foreign policy ‘feminist’?

Participants interviewed for *From Seeds to Roots* held different views on this question. Ultimately, however, IWDA concluded that the use of the label was critical to both signalling the transformative potential of the agenda and demonstrating that the leader adopting it had the political capital to implement it – because if you don’t have the courage to use the word, you likely don’t have what it takes to implement a feminist agenda.

THE STATE OF FFP IN 2024

10 YEARS OF FFP

2014	Sweden (2014-2022)			
2017	Canada (Feminist International Assistance Policy)			
2019	France	Luxembourg		
2020	Mexico	Spain	Canada (FFP)	
2021	Germany	Libya		
2022	The Netherlands	Scotland	Liberia	
2023	Argentina (2023-2023)	Colombia	Slovenia	Chile

Source: Adapted from Katie Whipkey, Kirthi Jayakumar, and Vaishnavi Pallapothu, *Feminist Foreign Policy Tracker, The Gender Security Project, 2019-2024*^[2]

2 In regard to Libya’s commitment to FFP, according to Whipkey, Jayakumar and Pallapothu: ‘The government has not made any further declarations of its commitment to FFP nor its abandonment of the commitment since its original announcement in 2021 at the Generation Equality Forum. However, the only outspoken government official on FFP – former Foreign Minister Najla El Mangoush – was dismissed from her position in August 2023. The government’s commitment is likely to remain unfulfilled.

As we mark 10 years since FFP was first adopted by governments, this research reflects on progress, challenges and evolutions in how and why FFP commitments have come about, as well as the extent to which they have lived up to their transformative potential.

Of the 15 governments that have had at some point over the past decade a formal commitment to FFP, nearly half are in the Majority World,^[3] bringing greater diversity to the definitions and prioritisation of issues within FFP.

For example, most Minority World governments with FFPs have faced backlash for continuing to profit from global military supply chains – in some cases actively defining militarism as congruous with feminism, in contrast to the views of many members of feminist civil society. Yet the Colombian Government, one of several Majority World governments committing to FFP in recent years, identifies pacifism as one of the three guiding principles of its approach.^[vii] Meanwhile, in the sphere of trade and economic policy, the Chilean Government has taken steps to ensure a significant focus on transforming economic structures as part of its FFP, including through prioritising action on comprehensive care systems.^[viii]

Since 2021, several countries have also made commitments to other values-based foreign policy approaches. In 2021, Aotearoa New Zealand's first Māori Foreign Minister, Nanaia Mahuta, gave a speech outlining the Māori world views and values that would guide her foreign policy, speaking of:

manaaki – kindness or the reciprocity of goodwill; whanaunga – our connectedness or shared sense of humanity; mahi tahi and kotahitanga – collective benefits and shared aspiration; and kaitiaki – protectors and stewards of our intergenerational wellbeing.^[ix]

In 2022, Australia's Foreign Minister Penny Wong committed to a First Nations approach to foreign policy 'that weaves the voices and practices of the world's oldest continuing culture into the way we talk to the world'.^[x] This commitment led to the appointment of an Ambassador for First Nations

People and the establishment of an Office for First Nations International Engagement within the Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.^[xi]

This new thinking from settler-colonial countries about embedding First Nations approaches into foreign policy represents a new development in the landscape alongside FFP, with significant points of interconnection.^[xii]

At the same time, we have begun to see governments moving away from previous commitments to FFP. The abandonment of Sweden's commitment to FFP following the election of a far-right government in 2022 (in what many had presumed to be a progressive country) has been one of the most significant developments in the landscape. As the first country to pursue FFP in 2014, Sweden has been highly influential in shaping the agenda. The election of a far-right government, which chose to move away from the feminist label on foreign policy as one of its first acts of government, has highlighted the tenuous nature of these commitments.

Sweden's shift was followed by a short-lived commitment in 2023 from the then government of Argentina (jettisoned when the ruling party lost office to the far-right). A change of government in the Netherlands later that same year also resulted in the decision to move away from FFP.^[xiii]

At the same time, geopolitical events (such as the wars in Ukraine and Gaza) are exposing limitations, contradictions, incoherences and lack of accountability for practising feminist foreign policy. The vast differences in the response of different FFP governments to Israel's war on Gaza has highlighted the lack of coherence in how FFP is guiding – or is failing to guide – their approaches.

This failure of FFP to provide a unifying basis for action in the face of what the International Court of Justice has determined is the Palestinian people's plausible rights to protection from genocide^[xiv] has led many among feminist civil society to express concerns about the concept's overall credibility.

3 IWDA chooses to use the term 'Majority World' in place of 'global south', 'developing world' or 'third world', and 'Minority World' in place of 'global north', 'developed world' or 'first world'. This is a political choice, as using this language demonstrates that 'global south' populations and cultures are in the global majority, thereby challenging the problematic hierarchies implied by other commonly utilised terminology. See IWDA, 'Decolonial Framework and Strategy' 2023, <https://iwda.org.au/resource/iwda-decolonial-framework-and-strategy/>

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research sought to update the empirical evidence about the key factors that have influenced FFP trajectories, and determine how these have changed. This evidence is critical to provide a comprehensive evidence base to support advocacy of FFP uptake and accountability.

Our guiding question was: What factors and conditions have enabled the declaration, development and institutionalisation of feminist foreign policies?

In line with IWDA's feminist and decolonial research values, this research project adopted a qualitative research methodology and research activities that were feminist, accountable and collaborative, with a view to creating evidence that can contribute towards achieving transformational change.^[xvi]

To build the broadest view of the influences and drivers (and spoilers and challenges) to the declaration, development and institutionalisation of FFPs, and how these have changed, in-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders across civil society, academia and government, who contributed specific knowledge of countries that have adopted FFP.

Interviews were conducted between October 2023 and February 2024 with twenty-five participants from 14 countries. Participants had distinct knowledge of one or more of the FFP trajectories of 12 countries that have at some point made a commitment to feminist foreign policy. Nine of the interviews were with government representatives and the remaining 16 with representatives working in civil society or academia.

Data analysis was thematic, participatory and involved multiple stages. Members of the research team first identified key themes from the interview

transcripts. Research participants were then invited to review and provide verbal and/or written feedback on these themes and their implications for knowledge and advocacy. Eleven research participants, including representatives from government, civil society and academia, did so.

Further feedback was invited, and received, by participants in 3 convenings held in Mexico City in June and July 2024: the 2024 Convening of the Global Partner Network for Feminist Foreign Policy (27 to 29 June), the III Ministerial Conference on Feminist Foreign Policy, 'Solutions for a better tomorrow' hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico (1 to 3 July) and 'Towards a Feminist Foreign Policy in Latin America and the Caribbean: Side event on the margins of the III Ministerial Conference on Feminist Foreign Policies' (2 July). Three additional people provided oral or written feedback on a written summary of the key findings and discussion questions. This participatory validation process helped to strengthen and nuance the research findings.

It is important to note that there were several limitations to this research project. We were unable to reach participants with distinct knowledge of Liberia, Libya or Luxembourg's pathways towards adopting FFP. In the case of Germany, we were unable to interview a member of the government and rely instead on civil society perspectives. In the cases of Spain and Slovenia, we were only able to speak to representatives from government. As this research focused primarily on the *trajectories* of FFP – rather than thoroughly assessing the *effectiveness* of their implementation – perspectives are drawn from those in countries with commitments to FFP, rather than people in countries that might be affected by those foreign policies. Further enquiry to address these limitations is warranted.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Our research findings are organised chronologically, according to the factors that influence the 4 phases of feminist foreign policy (FFP): getting to declaration, declaration to development, institutionalisation and future trajectories. Each section briefly compares the findings with the key factors identified in the 2021 research, and assesses how these have changed or remained consistent. This is followed by a discussion of the implications of the updated findings for further enquiry and action.

THEME 1. GETTING TO DECLARATION: FROM STANDING OUT TO FITTING IN

KEY FACTORS IN 2021	STILL A KEY FACTOR?	KEY FACTORS IN 2024
Declarations come as a surprise	No	Declarations more intentional and come alongside a policy process
Are made by a values-aligned political leader	Yes	Values-alignment of leader still relevant, with FFP seen as a new way of articulating existing values
Responding to the need for an 'announceable'	In some countries	A mix of values-based and pragmatic drivers still relevant in some contexts
Are made on the world stage, with a desire to stand out	No	Motivation to position countries among an 'FFP club'
Are supported by an enabling environment for feminist policy-making, created by feminist civil society	Yes	Feminist insiders and outsiders both play a crucial role

The 2021 research, *From Seeds to Roots*, identified 5 key factors in the declaration of feminist foreign policies (FFPs). These were that declarations:

- come as a surprise
- come from a values-aligned political leader
- respond to the need for an 'announceable' and/or an opportunity on the world stage
- are supported by an enabling environment for feminist policy-making created by feminist civil society.

Today, however, the element of surprise and the imperative to 'stand out on the world stage' no longer seem to be key factors. Countries are instead using FFP as a way to signal the alignment of their values with others' values – including via regionally defined approaches – and/or their opposition to anti-rights movements.

The alignment of values of political leaders remains important, as does – in some cases – the pragmatic need for an 'announceable'. The role of civil society in creating an enabling environment for FFP was affirmed, with a new theme emerging: the critical importance of collaboration, or interplay, between feminists both inside and outside governments.

In this context, actors within governments are increasingly framing FFP as a new way of articulating existing values and commitments, suggesting this could be an effective strategy to build support within government for using the label. But in so doing they create new risks: that the commitments under FFP are not different enough from business-as-usual gender equality efforts to generate more transformative feminist outcomes, and that by lumping these efforts together, they may be expanding the target for those opposing feminist practice.

THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE IS NO LONGER A KEY FACTOR

With the proliferation of FFPs over recent years and a corresponding increase in advocacy for FFPs by feminist civil society groups, the element of surprise no longer seems to be a key imperative or factor for declaring FFP.

I think there's a transition. I feel like those early initial countries were very keen on being the first, being in that vanguard, like Sweden being the first, or Mexico being the first Global South country. And they're really proud of that. I feel like the kind of second wave of countries is a bit more interested in saying, we're joining the FFP Club, we're part of this band of like-minded countries that are doing these wonderful things.
– Anonymous

In the Netherlands, for example, the declaration was achieved by a mix of political, bureaucratic and civil society engagement processes, with a deliberate and intentional review of what the value-add of a feminist approach would be for the Dutch,^[xvi] who were already noted in the development cooperation sector as leaders in gender equality and feminist approaches to aid funding.

