

Zilla, Claudia (Ed.)

## Research Report

# Feminist foreign and development policy in practice: Requirements and potentials

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SWP Research Paper

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*Claudia Zilla (ed.)*

# Feminist Foreign and Development Policy in Practice

Requirements and Potentials



Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik  
German Institute for  
International and Security Affairs

SWP Research Paper 9  
June 2024, Berlin

- Feminist foreign policy (FFP) provides a policy framework for government action and for processes and structures within ministries. The introduction of such a framework is linked to a change in policy that is intended to help reduce discriminatory asymmetric relations of power.
- FFP is a new political concept that has emerged in the context of increasing gender awareness in international politics. The Swedish government was the first to officially describe its foreign policy as feminist in 2014. Other countries from various regions have gradually followed suit.
- Germany joined the trend in March 2023, when the Federal Foreign Office published its guidelines for feminist foreign policy and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development published its strategy for a feminist development policy.
- Both ministries see their documents as unfinished concepts that – with the help of research – will be adapted and further developed. This study, with its 11 application-oriented analyses, can contribute towards this effort.
- In addition to the core elements of national FFP concepts, German and European policy towards selected countries (states in Eastern Europe as well as Turkey, the Palestinian territories and Iran) as well as individual policy areas and international instruments (trade policy, digital policy, migration, flight and displacement, stabilisation and sanctions) are examined with regard to the limits and potentials of implementing FFP.

**SWP Research Paper**

*Claudia Zilla (ed.)*

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**International and Security Affairs**

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June 2024, Berlin



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Stiftung Wissenschaft und  
Politik  
German Institute  
for International  
and Security Affairs

Ludwigkirchplatz 3–4  
10719 Berlin  
Germany  
Phone +49 30 880 07-0  
Fax +49 30 880 07-200  
[www.swp-berlin.org](http://www.swp-berlin.org)  
[swp@swp-berlin.org](mailto:swp@swp-berlin.org)

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### Feminist Foreign and Development Policy in Practice: Requirements and Potentials

Feminist foreign policy (FFP) emerged as a political concept about 10 years ago, when the former Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallström gave this label to her ministry's policy approach. FFP is also a product of a growing gender awareness in international politics. In a process of international norm diffusion, more and more states in different regions of the world have followed suit.

FFP can be described as a policy framework: for the foreign policy actions of governments as well as for processes and structures within the ministries. It is linked to a policy shift aimed at reducing power asymmetries (not only between the sexes) that threaten peace and generate discrimination. FFP claims to be value-led and evidence-based. It is justified both normatively with arguments for justice, and pragmatically with reference to the peacebuilding effect of inclusion.

However, there is no generally accepted normative or international legal definition of FFP. Even if certain elements can be found within all the national variants of FFP, many questions remain unanswered about the concept, its value and implementation, and even its relevance and viability. Meanwhile, there is now a lively exchange between the governments that are committed to FFP as well as an equally fruitful and tense dialogue between them, civil society and academic actors. This is because feminist movements and theories, both of which have a longer history than FFP, are now critically examining the new political concept.

The discussion is diverse and dynamic, and Germany has been involved since the Federal Foreign Office (FFO) presented its guidelines for an FFP, and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) presented a strategy for a feminist development policy (FDP). Ambassador Gesa Bräutigam has been the FFP Special Envoy for Feminist Foreign Policy (and Director for Human Rights) in the FFO since August 2023. So far, however, the German debate on FFP has tended to run parallel to other political debates and is barely interlinked with high politics, such as important decisions on how to deal with certain states or on political and military (direct



or indirect) interventions in serious conflicts. This study aims to help overcome this segmentation.

The FFO and BMZ ministerial documents are conceived as preliminary, open concepts that need to be adapted and developed further. Accordingly, they leave a number of questions concerning both the requirements and the potential of FFP and FDP unanswered. Against the backdrop of current German and European policies, where do conflicts and synergies arise from a feminist research perspective? What are the limits and development possibilities of FFP in this context? Answers to these questions can only be given on the basis of actual empirical cases. This study therefore examines regions and countries (Eastern Europe, Turkey, the Palestinian territories, Iran) as well as policy areas and international instruments (trade policy, digital policy, migration, flight and displacement, stabilisation and sanctions). Based on the analyses and assessments, the contributions provide case-specific recommendations. In addition, general approaches for an FFP can be identified and overarching conclusions can be drawn at a more abstract level. These can be summarised as follows.

There can be no talk of a German FFP as long as no broader concept is developed and adopted by cabinet decision – a concept that is supported by the entire government, integrates the areas of responsibility of various ministries and does justice to the complexity of foreign policy, including its interlinkages with domestic policy.

FFP has little chance of success if it is limited to a harm-reduction approach while power asymmetries and human rights violations in key policy areas are ignored. FFP can only have a peacebuilding effect if it addresses key political issues such as security and migration, and changes prevailing perceptions and practices – thus emancipating itself from its role as a subsidiary programme.

Despite their claims of inclusivity and intersectionality, most governmental FFP variants revolve around issues of gender equality. Although FFP can provide an impetus for gender mainstreaming, it cannot be limited to this if it is to help eliminate the power imbalances that threaten peace more generally.

FFP does not offer a ready-made strategy that can be easily applied. Rather, like democracy, it is a work in progress and highly context-dependent in its conception and implementation. It does not exempt one from decision-making when having to weigh up conflicting (not only feminist) aims and means. However, this does not mean arbitrariness, since a commitment

to FFP entails a number of requirements: first and foremost, a broadening of analytical perspectives, a (power-)critical questioning of the categories and criteria being used, and a reassessment of priorities. This study explores what this means in individual cases and where the limits and potentials of FFP and FDP lie.

Claudia Zilla

# Introduction: Feminist Foreign Policy as a Work in Progress

In 2014, Sweden became the first country to officially declare a feminist foreign policy (FFP). Over the years, countries as diverse as Canada (2017), France (2019), Mexico (2020), Libya (2021), Luxembourg (2021), Spain (2021), Chile (2022), Colombia (2022) and Argentina (2023) have followed suit with announcements and concepts or have already implemented FFP, feminist development policy (FDP), feminist diplomacy or other similar initiatives. In doing so, they are contributing to a phenomenon known as “norm diffusion” in international relations.<sup>1</sup> In Germany, two ministerial documents were published on 1 March 2023: “Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy: Federal Foreign Office Guidelines”<sup>2</sup> of the Federal Foreign Office (FFO), headed by Annalena Baerbock (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen); and “Feminist Development Policy: For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide”<sup>3</sup> of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) under the leadership of Svenja Schulze (SPD).<sup>4</sup> The

FFP guidelines and the FDP strategy aim for a “cultural shift” and a “systemic change”, which – as both documents explicitly state – require inter-ministerial efforts. In addition, they emphasise the need for further development and concretisation of FFP and FDP, drawing explicitly on research from a feminist perspective.<sup>5</sup>

This study builds on this conceptual openness and interest in gaining new knowledge: By critically examining the concepts presented, the assumptions behind them and current practice, we aim to contribute to this debate and highlight the potentials, limitations, synergies and trade-offs of FFP and FDP. To this end, we analyse specific cases. This study is thus located at a medium level of abstraction of complex and contextualised foreign and development policy research, which lies between the normative requirements generally formulated in the FFO guidelines and the BMZ strategy and the concrete publicly funded projects that are gender-sensitive and gender-

1 Karin Aggestam and Annika Bergman Rosamond, “Feminist Foreign Policy 3.0: Advancing Ethics and Gender Equality in Global Politics”, *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 39, no. 1 (2019): 37–48, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/733457> (accessed 20 May 2023).

2 Federal Foreign Office (FFO), *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy: Federal Foreign Office Guidelines* (Berlin, February 2023), <https://bit.ly/3PJ9MWZ> (accessed 15 March 2024).

3 Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), *Feminist Development Policy: For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide* (Berlin, April 2023), <https://bit.ly/3Tv0SgU> (accessed 15 March 2024).

4 The announcement from the coalition agreement for the years 2021 to 2025 has thus been given its first conceptual form: “Together with our partners, we want to strengthen the rights, resources and representation of women and girls worldwide and promote social diversity in the spirit of a feminist foreign policy. We want to appoint more women to international leadership positions and ambitiously implement and further develop the National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Resolution 1325” (translation from German by the author). *Mehr Fortschritt wagen – Bündnis für*

*Freiheit, Gerechtigkeit und Nachhaltigkeit. Koalitionsvertrag 2021–2025 zwischen der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands (SPD), Bündnis 90/Die Grünen und den Freien Demokraten (FDP)* (Berlin, 7 February 2021), 114.

