

Trends in Latin American International Relations

Shifting Alliances in the New World (Dis)Order

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Chapter 11

Feminist Foreign Policy in Latin America

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11 Feminist Foreign Policy in Latin America

The Approaches of Mexico, Chile, and Colombia

Claudia Zilla

Since 2014, starting with Sweden, an increasing number of governments from different regions have committed themselves to a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP). Adopting such an approach implies two things: first, the recognition that the usual patterns of external action contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequality and other forms of injustice based on discrimination and marginalisation of social groups along certain attributes, and that these asymmetries endanger (social) peace and prosperity; and second, the ambition to reshape the content and modes of foreign policy in order to change the status quo for the better.

The spread of FFP can be seen as part of a growing gender awareness in international politics and a phenomenon of international norm diffusion (Zilla 2022b). At the same time, these developments are neither linear nor universal. They can stagnate or even be reversed, as demonstrated by Sweden's abandonment of an FFP in 2022. Moreover, they coexist with opposing trends such as the pushback against sexual and reproductive health rights, the so-called "culture war" and the fight against "gender ideology" promoted by various actors and forces of the far-right or what has been described as patriarchal populism (Sanders and Dudley Jenkins 2023), as well as high levels of violence (including against women), rearmament, and the proliferation of armed conflicts. In this sense, the recent history of the FFP also includes political reversals and contradictions between the ambitions of this approach and the context in which it is conceived and implemented.

In this chapter, I focus on the Latin American context, with particular attention to Mexico, Chile, and Colombia, the only three countries in the region that have officially adopted a feminist approach to foreign policy and are still pursuing it in 2025. The Latin American case studies are set against the background of global trends and the findings of FFP's research. The analyses focus conceptually on national approaches to the FFP, while an empirical assessment of its implementation is beyond the scope of this article and would require a longer observation period. The first section is devoted to the growing gender awareness in international politics at the global and regional levels and the proliferation of networks and events on FFP. The second section presents the core elements of the FFP that are common to a

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large number of national strategies. The following sections focus on the FFP approaches of Mexico, Chile, and Colombia. Finally, the concluding section discusses some comparative aspects and criticisms.

Growing gender awareness in international and regional politics

While we have been witnessing the spread of FFP for only a decade, growing gender awareness has been shaping international politics for much longer. Gender awareness means being able to reflect on and take into account at least two gender-related aspects: first, most developments and policy decisions have a gendered impact, i.e. they affect people identified (by themselves and/or others) with different genders in different ways and to different degrees. This is because societies are based on gender regimes, in which gender conditions social roles, life experiences as well as the access to rights and freedoms, to resources, and to positions of power. Second, gender hierarchies, i.e. the asymmetries of power between people identified with different genders, are not only unjust because they violate the principle of equality between human beings but are also one of the causes of social conflict and exacerbate problems of other origins.

Because men (male human beings) have generally and historically enjoyed a privileged status, and have predominantly shaped and remained at the centre of domestic and international politics, gender awareness has primarily meant considering and including women. However, overcoming the dominant gender duality of men and women as two mutually exclusive identities and the heteronormativity connected with it, as well as the alignment of gender, sex, social roles, and identities, allows for a broadening of gender awareness beyond (heterosexual) women to include a variety of options and experiences—most often summarised under the umbrella term LGBTQIA+¹—that may also be subject to invisibilisation and discrimination. In this sense, gender awareness has been driven not only by international feminist and women's movements (Aggestam and Towns 2018), but also by civil society organisations working on LGBTQIA+ issues.