This is consistent with a shift from early declarations, designed to be attention-grabbing and help a government 'stand out' in the crowd, to more recent declarations that are about signalling like-mindedness, or joining a group.

It also contradicts our supposition in the 2021 research that the appeal of FFP could diminish as more countries adopted it, as the motivation of early adopters seemed to be more about 'standing out' and differentiating themselves from other political leaders. Instead, it is now seen as a way to signal membership of a group of like-minded countries that care about gender equality – which can also increase political legitimacy for countries that hold less power in the global system.

... it can be a legitimating tool. You know, the UN had the Feminist Foreign Policy+ Group ... joining this club at the UN can signal that you care, or you're involved in what is seen as sort of progressive politics and care about gender justice. – Toni Hastrup, Chair in Global Politics, University of Manchester, UK

Declaring an FFP was also seen as a response to the growing influence of anti-rights movements, both social and political. In this context, the Generation Equality Forum was commonly cited as an example of a forum that inspired countries to look for more ways to advance gender equality and human rights outside the gridlock of the traditional UN architecture, and the UN FFP+ group was seen as a new space for collective commitments (exemplified by the September 2023 Political Declaration on Feminist Approaches to Foreign Policy)^[xvii]. This link was connected to the politics of using the word 'feminist' (explored further in subsequent sections), which some described as a way to draw a 'line in the sand' against anti-rights movements.

Well, I think the most important [factor enabling commitment to FFP] was the changes in the UN. As the situation in the UN, specifically in the CSW [Commission on the Status of Women], was very difficult. The first initiative to change things was the Generation Equality Forum ... we started to think we need to do some things to impact the UN in order to become more open and allow our ideas to be supported and to be executed and incorporated. – Mabel Bianco, President, Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer, Argentina

It's an important declaration by a government in an increasingly polarised world where you have the pushback on rights and where you have Hungary and Poland and Russia and previously Bolsonaro [in Brazil] – these very authoritarian, anti-gender, anti-rights governments that have this counterweight of governments who actually declare their foreign policies 'feminist'. The fact that [the UN FFP+ Group] were able to come out with a declaration in September I think is really interesting. They thought it was important to do ... it doesn't have a lot of super-innovative text, but the fact that they were able to come to a consensus on a political document I think is really interesting in this moment when there's so much contention at the UN and negotiations are really fraught. – Beth Woroniuk, Senior Fellow, Feminist Foreign Policy Collaborative, Canada

There were some outliers to this trend of 'fitting in' rather than 'standing out' by declaring FFP. In the case of Scotland, civil society representatives explained it as a way for Scotland to distinguish itself from the rest of the United Kingdom.

While driven by the unique political context of Scottish nationalism, this echoes the trend encountered in 2021 where countries adopting FFP did so to stand apart from a neighbouring country or previous government.

Officially we don't have a 'foreign policy' as a sub-state. That's both a kind of constraint and an enabler ... It's not simple for the Scottish Government to announce it has a feminist foreign policy in the way that say Sweden or Canada or Australia can. Every time the Scottish Government makes an utterance like that, it attracts the ire of the UK government, and this can have an inhibiting effect on policy initiatives. But in some ways, being a substate is an enabler because, when the party that governs is the Scottish National Party (SNP) (which it has been since 2007), a feminist foreign policy perhaps becomes more likely because the SNP is often looking for ways to try and distinguish Scotland from the rest of the UK and make Scotland look like it could be an independent state. – Claire Duncanson, Senior Lecturer in International Relations, University of Edinburgh, Scotland

REGIONALLY DEFINED APPROACHES TO FFP AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL SUPPORT FOR ADOPTION

A new dynamic of FFP regionalism has emerged in recent years through the growth of FFP commitments in Latin America. Mexico's position among the first wave of adoptees, closely followed by Spain in 2021, provided strong examples of Spanish-language FFPs that government officials across Latin America could learn from. Mexico has become a go-to for FFP in the region, providing advice to other countries that are considering – or have already committed to – FFP, for example by developing agreements with other countries in the region to strengthen feminist foreign policy approaches.

We have been working on the adoption of a feminist foreign policy with different countries ... To give an idea, the other day I received a call from a top official of this country ... like ... 'we are looking to adopt a FFP thus I want to know how you did it. I want to know everything because we are either in the process or we want to adopt one, or we have been using this gender perspective way on a particular way'. In the last months we have been working closely with Chile, Argentina, Colombia and Honduras. – Cristopher Ballinas Valdés, academic, human rights expert,

former Director General for Human Rights and Democracy – Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, and author of Mexico's Feminist Foreign Policy

Movement of diplomats around the region has also been an enabler of FFP uptake. For example, Verónica Rocha, the lead ambassador of Chile's feminist foreign policy, had come to her role directly from a posting to Mexico, where she had engaged with senior officials implementing FFP.

The last five years I was posted in Mexico ... [it] was part of my job as a diplomat to find out more about the Mexican feminist foreign policy. – Verónica Rocha, Ministra Consejera, Jefa de Gabinete del Ministro, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Gobierno de Chile

This FFP regionalism also extends post-declaration, with countries actively working together to develop FFP approaches that respond to the Latin American context. The 'High-Level Meeting on Feminist Foreign Policy: Vision and Challenges from Latin America and the Caribbean' held in August 2023 was a key demonstration of this effort. Organised through a collaborative push from feminist civil society and feminist insiders within governments, it provided a critical platform for a shared regional FFP agenda.^[xviii]

We are a group of the countries that have feminist foreign policies. We know that our feminist foreign policies are very different to the feminist foreign policies, for example, of Northern countries ... feminist foreign policies of Latin American respond to her context. – Diana María Parra Romero, Advisor on Gender Affairs and Feminist Foreign Policy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Colombia

Beyond the region, Spain, Canada and Germany were often named as countries providing advice and support to FFP declaration elsewhere. Despite Sweden abandoning the concept, Swedish proponents continue to influence others to take up the concept, including through the efforts of its former Foreign Minister as an informal global ambassador for FFP. As the first country to adopt FFP, Sweden has played a major role in shaping the agenda and influencing the practice of other countries. Sweden also remains one of the few countries to have developed comprehensive guidance to support FFP implementation and to commission an independent evaluation of the progress of their FFP.^[xix]

One of my main goals was to see, too, that the concept of the feminist foreign policy was brought to other countries' attention. Now it's roughly 15 countries who have a feminist foreign policy ... By systematically bringing up the issue of a feminist foreign policy, we hoped to get interest, which we also did. – Ann Linde, former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sweden

VALUES-ALIGNMENT OF POLITICAL LEADERS

The values of the political leader behind the commitment to FFP are still a considerable factor in its adoption. Commitments almost always come from progressive political parties with ministers and other senior figures who publicly identify as feminist. This was particularly the case for Spain and Chile, where the Prime Minister and President of these countries (respectively) were self-proclaimed feminists championing gender equality agendas.

... the Prime Minister in Spain is feminist. And we know that in all his meetings, in all his visits with other Prime Ministers, he always put gender equality on the agenda. – Anonymous

I think President Boric [is] very much considered a feminist ... the government was really looking at changing a lot of policies at the national level and in foreign affairs around women. – Paulina Ibarra, former Executive Director, Fundación Multitudes, Chile

Another new pathway emerging through this research update is the role of demographic changes in foreign policy leadership. For example, in Slovenia and Mongolia, significant achievements for women's representation in foreign policy leadership – rather than a commitment to feminism per se – were noted as driving influences, suggesting that a surge in women's representation may be an enabling factor for FFP commitments. This was sometimes linked to 'generational shifts' in political leadership, where a change of government leads to an influx of younger representatives who are more open to feminism.

We have now three of the most important postings in government, and in the country, run by

women. So we have a President of the Parliament, we have a President of the Republic, and we have a Foreign Minister. So this is for the first time in the history of the Slovenian nation that we have these three posts held by women. – Peter Grk, Secretary-General of Bled Strategic Forum and Western Balkans Coordinator, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Slovenia

I think that it was the input of a new generation coming into politics at the highest level ... Gabriel Boric is 36. He is the President of a generation who was born in democracy. I think that they're more ambitious – they're more audacious. – Verónica Rocha, Ministra Consejera, Jefa de Gabinete del Ministro, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Gobierno de Chile

[Mongolia has] a very, very active woman Foreign Minister and she has been very active in the network for female foreign ministers ... Her party, the Mongolian People's Party, is very much into gender and feminism ... they have a big generational shift. – Ann Linde, Former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sweden

In some contexts, interviewees named pragmatic – as well as values-based – drivers. This is consistent with the first wave of FFP adopters, where the influence of the #MeToo movement on political parties was being felt, incentivising governments to look for gender-focused and feminist policy 'announceables'. Consistent with the 2021 research, this was not the only driver in our latest research, but one of a range of enabling factors.

The Dutch reputation is that we're very progressive, and that we are one of the frontrunners when it comes to women's rights and gender equality. But there's also still a lot to do in the Netherlands ... Just to paint a wider picture, in that same spring, we had several things happening. There was a big #MeToo scandal in a public broadcaster, and we had a letter of 600 female civil servants leaked to the press shining a light on the glass ceiling. And there was uproar, also in the press, about the Minister appointing a man as the next Director General for Political Affairs, instead of a woman. So those three things were out in the public debate. – Anonymous

AN EMERGING PATHWAY: PROGRESSIVE ACTORS IN COALITION GOVERNMENT MODELS

While the personal values of the responsible minister play an important role, another emerging pathway for declaration of an FFP is through the role of progressive members within coalition governments.

The 2021 research did not look in depth at the case of Luxembourg (due to limitations in our ability to secure interviewees with distinct knowledge of the context); however, its FFP commitment was negotiated as part of a coalition governing arrangement – the only example of this approach in the first wave of FFPs.^[xx]

In this update, we found that the Green Party were instrumental in securing Germany's commitment to FFP via negotiations to form a governing coalition. Meanwhile, the coalition model of government in the Netherlands was an enabling factor in its ultimate adoption of FFP. This emerging pathway may prove to be an effective strategy for advocates of FFP working in countries whose political systems tend to produce coalition governing arrangements.