5 Selected examples from the FFO guidelines: “The Federal Foreign Office guidelines are designed as a living document. They are open to ideas and revisions, criticism and corrections” (p. 14). “The guidelines [...] are not formulated definitively, but represent a work in progress” (p. 20). “We want to further pursue the threads of discussion with academia and civil society which we began while developing these guidelines. We will therefore establish a forum for critical exchange with experts on all aspects of feminist foreign policy” (p. 80). Selected examples from the feminist development policy (FDP) strategy: “The BMZ and the implementing organisations are striving to improve the evidence base for feminist development policy and use it systematically for policy development and implementation. To that end, the BMZ will commission analyses and studies and ensure that they are aligned with feminist principles in order to continuously improve feminist development policy” (p. 29).

transformative or have gender equality as a significant and principal objective.<sup>6</sup>

It is true that Germany cannot single-handedly change the reality of people's lives in other countries, the governance structures of specific policy areas or the design of instruments at the international level. However, the "empathic reflexivity"<sup>7</sup> characteristic of feminist perspectives should be understood as an invitation to question one's own position self-critically and to take into account the needs and concerns of others. In this context, we are tasked with examining where German policy contributes to the establishment or consolidation of discriminatory power structures that undermine the peaceful coexistence of people, as well as exploring where policy can, or even should, be made more coherent and just than it is now. For this purpose, a medium level of abstraction is appropriate, as it allows for a systemic approach to questions about the respective design of German foreign policy in the individual cases discussed here; the potential tensions or contradictions between interests and policy goals; the appropriateness of the chosen means and priorities; as well as opportunities for advancement.

In line with feminist critiques of the compartmentalising understanding of politics, that is, the construction of dichotomous spheres — public vs. private or domestic vs. foreign policy — we have chosen subjects for this study that do not seem appropriate for making a sharp distinction between diplomacy or development cooperation and international security, or between domestic and foreign policy (because it is under-complex and unrealistic).

<sup>6</sup> Gender-sensitive and gender-transformative are not the same as gender equality as a significant and principal objective. The latter terms are based on the OECD Development Assistance Committee's (DAC) Gender Equality Policy Marker, i.e., qualitative statistical tools for recording development activities that pursue gender equality as a policy objective. If gender equality is the "principal objective" of the project/programme, it is fundamental to its design and expected results. Without it, the project/programme would not have been implemented. In the case of a "significant objective", gender equality is an important and deliberate objective, but not the main reason for implementing the project/programme. See *DAC gender equality policy marker*, <https://bit.ly/468SDvA> (accessed 20 May 2023).

<sup>7</sup> Jessica Cheung et al., *Practicing Feminist Foreign Policy in the Everyday: A Toolkit* (Berlin: Internationale Frauenliga für Frieden und Freiheit Deutschland, November 2021), <https://bit.ly/48tMOuS> (accessed 20 May 2023).

With regard to the research question, we combine three perspectives to structure the respective analyses:

- Analytical-descriptive: current situation (actual state). What does the case look like when viewed through the FFP/FDP lens?
- Normative: target state. What should the policy look like in this case — according to the standards and requirements of an FFP/FDP? Where are the challenges, contradictions and conflicting objectives — but also the potentials?
- Policy-oriented: context-sensitive recommendations with regard to a desired state. What could/should German/European foreign policy do (differently) in the near future in line with FFP/FDP? What are the preconditions and implications?

The authors make use of three types of knowledge: (1) expert knowledge: theoretical and empirical knowledge about social phenomena, (2) context knowledge: knowledge about the case in its temporal and spatial dimensions as well as about German (foreign) policy and (3) practical knowledge: knowledge acquired through practice and experience. While expert and context knowledge in particular are the core competences of the authors, we sought to gain better access to practical knowledge by conducting a workshop with people from the field and those engaged in civil society and advocacy work.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the analyses are informed by feminist perspectives, which are reflected in both ministerial documents and social science approaches.

## Foundations of the study

In line with the aim of developing a systemic understanding of the requirements and potentials associated with the conceptualisation and implementation of FFP and FDP, the common starting point for the contributions in this study is an inclusive understanding of feminism. This refers to feminist approaches that include queer perspectives and go beyond gender-specific discrimination in order to consider other overlapping forms of structural disadvantage and oppression of social groups (intersectionality) as well as (post-)colonial asymmetric power relations. The fol-

<sup>8</sup> The authors of this study would like to thank the workshop participants for their valuable comments and suggestions.

lowing questions will shed light on what this means specifically and which concepts are relevant for this.<sup>9</sup>

## What is feminist foreign policy?

FFP – understood here in a broader sense – provides a policy framework for the foreign policy actions of governments, as well as for processes and structures within the ministries. The introduction of such a framework is tied to a policy shift, as FFP explicitly aims to change the status quo. Depending on the national variant, FFP differs in terms of the foreign policy areas covered and their links with domestic policy, the changes sought and the priority target groups. The lowest common denominator of the various official versions of FFP is that they aim at achieving substantive, procedural and institutional reforms that contribute to eliminating discrimination against women and girls in a ministry’s policy area of responsibility. This raises the question of whether such an approach, which is essentially limited to gender equality or gender mainstreaming, deserves the adjective “feminist”. More ambitious versions aim for transformative change; they address the structures that are seen as unjust and that underlie multiple and interwoven (i.e. not just gender-based but intersectional) forms of discrimination, going beyond the remit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>10</sup> This describes a minimalist and a maximalist ideal type. Empirically, the actual FFP variants are less homogeneous.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Some of the following sections are based on two publications by the same author: Claudia Zilla, *Feminist Foreign Policy: Concepts, Core Components and Controversies*, SWP Comment 48/2022 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, August 2022), doi: 10.18449/2022C48, and idem, *Foreign Policy Reorientation: Feminist Foreign and Development Policy in Ministerial Documents and Debates*, SWP Comment 22/2023 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, April 2023), doi: 10.18449/2023C22.

<sup>10</sup> This is a descriptive-analytical definition of FFP. In addition, there are comprehensive normative definitions; see Lyric Thompson et al., *Toward a Feminist Foreign Policy in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: International Center for Research on Women [ICRW], 2020), <https://bit.ly/48jeAdh> (accessed 20 May 2023), and Cheung et al., *Practicing Feminist Foreign Policy* (see note 7).

<sup>11</sup> See the contribution by Pauline Reineke and Claudia Zilla in this study, pp. 19ff.

## In terms of its origins, FFP is not a scientific concept, but a political one.

In terms of its origins, FFP is not a scientific concept, but a political one that emerged in the state context and is now being addressed in the social sciences. In the scientific appropriation, the concept of FFP is analytically delimited, permeated with theory and saturated with data. Feminist civil society groups (understood here in their diverse forms) direct both criticism and normative demands to governments committed to FFP. Between these three spheres (state, academia and civil society), a fruitful and tense dialogue is developing.

In terms of its rationale, FFP is generally associated first and foremost with a commitment to human rights. This is not only about recognising and protecting rights, but also about empowering people to demand their right so that their basic needs can be met. Second, FFP draws on perspectives and demands from feminist approaches. Reference is made to the feminist critique of patriarchal structures, which underlie the power hierarchy between genders, 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 takes into account empirical evidence concerning 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. In particular, improving the situations 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 comprehensive inclusion is both intrinsically normative (in the sense of a value in itself, 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.

## What is meant by feminism?

National FFP concepts rarely include a definition or explanation of the term “feminism” on which they

are based.<sup>12</sup> Some FFP documents do not even refer to “patriarchy” or “patriarchal structures”.<sup>13</sup> This is because what “feminism” means or encompasses is contested. Originally coined in the West, the term has been (and continues to be) critically examined and expanded, resulting in different interpretations (and so-called waves). This has been made possible by the contributions to the debate made by Black women, women from the Global South and queer people, among others.

Western-liberal feminist positions are rooted in the recognition that there is a socially constructed, that is, relationship of dominance between the genders (male dominance = patriarchy), and that this is accompanied by an unequal distribution of rights, privileges, resources and opportunities, among other things. Feminism therefore leads to the deconstruction of power structures that are considered “natural” – they become visible and their contingent character is revealed. In normative terms, this structural asymmetry of power is seen as unjust, discriminatory and oppressive. Proponents of these feminist positions therefore demand that patriarchy be eliminated and gender equality be achieved in all areas of society.

The emancipatory goal of feminism is the abolition of all forms of gender domination (not the reversal of existing domination). According to Marxist-feminist approaches, this presupposes the abolition of capitalism. According to other feminist views, it is questionable whether comprehensive emancipation is compatible with national politics or with the existence of the state, which is seen as a patriarchal apparatus of oppression.

Queer feminist positions seek to overcome heteronormativity (which establishes heterosexuality as the norm in society) and a gender binary (which distinguishes between only two sexes, one female and one male). This breaks down the binary-centric social ordering principles for sexuality and gender on “cis-gender” men and women (whose gender identity corresponds to the sex they were assigned at birth). In an inclusive understanding of feminism, other identities such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer and more (LGBTIQ+) are also recognised.

Criticism of a “white feminism”, for example, which perpetuates colonial racist thought patterns and structures, has led to the development of feminist positions that aim to combat all discrimination and

oppression based on characteristics such as gender, sexual orientation, skin colour, disability, religion or ethnicity. Intersectional feminism takes a critical look at multiple forms of discrimination. It focuses on the question of how the interplay of different disadvantages in different contexts conditions people’s (social) lives.