The gender perspective within the UN system

The integration of a gender perspective into international politics has been particularly evident within the UN system. In 1946, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), in its Resolution 11 (II) of June 21, established the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) as the principal global inter-governmental body devoted exclusively to the promotion of gender equality and the rights and empowerment of women.² In 1972, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), in its Resolution 3010 (XXVII)³ of December 18, proclaimed 1975 “International Women’s Year”. Accordingly, the First World Conference on Women⁴ was held in Mexico in 1975, followed by a Plan of Action and UNGA Resolution 31/136⁵ of December of the same

year, which declared the period 1976–1985 to be the “Decade of Women: Equality, Development and Peace”. During these ten years, the UNGA adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)⁶ in 1979, which entered into force in 1981, and two further World Conferences on Women were held in Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985). The Fourth World Conference on Women took place in Beijing in 1995, culminating in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.⁷

Gender equality has also found its place in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs 2000–2015, Goal 3) and their successor, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 2016–2030, Goal 5). This trend has also affected international security: In 2000, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325⁸ on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) at the initiative of Namibia’s Minister of Women’s Affairs, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah. This was followed by nine other resolutions on gender-related issues (the WPS agenda).⁹ Since 2005, around 100 countries have developed and regularly updated National Action Plans to implement UNSCR 1325. After years of negotiations between UN Member States, women’s groups and civil society, the UNGA adopted Resolution 64/289 on July 2, 2010, creating UN Women, an UN organisation dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women, by merging several UN-units dedicated to women issues.¹⁰ More recently, agreements on climate change (Altmann and Aguilar 2022) and trade (Frohmann 2022; Rudloff and Stoll 2024) have included increasingly frequent and explicit gender chapters.

The gender agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) have traditionally been strongly involved not only in the development of the UN, but also in the promotion of women’s rights within the UN system and regional organisations. The region is home to 20 of the 51 founding members of the UN. Of the 160 signatories of the UN Charter, only four were women, and two of them were from LAC: Minerva Bernardino (Dominican Republic) and Bertha Lutz (Brazil), together with Virginia Gildersleeve (United States), and Wu Yi-Fang (China). It is thanks to Lutz and Bernardino that an explicit reference to women was included in the phrase “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women”¹¹ in the preamble of the UN Charter (UN Women 2019, 4).

The “Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean” (RCWLAC)¹² is the main intergovernmental forum on women’s rights and gender equality in the region and a subsidiary body of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), which is responsible for the Secretariat of the RCWLAC and has been working in this area in coordination with UN Women since 2000. Since its

inauguration in 1977 in Havana, Cuba, the RCWLAC has brought together governments, civil society, in particular women's and feminist movements and organisations, academia, intergovernmental bodies, cooperation agencies, and the UN system. To date, 15 conferences have been held; Mexico will host the XVI edition in 2025. The agreements and achievements made in this context have formed the Regional Agenda on Gender.

At the X Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Quito, Ecuador, in 2007, the Gender Equality Observatory for LAC¹³ was created. Its aim is to contribute to the strengthening of national mechanisms for the promotion of women's rights, to make available official information from governments in the region and to facilitate the monitoring of international and regional agreements on women's rights and gender equality. It maintains up-to-date figures and information on a range of issues relevant to decision-making and policy formulation, and co-ordinates the efforts of other UN and cooperation agencies and governments in the region.

One of the most important agreements on gender issues in LAC is the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, known as the Belém do Pará Convention, adopted in 1994 by the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) and ratified by 32 Latin American countries.¹⁴ This legally binding international instrument within the Inter-American System was the first in the world to recognise violence against women as a human rights violation and a systemic problem, and to define the "due diligence" obligations of States in terms of prevention, investigation, assistance, and punishment.¹⁵ The effective implementation of the Convention requires a process of continuous and independent evaluation and support, for which the Follow-up Mechanism of the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI) was established in 2004.

Institutions and working groups that bring women together and address their rights, concerns, and interests have also been created in the framework of regional organisations. The Inter-American Commission on Women (Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres, CIM), established in 1928, was the first intergovernmental body created by the Pan-American Union (succeeded in 1949 by the OAS) to ensure the recognition of women's human rights, and is the only hemispheric political forum for women's rights and gender equality. Since then, more and more bodies dedicated to these issues have been established at the regional level within the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and subregional integration systems such as the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) (Ribeiro Hoffmann 2022, 160; Díaz García 2016, 82ff.).