It definitely came through the Green Party and was facilitated by the social Democrats. And luckily not blocked by the liberals [members of the coalition government in Germany] – that is how I would describe it. – Kristina Lunz, Co-Founder and CEO, Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, Germany

POSITIONING FFP AS A NEW WAY OF ARTICULATING EXISTING VALUES AND COMMITMENTS

In the 2021 research, FFP was positioned by some as a way of 'upping the ante' on previous achievements in gender equality. For example, in Mexico it was noted that then Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard had a strong previous record on gender equality issues and saw FFP as a way to lift the policy ambition.

An emerging trend in this research update is that most new FFP commitments were described as a sharper articulation of existing values, and a

continuation of longstanding commitments to gender equality in foreign policy. Some government interviewees reported using this framing in their internal advocacy to build support for FFP by positioning it as consistent with, or an extension of, existing commitments and practice.

Human rights and rule-based international order are two pillars, two principles where Slovenia's foreign policy was actually created. So in this sense, we wanted to put even more focus on the issues that we hold dear ... we are already abiding by the same principles that the Minister for Foreign Policy should abide to. So we should maybe framework it a little bit better. – Peter Grk, Secretary-General of Bled Strategic Forum and Western Balkans Coordinator, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Slovenia

What we did was to change the focus and try to underline that this was not a super transformational ideal. The idea was to propose an approach of continuity of all the principles of the Chilean foreign policy – based on human rights, based on democracy. That it was not an idea of some crazy feminists that happened to be diplomats. It is the continuation of the work of this ministry, the work that this ministry have been doing for the last 30 years ... this idea of feminist foreign policy was 2.0 phase or 2.0 level to articulate better this narrative, not to invent something new. – Verónica Rocha, Ministra Consejera, Jefa de Gabinete del Ministro, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Gobierno de Chile

Existing commitments to gender equality and human rights were often described as national values, or 'something we've always done'. Yet the case of Argentina's short-lived commitment to FFP demonstrates that national values are always contested, and therefore not immune to shifts in the political climate.

The critique from civil society about this approach, however, is that treating FFP as a simple re-brand of gender-focused or women-focused initiatives is appropriating the feminist label without sufficient attention to the transformative nature of feminist praxis. In other words, the sharper *articulation* is not necessarily translating into sharper *practice*.

One of the things that has really emerged over the last three years is the fact that feminist foreign policy has become kind of an alternate term for prioritising gender equality in foreign policy practices. Now, one of the things that we then question – is this about giving more visibility to existing gender equality programs? ... Or is this about changing the ethos of foreign policy itself so that it aligns with feminist ethics? ... it hasn't, and I'm not sure that it can, because foreign policy by its definition is supposed to be hierarchical, supposed to be about a state defining itself in opposition to another. – Toni Haastrup, Chair in Global Politics, University of Manchester, UK

... at the Labour Party conference this year, [the then Shadow Minister] was talking a lot about 'Labour's going to have a feminist development policy' ... And what she talked about in the context of that was just the stuff that development ministers have talked about for the last 15 years across parties in British government, which is women and girls, and girls' education. – Anonymous

INSIDER/OUTSIDER FEMINISTS SOFTENING THE GROUND FOR FEMINIST POLICY

The role of feminist civil society in creating the enabling environment for FFP remained a strong theme in this update. In contrast to the 2021 research, in a few contexts there were civil society groups who were *explicitly* advocating for the adoption of FFP, something that had not yet emerged in the first wave of adoptions.

In Germany, the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy had been leading efforts calling on the government to adopt FFP, which was a critical factor in adoption.

It was actually in 2023 at the Munich Security Conference ... that Annalena Baerbock, the German Foreign Minister, said that there would not be a feminist foreign policy in Germany had it not been for us. – Kristina Lunz, Co-Founder and CEO, Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, Germany

Beyond this direct advocacy, broader efforts by civil society to build up public sentiment in support of gender equality and feminist objectives over time were noted as enabling factors in FFP adoption.

For example, successful advocacy by the Green Wave movement for reproductive rights in Latin America was seen as laying the foundations for FFP, by creating a political climate that was more conducive to feminist policy. The role of feminists within government was also an important factor, through the decades-long project to establish the foundations for gender mainstreaming and feminist work inside bureaucracies. In some cases, interviewees could point to individual feminists who had been at the forefront of these efforts to advance gender equality for decades.

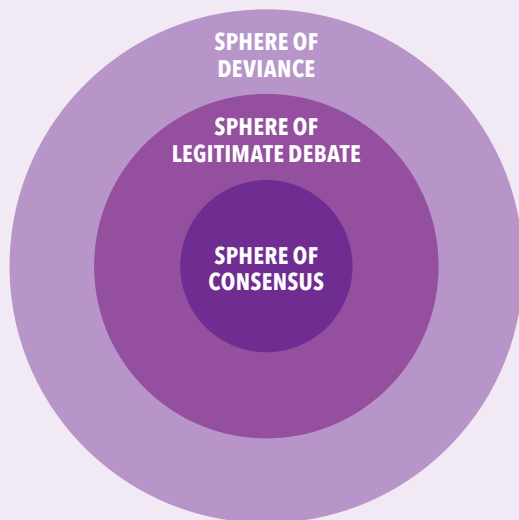
We have here in Argentina, for many, many years – let's say in the beginning of the '90s – we have in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a unit for gender issues that [although the direction did not come from] a very top level, it was important, and there were all the preparations for CEDAW [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women], for everything. – Mabel Bianco, President, Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer, Argentina

If the question is, does civil society play a role, the answer is 'absolutely'. But my sense was ... it was overwhelmingly started in government ... mostly government commitments, governments talking to each other, whether it's at the UN or otherwise, and saying, oh, we've got a feminist foreign policy, you should too. In Latin America that's a little different because of the powerhouse that is Mabel Bianco ... I think my theory here is if you don't have a powerful champion in government who's going to push this through, it's not happening. – Lyric Thompson, Founder and CEO of the Feminist Foreign Policy Collaborative, USA

DISCUSSION: GETTING TO DECLARATION

This update marks a shift in FFP discourse, which has moved from a fringe idea to something that has greater acceptance from mainstream actors.

Hallin's Spheres^[xxi], originally proposed as a way to conceive of journalistic objectivity, help to illustrate how political discourse can move between three concentric circles of 'deviance', 'legitimate debate' and 'broad consensus' – demonstrating the potential for widespread shifts in the legitimacy of concepts and policy options.



In the language of this framework, this research update suggests that FFP has moved from the edge of the 'sphere of deviance' and now sits within 'legitimate debate'. While FFP does not have the support of a majority of actors, it is seen as a much more legitimate policy concept than it was in 2021.

This is indicated not just by the increase in countries adopting the concept, but also by the way it is being legitimised through multilateral spaces, such as the FFP+ Group of the United Nations, and by the normalisation of ministerial-level dialogues and conferences explicitly organised about FFP.

This is important, because it changes the characteristics of the political leader who is likely to declare an FFP. While alignment of personal and political values remains important, and significant political capital is likely still required to bring party colleagues and senior bureaucrats on board, there is no longer the sense that FFP requires a political leader who is willing to go out on a limb by themselves, which was our finding in the 2021 research.

For advocates of FFP adoption, this means that rather than pointing to the ways in which FFP is a point of differentiation, it may be more promising to point to the opportunity to join a group of like-minded countries. A key rationale for 'joining' may be to ensure that a country continues to be included among those who are seen to be taking the most ambitious action on gender equality (whether or not they actually are, as we discuss further in later sections). Fear of missing out – whether of being part of a global or regionally defined FFP collective – rather than personal legacy, may now be the best motivator of political leaders who consider themselves to be leaders on gender equality. It may also be a way for countries to increase their real or perceived power as a progressive actor in the global system, by acting in concert rather than acting alone.

Similarly, further developing and exploring regional concepts of FFP may provide additional options for countries to see themselves as part of a club. This could be particularly useful in parts of the world where feminism is perceived as a Western/Minority World construct, as it would enable FFP to be defined in context specific ways that align to the priorities of local feminist and women's rights movements, regardless of whether countries ultimately make use of the FFP label.

This raises the related point: should advocates (whether inside or outside of government) play into the framing that FFP is simply a new way of articulating existing values and approaches?

Doing so may expedite adoption, but would also pose two key risks. First, the risk that a declaration doesn't motivate any substantive action and encourages (or at least excuses) carrying on what is really a gender mainstreaming approach under a more ambitious-sounding name. The second is that it risks bringing gender mainstreaming under fire, should political dispositions change through elections.

When a government cannot credibly distinguish between business-as-usual support for gender equality from a feminist approach – due to the appropriation of the language without concurrent adoption of feminist practice – the risk is that even the most basic supports for gender equality can come under threat. Far from being simply of concern to gender equality advocates, this risk should activate all practitioners and policy-

makers working in the field of international development cooperation (and ideally, all foreign policy practitioners) to have a level of gender mainstreaming as a minimum.

In light of these benefits and risks, the best approach might be somewhere in the middle. That is, emphasising the continuity of FFP with existing practice (as governments that are doing nothing on gender equality are unlikely to be good candidates for adopting FFP in any event) while also emphasising that it is not enough to just do what has always been done – and that FFP requires the ratcheting up of ambition. As explored in Theme 2 and Theme 3 below, this also requires FFP advocates to hold existing FFP governments accountable if they fail to make meaningful changes in their approach, or run the risk of a gradual hollowing out of the concept.

THEME 2. FROM DECLARATION TO DEVELOPMENT: EMERGING GOOD PRACTICE LEAVES EARLY ADOPTERS BEHIND

KEY FACTORS IN 2021	STILL A KEY FACTOR?	KEY FACTORS IN 2024
Announcement of political commitment to FFP not linked to policy development process	No	Consultative and evidence-based policy development process often announced alongside commitment, with some new opportunities to normalise consultation in contexts that have not prioritised it
	New	Some early adopters seen to be postponing detailed policy development to avoid criticism
Tension between domestic and international civil society stakeholders	Yes	Governments still perceived to privilege input of international civil society over domestic feminist organisations
Variation in the culture of consultation between policy areas	Yes	Consultation most meaningful in international development; less so in foreign policy and trade policy. Security/defence policy almost untouchable apart from the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda

IWDA's 2021 research identified that FFPs tended to be announced as political commitments, with the expectation (at least from civil society) that policy development would follow. By contrast, this update found that newer FFP commitment-makers were taking a much more intentional approach to policy development, announcing their commitment alongside a consultative policy development process. Early adopters are now playing catch-up to develop policy frameworks.