### What is new about feminist foreign policy?

FFP is a new political concept: The first time a specific policy area was officially designated as feminist by a government was about a decade ago. In this respect, it is a recent phenomenon that can be seen as the product of a steadily growing awareness in international politics about gender.<sup>14</sup> The focus was first on development policy, then on human rights, conflict and security, and finally on foreign policy.<sup>15</sup> It began with the three World Conferences on Women as part of the United Nations (UN) Decade for Women in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985). In 1979, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which entered into force in 1981. Germany ratified it in 1985. The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) resulted in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a comprehensive concept for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, including the definition of strategic goals and the listing of various measures. Gender equality has also been included first in the Millennium Development Goals (2000–2015, Goal 3) and then in the Sustainable Development Goals (2016–2030, Goal 5). In 2000, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on “Women, Peace and Security” (WPS) at the initiative of the then Namibian Minister for Women, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah. This was followed by nine other resolutions on gender-related issues as part of the WPS agenda, including Resolution 2467 on sexualised violence, which Germany introduced as a non-permanent member of the

<sup>14</sup> Karin Aggestam and Jacqui True, “Gendering Foreign Policy: A Comparative Framework for Analysis”, *Foreign Policy Analysis* 16, no. 2 (2020): 143–62, <https://bit.ly/3ZrsiHa> (accessed 20 May 2023).

<sup>15</sup> Jennifer Thomson, “Gender Norms, Global Hierarchies and the Evolution of Feminist Foreign Policy”, *European Journal of Politics and Gender* 5, no. 2 (2022): 173–90, <https://bit.ly/3EEXUPZ> (accessed 20 May 2023).

<sup>12</sup> The FDP strategy of BMZ is one of the exceptions.

<sup>13</sup> This applies to the FFP guidelines of the FFO.

UN Security Council in 2019. Since 2005, around 100 countries, including Germany, have launched a National Action Plan to implement Security Council Resolution 1325.

### **Gender awareness is also increasing in the institutions of the European Union.**

Gender awareness has also grown within the institutions of the European Union (EU). In 2015 the Council of the EU underlined the importance of initiatives to promote women's and girls' rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in development policy. The European Commission's Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016–2019, later updated for 2020–2025, defined the framework for its activities in this field. In 2020 it published its Gender Action Plan III (Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Relations 2021–2025) to promote the gender perspective in the EU's external relations, followed in 2022 by a proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating violence against women and domestic violence.

This multilateral framework, to which the national FFP variants refer, should be seen above all as an achievement of transnational, civil society feminist movements.<sup>16</sup> It demonstrates the impact of their engagement on international politics, norm-building and juridification. In this respect, the history of both feminist movements and feminist theories goes back to before the “*feminist turn*” in foreign policy.

### **Why should foreign policy, of all things, be shaped in a feminist manner?**

It is part of the contingency of politics that Margot Wallström — who had been UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict from 2010 to 2012 — became Swedish Foreign Minister in 2014. In the then new government, which described itself as “feminist”, Wallström announced the policy area for which she was responsible as such. In 2022, after the change of government, the new foreign minister, Tobias Billström, eliminated the term and various publications on the subject were removed from the

Ministry for Foreign Affairs' website.<sup>17</sup> With this development, Sweden is once again becoming a point of reference for government coalitions and civil society organisations that want to anchor FFP institutionally so that it survives transfers of power and policy changes. It is no coincidence that Sweden has been considered a pioneer and role model for FFP for about a decade. The country has traditionally been strongly committed to gender equality in both its domestic and foreign policy,<sup>18</sup> with many countries attesting to its high degree of normative legitimacy (reputation and recognition).<sup>19</sup>

### **Generally, in foreign policy, structures are particularly male-dominated.**

Generally, in foreign policy, structures are particularly male-dominated and therefore give priority to men's perspectives, ideas and experiences. As a result, a foreign policy that sees itself as “gender neutral” reproduces gender injustice by failing to take into account different gender perspectives. It cements the status quo. In an gender regime based on asymmetric power relations, men and women have different experiences; due to their respective positions and roles in society, they each experience the existing power structures in specific ways. The same is true for people who do not fit into these categories and identify as non-binary. Women, men and queer people are (severely) affected in different ways by poverty, conflict and war, and their contributions to development and peace also diverge.

However, the gender asymmetry in foreign policy is particularly pronounced, not only because men and their perspectives are disproportionately represented

<sup>17</sup> “Gender equality is a fundamental value in Sweden and also a fundamental value for this government”, says Billström. However, the term “feminist foreign policy” will be deleted, “because labels have a tendency to obscure the content” (translation by the author). “Schweden kippt feministische Außenpolitik”, *Tagesschau* (online), 18 October 2022, <https://bit.ly/46buW5Z> (accessed 5 May 2023).

<sup>18</sup> Sweden, for example, introduced gender mainstreaming as a government strategy by law in 1994.

<sup>19</sup> Malena Rosén Sundström, Ekatherina Zhukova and Ole Elgström, “Spreading a Norm-Based Policy? Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy in International Media”, *Contemporary Politics* 27, no. 4 (2021): 439–60, <https://bit.ly/48tOAFw> (accessed 20 May 2023).

<sup>16</sup> Cheung et al., *Practicing Feminist Foreign Policy* (see note 7).

(especially in decision-making positions),<sup>20</sup> but also because women's contributions are silenced and rendered invisible. Feminist approaches to international relations address this restricted view and identify how and where women and alternative perspectives can play a role (which has not yet been acknowledged).<sup>21</sup>

It is true that there is no area of society or politics that is free of patriarchal structures or in which overcoming them would not have positive effects. However, proponents of FFP often associate its introduction on the one hand with a broader approach to foreign policy that has long been propagated in the discourse, such as a values-based or human rights-based foreign policy. FFP would thus increase the normative pressure to finally implement what is necessary or humane. On the other hand, positive spillover effects on other policy areas (including domestic policy) are also hoped for,<sup>22</sup> meaning that any policy area is welcome to be used as a starting point.

However, the question is whether it is easier, that is, less politically and socially controversial, for the government to introduce feminist perspectives into an outward-looking policy area than into an inward-looking one. The budget issue is also likely to be relevant: Whereas the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) had around 35 per cent and the Federal Ministry of Defence (BMVG) around 10.5 per cent of Germany's total federal budget at its disposal in 2023, the share for the BMZ was around 2.5 per cent and for the FFO around 1.6 per cent.<sup>23</sup> In the ministries that have adopted a feminist policy framework in Germany, the sums involved are therefore modest.

**20** According to the FFP guidelines of the FFO, women accounted for 49.5 per cent of employees in 2022. However, only 27.1 per cent of the heads of foreign missions and 26 per cent of the heads of divisions at home and abroad were women. See data sheet: Women at the Federal Foreign Office, in: FFO, *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy* (see note 2).

**21** Cynthia H. Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 2014).

**22** This is also explicitly pointed out in the FFP guidelines of the FFO.

**23** Federal Ministry of Finance (Bundesministerium der Finanzen), *Bundeshaushalt Digital*, <https://bit.ly/3PJ1iQd> (accessed 2 August 2023).

## What is feminist about feminist foreign policy?

There is no final consensus on what is or should be feminist about FFP, neither in politics nor in feminist scholarship and practice.<sup>24</sup> It is true that the terms, perspectives, concerns, demands, etc. from feminist movements and approaches appear in governmental FFP strategies. However, these are often modified and, in some cases, undermined by state reinterpretations and framings (purplewashing). For example, FFP strategies often make claims of being transformative and intersectional, but these are rarely substantiated conceptually, and even more rarely realised in practice.<sup>25</sup> This is where the feminist critique of state FFP comes in.

The goal of expanding the rights, representation and resources of women and girls, in line with the Swedish 3Rs approach, is at the heart of most national FFP policies. The aim is to reduce the power asymmetry between the genders (also in their own ministry). One way of achieving this is through the gender-sensitive or gender-transformative design of projects and measures in other countries, as well as the working environment in one's own institution. Inclusive approaches also address additional power hierarchies associated with exclusion, marginalisation and oppression.

Many FFP concepts refer to the UN's WPS agenda and related National Action Plans, which enhances their importance. They also often adopt the concept of human security. Whereas the conventional understanding of security refers to the state and the protection of its territory and population from targeted attacks by other states or individuals, human security shifts the focus to the people and expands the security dimension to include threats to their livelihoods that go beyond physical violence – such as environmental degradation, disease and economic instability. The concept of human security predates FFP by 20 years: It was introduced in a 1994 report on human security from the UN Development Programme<sup>26</sup> and

**24** Uta Ruppert, "Ein bisschen Feminismus im Krieg? Über das Paradoxe feministischer Außenpolitik", *PROKLA* 208 52, no. 3 (September 2022): 499 – 507 (501), doi: 10.32387/prokla.v52i208.2010.