Beyond gender equality and gender mainstreaming

Along with countries such as Canada, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the Netherlands, three Latin American

countries—Mexico, Chile, and Colombia—have explicitly committed to an FFP. The proliferation of national FFP strategies can be seen as another step in the context of a growing gender awareness in international politics, especially in the UN framework. Margot Wallström—the first foreign minister to introduce a feminist approach to foreign policy in 2014, coining the term—had been the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict from 2010 to 2012. The adjective “feminist” qualifying foreign policy refers to women’s concerns only as a starting point, but with a much broader and transformative ambition that goes beyond gender equality policies and gender mainstreaming to advance other political perspectives, goals and means different from those typical of business as usual, i.e. seeking for structural change (more on this in the following section).

At the same time, the spread of national FFP strategies is the result of horizontal norm diffusion, promoted by the cooperation of governments that have officially adopted an FFP or wish to move towards it. An expression of this multilateral networking is the annual ministerial conference on FFP, which has so far taken place in Germany (2022), the Netherlands (2023), and Mexico (2024), and will be organised by France in 2025, as well as the creation of the “Feminist Foreign Policy Plus” (FFP+) Group in 2022, co-chaired each year by a country from the Global North and a country from the Global South (2023: Chile and Germany, 2024: Mexico and Spain) (Zilla 2024c, 352).

In addition, regional and international civil society networks and research initiatives have emerged, bringing together state and non-state actors to share experiences and identify best practices. One example is the regional platform *Política Exterior Feminista de América Latina* (PEFAL), an initiative developed and coordinated by the *Centro de Estudios Nueva Política Exterior* with support from the Open Society Foundations.¹⁶

It should be noted that a government’s official declaration that it will adopt an FFP is neither a precondition nor a guarantee for the pursuit of a feminist approach in external action. However, this political step can act as an entry ticket to several networks and events, such as those mentioned above, and provide access to funding for projects and initiatives in this area. Moreover, FFP can be used by a government as a strategic narrative (Zhu-kova 2021) to contribute to the country’s reputation and status in international hierarchies (Achilleos-Sarll 2018). Finally, as with any type of policy, FFP can be instrumentalised: by officially adopting an FFP, a government can also seek to “purple wash” without making real progress in this field, or even to avoid substantive change.

Core elements of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP)

A government’s explicit rhetorical commitment to an FFP has not always been followed by the development and publication of an FFP strategy. However, it can be an opportunity to make explicit the country’s

understanding of FFP, as there is no established definition in either international politics or social science (Reineke and Zilla 2024, 20; Zilla 2024c). Analytically, FFP is a policy framework for shaping external action as well as the processes and structures within ministries, most often the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Zilla 2024b; Reineke and Zilla 2024). Its content remains controversial, just as “feminism” is a contested term that encompasses different currents.

Generally speaking, there are three pillars on which the content of the FFP is most often based. First and foremost, FFP is generally associated with a substantive commitment to human rights. This is not only about recognising and protecting rights, but also about empowering people to claim their rights so that their basic needs can be met. Secondly, FFP draws on the perspectives and demands of feminist approaches. Reference is made to the feminist critique of patriarchal structures that underlie the power hierarchy between the sexes, as well as various forms of discrimination and oppression. The emancipatory drive goes beyond the demand for “more rights for all” (within the prevailing order) and is also directed towards structural conditions that would enable all people to lead self-determined lives. Third, FFP considers research findings on the benefits of inclusion. It draws on evidence of the positive effects of integrating previously structurally marginalised people and perspectives into political processes and institutions. With a focus on gender relations, it examines the positive correlation between gender equality on the one hand and prosperity and peace on the other. Improving the situation and opportunities of women benefits not only this group, but also society as a whole and the international system. On this basis, the argument for gender equality and full inclusion is both intrinsically normative (in the sense of a value, with reference to human rights and the prohibition of discrimination) and extrinsically pragmatic (in the sense of a benefit, with reference to empirical evidence). FFP thus claims to be both value-oriented and evidence-based (Zilla 2024b).

