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Exploring Feminist Foreign Policy: Who Is Leading the Way?^[1]

Feminist foreign policy (FFP) has emerged as one of the most significant shifts in global diplomacy in the last decade. While gender equality has long appeared on the international development agenda, including in the [Millennium Development Goals](#), it was not until 2014 that the concept formally entered foreign policy practice, when Sweden became the first country in the world to adopt a feminist foreign policy.

Since then, the idea has gained considerable momentum. In 2022, Sweden announced the [formation of the Feminist Foreign Policy Plus Group](#) , bringing together 16 countries committed to advancing gender equality through their external relations. Today, Europe--alongside countries such as Canada, Mexico, and Chile--continues to lead in developing concrete frameworks for feminist foreign policy implementation.

What exactly is feminist foreign policy? To answer, one must first understand feminism not merely as the advancement of women, but as a framework for challenging systemic inequality.

Although women comprise half the global population, no country has yet achieved full gender equality. Persistent power structures--including patriarchy, colonial legacies, economic inequality, and discrimination--continue to shape global outcomes. Feminist foreign policy seeks to transform these systems.

According to the [Australian Feminist Foreign Policy Coalition](#) , feminist foreign policy is, “A framework to understand and transform the global systems of power that uphold and perpetuate inequality — including patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, racism and others — in order to create peaceful and flourishing societies.”

Importantly, feminist foreign policy is not only about increasing the number of women in leadership. Rather, it aims to reshape the foundations of policy-making so that diplomacy, development, peacebuilding, and security produce fairer outcomes for all.

Greater inclusion of women's voices across all areas of foreign policy leads to more representative, sustainable, and effective decisions, benefiting societies as a whole.

Who is leading?

European states have taken the lead in formalizing feminist foreign policy, publishing national strategies and implementation guidelines. While approaches differ, most share common priorities: human rights, gender justice, peace and security, political participation, economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and climate action.

A key emphasis is financing. The Australian coalition highlights that funding women's rights organizations and feminist movements is among the most effective drivers of change.

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The Netherlands offers a strong example. Article 1 of its constitution declares: "All persons in the Netherlands shall be treated equally in equal circumstances."

The Dutch government views feminist foreign policy as essential to protecting human rights and ensuring meaningful participation for all genders. Between 2021 and 2025, it allocated €510 million to advancing gender equality under Sustainable Development Goal 5, currently one of the largest public investments in women's rights worldwide.

Another core element of feminist foreign policy is resources. Commitments to equality are only meaningful when backed by sufficient financial and institutional support. Without dedicated resources, feminist foreign policy risks remaining symbolic rather than transformational.

Sweden, meanwhile, frames its approach around the "Three Rs" : Rights, Resources,  and Representation. It consistently ranks among the world's most gender-equal countries, and approximately 90 percent of its overseas development assistance integrates gender equality as a principal or significant objective.

Lastly, how to measure the progress?

The Feminist Foreign Policy Index, developed by the International Center for Research on Women, offers a quantitative tool for assessing countries' progress. The index evaluates its 48 member states and OECD partners, examining how policies contribute to structural change and address inequality. It is a quantitative framework that explores what a feminist foreign policy could look like in practice. It envisions FFP as a tool for systems change, while identifying both the drivers and challenges of inequality across countries.

In the most recent rankings, Sweden leads with a score of 0.80, followed by Norway (0.73), Mexico and Finland (0.67), Costa Rica and Peru (0.65), and Germany (0.63). Countries scoring lowest include the United States (0.12), India (0.24), China (0.28), Türkiye (0.31), and Israel and South Korea (0.34).

Sweden's early and courageous initiative has catalyzed a growing global movement. Across regions, increasing numbers of women are entering senior leadership positions in politics, finance, and public service--a shift that reinforces the principles underlying feminist foreign policy.

Ultimately, feminist foreign policy is not only about gender. It is about rebuilding global governance systems to deliver peace, prosperity, and justice more effectively for everyone.

The effects of these shifts are increasingly visible beyond Europe and the Americas. In Hong Kong, the financial sector has experienced significant growth in women's participation at

senior levels, particularly in banking, asset management, insurance, and fintech. Women now hold 45 percent of senior leadership roles within three reporting levels of top management — including CEOs and managing directors.