**25** See the contribution by Pauline Reineke and Claudia Zilla in this study, pp. 19ff.

**26** United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1994: New Dimensions of Human Security* (New

has been further developed since, including by the UN Commission on Human Security in 2003.<sup>27</sup>

**From a feminist perspective, there is also criticism of the concept of human security.**

However, there is also criticism of the concept of human security from a feminist perspective: This criticism problematises, for example, the securitisation that results from overextending the concept of security, the undifferentiated nature of the universalist view – which once again ignores (not only gender-specific) asymmetric power relations as well as the narrow, mostly state-centric implementation of the concept.<sup>28</sup> Even if the concept of human security generally fails to radically reformulate security in political practice, pragmatic feminist voices see state security as a prerequisite for the realisation of human security. From a feminist perspective, this, in turn, should focus not only on the individual but also on social groups.

In any case, the plea for a security approach that ensures a critical examination of the structures that include and exclude people – as individuals and as groups – remains central.

In feminist approaches, war is not seen as a purely situational outbreak of conflict, but as a phenomenon embedded in a continuum of patriarchal patterns of violence.<sup>29</sup> Its representatives oppose “militarism and the political creation and maintenance of the capacity for war” as well as “the militarisation of discourses and emotions and the inevitable escalation of nationalism and racism”.<sup>30</sup> They therefore advocate arms

(export) control and disarmament – a demand found in many FFP strategies. Significantly, however, the topic of the arms industry is usually left out of the ministerial documents, just as questions concerning economic system are rarely problematised.

**Feminist approaches draw attention to a care perspective.**

In line with the critique of militarism and the concept of human security, some feminist approaches draw attention to a care perspective, that is, to people’s circumstances in terms of living conditions and social relations.<sup>31</sup> This issue is addressed in some state FFP concepts, albeit within the narrow framework of gender equality aspects, which amounts to a symbolic and financial revaluation of care and caring work.

Feminist approaches also emphasise the importance of broadening perspectives.<sup>32</sup> The inclusion of diverse views – especially those of affected and marginalised groups – in policy processes is highly relevant in terms of both equity and policy effectiveness. In the context of official FFP, this insight is often translated into a call for the broader participation of civil society both in the development of FFP strategies and in policy formulation and implementation.

**Is FFP in danger of being perceived as a colonial norm imposed by the Global North?**

Fears that FFP could be understood outside the so-called Global North as the practice of colonial norm-setting can be heard above all where governments in the Global North have committed themselves to an FFP. This is strongly articulated by political forces that are sceptical, critical or opposed to feminism. A determined fight against feminism or “gender ideology” is in turn being waged by some (right-wing to far-right) governments, such as those of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Viktor Orbán in Hungary and Vladimir Putin

York, NY, 1994), <https://bit.ly/3vZm8U5> (accessed 20 May 2023).

<sup>27</sup> The Commission on Human Security was established in 2003 on the initiative of Japan and with the support of the UN Secretary-General. It was chaired by former UN Refugee Envoy Sadako Ogata and 1998 Nobel Laureate in Economics Amartya Sen. Commission on Human Security, *Human Security Now* (New York, NY, 2003), <https://bit.ly/3Spwvrw> (accessed 20 May 2023).

<sup>28</sup> Heidi Hudson, “Doing Security as Though Humans Matter: A Feminist Perspective on Gender and the Politics of Human Security”, *Security Dialogue* 36, no. 2 (2005): 155–74.

<sup>29</sup> Cynthia Cockburn, “Gender Relations as Causal in Militarization and War”, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12, no. 2 (2020): 139–57.

<sup>30</sup> Translation from German by the author. Ruppert, “Ein bisschen Feminismus” (see note 24), 500.

<sup>31</sup> “The goal of feminist foreign policy and thus also of feminist cultural diplomacy is a disarming, caring foreign policy” (translation from German by the author), says Ines Kappert, *Überlegungen zu einer Feminist Cultural Diplomacy* (Berlin: Heinrich Böll Foundation and Gunda Werner Institute, 2022), 4, <https://bit.ly/46eEv48> (accessed 20 May 2023).

<sup>32</sup> Lyric Thompson, *Feminist Foreign Policy: A Framework* (Washington, D.C.: ICRW, 2020), <https://bit.ly/44PBqq9> (accessed 20 May 2023).



in Russia,<sup>33</sup> which see feminist concerns as an imposition of the values of the international community, Europe, the West, etc., on them.

Reservations about FFP in Germany are also fuelled by the fact that the public discourse about FFP and the changes it seeks to bring about are all too often focused on the (non-feminist) others abroad rather than on the means and goals of Germany's foreign policy. An attitude of "empathic reflexivity" seems to have given way to one of "lecturing demands", which can certainly be interpreted as "norm imperialism". Post-colonial feminist authors problematise this shift in focus, showing how, for example, narratives of women's "salvation" or "liberation" or "protection of their rights" often justify paternalistic measures or are instrumentalised for other (non-feminist) purposes.<sup>34</sup> In relation to FFP, social scientists sometimes examine how certain states use FFP as a strategic narrative<sup>35</sup> or attempt to position themselves in global hierarchies through FFP.<sup>36</sup>

The allegation that FFP does not do justice to the diversity of various cultural contexts is often also an expression of ignorance about feminist groups and struggles in "other cultures". From a feminist perspective, a strongly unidirectional understanding of foreign policy and international politics that reduces the subject and object to states and governments is often criticised in this context. Instead, there is a need to broaden the scope of reference, overcome equating (supposedly homogeneous) societies with their governments or with (politically or religiously) dominant groups, and recognise social diversity (at home and abroad). Intersectional-feminist and especially racism-sensitive approaches therefore warn against essentialist and stereotypical overgeneralisations regarding

"traits of the others".<sup>37</sup> The view that "feminist enlightenment" is a European monopoly leads to overlooking structures of discrimination and oppression in Germany and the EU; misjudging theoretical and practical debates and successful (feminist) strategies in other regions; and creating new hierarchies between people. This is tantamount to a loss of learning and opportunities to build alliances.

The voluntary commitment of individual states to FFP is often associated with the hope of many people abroad – who suffer from the foreign policies of those very states or from neglect – that this may create additional pressure to allow the rhetoric of a policy that is based on human rights and values, for example, to guide their actions or earnestly address the situations of the people in these countries. FFP becomes a reference point for demanding a different kind of policy, a normative yardstick for evaluating political practice.

## The contributions in this study

The publication consists of three parts. In the first, *Pauline Reineke* and *Claudia Zilla* examine the core elements of national FFP concepts. They develop tools for synthesising an understanding of FFP and making systematic comparisons. They also identify differences and similarities: Not all governments that profess to be committed to FFP have developed a corresponding strategy. In most cases, their stated claims of being transformative and intersectional lack substantive anchoring; the concepts remain rather reformist and gender-centred.

The four contributions in the second part focus on German policy towards selected countries; two of them use the 3Rs approach, which is only one component of the FFO guidelines and the BMZ strategy, for their analysis. The different perspectives offered in these contributions reflect the broad conceptual and operational scope of FFP and FDP. Nevertheless, two aspects are common to all country cases: On the one hand, "anti-genderism" – or the severe curtailment of women's human rights – is part of the government ideology or the social and political realities in these countries; on the other hand, security policy

**33** On Russia, see the article by Sabine Fischer in this study, pp. 27ff.

**34** The US invasion of Iraq is a well-studied case in point. See Nadjie Al-Ali and Nicla Pratt, *What Kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 2009).

**35** Ekatherina Zhukova, "Postcolonial Logic and Silences in Strategic Narratives: Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy in Conflict-Affected States", *Global Society* 37, no. 1 (2023): 1–22, <https://bit.ly/46647QM> (accessed 12 June 2023).

**36** Columba Achilleos-Sarll, "Reconceptualizing Foreign Policy as Gendered, Sexualised and Racialised: Towards a Postcolonial Feminist Foreign Policy (Analysis)", *Journal of International Women's Studies* 19, no. 1 (2018): 34–49, <https://bit.ly/3ZngdT2> (accessed 12 June 2023).

**37** Sabine Hark and Paula Villa, *Unterscheiden und herrschen. Ein Essay zu den ambivalenten Verflechtungen von Rassismus, Sexismus und Feminismus in der Gegenwart* (Bielefeld, 2017).

considerations play a central role in Germany's policies towards these states.

Looking at the states of *Eastern Europe*, Sabine Fischer shows how Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine promotes traditional, dichotomous gender roles and rearmament. She analyses the connection between war and gender, justifies the need for FFP in the so-called *Zeitenwende*, and identifies what elements a feminist German policy towards Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, as well as Russia and Belarus, should contain.

Hürkan Ash Aksoy analyses the development of the gender regime in *Turkey*, highlighting both the achievements of feminist and other civil society organisations up to the 2000s and the gender policy backlash that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government has been pushing since then. She sees the transactional nature of Germany's Turkey policy as the main obstacle to the implementation of FFP, but points to various areas where it could still be applied.

Muriel Asseburg's contribution focuses on the *Palestinian territories*. She analyses the very limited participation of the local population, not least that of women and marginalised groups. Structurally, the implementation of FFP in the Palestinian territories is hindered by the dominance of (traditionally understood) security considerations and the focus on the security of the State of Israel. The author develops starting points for a policy that is oriented towards human rights and human security.