Only three countries in the region have officially introduced a high-level FFP: Mexico in 2020, Chile in 2023, and Colombia in 2024. In each case, the initial announcement about a year earlier started a period of consultation with civil society to develop an FFP strategy. In four other Latin American countries there has been some approach to FFP: Argentina had an ambassador for FFP under the government of Alberto Fernández, a position abolished by Javier Milei in December 2024; Brazil has an ambassador for FFP; and Costa Rica proposed an institutional approach on gender equality in foreign policy in 2022. In October 2024, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Plurinational State of Bolivia also announced its commitment to building a depatriarchal and decolonial foreign policy (Pérez Gil and Tickner 2025, 139). At the VIII CELAC Summit in St. Vincent and the Grenadines in March 2024, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, México, and the Dominican Republic signed a declaration on FFP.¹⁷

Feminist Foreign Policy of Latin American states

In line with the international trend, the FFP was introduced in Mexico, Chile, and Colombia under male presidents, in the context of left-wing or progressive governments. In most cases, even the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is a man. However, it has always been women, usually the number two in the foreign ministry hierarchy, who have been responsible for coordinating the development, drafting, and dissemination of the FFP strategy (Reineke and Zilla 2024, 19).

Mexico's approach

In September 2019, under the presidency of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO, 2018–2024) of the National Regeneration Movement (Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional, MORENA) in Mexico, the Foreign Secretary, Marcelo Ebrard (December 2018–June 2023), delivered a speech to the UNGA in which he assured:

[The] Government of Mexico considers itself a feminist government, and we will demonstrate this through our commitments and our actions in these years, and we believe that gender equality is the basis, the foundation of a society characterised by equality; social reality cannot be changed without a deep and broad commitment to the promotion of gender equality.

(SRE 2019, author's translation)

In January 2020, during the XXXI Annual Meeting of Ambassadors and Consuls (REC) at the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs (SFA), the adoption of an FFP was officially announced.

On that occasion, the FFP was characterised as a foreign policy that seeks to promote government action to reduce and eliminate structural differences, gender gaps, and inequalities, in order to build a more just and prosperous society. The SFA is responsible for the development and implementation of the Mexican FFP, and in particular the Undersecretary of State for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights (at the time headed by Martha Delgado Peralta), through the General Directorate for Human Rights and Democracy.

The SFA justifies the adoption of an FFP in the context of a government that considers itself progressive and inclusive in terms of human rights and gender, and that responds to legitimate social demands (SRE 2020, 3). In this line, the SFA sees the FFP in a series of achievements in the field of gender equality, such as the gender parity in the AMLO cabinet and the constitutional reform approved by Congress in 2019, which introduced the obligation to apply gender parity in all branches of the Union (CELG 2019). The XXIXth generation of the Mexican Foreign Service (Servicio Exterior

Mexicano, SEM), which began in 2019, was the first to have gender parity (SRE 2020, 11). According to the SFA, Mexico seeks a leadership role in multilateral, regional, and international fora regarding an equality agenda, for instance chairing together with France the Generation Equality Forum 2021, convened by UN Women.¹⁸

According to the SFA (SRE 2020, 4), the objectives of the Mexican FFP are to mainstream a human rights approach, a gender perspective, and intersectionality in all areas of Mexican foreign policy (including positions, resources, decision-making, and leadership); to make visible women's contributions to foreign policy and global action; and to ensure policy coherence and consistency, both internally and externally. The Mexican FFP is based on five principles or axes of work: (1) a foreign policy with a gender perspective and a feminist agenda abroad plus (Mexico's international leadership on gender issues); (2) an SFA based on gender parity (organisational reforms for egalitarian development); (3) an SFA free of violence and safe for all (elimination of gender-based violence); (4) equality is visible (visibility of women's capital in SFA); (5) SFA is intersectional feminist (complementarity with other global actions) (SRE 2020, 6). These principles or axes of work should shape all areas of Mexican foreign policy with a focus on (1) international cooperation and assistance based on a human rights and gender approach; (2) economic promotion that empowers women and makes them visible; (3) cultural promotion that recognises women's contribution to Mexican culture; and (4) tourism promotion with a gender perspective (SRE 2020, 16). Finally, the Mexican presentation of the FFP includes a proposal for a roadmap and work plan for the period 2020–2024 along the five thematic axes, including the organisation of events, the elaboration of handbooks, the joining of initiatives and the achievement of objectives. Among the activities and actions announced in 2020, a “Guide to inclusive, non-sexist language” (SRE 2023) was published in January 2023. According to the SFA (Equis 2024, 17ff.), women have been promoted in international representation spaces, as candidates for international and multilateral bodies, and their number have increased in Mexican delegations.