Best-practice approaches to feminist policy development are emerging from the various FFP processes. These include the important role of civil society in pushing for - and informing - policy development; the need to consult across all areas of

foreign policy, including those that are traditionally 'harder to crack'; and the importance of including the voices of both domestic and international feminist stakeholders.

Tensions between domestic and international feminist civil society in policy development processes emerged in the 2021 research and present an ongoing challenge. In the context of the gap between political rhetoric and meaningful action (the 'rhetoric-action gap') introduced in the section above, and further articulated here, these findings have implications for the players in the policy ecosystem (from government and civil society) who hold the most power.

EARLY ADOPTERS LAGGING ON POLICY DEVELOPMENT

This update found that countries in the first wave of FFP adopters have since lagged in the policy development phase. France only began to develop its first set of guidelines for FFP in 2023, after declaring FFP in 2019. Canada – despite having a clear Feminist International Assistance Policy Framework since 2017 – was yet to release its promised policy paper on FFP at the time of publication.

Because we don't have [guidelines] so far, unlike the Germans and like the Dutch and like the Mexicans, the Spaniards, the Canadians, almost everybody. So we're catching up a little bit late ... for the first time ever with conducting more than 6 months of consultation with civil society... So this is definitely a major change, and I think this will be the first ever guideline document that will be strongly based on consultation with civil society.
– Delphine O, Ambassador and Secretary-General, Generation Equality Forum, France

For some, not developing a detailed policy framework has been intentional. In the case of Mexico, the lack of consultative policy process was described as an intentional effort to ensure FFP didn't fall victim to political debate: bureaucrats chose to publish principles rather than a detailed policy document.

We didn't publish a white paper or a blue paper when we launched [our FFP]. That was because of two reasons, one political and one, let's say, technical. The first reason is because this tension between the President and feminist movements in Mexico during the moment of the adoption – in some point we thought that a formal publication will doom the FFP... Therefore, we stressed on the fact that the Mexican Constitution states principles for foreign policy, so a good way was to publish it as a collection of principles, principles for actions, and that makes sense. – Cristopher Ballinas Valdés, academic, human rights expert and former Director General for Human Rights and Democracy – Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, and author of Mexico's feminist foreign policy

In the case of Canada, interviewees attributed the delay to disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the war on Ukraine and the war on Gaza, and to several ministerial changes in the foreign affairs portfolio. In addition to these crises

diverting energy and resources of ministers and bureaucracies, several interviewees also said that governments, including Canada and the Netherlands (prior to its move away from FFP), may be holding back from publicly releasing policies in an attempt to avoid further criticisms of their position on Israel's war on Gaza.

NEW ADOPTERS PRIORITISE EVIDENCE- AND CONSULTATION-INFORMED POLICY

By contrast, more recent FFP countries are taking an intentional approach to policy development. In some cases, this began with research or scoping to inform the decision to commit to FFP. For example, in the Netherlands, staff within the foreign affairs department were tasked with exploring the potential benefits of FFP, including consultations with civil society and ministry staff, as well as commissioning a (public) literature review. This informed a detailed recommendation letter to parliament and the development of internal guidelines on implementation. Scotland undertook a similar process, scoping and publishing the evidence collected to inform the commitment.

Many of the newer FFP countries (including, at least, Colombia, Chile, Germany, the Netherlands, Scotland and Spain) commenced consultations to inform their policy development process alongside or shortly after declaration. While it has taken longer, some of the first-wave countries have also done so. As part of these processes, a number of countries have established cross-government and civil society advisory groups to inform consultation, seen as a highly effective strategy – both to inform policy development and to build ownership over the resulting framework.

... [what] we did was the establishment of an advisory group, a high-level advisory group which is made up by representatives of about 10 ministries ... all the ministers that are engaged in the priorities of our feminist foreign policy agenda. And we count also with the participation of the civil society organisations that have been really engaged in the developing of thoughts and new ideas and new strategies on cooperation and policy in the international arena. And we invited also five knowledge centres, the think tanks and universities, the private sector... It is a great progress because the action plan is going to help us to be accountable to the Parliament ... I think that this is the smartest thing that we have done so far to engage others. – Anonymous

In the case of France, this kind of engagement with civil society is relatively uncommon. It was therefore seen as an important ‘hook’ to begin to normalise civil society consultation in a policy culture that has not valued it.

... if we had been in a passive mode then they [the government] would just write their strategy between themselves ... of course, somebody opened the door a little bit at the government level, but I think we pushed hard ... it's the fact that we've been doing the advocacy for so many years and that the ministry hired people who are convinced and who work well, and then it's probably easier for them to say 'we have civil society knocking at the door, and they have stuff to say, I think at least we should hear them out'. And I really think what has changed is that we have allies within the institutions. – Nicolas Rainaud, Advocacy Manager, Equipop, France

CHALLENGES TO CONSULTATION PROCESSES

Consultation and input from civil society was highlighted as a critical aspect of ensuring policy commitments were ambitious and transformative in nature. Civil society interviewees pointed out that, in some contexts, relatively short timeframes and a lack of compensation for civil society involvement made it difficult to fully engage, and high levels of control over the process by governments meant that engagement felt extractive.

The Coalition Treaty doesn't give you very much to go on. It gives you 2 sentences essentially as a framework. So the question was, what do we do with this? And then it became clear very quickly that there would be a development process for the policy ... It's always framed as if there was a very extensive long process. But if we look at the timeline, we see that was actually just a few months ... Then there was a public consultation process, and that was quite heavily organised, and I would even say controlled by the foreign office in terms of who could access, who could participate ... So civil society in particular was treated as a source of information, as experts on feminist foreign policy, which was something that the foreign office had little to no previous expertise in. But the input that we gave was also very heavily translated to fit into the policy frameworks and knowledge production mechanisms that the foreign office were familiar with. – Anonymous

As found in the previous research, there was tension between domestic and international civil society groups when governments were perceived to be privileging the input of international FFP experts over domestic feminist organisations. This was the case in Mexico in the 2021 research and was raised again by Mexico and several other countries in this update.

This poses important questions for FFP advocates and organisations based in the Minority World, which may be sought out by governments both for their expertise in FFP, and for their lack of alignment to issues that activate domestic politics.

Even though civil society is working with states around feminist foreign policy, there's a huge power asymmetry. There's a huge power gap. And ultimately, the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy and Feminist Foreign Policy Collaborative and ICRW [International Centre for Research on Women], they care more about their partnerships with states than with other smaller civil society organisations, especially grassroots organisations ... there are gatekeepers and smaller players are being kept out, are being kept to the side. And also most of the funding is going to these bigger organisations and it makes it really difficult and very competitive to access funding. – Anonymous

Some interviewees posited that governments viewed international organisations as more appropriate discussants due to their experience with international policy settings. However, where domestically focused feminists have been involved in consultations, it was reported as an effective two-way learning process between those with expertise in foreign and those with the experience of feminist issues ‘on the ground’.

When the Minister for Foreign Affairs called us for designing their foreign policy, I think not everyone knew what were we talking about ... So I think it was also interesting, because many of us learned a lot. What is external policy? What is not external policy? What are the main things that we should talk [about] in a foreign policy? ... What is our position about climate change? Or what is our position about narco-trafficking? What does it mean for us in a feminist international policy? ... What does it mean to have a lot of Colombian women in prison in many other countries in the world? What is the support of the embassies for Colombian women who have been captured by narco-trafficking? And these women are really poor women, that have just rented their bodies ...

So how do you address that? I think we have really, very important issues that we have to address.
 – Rosa Emilia Salamanca, Executive Director, Corporación de Investigación y Acción Social y Económica (CIASE), Colombia

The difference in consultation culture between different policy areas was also consistent with the 2021 research: consultation was more engaging and meaningful when it came to international development, and much less so with regard to foreign policy and trade policy. Security and defence policy areas were almost untouchable (except for the Women, Peace and Security agenda – an important, although often ‘siloes’ or discrete, initiative within security policy where consultation with civil society is common).

This spectrum was illustrated clearly in the case of Germany, which ran parallel consultations on the development of feminist foreign and development policies under different ministries:

... the process for the feminist foreign policy was a lot less extensive compared to the international development [policy]. [The Ministry for International Development] consulted more international organisations and also from Global South, and it was a lot more inclusive. And I don't know why that was the case. Of course, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is a lot more scrutinised compared to the development industry and has a lot more power for foreign affairs compared to international development. So maybe they just had more room really to experiment and to take time and without being criticised ... the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that has a lot more kind of hierarchies, but also classes, and the self-identification of diplomats, it's very different ... I think people who work at the different ministries have a very different understanding of themselves and who they are in society. – Kristina Lunz, Co-founder and Co-executive director of the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, Germany

HOW MUCH DOES CONSULTATION INFLUENCE POLICY?

The extent to which consultation is influencing final policy documents across countries is contested, with the key tension being the challenge of reconciling civil society ambition with the limitations of bureaucracy and politics.

It was beyond the scope of this research to comprehensively assess whether FFP commitments on paper were translating into practice. However, interviewees expressed a clear view that there was still a gap between feminist civil society's vision of FFP and the commitments governments were willing – or able – to make (see Theme 3 and Theme 4).

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that what is – or is perceived to be – transformational will differ by context. For example, in contexts where women's representation in diplomacy is very low, or only became possible in recent decades, a focus on increasing the number of women diplomats may appear a radical change. By contrast, in other contexts feminist civil society may see women's representation in the sector as an important but insufficient focus to achieve a feminist agenda.