Azadeh Zamirirad analyses German policy towards *Iran*, particularly in response to the 2022 protests and their suppression by the Iranian security forces, and in light of the country's nuclear programme. It is true that Germany's Iran policy is partly based on feminist principles. However, its further development in the sense of FFP requires a change of perspective, away from the Iranian state and towards Iranian society.

The third part of the study is devoted to four policy areas and two international instruments. Bettina Rudloff and Peter-Tobias Stoll focus on gender equality in *trade policy*. They examine existing trade regimes, distinguishing between rules at the multilateral, plurilateral and bilateral levels, and the more recent unilateral approaches by the EU and Germany. On this basis, they identify opportunities to promote gender equality, for example by expanding the evidence base and improving impact assessments. They see the creation of a coherent link between the various approaches as a key recommendation in order for Germany and the EU to achieve gender equality.

Martha Stolze analyses *digital policy*. She develops conceptual requirements for a feminist digital policy, problematises the phenomena of gender-specific digital violence and disinformation, and outlines approaches to combat them. She concludes that Germany should advocate for regulations by the state or the expansion of its powers at the EU, UN and bilateral levels. Concrete recommendations for action are aimed in particular at the negotiations on the Global Digital Compact within the EU.

Nadine Knapp and Anne Koch examine the policy area of *migration*. Against the background of intersectional-feminist approaches to migration research, they focus on intersectional inequality as well as violence and exploitation in the field of labour migration. Central to the elements of FFP and FDP on labour migration that they have developed is a shift away from the logic of domestic politics – that is, a focus on receiving countries – towards the interests of migrants and their countries of origin.

Nadine Biehler and Amrei Meier focus on *flight and displacement*. They analyse the slowly increasing but still weak integration of aspects of intersectional feminism into the refugee regime and develop starting points for a more feminist design of humanitarian aid and development cooperation. They focus on the collection of disaggregated data, the participatory design of decision-making processes, the mitigation of personal asymmetric power relations, and improvements in the measurement of progress and success.

The last two chapters deal with international instruments. Gerrit Kurtz examines the tensions between FFP and *stabilisation*. He takes a critical look at Germany's use of this instrument and identifies possible contributions of feminist approaches. He identifies the potential for overcoming "purely liberal" peacebuilding, for the critical analysis of power and security, for feminist conflict transformation and for promoting reflexive learning processes.

*Sanctions* are the focus of Judith Vorrath's analysis. She discusses how sanctions can be used in the context of an inclusive and intersectional understanding of FFP with regard to their purpose, goals and effects. She argues that sanctions can be an instrument of FFP, but that they also have potentially problematic aspects. She argues for a policy of protective sanctions aimed at peacebuilding and improving human security, especially for marginalised groups.

## Overarching conclusions

In the respective contributions, a number of recommendations for the design and further development of context-sensitive FFP and FDP in Germany are derived from the analyses of the specific cases. In addition, recurring starting points can be identified and overarching conclusions can be formulated at a higher level of abstraction.

### Germany's feminist foreign policy needs an overarching concept.

Germany's feminist foreign policy needs an overarching concept that is adopted by cabinet decision. The FFP guidelines of FFO and the FDP strategy of BMZ – as policy-making frameworks for only two ministries – are not sufficient as a foundation for developing an FFP for the Federal Government; at best, individual elements can be implemented on the basis of their merits. However, this does not do justice to the complexity and multi-layered nature of foreign policy, as the range of cases and topics examined here makes clear. In practice, foreign policy is interlinked with domestic policy and touches on the areas of responsibility of various ministries.

FFP has little chance of success if it is limited to a harm-reduction approach, for example as feminist development policy that attempts to compensate for unfair trade policy, or as feminist humanitarian aid that accompanies refugee policy which violates human rights. In order for FFP to have a peacebuilding effect, it must penetrate the central issues of politics. The boundaries of FFP are not marked by security or stabilisation policy, for example, but they are rather areas in which feminist perspectives should shape and thus change analyses, understandings and decisions.

Most states committed to FFP claim to have an inclusive and intersectional approach. However, a closer look reveals a strong focus on gender issues. Even on this narrow path, there is still a long way to go, as the contributions in this study show. FFP can certainly provide an impetus for gender mainstreaming, but it must not be limited to this if it is to help eliminate the power asymmetries that threaten peace.

FFP is not a finished strategy that can be implemented in a clear-cut way. Like democracy, it is a work in progress in concept and practice. Its design remains contextual in the sense that, in many situations, a balance must be struck between different

(often conflicting, not only feminist) aims and means. This does not mean arbitrariness or selectivity. A commitment to FFP entails a number of requirements, above all the broadening of analytical perspectives, a (power) critical questioning of the categories and criteria being used, and a reassessment of priorities. Within this framework, the authors use specific cases to explore the limits and potentials of German FFP and FDP.

# National Concepts and Strategies



Pauline Reineke and Claudia Zilla

# Feminist Foreign Policy: Core Elements in International Comparative Perspective\*

In 2014, with its comment to a feminist foreign policy (FFP), the then government of Sweden started a development that has since been joined by a number of countries from different regions. However, it is questionable as to when it can be said that a government is pursuing an FFP and which policy areas it covers. A mere declaration of intent seems insufficient; only a conceptual and/or institutional anchoring can provide an empirical foundation for the government's policy. Furthermore, the term "feminist foreign policy" is sometimes understood in a narrow sense that refers exclusively to foreign policy; sometimes, as in this article, it is understood as a broader umbrella term that also includes concepts such as feminist diplomacy (France)<sup>1</sup> and feminist development policy (FDP, Germany). By taking an international comparative perspective, it is possible to identify the core elements of FFP and derive analytical categories that can be used as dimensions for further comparisons and evaluations. An analytical synthesis can also contribute to a better understanding of FFP beyond the specific empirical cases.

## Context of the FFP launch

So far, the governments that have decided to pursue an FFP have tended to be liberal, progressive, social democratic or left-wing. Although in all these cases men were or are at the head of the government, it is mainly women who – as foreign ministers or secretaries of state – have been entrusted with announcing, developing and implementing FFP or who have

actively campaigned for it (e.g. in Chile, Germany, Canada, Colombia, Libya, Mexico, Spain and Sweden).

Governments take different approaches to specifying their FFPs. Chile,<sup>2</sup> Germany,<sup>3</sup> Mexico,<sup>4</sup> Spain<sup>5</sup> and Sweden<sup>6</sup> anchor their FFPs conceptually in publicly available ministerial documents, which are often developed through consultation processes with civil society. Libya, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Colombia on the other hand still have not produced a central document. Meanwhile, some countries use other concepts or strategies as functional equivalents: France sees the core elements of its FFP reflected in its International Strategy for Gender Equality (2018 – 2022),<sup>7</sup> and Canada bases its FFP on a number of existing policy-specific documents and initiatives, includ-

2 Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Chile, *Política Exterior Feminista* (s.l., June 2023), <http://rb.gy/lyjxvn> (accessed 14 September 2023).

3 Federal Foreign Office (FFO), *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy: Federal Foreign Office Guidelines* (Berlin, February 2023), <https://bit.ly/3PJ9MWZ> (accessed 15 March 2024); Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), *Feminist Development Policy: For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide* (Berlin, April 2023), <https://bit.ly/3Tv0SgU> (accessed 15 March 2024).

4 Gobierno de México, *La Política Exterior Feminista del Gobierno de México* (Mexico City, 2021), <https://rb.gy/599uw> (accessed 12 June 2023).

5 Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación, *Spain's Feminist Foreign Policy: Promoting Gender Equality in Spain's External Action* (Madrid, 2021), <https://rb.gy/foxmb> (accessed 12 June 2023).

6 Government Offices of Sweden, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Handbook: Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy* (Stockholm, 2018), <https://rb.gy/c8pxi> (accessed 12 June 2023).

7 French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, *What Is Feminist Foreign Policy?* (Paris, 2022), <https://rb.gy/d85o9> (accessed 12 June 2023).

\* The authors would like to thank Madita Standke-Erdmann, Katrin Falk and Martha Stolze for their valuable comments on earlier versions of this article.

1 Lyric Thompson, Spogmay Ahmed and Tanya Khokhar, *Defining Feminist Foreign Policy: A 2021 Update* (Washington, D.C.: ICRW, 2021), <https://rb.gy/4c9ym> (accessed 12 June 2023).

ing the Feminist International Assistance Policy, adopted in 2017.<sup>8</sup>

The development of an FFP strategy is neither a requirement nor a guarantee for shaping foreign policy in a feminist way. However, setting out basic principles, priorities and objectives in writing can be useful for communicating with national and international actors, managing expectations and creating a basis for accountability mechanisms. Last but not least, it facilitates comparative analysis, which is why the focus below is on FFP variants with a clear textual foundation.