Chile's approach

Gabriel Boric of the Frente Amplio (FA) was elected president of Chile (2022–2025), promising to deepen democracy, promote the inclusion of marginalised groups, and advance a human rights agenda (Zilla 2022a). From the outset, he assembled a highly representative cabinet of 14 women and 11 men, including young politicians and LGBTQIA+ activists. He also decided to integrate the Ministry of Women and Gender Equity into the Political Committee, the small circle of highly relevant ministries. Boric has explicitly committed to a feminist government in which women hold key ministries, including his first Foreign Minister, Antonia Urreola (2022–2023), and the Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs, Ximena Fuentes (2022–2023),

who was succeeded by Gloria de la Fuente (2023–2025) under the new Foreign Minister, Alberto van Klaveren (2023–2025). In 2022, Ambassador María del Carmen Domínguez became the first woman to head the Andrés Bello Diplomatic Academy.¹⁹ By 2022, the proportion of female ambassadors was close to 30%, the highest in Chilean history (27 female heads of mission—16 from the diplomatic career and 11 political appointments) (MRECh 2024a, 10).

Regarding the WPS agenda, Chile was the first country in Latin America to develop a national plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 (2000) and the first in the region to update it in 2015.²⁰ In the field of international trade policy, Chile has pioneered an inclusive approach, with gender and trade chapters in several free trade agreements since 2016 (Rudloff and Stoll 2024, 50).

In line with this gender agenda, the presidential understanding and following the international trend, Chile announced the adoption of a feminist approach to foreign policy in March 2022 with the aim of establishing the principle of equality and non-discrimination as a guiding principle in Chile's external action.²¹ The FFP strategy was presented in June 2023 (MRECh 2023). Chile's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) sees FFP as an evolving paradigm and its own FFP strategy as a living document (MRECh 2023, 29), a policy in the making. The MFA recognises the value of FFP in terms of its contribution to democratic representation, human rights, sustainable development and international engagement (MRECh 2023, 28). Chile's FFP focuses on reducing the gender gaps that hinder improvements in all these areas. In line with national gender equality policies and priorities, and through its commitment to the FFP, Chile seeks to influence multilateral and bilateral bodies to strengthen global and regional governance that ensures the protection and promotion of the dignity and autonomy of women and girls in all their diversity. The country's commitment to a gender equality agenda is also understood as a legal obligation stemming from international treaties and multilateral instruments signed by Chile (MRECh 2023, 28).

The MFA characterises its approach to FFP as participatory, in that it opens up spaces for all actors in policy design and implementation; inclusive, in that it seeks to ensure that its benefits reach all; transversal, in that it promotes coordinated action across the MFA's work and at national and international levels; and intersectional, in that it recognises that inequality is not only structural but also shaped by the intersection of different factors (MRECh 2023, 29).