For a lot of us, in civil society and academia, a feminist approach to foreign policy is about doing foreign policy differently in order to achieve the goals of peace and climate justice and equality. So, it's about really trying to tackle the dynamics that drive gendered inequalities and insecurities, whether those be militarism and war or neoliberal capitalism or the climate crisis ... For a lot of politicians and civil servants, however, the focus seems to be more on the inclusion and participation of women. For some of the women we involved in our consultations, this was the prime concern too: how can you listen to us more? How can we be at the table more? ... A focus on inclusion and participation is necessary but not sufficient. There needs to also be some concrete actions aimed at tackling the structures that drive gendered insecurities and ecological collapse. This more ambitious, transformative version of feminist foreign policy tends to be much harder to get into the final drafts. – Claire Duncanson, Senior Lecturer in International Relations, University of Edinburgh, Scotland

When you look at definitions of feminism around policy by German civil society, it's very much focusing on power structures – broadly understood. Like coloniality, militarism, capitalism, the patriarchy, racism. All of these things are not present or hardly present in the way in which feminist foreign policy is understood by the foreign office. So yes, there is a clear gap. And I think there's also, to some extent, some disappointment in German civil society that the gap is so big and that even through the consultation processes, there was no option to close it further. – Anonymous

DISCUSSION: POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The increase in countries taking an intentional and consultative approach to policy development is a welcome development since 2021. Feminists inside and outside government should take the opportunity FFP provides to normalise consultation culture across new areas of policy that have been harder to access. Past engagement on topics such as the Women, Peace and Security agenda can be leveraged for harder-to-access areas of government such as defence, but they should be seen as the starting point – not the full extent – of potential policy engagement with non-state actors.

Drawing from elements of good practice that have been utilised so far across different FFP government consultations, as well as critiques raised by civil society, we suggest best-practice FFP consultation should involve:

1. Announcement of the commitment to FFP alongside a clear, transparent and timebound process for policy development
2. Broad consultation, supported by resourcing and time, across multiple stakeholder groups:
 - inside and across government (to inform the policy and to build support and ownership), and
 - diverse representatives of domestic and international feminist civil society (to ensure the policy is ambitious and transformative, reflects the priorities of local feminist movements, and to create space for mutual learning)
3. Consultation across all areas of foreign policy, from international development to trade and defence (at a minimum), as well as for other policies that have international implications (such as climate and migration)
4. Reporting back to stakeholders to share what has been heard through consultations, and how it has (or hasn't) been incorporated into the final policy, as a method to increase accountability and transparency
5. Building in regular, formal and informal touchpoints with internal and external stakeholders for policy review and update in the future.

Even when these approaches are followed, policy development and consultation are political processes that require navigating complex power dynamics. This has implications for the players in the policy ecosystem who hold the most power (in both government and civil society).

For government actors, it means that they must be prepared to sit with discomfort – to listen to the accountability critiques of feminist civil society, even when it feels like the issues raised are outside their own individual sphere of control. At the same time, they need to recognise the power they hold within the system, and lean in to the discomfort – and professional risk – of advocating for the calls of feminist civil society. They need to consider it their responsibility to strive for what is needed, as opposed to only defending what is (or is perceived to be) possible.

Some areas or individuals within government will be better able to practise this from the outset, as most mechanisms of government are designed to maintain the status quo – or in the language of Hallin's Spheres, to limit policy action to ideas that fall within the inner sphere of 'consensus', or the areas of the 'legitimate debate' sphere that are closer to 'consensus' than 'deviance'. Those government actors working to increase the ambition of FFP will need to contend with the parts of government that favour stasis.

Feminist civil society actors will need to be alert to the ways their advocacy for government adoption of transformative concepts within FFP may lead to the de-politicisation of these concepts. Again in the language of Hallin's Spheres, this is the risk that ideas are stripped of the aspects that make them transformative in order to move them from the sphere of 'deviance' to that of 'legitimate debate' or 'consensus'.

This is a complex balancing act, as advocating for transformative social change requires us to shift perceptions about deviant policy ideas so they become more accepted – and ultimately adopted – by mainstream actors. But we need to ensure that we are changing the minds of policymakers about

the ideas, not changing the ideas to fit the beliefs of policymakers. This is especially critical when FFP is adopted in name before the content is agreed, as government and civil society actors hold a range of different assumptions about what FFP will – or should – ultimately hold.

Those in feminist civil society most at risk of getting this balance wrong are also those who hold the most power within the system – primarily Minority World feminists who hold close relationships with government actors. Findings in this section indicate that relationships of trust between feminist bureaucrats and civil society are critical enablers of FFP. These relationships provide opportunities to exchange knowledge about priorities and constraints, and, over time, develop elements of a shared vision for change. Feminist civil society provide the demand side of the relationship and feminist bureaucrats provide the supply side. Whether through intention or as a natural consequence of their positionalities, this becomes a symbiotic relationship.

However, feminist civil society is not homogenous. Further, governments develop these symbiotic relationships not only (or perhaps not often) with domestic feminist movements and organisations, but with feminist foreign policy experts, operating at the global level, who may have less context from which to mount vocal critique of government, and less incentive to do so. Therefore, it is their proximity to power (most often the power of whiteness or coloniality) that makes them valued counterparts. This is not surprising, as the power of whiteness and coloniality are still dominant paradigms within

traditional foreign policy and global governance and the arenas that governments operate in,^[xxii] even if those governments are genuine in wanting to transform these systems.

For feminist civil society – particularly actors in the Minority World operating in a global capacity – there is also a need to lean in to discomfort and think critically about the types of power they hold and how they are using their power. While they should be willing and able to define evolutionary change in practice towards FFP and hold governments accountable for ramping up ambition over time, all feminist actors need to amplify and stand in solidarity with voices of Majority World feminists – especially those who are calling for transformational change.

If we want to see both alleviation of the impacts of marginalisation on women and diverse people, and the wholesale transformation of the systems that drive it, we need to find a way to navigate these tensions.

Here, the concept of ‘transparent misalignment’ provides a strategy to ensure that discordances are actively named, rather than sitting there as the ‘elephant in the room’, eroding the concept of FFP. ‘Transparent misalignment’ emerged from early discussions on FFP accountability mechanisms and is a way to name contradictions between existing policies and FFP commitments, with a view to transforming those policies over time.^[xxiii] It relies on effective accountability structures to ensure that change *does* happen, and is discussed further in the next section.

THEME 3. INSTITUTIONALISATION: DEBATES INCREASING, PROGRESS LIMITED

KEY FACTORS IN 2021	STILL A KEY FACTOR?	KEY FACTORS IN 2024
Governments focused on increasing ownership to support greater implementation	Yes	A mix of top-down and bottom-up approaches critical to create the incentives and ownership that lead to action
	New	Ownership not sufficient - greater focus on accountability mechanisms required to support implementation
Rhetoric-action gap demonstrates more work to do in institutionalisation and implementation of FFPs	Yes	Failure to address this gap over time undermining legitimacy of FFP commitments

In the 2021 research,^[4] actors were focused on increasing buy-in and ownership of FFP commitments across government actors, with the expectation that greater ownership would lead to greater implementation, supported by accountability from civil society. This update discusses various strategies being utilised to build ownership across established and new FFP commitments, but demonstrates that it remains an ongoing challenge.

It also confirms that implementation of FFP commitments that go beyond existing practice cannot be assumed as a necessary output of greater ownership. In addition, greater focus on accountability mechanisms are required to ensure

that FFP does not merely become a new way of describing gender mainstreaming or women’s participation in foreign policy, but actually leads to transformative changes in practice.

TOP-DOWN AND BOTTOM-UP APPROACHES BOTH CRITICAL FOR INSTITUTIONALISATION OF FFP

Participants noted that a one-size-fits-all model was unlikely to work due to the differences in institutional systems across countries. However, many cited senior leadership as an enabler. One participant noted that the appointment of ambassadors or senior staff to champion FFP helped build buy-in within and across departments.

4 From *Seeds to Roots* looked at policy development and institutionalisation as one theme. This time, we have separated the two because more data is available.

So the fact that I was appointed and I was appointed at the ambassador level was very important. Because that's very different from having somebody who's a director or deputy director or something like that. Because I have the mandate and the ability to leverage the entire deployment network to leverage all directors within the Ministry. I have the ability to talk to counterparts who are ambassadors from other countries, even to ministers from other countries. So this really elevated the issue within the organisation. – Delphine O, Ambassador and Secretary-General, Generation Equality Forum, France

Other top-down approaches included strategies to build buy-in across ministries via cabinet committees, or by setting a common framework (such as the 4 'Rs' of Rights, Resources, Representation and Reality check, which originated with Sweden but has been adopted by others).^[xxiv] A handful of countries have attempted to legislate FFP in order to formalise it as an approach that is not linked to a particular leader or government, although at the time of writing none have yet been successful.

So, we start working with the Senate about proposing some amendments to the foreign service law, a secondary law coming from the Constitution in the context of parity in appointments at top levels of the government ... We put together a proposal that was presented and approved at the Upper House and now is in review in the Lower House ... I'm really optimistic; if approved we are going to be the very first country to include in the law a special reference to a feminist foreign policy and to include improvements based on those principles ... – Cristopher Ballinas Valdés, academic, human rights expert and former Director General for Human Rights and Democracy - Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mexico and author of Mexico's Feminist Foreign Policy

So the idea is to create all the institutions, all the framework inside of the diplomatic body. So they take full ownership of the policy. That is one approach, one action. And the other one is the women's movement; in the civil society movement in Colombia, they are demanding - there is such strong demand for the policy to be adopted, that

both of those things will ensure the continuity of the feminist foreign policy over the next years, for always. And the other form is creating resolutions, administrative texts or documents that [situate] these policies inside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ... and in the Constitution. – Diana María Parra Romero, Advisor on Gender Affairs and Feminist Foreign Policy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Colombia

Bottom-up approaches included a strong focus on training to build ownership among bureaucrats and diplomats and build their knowledge base on FFP - which for many was starting from a low base. Positioning FFP as a continuation of other work, such as the Women, Peace and Security agenda, was named as a strategy to get those with a low understanding on board. In a few contexts, this work of building understanding and buy-in within government was also linked to ensuring they engaged with the demands of civil society.