## Core elements of governmental FFP

The core elements that can be derived from the different FFP strategies vary considerably.<sup>9</sup> If FFP aims to reduce the asymmetries of power that are unjust and pose a threat to peace, which disadvantaged social groups are at the centre of the policy? If FFP provides a policy framework for governments' external actions and for processes and structures within ministries, to which policy areas and ministries does it apply? How can priorities be implemented and objectives achieved? And to what extent does each FFP conceptually live up to its rhetoric of transformative structural change?

## Inclusion and target groups

Depending on which (disadvantaged) people are considered, FFP strategies differ in their degree of inclusiveness with regard to target groups. Whereas the earlier FFPs in particular – for example in Sweden, Canada and France – identify women and girls as the primary target group and remain binary- and cisgender-centred, recent FFPs tend to be more inclusive. Luxembourg, Mexico and the Netherlands,<sup>10</sup> for

example, also define LGBTIQ+ as a key target group for their FFPs.<sup>11</sup> In its FFP guidelines and FDP strategy, Germany focuses on women and girls, marginalised groups (including LGBTIQ+) and ultimately all people, albeit in descending order of priority.<sup>12</sup>

Most FFP variants claim to adopt an intersectional approach, which takes into account the complex interaction of different mechanisms of discrimination: gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, disability, socio-economic status, religion, etc. However, this declared intersectionality is often understood as nominal and summative rather than substantive and transversal. In some FFP approaches (e.g. Canada<sup>13</sup> and Spain<sup>14</sup>) it also remains women-centred.

## Scope and horizontal coherence

The content of FFP differs depending on the policy area (foreign policy, diplomacy, development cooperation, etc.) to which the adjective “feminist” refers and on the way in which states organise their foreign policy at the institutional level.

### The vast majority of FFP variants cover all areas of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The vast majority of FFP variants cover all areas of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but rarely go beyond its boundaries. The situation is different in Germany, where the unusual institutional separation of foreign and development policy has led to two ministerial concepts. However, the practice of foreign policy is more complex and multi-layered than the explicitly formulated and mostly ministerial scope of FFP. On the one hand, ministries that are generally inward-looking (such as for education and research) also per-

<sup>8</sup> Global Affairs Canada, *Scene-Setter: Feminist Foreign Policy Dialogue* (Ottawa, 2020), <https://rb.gy/tj5xi> (accessed 12 June 2023).

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., on the German strategies Claudia Zilla, *Foreign Policy Reorientation: Feminist Foreign and Development Policy in Ministerial Documents and Debates*, SWP Comment 22/2023 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, April 2023), doi: 10.18449/2023C22.

<sup>10</sup> Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, *Letter of 8 November 2022 from the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Trade and Development Cooperation to the House of Representatives on*

*Feminist Foreign Policy* (The Hague, 8 November 2022), <https://rb.gy/sm4hi> (accessed 12 June 2023).

<sup>11</sup> Thompson et al., *Defining Feminist Foreign Policy* (see note 1).

<sup>12</sup> Zilla, *Foreign Policy Reorientation* (see note 9).

<sup>13</sup> Global Affairs Canada, *Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy* (Ottawa, 2017), <https://rb.gy/b80sa> (accessed 12 June 2023), 49: “Women often face additional intersectional discrimination [...]”.

<sup>14</sup> Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación, *Spain's Feminist Foreign Policy* (see note 5), 8: “The situation of women and girls cannot improve without recognizing the existence of intersectional and multiple forms of discrimination.”

form foreign policy tasks; on the other hand, foreign and domestic policy (e.g. in the area of migration and refugees) can be closely linked. Horizontal coherence therefore depends on the extent to which policy is feminist in its inter-ministerial and multi-dimensional interconnections.

Armaments policy is often in a markedly tense relationship with FFP, not only from the normative perspective of feminist antimilitarism, but also in terms of the principles and goals enshrined in national FFP strategies. This has implications for the coherence of the policies involved. Germany's arms deliveries to Saudi Arabia, which is militarily involved in the Yemen conflict, is just one example.<sup>15</sup> France and Canada have also been criticised in this respect.<sup>16</sup> The FFP guidelines of the Federal Foreign Office (FFO) state that FFP "is not synonymous with pacifism" and that in some cases human lives must be protected by military means.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, the FFO advocates a safe world without nuclear weapons as well as recognition and compensation for the victims of nuclear testing.<sup>18</sup> However, there is no critical scrutiny of the arms industry or of the fact that Germany is the world's fifth-largest arms exporter and remains part of the nuclear sharing agreement in the frame of NATO.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Germany's arms production and exports have actually increased significantly in the course of the *Zeitenwende* (turning point).<sup>20</sup>

Some FFP variants make explicit reference to domestic politics. In doing so, they take into account feminist approaches that criticise a dichotomous distinction between "inside" and "outside" and an externalisation of feminist policies along North-South hierarchies. But what legitimacy does a state have to espouse feminist policies to the outside world if it itself performs poorly on key indicators of gender

equality? According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2022,<sup>21</sup> Sweden has the highest level of horizontal coherence between domestic and external gender equality requirements among countries that adopted an FFP: it ranks fifth in the world, having closed 82.2 per cent of its gender gap,<sup>22</sup> followed by Germany (80.1), France (79.1), Spain (78.8) and Canada (77.2). Mexico, where at least 10 women are murdered every day because of their gender (femicides),<sup>23</sup> is at the bottom of the list with 76.4 per cent. A different picture emerges from other indices: With 35.1 per cent of the Bundestag being comprised of women, Germany ranks 44th out of the 230 or so countries surveyed,<sup>24</sup> whereas Mexico, with gender-parity representation in parliament, ranks fourth.

This lack of horizontal coherence leaves room for different assessments. While Martha Delgado Peralta, the Mexican Undersecretary of State for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights, relies on FFP to generate synergies and support for gender equality domestically and in the international community,<sup>25</sup> a lack of coherence between domestic and foreign policy can also deprive countries of the normative legitimacy to credibly represent feminist values in multilateral organisations or vis-à-vis other states.

## Vertical coherence and institutionalisation

Vertical coherence refers to the degree of implementation of what has been announced or conceptualised in ministerial documents. Institutionalisation – the embedding of national FFP concepts into structures and procedures – promotes vertical coherence. The

<sup>15</sup> "Ampel gibt Eurofighter für Saudi-Arabien frei", *ZDFheute*, 7 January 2024, <https://bit.ly/3w6jbAN> (accessed 8 January 2024).

<sup>16</sup> Thompson, Ahmed and Khokhar, *Defining Feminist Foreign Policy* (see note 1).

<sup>17</sup> FFO, *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy* (see note 3), 13.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 16, 20, 28.

<sup>19</sup> Pieter D. Wezeman, Justine Gadon and Siemon T. Wezeman, *Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2022*, SIPRI Fact Sheet (Solna: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (March 2023), <https://rb.gy/57y12> (accessed 12 June 2023).

<sup>20</sup> "Neuer Rekord bei deutschen Rüstungsexporten", *ZDFheute*, 27 December 2023, <https://bit.ly/3HFwECr> (accessed 8 January 2024).

<sup>21</sup> World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2022* (Geneva, July 2022), <http://rb.gy/0sbhc> (accessed 12 June 2023).

<sup>22</sup> The gender gap is measured by comparing the participation and opportunities of women and men using a range of indicators in key areas such as the economy, education, health and politics. Contextual factors such as family and care responsibilities and access to financial resources are also analysed.

<sup>23</sup> Amnesty International, *Justice on Trial: Failures in Criminal Investigations of Femicides Preceded by Disappearance in the State of Mexico* (Mexico City, 2021), <http://rb.gy/diuwd> (accessed 12 June 2023).

<sup>24</sup> "Monthly Ranking of Women in National Parliaments", *IPU Parline*, July 2023, <http://rb.gy/h8ipf> (accessed 15 July 2023).

<sup>25</sup> Ann Deslandes, "Checking In on Mexico's Feminist Foreign Policy", *Foreign Policy Magazine* (online), 30 December 2020, <http://rb.gy/5cbmg> (accessed 12 June 2023).



greater the degree of institutionalisation, the more likely it is that FFP will survive changes of government and, above all, changes of power. A cautionary example is Sweden, where the foreign minister of the new conservative government, Tobias Billström, announced the discontinuation of FFP in 2022. Since then, supporters of FFP have considered it to be even more urgent to institutionalise it.<sup>26</sup>

Some countries have appointed special ambassadors, equality commissioners or officials with similar functions to advance FFP. The call to implement the original Swedish 3Rs approach — strengthening women’s rights, representation and resources (or resources for women-focussed projects) — is often also raised within the country’s own ministry. Mexico’s FFP, for example, states that it is committed to gender-equitable representation and combating sexualised violence within ministerial structures.<sup>27</sup> Germany’s FFO and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) also aim to promote equality, diversity and inclusion internally and to ensure equal opportunities and a non-discriminatory working environment; the FFO has presented more concrete measures (e.g. a division for gender equity and diversity) than the BMZ.<sup>28</sup>

The commitment to FFP is often accompanied by an increase in financial resources for development policy activities to promote gender equality.<sup>29</sup> Both the FFO and the BMZ have set themselves the goal of spending 85 per cent of project funds on gender-sensitive projects or those that have gender equality as a significant objective and 8 per cent on gender-transformative projects or those that have gender equality as the principal objective by 2025.<sup>30</sup> For comparison: Canada and France go even further, aiming for a commitment of 15 per cent<sup>31</sup> and 20 per cent<sup>32</sup>

of their project funding, respectively, for projects with gender equality as the principal objective.

