

Feminist Foreign Policy for Germany

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Feminist foreign policy (FFP) is based on an alternative understanding of power that informs its approach to foreign policy. Power politics does not guarantee peace nor can states bring about security and prosperity alone. FFP promotes a logic of empowerment through diplomacy that supports women and men to deliver peace and prosperity through principles of human rights and gender equality. Germany has an opportunity to mobilise and expand FFP principles, instruments and actions to all domains – security, diplomacy, trade, development aid and humanitarian responses with the new Coalition government agreement in Germany approaching foreign policy “alongside feminist foreign policy” (Koalitionsvertrag 2021: 144).

Feminist Principles in Foreign Policy provide guidance on *what* the content of foreign policies should consist of, but also on *how* foreign policy can and should be conducted.

First and foremost, **FFP treats fundamental human rights including women’s rights as non-negotiable, a red line**, and not able to be traded-off. Standing up for women’s human rights and reducing gender inequality around the world are core foreign policy goals in their own right.

Second, **FFP is “pragmatic”** - building on the tradition of feminist pragmatism. To guide foreign policy decisions, FFP directly **engages with people’s experiences and practical experimentation to find solutions to insecurity**. So, for example, with regard to conflict situations or climate threats affecting national and regional security, foreign policy actors meet with the groups “most affected” to understand the ‘truth’ of the situation and what actions could be effective to reduce insecurity. FFP derives its distinct power from inclusive community engagement with many different groups – starting domestically but moving outwards to engage groups in other countries and societies. With this principle, it is plausible that feminist foreign policy could support defensive capacities to protect people’s human rights, but this must be balanced with preventative capacities involving diplomatic tools and strategy.

Third, FFP seeks not only to effectively and inclusively respond to crises in real time but to **develop a long-term vision and strategy for achieving positive peace** beyond the absence of war or violence toward gender justice. By contrast, revisionist foreign policy is marked by an emphasis on short-term security concerns, often stoking conflict, to achieve its vision of national or civilisational supremacy. Fundamentally, feminist approaches to foreign policy must contrast with hyper-masculine and strongman approaches that are destabilising for democracy, human rights and peace. While self-defence and collective security arrangements may be consistent with a FFP, the use of force brings peace only in a limited way; it cannot sustain it.

The promotion of FFP reflects a broader global shift in political power and a gradual power shift in gender relations as women’s economic and political participation increases

worldwide. It also reflects geopolitical power and the reality that soft power tools that reflect a country's values and advance normative principles are a major mechanism of foreign policy. To be influential actors internationally, states must live up to their own espoused values and normative principles in domestic politics and policy as well as in foreign policy. And they must be consistent across foreign policy domains – articulating a broader political strategy.

Instruments of Feminist Foreign Policy

The international system is a gender-hierarchy writ large – wherein state functions, distribution of capabilities and inter-state interactions advantage the strong and powerful, who are largely represented by men. Discriminatory gender norms are reflected in the patriarchal structure of states and the state system. Even as states have promoted gender equality as an international norm and developed institutional mechanisms to address gender discrimination and injustice, these norms and mechanisms remain contested. Resurgent patriarchal extremist movements and insurgencies around the world attack gender equality norms and institutions, and the governments that purport them. FFP requires instruments to build its constituency, counter the opposition and achieve meaningful and robust affirmation from local communities at home and abroad.

- **FFP Policy Leadership:** A FFP approach requires clear messaging and a values-based strategy. Germany's foreign policy diplomats and officials must adopt concrete, unambiguous language and communication strategies to upholding women's rights and human rights and to avoid legitimising regimes in violation of these international norms. They must prioritise relationships to the 'most affected' in situations of regional and global crisis and insecurity. Former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton paved the way in her bilateral state visits by requesting to be taken to meet grassroots women's initiatives related to US foreign policy goals. It is important that the Foreign Minister and the highest-level officials maintain this stance.
- **FFP Consultation Mechanism:** Civil society is a powerful instrument of FFP given the people-to-people cooperation that embeds norms of gender equality, human rights, and democracy through social and cultural activities as well as advocacy. FFP goals cannot be achieved without societal mobilisation and efforts to build feminist civil society transnationally. In Australia, where the government has not adopted an FFP, a consortium of civil society actors has launched a new project to map FFP issues and suggest strategies and options for further advancing these policies (ActionAid et al., 2020).
- **FFP Ambassador.** A thematic ambassador position has emerged across states to promote women's rights and gender equality through foreign policy.¹ This new office provides an instrument for the development and practice of Germany's FFP and its connection with other like-minded countries and encouraging champions across state institutions.