I think their attempt here was to create that ownership in a relatively similar way to what Sweden has done. To try and involve the staff, try and get their ideas. Try and emphasise that this is something that we're mainstreaming across the Ministry ... And to have a very clear sense that this is something that political leadership wants, so you're expected to implement it. That was a hierarchy - I wouldn't necessarily say that this is the most effective way, but it is certainly one way. – Anonymous

So when you dive into it, and when you explain what you mean regarding the feminist foreign policy, I think the majority of the diplomats understood that this is something that we have been doing already in the past. But now we would like to put it on the agenda even more, so that we are even more promoting the things that we have been already doing. – Peter Grk, Secretary-General of Bled Strategic Forum and Western Balkans Coordinator, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Slovenia

Government interviewees acknowledged that FFP 'branding' exercises can be tokenistic if not backed up by action. Yet they also used conferences, events, branded notebooks and other materials to build interest and energy around the concept.

... it shouldn't be a 'brand', and it has to be meaningful - absolutely it has to be meaningful. But you also need to brand it in order to build excitement and ownership ... I think we won't see the enormous steps and the giant leaps that we wanted to see, but little steps are important too.
- Anonymous

RISKS TO EFFECTIVE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF FFP: INCENTIVE, POWER, RESOURCING AND THE EXPECTATION-REALITY GAP

While leadership from the highest levels was clearly a key enabler of FFP institutionalisation, some interviewees noted the risk of FFP becoming too closely associated with particular leaders or senior staff. This could lead to others feeling that there was no space - or perhaps no incentive - to champion the commitment.

... even though there was stuff that would fall under Mexico's feminist foreign policy, they wouldn't announce it as such, or they were really reluctant to engage with the topic of feminist foreign policy just because Christopher Ballinas and Martha Delgado [senior officials in the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs] had such a strong monopoly over it that they just didn't want to even touch the issue. - Anonymous

Another risk to effective institutionalisation was that development of FFPs was often delegated to staff who lacked institutional power, undermining buy-in once the policy had been developed, as those closest to the content lacked the power to institutionalise it. Similarly, the teams coordinating FFP were often small and poorly resourced. This was linked by participants to budget cuts to foreign policy and aid departments.

... when it comes down to who is actually writing this feminist foreign policy, it's a very small team. It's often quite junior people. In Canada, for example, I know it's quite a small team and I get the sense that they kind of write stuff and then they send it out to different sections within, so it doesn't feel super-mainstreamed ... [In Germany] it's a very small team and it's all junior women. And so I think that's part of this as well, when you talk about the institutionalisation of it, you're talking about 2 or 3 junior female bureaucrats that don't have a lot of power and sway. - Anonymous

... lack of resources, not in terms of our ODA [overseas development assistance], but internal resources. So myself on my own, versus big teams in other countries, and lack of internal budget to actually conduct the policy ... But ironically, there's a reverse trend in terms of the funding that we've allocated in our ODA for gender. So we've doubled our Support Fund for Feminist Organizations to 250 million [EURO] over five years. So we're the number one governmental fund for feminist organisations in the Global South - ahead of the Netherlands, ahead of Canada. So we managed to secure a huge budget for gender ODA, but we have a ridiculous budget internally to actually conduct the policy. - Delphine O, Ambassador and Secretary-General, Generation Equality Forum, France

This connects to a theme that emerged in the key debates section of the 2021 research: that the most transformative elements of FFP - such as demilitarisation and decolonisation - are also the most challenging to governments, which may prefer to focus on 'softer' aid commitments. When staff who may have pushed for transformative elements to be included in the policy lack the power to ensure they are acted upon, it exacerbates the expectation-reality gap with civil society.

I mean, shifting the power [to Global South feminist movements] - I think the Dutch Government is already taking quite bold steps in that, but the decolonisation agenda, I think, is not something that the Dutch Government dares to venture into yet ... because once you are really going into the decolonisation route, it also has implications for reparations. - Marinke Van Riet, Manager, Walking the Talk Consortium - Hivos, The Netherlands

ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS SUPPORT ONGOING INSTITUTIONALISATION VIA INTERPLAY OF FEMINIST INSIDERS/OUTSIDERS

For countries whose FFPs had been in place longer - such as France and Sweden (prior to Sweden abandoning the concept) - independent evaluation and accountability mechanisms were noted as critical strategies to support meaningful institutionalisation of commitments.

Interviewees noted that when feminists outside government used evaluation/accountability mechanisms to exert pressure, this gave licence to feminists and allies working inside the system to push for more action.

... the Minister really didn't like our report - I mean, nobody likes it when you have a report that says that you haven't done enough ... It was probably one of the first times that it was an independent body who said 'not good enough' ... [It's been about] 100 days since the report was handed in. I can tell you that people are not demotivated, they have been boosted by that. All the people come to us and say you need to be quite firm because it will allow us internally to put it higher on the agenda. And the other thing is that the Minister was - I think there was some kind of pride involved too. - Nicolas Rainaud, Advocacy Manager, Equipop, France

It's also the fact that we have independent monitoring and evaluation by the High Council for Equality, as you might know. There's a second report now this year. And it's very independent, very balanced. At the same time, it commends the government or the ministry for progressive [steps in name], but it also points out critical gaps and failures. And this is a public report that gets some traction in the media. Definitely a big push for administration to do even more on that. - Delphine O, Ambassador and Secretary-General, Generation Equality Forum, France

Governments that already had strong mechanisms in place for participatory monitoring, evaluation and learning processes were utilising these to advance FFP accountability. For example, in the case of Scotland, there was a pre-existing Global South Advisory Panel with representatives from the countries where Scotland provides international development cooperation, which could be utilised to support FFP monitoring and evaluation.

Where these systems had not been established by government, civil society groups were considering setting them up, building on practice from other spaces such as Women, Peace and Security.

What we're seeing is that civil society has always been reactive to a consultation from a ministry on an FFP rather than proactive in developing its own vision of an FFP and what the journey would be or maybe even some kind of scorecard. I'm just thinking out loud and really like, what is that accountability mechanism? Should it be something similar to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, [even] with all its flaws? - Marinke Van Riet, Manager, Walking the Talk Consortium - Hivos, The Netherlands

There are some emerging examples of good accountability practice, including the use of independent evaluations - such as the evaluation of Sweden's FFP by the government body set up to scrutinise aid effectiveness, the Expert Group for Aid Studies.^[xxvi] Also encouraging are formalised accountability bodies, including civil society voices that have the power to investigate progress - such as France's High Council for Gender Equality, referenced above. While comparative measures such as the ICRW's Feminist Foreign Policy Index^[xxvii] are an important element of accountability, in an environment where few, if any, FFP countries are undertaking transformative actions that can be easily measured, interviewees expressed a need for more diverse methodologies to measure progress across FFP countries.

TO WHAT EXTENT IS FFP INFLUENCING ACTION?

Again, the rhetoric-action gap emerged as a strong theme. The question of whether any particular foreign policy action can be directly attributed to FFP is commonly raised. In other words, would a country have taken a particular action without a commitment to FFP? This research update affirmed that this remains a difficult question to answer.

While some participants attributed specific foreign policy actions or initiatives to the country's FFP, others felt that the government would have taken these actions anyway based on their broader position on gender equality and human rights, and/or their international ambitions. That is, using the word 'feminist' to describe their foreign policy was not the determining factor underpinning action.

Before the adoption [of FFP] there were few conventions and international agreements on human rights that Mexico was not recognising ... and Mexico had not ratified any international convention on human rights in 15 years ... Thus, once in my office, we worked in less than 3 years' time to ratify 6 international conventions on gender and human rights; the highest rate of approval for any federal administration.
 – Christopher Ballinas Valdés, academic, human rights expert and former Director General for Human Rights and Democracy - Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mexico and author of Mexico's feminist foreign policy

Mexico has made all these really amazing statements on disarmament, and they hosted Generation Equality - they're one of the co-hosts. They have done a lot of work on the Women, Peace and Security agenda. They were very outspoken about the Women, Peace and Security [agenda] when they had the non-permanent member 2-year tenure in the Security Council. Yes, absolutely. I don't want to take away from that, but that wasn't something that happened because of the feminist foreign policy. – Anonymous

Many interviewees across contexts expressed the view that FFP governments continue to engage in actions that run counter to their commitments, undermining not only the legitimacy of their commitments but of FFP as a concept. This issue is discussed further in Theme 4.

DISCUSSION: INSTITUTIONALISATION OF FFP

Institutionalisation is a process to ensure ownership of FFP can be felt not just by the team who have accountability for its development or responsibility for reporting on progress, but by all relevant actors in government. In this way, it becomes an underpinning philosophy of all that a government does, as opposed to a discrete, 'siloed' commitment owned by a narrow part of the bureaucracy.

Decades of lessons from the gender and development space indicate how this type of institutionalisation is a long-term project requiring substantial input - focal points, training, guidance, accountability and incentives. These can all produce shifts in the right direction, but outcomes vary across contexts in terms of delivering a desirable level of institutionalisation on gender in development.

Given the relatively short time that FFP has been in practice, it is difficult to see how taking the same approaches could produce swifter or more enduring results, particularly since it remains unclear to what extent those aiming to institutionalise FFP

are building on the lessons from past decades of practice.

Despite this, institutionalisation still represents a critical juncture for determining the nature and extent to which FFP declaration and policy will result in changes to practice and action. And, despite the sincere and genuinely held commitment of most FFP advocates and focal points within governments, what we see playing out in many contexts is reminiscent of Sara Hlupekile Longwe's 1997 thesis on *The evaporation of gender policies in the patriarchal cooking pot*.^[xxvii] Longwe suggests that when we depoliticise gender policies - treat them as though they are a common, rather than contested goal - we 'conceal the essence of the problem', which is the opposition they face by forces of patriarchy. As discussed in the previous section, this de-politicisation can happen as ideas are brought inwards from the sphere of deviance, especially where there is not true commitment to acting on the more political aspects of gender equality.