Monitoring and evaluation are increasingly being institutionalised in order to continuously review and adapt measures. Whereas these instruments remain vague in the FFO’s FFP guidelines,<sup>33</sup> the BMZ — in the chapter “Measuring success” of its FDP strategy — envisages a gender action plan with a system for measuring impact and a reflection process for evaluating success in 2025.<sup>34</sup>

However, a high degree of vertical coherence is not a gold standard: The less aspirational the objectives of an FFP approach are, the easier it is to reconcile rhetoric and practice. A purely quantitative approach, in which quotas are used primarily to increase (descriptive) representation, is relatively easy to develop and implement. However, it does not guarantee that the concerns of minorities and marginalised groups (in terms of substantive representation) will be taken into account.<sup>35</sup>

## Depth of change sought

FFP strategies also differ in the depth of change they seek. Whereas a reform-oriented approach focuses on “corrections within patriarchal structures that may lessen discrimination and asymmetries (for example through gender quotas)”,<sup>36</sup> a transformative approach goes beyond gender equality to pursue a “transformation of existing violent structures and unjust power relations in the international system — and thus a disruption”.<sup>37</sup>

26 Rachel A. George, “Sweden’s Feminist Foreign Policy Can’t Be Undone”, *Foreign Policy Magazine* (online), 18 November 2022, <http://rb.gy/ii6ud> (accessed 12 June 2023).

27 Martha Delgado, “Mexico’s Feminist Foreign Policy”, *Transatlantic Policy Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (2020): 35–39, <http://rb.gy/lyyaz> (accessed 12 June 2023).

28 FFO, *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy* (see note 3), 60.

29 Foteini Papagiotti, Lyric Thompson and Spogmay Ahmed, *Feminist Foreign Policy and Development Finance for Gender Equality: An Assessment of Commitments* (Washington, D.C.: ICRW, 2022), <http://rb.gy/9irou> (accessed 12 June 2023).

30 See the explanation in note 6 of the Introduction to this study on page 8.

31 Global Affairs Canada, *Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy* (see note 13).

32 SEEK Development: Donor Tracker, *Issue Deep Dive: France/Gender Equality* (Berlin, 24 May 2023), <http://rb.gy/irx5n> (accessed 12 June 2023).

33 FFO, *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy* (see note 3), 73.

34 BMZ, *Feminist Development Policy* (see note 3), 34f.

35 Jessica Cheung et al., *Feministische Außenpolitik: ein Leit-faden zur praktischen Umsetzung*, (Berlin: Internationale Frauenliga für Frieden und Freiheit, November 2021), <http://rb.gy/548mh> (accessed 12 June 2023).

36 Claudia Zilla, *Feminist Foreign Policy: Concepts, Core Components and Controversies*, SWP Comment 48/2022 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, August 2022), doi: 10.18449/2022C48, 6.

37 Marieke Fröhlich and Anna Hauschild, “Feministische Außenpolitik. Hintergründe und Praxis”, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (APuZ) 17 (2023), <http://rb.gy/8km0j> (accessed 12 June 2023); translation by the authors.

### Power asymmetries such as (post-) colonial structures are only problematised in a few FFP strategies.

Rhetorically, the national FFP initiatives – with the exception of France’s International Strategy for Gender Equality – aim at transformative change. In essence, however, the national FFP variants do not meet the normative feminist demand for transformation. Instead, they often follow the 3Rs approach, which is as descriptive as it is measurable. Furthermore, there is often disagreement between policy-makers and civil society about what a transformative approach, in the sense of an FFP, should and can look like. Spain’s definition of a “transformative approach”, for example, refers to coherence across all areas of external action as well as structural changes in the working methods and institutional culture of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,<sup>38</sup> and therefore it does not imply overcoming international structures of asymmetric power relations and violence. This also applies to the FFP guidelines of the FFO, which state the following with regard to their transformative claim: “We are thus extending into foreign policy what we term ‘gender mainstreaming’ in domestic policy”.<sup>39</sup> Asymmetric power relations such as (post-)colonial structures are only mentioned in a few FFP strategies, mostly with reference to the populations of other countries (e.g. in Germany’s FFP guidelines and FDP strategy).<sup>40</sup>

### In search of FFP and its impact

In the public debate on FFP, it is often asked whether its implementation has positive results. Both those who are sceptical or critical of FFP and wish to point to its ineffectiveness as well as those who wish to learn from best practices of other governments with FFP are interested in this issue. But this line of questioning falls short: What is meant by the implementation of FFP, and how is it actually conceived? In the empirical world of politics, FFP brings together a range of concepts, priorities, policy and action areas,

target groups, objectives and requirements. These are embedded in the varied contexts of each country. National FFP concepts are feminist, insofar as they discursively incorporate the arguments and demands of feminist theories and movements. These are often condensed within the 3Rs approach, which contains important dimensions but remains limited due to its focus on gender equality and gender mainstreaming. A comprehensive feminist interpretation, vision and transformation of the world and international politics is still lacking, both in FFP concepts and in the actions of governments claiming to pursue an FFP.

38 Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación, *Spain’s Feminist Foreign Policy* (see note 5), 4.

39 FFO, *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy* (see note 3), 9.

40 Ibid., 56: “Reflecting on our own history”; BMZ, *Feminist Development Policy* (see note 3), 11: “Post-colonial and anti-racist development policy”.



# German and European Policy Towards Countries



Sabine Fischer

# Eastern Europe: A Feminist Policy in the Light of War\*

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is putting many basic assumptions of feminist foreign policy (FFP) to the test. With its aggression, the authoritarian regime in Moscow has not only forced the neighbouring country into an existential defensive struggle. The entire region of Eastern Europe is suffering the consequences of this imperialist war, with which Russia has dealt a hard blow to the European security order. Now in its third year, its consequences have become manifest: Military spending in the West is rising rapidly because an international coalition is providing Ukraine with massive amounts of arms. European countries are also investing more resources in their own security – with this in mind, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz proclaimed a *Zeitenwende* (turning point) in German defence policy on 27 February 2022. NATO has acquired a new significance and has accepted new members. Ukraine's accession after the end of the war has become a real possibility. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 means that governments in Europe have made deterrence, defence, military and security policy (even) more central to their policies.

The war is challenging FFP's transformative claim. By dismantling patriarchal and other unjust structures and combating militarism, it aims to contribute to a more sustainable peace. Feminist approaches assume a close connection between social, domestic and international peace. Discord, injustice and oppression – for reasons of gender, sexual orientation, racialisation or social origin – are perpetuated externally and can lead to aggressive behaviour towards other societies and states. Conversely, interstate wars have devastating effects on internal social relations. They cement patriarchal-authoritarian power structures and increase levels of violence – Russia and Belarus are cautionary examples. However, Ukraine

and other societies in the region are also threatened with this kind of “violence boomerang” as a result of the war.

## War and gender

Every war has a gender dimension and is also an expression of gendered structures of violence. This is simply due to the fact that the actors, perpetrators, victims and those affected are of different genders. In the vast majority of cases, the political decision-makers and combatants are predominantly men. Women are less involved in combat operations and more exposed to the humanitarian consequences of war. The extreme dichotomisation of gender roles in war also exposes queer people to particular risks.

### **Anti-feminism and LGBTIQ+ hostility are important components of Russia's policy of influence and destabilisation.**

In Russia's war against Ukraine, the gender dimension is particularly charged. Russia's domestic and foreign policy is characterised by aggressive anti-feminism and hyper-masculinity.<sup>1</sup> So-called traditional values and extremely pronounced patriarchal structures have become increasingly important legitimising pillars of the political regime.<sup>2</sup> This can be seen in repressive laws that are explicitly anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ+, or in the decriminalisation of domestic violence. Anti-feminism and the cultural war against the allegedly decadent and effeminate homosexual Europe (“Gayropa”) play a central role in Russian poli-

1 Sabine Fischer, *Die chauvinistische Bedrohung. Russlands Kriege und Europas Antworten* (Berlin, 2023).

2 Valerie Sperling, *Sex, Politics & Putin: Political Legitimacy in Russia* (Oxford, 2015).

\* The author would like to thank Nina Bernarding for her valuable comments on an earlier version of this article.

tics and propaganda.<sup>3</sup> The official narrative of the Putin regime claims that Russia must defend itself against Western “decadence”. Anti-feminism and LGBTIQ+ hostility are important components of Russia’s policy of influence and destabilisation towards its immediate neighbourhood and Europe as a whole.