¹ Sweden, USA, Seychelles, UK, Iceland, Spain, Netherlands, Norway, Australia, Finland, Canada, Luxembourg, see <https://www.cfr.org/blog/ambassadors-gender-equality-who-they-are-what-they-do-and-why-they-matter>.

- **FFP Alliance and Global Platform.** Alliances across policy areas have been vociferously building on the FFP movement, calling for a ‘feminist post-COVID-19 recovery’ and for ‘feminist peace’, especially in light of the 2021 change in the US Presidency. Germany could further build the FFP narrative and network, harnessing actors at all levels in a new FFP alliance, which could be influential in existing multilateral for such as the UN, G7, EU, G20 etc. Germany could also support the Munich Security Conference (MSC), a leading global forum for world leaders to discuss important national and international policy concerns, to develop an FFP platform. Since 2016 the MSC has been committed to achieving equitable inclusion of ‘female perspectives on peace, security and defence policies.’ In 2020 it held a side event entitled ‘No Peace without Feminism: Why every state needs a feminist foreign policy’, involving men and women, state and civil society leaders. It noted the exclusion of women and other political minorities from foreign and security processes and the need for foreign policy to counter discriminatory and patriarchal structures around the world.
- **FFP Financing.** Where countries spend their defence and development aid dollars matters for FFP. Financing must back up and support key allies and groups that can safeguard women’s human rights and build local constituencies for gender equality, peace and democracy. Supporting women’s economic participation and leadership is crucial for regional stability and global security – but this participation depends on Germany’s support for women’s human rights to education, healthcare, reproductive rights, and maternity leave through diplomacy and development assistance.

Courses of Action

FFP must go beyond the perception of Germany’s nation brand to be salient in Germany’s foreign policy actions. An effective FFP needs to have positions on defence as well as diplomacy, justice as well as security. FFP should be a meaningful guide for how to understand and respond to current global conflicts taking seriously their implications for women’s rights and security.

- **Response to Russia’s war in Ukraine.** Military assistance to Ukraine has been laudable to support Ukraine’s self-defence as a democratic country. But sending weapons to a warzone cannot be the only foreign policy response. From an FFP perspective, this assistance and Germany’s defence budget reaching 2% of GDP needs to be on a par with its development assistance, specifically to support Ukraine business and civil society and their efforts to maintain peaceful operations and respond to the humanitarian situation. Currently, Ukrainian women are the primary breadwinners whose remittances sent from Germany and other European countries are funding Ukraine’s defence. Germany’s FFP can sustain the rights and access for the primarily women and children refugees, promote recognition of Ukrainian women’s contributions and accountability for sexual and gender-based crimes in Ukraine. There must be a long-term German FFP strategy to support women’s participation in the spaces where a peace settlement is being discussed as well as

FFP financing to support the voices of feminist civil society in the Ukraine and in Russia.

- **Multilateral diplomacy on Afghanistan.**

Germany can play a leading role as a FFP state in committing to supporting an inclusive peace settlement in Afghanistan, taking the cue from Afghan women activists who have been loud and clear on the need to protect women's fundamental rights and not progressively chip away at them with cultural and religious reservations to accommodate an extremist regime. Germany must clearly and consistently communicate its' FFP that fundamental women's rights are non-negotiable to avoid sending the wrong signals to the Taliban. Germany can support feminist civil society in Afghanistan in the short and medium term by providing space for the newly evacuated Afghan civil society leaders to connect with remaining grassroots organisations in Afghanistan to work on educational, cultural, socio-economic, political, and rights-based activities, as well as monitoring human rights violations to hold perpetrators accountable in Afghanistan. Germany should establish a single national taskforce and/or multilateral forum bringing together government and civil society actors with one aim to unite in support of the people of Afghanistan, especially women and girls, under the Taliban regime.

- **FFP diplomacy on climate change.** Germany has an opportunity to lead by example with regard to its FFP approach to climate change. An inclusive approach to climate diplomacy and equitable approach to energy transitions and means ensuring inclusive representation in decision-making and adaptation outcomes; both involving diverse women and civil society delegates and their knowledge and experience of climate change at multilateral fora, such as the COP27, is a minimum standard, as is developing policy options to achieving the zero-net emissions targets and SDGs in conjunction with 'most affected' groups. FFP should support solutions-focused local partnerships that showcase how **just and equitable energy transitions**, shifting from a fossil-fuel based economy to a low-carbon and renewable energy system can be achieved while upholding women's human rights and advancing social and environmental justice.