The priority themes identified by the MFA are (1) human rights and strengthening democracy with a focus on gender equality; (2) support for the eradication and elimination of gender-based violence; (3) women's empowerment and increased representation; (4) women's agenda, peace and security agenda; (5) trade and gender; (6) climate change and gender; (7) digital agenda, science, technology, and innovation; (8) comprehensive system of care (MRECh 2023, 31–36). For the implementation of these eight priority themes, the MFA distinguishes the following areas in the external sphere: (1) the multilateral, bilateral, and consular agenda in Latin America and abroad;

(2) the agencies under the auspices of the MFA, such as the Chilean Agency for International Development Cooperation (Agcid), the National Directorate of Borders and Frontiers (Difrol), the General Directorate of Export Promotion (ProChile), the Antarctic Institute of Chile (Inach); and (3) international economic relations (MRECh 2023, 40–49). In the domestic sphere and in the area of the Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, the implementation should focus on (1) institutionalisation of gender issues; (2) gender budgeting; (3) increased participation, representation, and visibility of women; (4) review and strengthening of capacity building and training programmes (MRECh 2023, 50–53). Similar achievements are expected in the area of the Undersecretary for International Economic Relations (MRECh 2023, 54).

The Chilean FFP strategy document is particularly explicit in announcing concrete next steps, such as: (1) the creation of a new Division on Gender Issues within the MFA; (2) the promotion of the gender equality certification process offered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); (3) the establishment of a network of gender focal points in the MFA in Santiago de Chile and in Chilean embassies and consulates; (4) the inclusion of the MFA in the Interministerial Council for Gender Equality; (5) the evaluation of the implementation of the Chilean standard Sello Iguala (Seal of Equality) for gender equality and reconciliation of work and family life in the MFA; (6) the creation of a council of experts to develop a strategy to promote women's participation in decision-making and achieve gender parity by 2030; (7) the introduction of a mechanism to monitor the implementation of an FFP action plan (MRECh 2023, 50–55).

In March 2024, less than a year after the publication of the FFP Strategy, the MFA presented its FFP Action Plan for the period 2024–2025, which is the result of an internal consultation process that had been underway since June 2023. It identifies three main challenges for this period: (1) the articulation of a gender agenda in foreign policy also with other actors in all areas and levels; (2) the institutionalisation of FFP; and (3) a better representation of women. The Action Plan includes measures around the eight priority themes identified in the FFP strategy that have already been developed and will be implemented in the future. Also in 2024, the MFA's *Handbook of Inclusive Non-sexist Language* (MRECh 2024b) was published as a practical guide to use with the aim of overcoming the dominance of stereotypes and promoting gender equality and respect for diversity. It is hoped that it will have an impact not only on the way people speak and write, but also on the way social relations are shaped.

Colombia's approach

Colombian President Gustavo Petro (2022–2026) of the Human Colombia/Coalition Historic Pact first mentioned the implementation of an FFP at the UNGA in September 2022, one month after taking office. The

“Development Plan 2022–2026: Colombia, World Power of Life”, published in May 2023, subsequently refers to the FFP, stating that:

the national government, under the coordination of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, will formulate and implement a foreign policy with a gender perspective as state policy, with the aim of promoting and guaranteeing gender equality in bilateral and multilateral policies.

(DNP 2023, 283; ARF 2024, 15)

Finally, in March 2024, the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRECo) presented its feminist approach to foreign policy to the UN during the 68th session of the UN CSW.²² The development of Colombia’s FFP began under Foreign Minister Alvaro Leyva (2022–2024) and Deputy Minister for Multilateral Affairs Elizabeth Taylor Jay (2023–2024), who succeeded Laura Gil (until March 2023), followed by Luis Murillo (from February 2024) and Kandya Obezo (from August 2024) respectively. Gender and Feminist Foreign Policy Advisor at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been Diana Parra.