Feminist and decolonial researcher Kirthi Jayakumar positions this as ‘purple washing’, in line with Françoise Vergès’ theory of ‘civilizational feminism’, which Jayakumar describes as the process by which ‘racialized women are welcomed into the fold of civilizational feminists on the condition that they align with the White feminist agenda and interpretation of women’s rights’.^[xxviii] Jayakumar goes on to describe FFP approaches that co-opt the language of feminism without taking feminist actions as a form of colonisation of the work of ‘women’s movements across the majority world that have been practicing feminist foreign policy for generations now’.^[xxix]

This risk may be exacerbated by this new environment where FFP is seen as a way of ‘joining in’ rather than ‘standing out’, particularly if the kind of policy agenda governments are ‘joining’ is generally being practised as a reconceived commitment to gender equality. By glossing over the transformative elements of FFP and what it takes to implement them in practice, government actors run the risk of creating narratives lacking the necessary politicisation of a feminist approach, undermining implementation. In addition, depoliticised concepts such as gender mainstreaming – while continuing to lack their essential political nature – can once again become targets for those who do not support feminism, making them more likely to be swept up in efforts to abolish FFP following changes in government (discussed further in the next section).

Another implication of the ‘joining in’ motivation for FFP is that once it is put in place, governments shift their focus to building buy-in for the commitment via awareness-raising, upskilling, shared learning and dialogue with peers. By contrast, feminist

civil society tends to move into the space of accountability – looking for proof that the policy has reach across government and ‘teeth’ to motivate action. This can create tension when feminists inside government feel that those in civil society are undermining their ability to build greater support for FFP by only (or more often) pointing out the areas where it is failing.

Building on the discussion in the previous section, accountability requires a focus both on areas where government action is furthest away from a transformative feminist approach (such as arms exports and militarisation) and on those areas where it may be possible to make incremental progress (such as development expenditure on gender equality and gender equality in leadership roles). Feminists both inside and outside government need to think critically about the power they hold in balancing the joint imperatives of increasing support for FFP implementation, and demanding accountability for (lack of) progress.

There is no one single way to strike this balance, which will be impacted by multiple factors in different contexts, partly because what counts as transformative may differ across contexts. But there are some general principles that can be applied in different ways. While government-to-government accountability can be powerful, in an environment where the ‘FFP club’ is not currently practising the most transformative elements of the agenda, relying on this form of accountability alone seems unlikely to lead to more transformative practice. For that reason, we suggest that greater focus is needed on accountability in each context, and across contexts.

THEME 4. FUTURE TRAJECTORIES: HAS FFP PEAKED?

In the 2021 research, the risk of losing FFP commitments if conservative governments won power was on participants' radar. Now that this has come to pass – in Sweden, the Netherlands, and in the case of Argentina's short-lived commitment – this concern dominated interviews, with several posing the question: has FFP peaked?

Contributing to this fear is the failure of FFP governments to take transformative action in response to the multiple crises facing them, and how this is undermining the perceived legitimacy of FFP. In the 2021 research, there was a general desire to see more governments committed to FFP: now the focus has shifted squarely to the quality of both new and existing commitments.

This update finds that, without intervention, the current trajectory of FFP as a field of government practice is likely to be a mix of erosion by election cycle, policy evaporation and hollowing out.

To avoid this, we need to disentangle FFP from becoming a new name for a gender equality focus and be cautious of advocating for – or rewarding – the adoption of FFP *in name* by governments that are not able to demonstrate any appetite for transformative changes *in practice*. Governments must establish robust accountability systems to drive improvements in practice. At the same time, feminist civil society needs to hold governments accountable for both incremental and transformative shifts, positioning FFP squarely as a framework to make visible the global structures of power that shape our world and that can ultimately transform them.

FAR-RIGHT GOVERNMENTS POSE THE GREATEST RISK TO FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION OF FFPS

At the country level, interviewees felt that change of government was the key factor that had – or was likely to – influence future FFP trajectories, intertwined with the rise of far-right movements adopting anti-feminist and anti-gender rhetoric as a key part of their political platform. The rise of right-wing governments in Sweden and the Netherlands (often seen as progressive countries by other parts of the world) has firmly demonstrated this, as has the ground gained by right-wing parties in France and Spain – but interviewees in most contexts felt their commitment could be under threat.

We may have seen the high point. Two years from now, we may be back to having 4 or 5 countries with feminist foreign policies ... And so the question is, how can you institutionalise it? And I think there's some things that you can do. [But] if you have a government that is just so fundamentally opposed to women's rights, there's nothing you can do to institutionalise it. It's a false – or an unrealistic goal – right? – Beth Woroniuk, Senior Fellow, Feminist Foreign Policy Collaborative, Canada

Connected to the previous theme, this raised some ambivalence about the possibility of institutionalising FFP, with interviewees torn between a desire not to lose ground on women's rights while also preventing further erosion of democratic systems and norms, which could be undermined if FFP institutionalisation is seen as an attempt to subvert democratic outcomes. This was also true for those working within government, some of whom clearly stated that while they provide advice to ministers on advancing gender equality, they must ultimately serve the priorities of the government of the day.

In Argentina, interviewees highlighted the way domestic economic pressures interacted with conservative political movements to produce an extreme right-wing government. This raises questions for issues such as feminist foreign policy, which could be perceived as disconnected from everyday struggles.

One [thing] very difficult to understand for the people outside the country is that most of the people that vote for Milei were pro-abortion, were supportive of same-sex marriage. They were supportive of the comprehensive sexuality education and so on. They were so much needing a change in the economic - to be able to eat, to survive, that they vote for that ... We need that our people be less poor ... you can imagine a county that has 60% of the children under poverty – Mabel Bianco, President, Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer, Argentina

In fact, many interviewees raised the dilemma of FFP – that it is not perceived as an election-winning issue by politicians because few people determine their vote based on foreign policy, and it is an easy target for right-wing leaders wanting to dismantle policies that symbolise the left, gender, human rights and multilateralism.

In Spain ... before the elections, we were working in the advisory group on different strategies, just in case the far-right were going to [form government] ... We are trying to do some [education] in the parliament with the different political parties, but with the far-right it's impossible because first of all, they deny the basic principles. I mean, they deny the rights of LGBTQ people. They deny gender-based violence. They deny sexual and reproductive rights and abortion. I mean, you can't convince anybody who is going to deny [human rights] ... it's impossible to talk because they have their own agenda. – Anonymous

A lot of the feminist advocacy groups, my own included, do not have endless resources to be out doing billboards and focus groups and all the kinds of stuff that you need to do to preserve political and policy wins in an electoral system ... however, the [anti-feminists] do. And any time that you have an issue like this one where the antis hate it more than the allies like it, it's going to be an uphill battle to keep it going. – Lyric Thompson, Founder and CEO of the Feminist Foreign Policy Collaborative, USA

FFP LEGITIMACY IN THE CONTEXT OF POLYCRISIS, AND THE LIMITS OF INSIDER-OUTSIDER COLLABORATION

Beyond the longevity of individual countries' commitments to FFP, this research also raised broader challenges to the legitimacy of FFP as a concept. In 2021, deep in the COVID-19 pandemic, the biggest threat to FFP was regarded as the sense that it was something to do 'when the sun is shining'. The pandemic and other crises, therefore, were posing the biggest threat.

In this update, participants again spoke about polycrisis – the interplay of multiple crises – facing political leaders, especially Israel's war on Gaza and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. They spoke both about the way in which these crises divert attention and resources from ongoing commitments to the centrality of gender equality, and the ways in which many FFP governments are failing to implement feminist principles in their responses to the crises.

The biggest challenge definitely is ... the multiple crises that are happening and that being a fact, and then maybe also some excuse, for not implementing it properly - because certain things can definitely be done. Like, we've been asking for an increase of spending for feminists or women's rights organisations ... So it's a fact and an excuse I think. – Kristina Lutz, Co-Founder and CEO, Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, Germany

... every state that has had a version of feminist foreign policy ... has not really tried to engage with what the limits were. In a sense, they've tried to circumvent it ... Canada did not want to deal with the idea of its membership in NATO. It did not want to deal with the level of arms transfers and who it was in business with. So what they did instead is they come up with a feminist international assistance program. That is easy. So you can have a development program that is feminist, that really ramps up the contributions to gender equality that says 85% of everything you do will be targeting women and all of that. But what happens in trade, what happens in environmental policy, what happens in defence? We can still keep selling our weapons. We can give weapons to countries that kill as many women as possible, but afterwards we can have some girls' education program. – Toni Hastrup, Chair in Global Politics, University of Manchester, UK

In particular, interviewees suggested that responses from FFP governments to Israel's war on Gaza, and the participation of Israel in the FFP+ group of the UN, were seen as undermining the credibility of FFP (noting that membership of the group is open to all UN members and appears to be largely driven by the interest of each country's representative in New York). This is despite the fact that FFP countries responded differently to the war – spanning from support for Israel, to calls for humanitarian ceasefire, to active support for South Africa's application to the International Court of Justice, alleging that Israel has breached the Convention on Genocide. This indicates that FFP has not always been the determining factor of governments' actions, with many countries instead following their established positions.

... when it comes to dealing with the conflicts, I think this notion of feminist foreign policy is being upheld [by Slovenia]. If you look at Gaza and what is happening in the Middle East, Slovenia is one of the advocates of a ceasefire, immediate ceasefire, humanitarian intervention, and also long-term conflict resolution, and stability. – Peter Grk, Secretary-General of Bled Strategic Forum and Western Balkans Coordinator, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Slovenia

I think the emphasis on the theme of militarisation and feminist foreign policy is totally brought to the fore with what's going on in Gaza. And countries with feminist foreign policies are being confronted with that, from feminist activists, in a way that we haven't seen before on feminist foreign policies ... Even before October 7th, the fact that Israel was a member of the FFP+ group raised a lot of civil society eyebrows. People were like, what? This gathering has no legitimacy if Israel is a member. – Anonymous

There is some consistency here with the debates discussed in the 2021 research. The difference in this update is that there was a widely held view that application of the FFP label by governments – particularly in the Minority World – who had failed to take meaningful actions was undermining the credibility of the concept overall. While FFP approaches are uniquely situated to contend with an environment of polycrisis, due to their focus on root causes, underpinned by robust power analysis, the erosion of the overall credibility of the concept of FFP creates the potential for a negative cycle.

That is, the credibility of the approach in question may further marginalise application of FFP approaches. This then perpetuates the rhetoric-action gap, and that gap further erodes the overall credibility of FFP.

QUALITY OVER QUANTITY ... BUT WHO DEFINES 'QUALITY'?

In the 2021 research, there was a general sense that more countries adopting FFP would be desirable. In this update, a strong theme emerged that we have reached a point where it is more important to maintain some level of minimum standard for FFP (although views differ on what that minimum should be, or how it should be determined).