Colombia’s FFP was institutionalised as public policy in 2024 through a series of political decisions and administrative acts. In February 2024, the internal working group Feminist Foreign Policy and Gender Issues was created by a resolution within the Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.²³ In June 2024, Arlene B. Tickner was appointed Roving Ambassador for Gender Affairs and Global Feminist Policy, a newly created position.²⁴ The official adoption of an FFP “or a foreign policy with a gender approach” was formalised by a draft decree in November 2024.²⁵ In the same year, another decree introduced the National Action Plan (NAP) for UNSCR 1315 and created the Committee for the Follow-up and Monitoring of the NAP,²⁶ following the announcement (in February 2024) of the creation of the Centre of Excellence for Women, Peace and Security for UNSCR 1315 in Colombia as the headquarters for the Latin American and Caribbean region, the third of its kind in the world.²⁷

The MFACo justifies the adoption of an FFP by referring to “the need to address structural inequalities and gender-based violence at the regional and global levels, and to actively promote equal opportunities and rights for women in their diversity” (MRECo 2024; author’s translation). This is seen as “a recognition that the elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination against women and LGBTQIA+ people is a key element of a comprehensive approach to gender equality” (MRECo 2024; author’s translation). The MFACo characterises the Colombian approach to FFP as participatory, pacifist and intersectional, and in this sense transformative. Its development has been a process of co-design with civil society organisations (women’s and LGBTQIA+), academics, and MFA departments, including exchange meetings with young women and girls. It identifies key themes in four different areas: (1) Social Justice: participation and representation;

trade, production and work (paid and unpaid); human mobility (forced and unforced). (2) Environmental Justice: climate action; sustainable environmental protection, conservation, and restoration; biodiversity; (3) Total Peace: peace and security agenda; gender-based violence; drugs and security; (4) Education, Science, Sports, and Culture: women's sport; life skills training; cultural promotion. Planned actions are listed not only for each of these key themes, but also for three internal dimensions of MFA: (1) co-responsibility in care; (2) institutional transformation for gender equality; (3) a non-violent external relations sector that promotes gender equality (MRECo 2023).

A 73-page document, which has not yet been officially published in its final form but only as a draft for comment, contains a detailed contextualisation of FFP, a conceptual explanation and a specification of objectives and working areas. It is the result of an extensive consultation process within and outside MFACo and shows some differences from the 2023 presentation. Together with an action plan, it is annexed to the draft decree of November 2024 adopting the FFP.

Conclusion: advancements and criticism

The Mexican, Chilean, and Colombian FFPs are part of an international trend that began in Europe, where most of the cases can be found, but is based on the strong commitment of these Latin American countries to an increasingly complex gender agenda in regional and international frameworks. Due to the context of the phenomenon and its main characteristics, FFP in Mexico, Chile, and Colombia cannot be considered simply as a norm import, but as an emerging approach in dialogue between national experiences, regional traditions, and global trends. The exchange of experiences has been promoted through cooperation projects: Mexico and Spain signed a Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in the field of FFP. In 2024, Mexico, Chile, and Colombia joined a community of practice with Germany and the ECLAC to strengthen the capacity of foreign ministries and international cooperation agencies to design and implement feminist foreign policy and international development cooperation.²⁸

Although Mexico was the first of the three countries to announce the adoption of a feminist approach to foreign policy, its FFP is the least institutionalised, as it has not been bureaucratically enshrined through legal or administrative measures, nor has it been comprehensively conceptualised and operationalised in a detailed action plan. Similarly, the consultation process promoted by feminist approaches to open up foreign policy to civil society participation and the inclusion of diverse perspectives appears to have been little formalised and not documented in the case of Mexico (Equis 2024). At the other end of the spectrum, Colombia, the last of the three to adopt an FFP, shows a high level of institutionalisation of the FFP as a result of

extensive consultation with a variety of actors and a high level of transparency and documentation of the development of the feminist approach.

In all three cases, the commitment to an FFP was a presidential initiative, with Chile the most consistent FFP with broader feminist understanding of the government (see chapter 15 by Raúl Bernal-Meza and Sergio González Pizarro in this book). In this context, Mexico is a case in point, where feminist and women's organisations have criticised AMLO's rhetoric and actions during his presidency as reflecting a patriarchal conception of the sexual division of labour, a traditional understanding of the family, and the role of women in society (Zepeda Patterson 2022). AMLO's statement that "the best foreign policy is domestic policy"²⁹ (see also Günther Maihold's Chapter 17 in this book) may explain the strongly domestic focus of the Mexican FFP. However, AMLO's accusations that the country's feminist movements were infiltrated by conservative groups opposed to his government challenged the core dimensions of an FFP.³⁰

While European FFP strategies tend to focus on international armed conflicts, gender-based violence as a war crime, disarmament, and the reduction of global asymmetries, Mexico, Chile, and Colombia place the elimination of gender inequality, violence against women, and the gender gap in the care system at the centre of their approaches. It is worth noting that a specific feature of the Colombian FFP is that it is explicitly pacifist. This is in line with the so-called total peace approach of President Petro and the experience of introducing a gender perspective and women's participation in the peace process with the FARC (Lima Mendes 2022).

In the FFP concepts of Mexico, Chile, and Colombia, no mention is made of the economic system and the way in which the region in general, and the national economies in particular, are integrated into the global economy. This is the most challenging aspect for Chile, whose foreign policy is very much dominated by economic considerations and trade promotion. In the case of Mexico and Colombia, the low level of enforcement of the rule of law and the high level of violence against women, feminicide, and human rights activists, including the involvement of members of the state security apparatus, lead to massive human rights violations.

It remains to be seen whether the FFP will bring greater coherence between different areas and levels of foreign policy, and between the external and internal spheres, by not only acting as an umbrella for a number of individual measures related to a gender and inclusion agenda, but also by articulating them. For the moment, it seems to have provided an impetus to advance gender equality and gender mainstreaming without challenging the ways in which foreign policy is made and the conceptual categories that shape it.

FFP cannot be implemented or evaluated as a single measure in isolation; rather, it is an approach that justifies and guides a series of measures that operate in a non-feminist context, i.e. in interaction with other policies, processes and structures that have opposite effects. FFP can make a substantial

contribution to a more equal, more peaceful, and more prosperous—in short, a more just—world if it brings about more and more structural changes, including in the way policies are thought about, formulated, and implemented. The future of FFP depends on its transformation from government policy to state policy, i.e. its internalisation into bureaucratic structures in such a way that it can survive changes in party majorities. Less institutionalised and more controversial than a human rights agenda, the FFP shares with it the gap between ideals and implementation in these three Latin American countries formally committed to democracy and the rule of law.

Notes

- 1 LGBTIQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual. The additional “+” refers to any other identities not included in the short acronym.
- 2 In 1996, ECOSOC, through resolution 1996/6, expanded the mandate of the Commission and decided that it should play a leading role in monitoring and reviewing progress and challenges in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and in mainstreaming a gender perspective in UN activities.
- 3 UNGA Resolution 3010 (XXVII): https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/191761/files/A_RES_3010%28XXVII%29-EN.pdf?ln=en.
- 4 World Conferences on Women: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/inter-governmental-support/world-conferences-on-women#:~:text=The%20United%20Nations%20has%20organized,series%20of%20five%2Dyear%20reviews>.
- 5 UNGA Resolution 31/136: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/191761/files/A_RES_3010%28XXVII%29-EN.pdf?ln=en.
- 6 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW): <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/#:~:text=The%20Convention%20on%20the%20Elimination,bill%20of%20rights%20for%20women> (accessed November 1, 2024).
- 7 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/01/beijing-declaration>.
UN Security Council Resolution 1325: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/>.
Women, Peace and Security and the UN-Security Council: <https://wps.unwomen.org/security-council/>.
- 10 The following units were merged into UN Women: Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW, established in 1976), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women (OSAGI, established in 1997) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM, established in 1976).
- 11 United Nations’ Charter: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/preamble>.
- 12 Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean: <https://www.cepal.org/en/subsidiary-bodies/regional-conference-women-latin-america-and-caribbean>.
- 13 Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean: <https://oig.cepal.org/en>.
- 14 Party states of the Convention of Belém do Pará: <https://www.oas.org/es/mesecv/docs/Signatories-Table-SP.pdf>. The Convention has been ratified by 32 of the 34 full members of the OAS; Canada and the US are the only full members of the OAS that have not ratified the Convention.

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