There was a concern that governments adopting FFP may be doing so to gain superficial credit for their positioning on gender equality, but without doing the work of accountability. Some interviewees suggested that it is FFP governments that want to see more countries adopting the position, and civil society that wants to see more accountability from those who have already done so.

You don't have to declare your foreign policy 'feminist' to be in the FFP+ group. That's what the 'plus' is. And given the way those friends' groups operate, they're very much, 'the more members the better'. It's definitely a quantity over quality choice ... I think that's one of the other global tensions that I've seen, is that governments have a real interest in getting other governments to sign on, whereas the civil society activists have been saying, no, we want clearer definition and greater accountability when a government chooses to call their foreign policy 'feminist'. – Anonymous

Interviewees discussed the benefits and risks of a shared definition of FFP – on the one hand, creating a common standard, but on the other, potentially perpetuating a hierarchy of Western/Minority World definitions of feminism over others.

I am personally not in favour of defining feminist foreign policy, of having a rigid definition of feminist foreign policy, because I do think it means different things to different countries, different contexts. And having one shared definition of feminist foreign policy would just restrict it too much. So if there had been a definition of feminist foreign policy in 2020 [it] would've maybe hindered other countries from adopting it, just simply because it didn't align with their context. Or it would be too rigid for what Latin America wants to do with feminist foreign policy. – Anonymous

Some interviewees wanted to see more Majority World countries adopting FFP in order to diversify the concept. Others worried this could lead to Majority World countries adopting Minority World concepts of FFP, rather than shaped theirs around locally or regionally defined feminisms (plural). This has informed the emergence of language such as 'feminist-informed foreign policy', coined by the African Feminist Collective on Feminist Informed Policies,^[xxx] as a more accurate description of FFP that can also help to ensure that commitments are based on local feminisms, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

What's important is also, obviously, to have the Global South countries so that it doesn't remain a Western elite hub. – Delphine O, Ambassador and Secretary-General, Generation Equality Forum, France

... when you say 'feminist foreign policy', you kind of indicate that the whole of your foreign policy is feminist and you've changed, whereas that's not what is happening. So as an academic who thinks language is important, I like the language of 'feminist-informed policies', where you can name the feminism and the role and the work that feminism is doing in the evolution of a particular policy area, but not call the whole thing feminist because it isn't yet. – Toni Hastrup, Chair in Global Politics, University of Manchester, UK

Separately, interviewees worried that an exclusionary definition of FFP could lead to a separation or 'siloing' between FFP countries and those that don't use the label, despite having similar approaches informing their foreign policy. This would come at a time when collaboration is needed to hold the line on human rights. It could also undermine the link to domestic policy coherence, as well as to complementary – yet distinct – values-based foreign policy initiatives, such as Australia's commitment to a First Nations approach to foreign policy.^[xxxii]

... it's quite difficult because basically a country has an FFP if it says it has an FFP, right? ... there's no kind of checklist that they have to follow ... Where do you draw the parameters? What is this community; who's in and who's out ... And then also I think you have a broader group of countries that aren't using this language, but are very sympathetic to these goals and are doing a lot of this work anyway. So, like Australia, like the UK, like Norway ... very pointedly not talking about feminism, but basically doing the work. – Anonymous

DISCUSSION: FUTURE TRAJECTORIES

Coupled with the findings in previous sections, the current trajectory of FFP as a field of government practice looks like a mix of erosion by election cycle, policy evaporation and hollowing out of the concept over time. If this comes to pass, it is likely that over time this leads to either a smaller or fluctuating group of countries using the label but which are not meaningfully different in their practice from other governments who prioritise gender equality in their foreign policy without the label of ‘feminism.’

While this is one trajectory for the field of FFP, others futures remain possible. Looking back at the period between 2020 and 2024, characterised by the COVID pandemic, global economic downturn and increasing conflict, it is promising that *any* country carried on identifying their foreign policy as feminist, let alone that the group expanded. This offers a different and potentially more hopeful future trajectory: that the situation of polycrisis facing the world will be profound enough for countries to acknowledge that business as usual is not going to be sufficient to resolve the inter-related, wicked and existential crises that we face. This may set up (via a planned and ordered transition) or spark (via an unplanned, opportunistic transition at points of inflection) more enabling conditions for feminist approaches to thrive.

We offer here one possible trajectory towards a more transformative approach to FFP institutionalisation. In 2019 women from the Majority World called for the idea of ‘transparent incoherence.’ Perhaps the future trajectory of FFP is in the reverse, “transparent coherence” saying when a State *will* rather than when it *won’t* be guided by a feminist approach. Doing so may also reduce replication of civil society structures where ‘white feminism’ is often rewarded with access and power. It can do this by making clearer when the civil society to Government relationship is one of advocacy versus accountability. This should also help reduce

fissures within civil society where some may be seen to be more comfortable playing ‘insider’ advocate roles with Government, and others, often those most impacted by systemic harm, and unwilling to accept incremental reductions to their own oppression, are pushed into ‘outsider’ roles, carrying the emotional labour of calling out, and calling for changes to, systems that cause harm. In a model of transparent coherence all feminist civil society should have the opportunity to be ‘insiders’ on the issues where experimentation is explicitly named and operating, whereas all feminist civil society should have the opportunity to be ‘outsiders’ to expand the issues and arenas identified for further feminist informed action. This allows everyone to have the benefit of nuanced relationships and for feminist approaches to flourish in their implementation rather than be diminished by their absence.

Finally, if we want to realise FFP’s potential to respond to the state of polycrisis facing the world, we need to go beyond simply positioning FFP as a framework to determine the action within the existing global power structures, and use it as a framework to make those structures visible, to problematise, question – and ultimately – transform them.

In this way, the greatest potential of FFP lies not in its ability to elevate more women to leadership positions in diplomacy, increase the number of trade agreements with gender chapters or the percentage of international development programs which have gender equality objectives – although these are all important and potentially even transformative actions. The greatest potential is in feminism as an underpinning philosophy and worldview, which can make power structures visible, subvert and invert those structures, and in doing so, open up different kinds of questions and possibilities that take us beyond the realm of the limited foreign policy options that seem possible today, towards different kinds of futures.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to understand whether the factors that influenced the FFP trajectories of four countries (Sweden, Canada, France and Mexico) identified in 2021 have remained influential over time as other governments make new, formal FFP commitments. Our research confirms that whilst some factors continue to be important (e.g. the enabling role of civil society and values aligned political leaders in getting to declaration, tensions between civil society and government over policy development, top-down and bottom-up approaches put in place by government to strengthen institutionalisation, and concerns over future trajectories of FFP). However, a range of new factors are enabling and undermining trajectories towards FFP.

As the feminist foreign policy ecosystem grows and changes, regional and intergovernmental support has become a critical factor in the uptake of FFP commitments and in shaping and contextualising FFP practice, especially for the Majority World. Governments that have more recently declared FFPs are prioritising evidence and consultation informed policy development processes and early FFP adopters are often now lagging behind in policy development. Civil society and government continue to have differing expectations of policy content, consultations, and implementation, however there is evidence of increasing tensions between majority world feminists, and minority world feminists, whose contributions to FFP discussion are seen to be privileged by governments and in multilateral spaces.

A key consideration in the 2021 research was the whether the label ‘feminist’ was worth it. In 2021, many participants expressed the view that the content of foreign policy, not the label, is what matters. However, in our discussion of the findings we argued that the label *enabled* the content, because the political nature of the word feminist was in fact critical to demonstrating the necessary political will to implement disruptive and transformative policy.

This update shows that we are yet to see the kind of transformative actions that the label promises, but rather the absorption of a separate discipline (gender mainstreaming) under a new name. While we had hoped to see greater maturation of the concept, the fact that FFP is now more visible in its absence than in its practice creates a level of confusion that may actually impede the maturation of FFP beyond the point of usefulness, unless urgent steps are taken.

Of critical importance is the need to avoid any suggestion that the declaration of feminist foreign policy is enough to ensure feminist action or outcomes. Even where governments take transformative actions, the application of feminist approaches in a system that is not holistically underpinned by a feminist ethos will be akin to swimming upstream. Notwithstanding, that feminist foreign policy *has not yet* resolved elements of the polycrisis is not reason enough to dismiss the idea that it has a contribution to make.

This is a complex task which will look different in every context, but we put forward three general principles that can be applied in different ways across contexts. First, to avoid the policy evaporation

of feminist approaches, we need to disentangle FFP from becoming a new name for a gender equality focus. Secondly, feminists inside and outside of government need to be cautious of pushing for – or rewarding – the adoption of FFP *in name* by governments who are not able to demonstrate any appetite for transformative changes *in practice*. This means understanding where feminist approaches currently sit within Hallin’s spheres in each particular context and committing to shifting beliefs about those approaches amongst those who would implement them, rather than changing the approaches to fit the beliefs.

Thirdly, governments need to show that they are serious by setting up robust accountability systems to drive improvements in practice over time, and feminist civil society need to hold governments accountable for both incremental and transformative shifts. As discussed in previous sections, this necessitates collaboration across the feminist ecosystem, between international and domestic organisations, and contextually appropriate calibration of advocacy approaches. Building from the work of the African Feminist Collective on Feminist Informed Policies, this could also look like an intentional and focused approach to naming areas of feminist *informed* foreign policy. This requires advocates and citizens to be intentional in calling for more opportunities for governments to take ambitious, feminist-informed approaches. It also reduces the likelihood that FFP will continue to lose legitimacy through the rhetoric-action gap.

The findings of our research also point to several areas of FFP related discourse that would benefit from further enquiry, including the influence of consultation on FFP policy; the impact of FFPs once adopted, and an evaluation of the successes and challenges of institutionalisation processes.

From high hopes to low expectations, the first ten years of FFP demonstrates the opportunities and challenges of introducing and implementing new approaches to foreign policy in a system deeply inured of the status quo. It is neither inevitable nor impossible for transformative FFP approaches to take root and thrive. We take from the research findings and the expertise, optimism and scepticism of the global FFP community, that the building blocks of future trajectories of FFP will be shaped by the willingness to confront and challenge systemic inadequacies, a focus on quality over quantity, and robust and contextual accountability mechanisms. These will either be the foundation or folly of the next ten years of FFP.

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