This policy reached its climax with Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which has been the object of Russian chauvinist fantasies about subjugation and rape since 2014.<sup>4</sup> In the current war of aggression, anti-feminism and aggressive hyper-masculinity perhaps find their most brutal form of expression in the use of sexualised violence as a weapon of war against women and men.<sup>5</sup>

In other states in the region, Russia uses anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ+ propaganda to undermine societal discourse. The Russian state and private Russian actors support anti-feminist, far-right and religious organisations across Europe.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, a feminist anti-war resistance movement (FAS) formed in Russia immediately after the renewed invasion of Ukraine. This loose network of activists organises protests, helps people deported from Ukraine to leave Russia and tries to counteract sexist state propaganda with feminist content.<sup>7</sup>

3 Kristina Stoeckl and Dmitry Uzlaner, *The Moralists International: Russia in the Global Culture Wars* (New York, NY, 2022).

4 Elizaveta Gaufman, “Damsels in Distress: Fragile Masculinity in Digital War”, *Media, War & Conflict* 16, no. 4 (2023): 516–33, doi: 10.1177/17506352221130271.

5 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations, *Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine. 1 August 2022 – 31 January 2023* (24 March 2023), 16, 18, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/ukraine/2023/23-03-24-Ukraine-35th-periodic-report-ENG.pdf> (accessed 29 July 2023); “UN Envoy: Rape Used as Part of Russian ‘Military Strategy’ in Ukraine”, *The Moscow Times* (online), 14 October 2022, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/10/14/un-envoy-rape-used-as-part-of-russian-military-strategy-in-ukraine-a79093> (accessed 28 July 2023).

6 Neil Datta, *Die Spitze des Eisbergs. Religiös-extremistische Geldgeber gegen Menschenrechte auf Sexualität und reproduktive Gesundheit in Europa 2009–2018* (Brussels: Europäisches Parlamentarisches Forum für sexuelle & reproduktive Rechte, June 2021).

7 Anna Efimova and Liliya Vezhevatova, “Women Will Shake and Reverse Public Opinion about This War”, *eurozine.com* (online), 6 October 2022. See also FAS Manifestos: “Manifesto Feministskogo Antivoyennogo Soprotivleniya” [Manifesto of the Feminist Anti-war Resistance], 25 February 2022, <https://www.eurozine.com/women-will-shake-and-reverse-public-opinion-about-this-war/> (accessed 17 June

Patriarchal structures also dominate in other societies in Eastern Europe. The upcoming European Union (EU) accession processes will increase the pressure for change with regard to unequal gender relations in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. In Ukraine, there were already signs of a change in gender roles after the Euromaidan revolution in 2014. Women are playing a much more visible role than before – particularly in civil society, but also in politics – and are more actively involved in defending their country.<sup>8</sup> Russia’s imperialist aggression also means that people in Ukraine are now more determined than ever to distance themselves from the social model propagated by Russia. Sociological studies and surveys show an increased level of tolerance towards queer people; the idea of masculinity is also changing, at least among the younger generation.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, there is a danger that gender relations in Ukraine will revert to patriarchal patterns as a result of the violent trauma people have been suffering during the war – even if, unlike in Moldova or Georgia, Russian propaganda no longer has much of an impact on Ukrainian society.

## Germany’s Eastern European policy and feminism to date

Until the start of Russia’s renewed invasion of Ukraine, feminist perspectives played no role in Germany’s official Eastern European policy. Bilaterally and within the framework of the EU’s Eastern Partnership (EaP), it was geared towards supporting the reform processes required for Ukraine’s association with the EU. The focus here was particularly on the fight against corruption; the expansion of the rule of law and democracy; economic reforms; and strengthening human rights. This implicitly included women’s

2023); “Programmnoye dopolneniye k manifestu FAS” [Programmatic Supplement to the Manifesto of the Feminist Anti-War Resistance], 24 August 2022, [teletype.in/@femantiwarresistance/manifesto\\_addition](https://teletype.in/@femantiwarresistance/manifesto_addition) (accessed 28 July 2023).

8 Olga Oliker, “Fighting While Female: How Gender Dynamics Are Shaping the War in Ukraine”, *Foreign Affairs* (online), 21 November 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/fighting-while-female> (accessed 28 July 2023).

9 Sarah D. Phillips and Tamara Martsenyuk, “Women’s Agency and Resistance in Russia’s War on Ukraine: From Victim of the War to Prominent Force”, *Women’s Studies International Forum* 98 (May/June 2023), doi: 10.1016/j.wsif.2023.102731.

rights, but it did not place them at the centre of attention.

Since 2015, the Federal Foreign Office (FFO) has been funding projects in the areas of pluralism and resilience, value discourses and human rights, as well as dialogue and rapprochement as part of the “Expanding cooperation with civil society in the Eastern Partnership countries and Russia (EaP)” programme.<sup>10</sup> Women’s rights and gender equality are not explicitly mentioned in the call text. The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) has long integrated gender equality into its working guidelines. For example, the empowerment of women at the local level was a focus of the support provided by GIZ in the 2010s as part of the decentralisation reform in Ukraine.<sup>11</sup> Similar approaches are being pursued in other countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Of the German political foundations, the Heinrich Böll Foundation in particular took up the issue of gender equality early on and cooperated with feminist and LGBTIQ+ activists in all countries of the Eastern Neighbourhood and in Russia.

So far, feminist perspectives have not been included in Russian state policy. Russian politics is male-dominated; this applies in particular to foreign and security policy. Before 2005, German-Russian relations were characterised by “(old) boys’ networks”, first between the heads of government Helmut Kohl and Boris Yeltsin, then between Gerhard Schröder and Vladimir Putin. Germany’s excessive energy dependence on Russia grew out of the latter “male friendship”.<sup>12</sup> By contrast, the relationship between German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Russian President Vladimir Putin was distant and cool. European politicians such as High Representatives of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton (2009–2014) and Federica Mogherini (2014–

2019) or Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (since 2019) were and are treated disparagingly by their Russian interlocutors — because they stood and stand for the EU, which is despised by the Russian political elite, and because they are women. Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock met Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in January 2022, shortly before the full-scale invasion and the final collapse in relations. This meeting was also chilly and met with derision in the Russian state media and social networks because Baerbock belongs to the Alliance 90/The Greens party, which is hated in Russia, and is a comparatively young woman. Like many other EU states, Germany has never sent a woman as ambassador to Russia and has thus repeatedly conformed with the misogyny and anti-feminism of the Russian political regime.

### **The opportunities to shape feminist projects in Russia have steadily decreased over the past decade.**

The opportunities for German state and non-state actors to organise feminist projects with Russian partners have steadily decreased over the past decade. The Putin regime has cracked down ever harder on feminist and queer activism. The state has defamed feminist activists as “foreign agents”, making it more difficult for them to work with non-Russian partners and access vital sources of funding. This development reached its climax with Russia’s renewed invasion of Ukraine. Today, the Putin dictatorship almost completely isolates the Russian population from Europe. The anti-feminism rhetoric has reached new levels. More feminist activists have been declared foreign agents and have had to flee abroad. LGBTIQ+ activism has been considered “extremist” since November 2023 and is banned in its entirety. German non-governmental organisations and political foundations can no longer work in Russia. The German embassy has been weakened in terms of staff due to mutual expulsions and is unable to continue the range of activities it had in previous years.

### **A feminist Eastern European policy**

The ministerial documents on feminist foreign and development policy published by the FFO and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in March 2023 offer a good foundation

<sup>10</sup> “Zusammenarbeit mit der Zivilgesellschaft in den Ländern der Östlichen Partnerschaft und Russland”, *Federal Foreign Office (FFO)*, 27 October 2023, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/aussenpolitik/europa/erweiterung-nachbarschaft/nachbarschaftspolitik/zivilgesellschaft-projekte-oestliche-partnerschaft/301008> (accessed 12 November 2023).

<sup>11</sup> “Ukraine: ULead with Europe”, *GIZ Gender Website*, 20 September 2023, <https://gender-works.giz.de/competitions2020/ukraine-ulead-with-europe/> (accessed 12 June 2023).

<sup>12</sup> Reinhard Bingener and Markus Wehner, *Die Moskau-Connection. Das Schröder-Netzwerk und Deutschlands Weg in die Abhängigkeit* (Munich, 2023).



for a feminist Eastern European policy.<sup>13</sup> Such a policy must take into account the fundamentally changed situation in the entire region. The gender dimension of the war must be fully understood and revealed in order to develop feminist-inspired strategies that are tailored to the respective country category: 1) to Ukraine as the country that has to fight for its very existence in the face of Russia's aggression, 2) to Moldova and Georgia as countries that are striving for EU membership and in geopolitical conflict with Russia and 3) to Russia as the aggressor, and Belarus taking its side.<sup>14</sup>

A feminist Ukraine policy should work in two directions. On the one hand, it should support Ukrainian society in defending itself against Russia's aggression. In addition to imperialism and nationalism, Russia's invasion of their neighbouring country also stems from extreme anti-feminism and Russia's idea of a cultural war against "Gayropa". This is why military support for Ukraine is also justified from a feminist perspective. The FFP guidelines state: "Russia's war against Ukraine shows that, in the face of brutal violence, human lives must be protected by military means, too. Thus, feminist foreign policy is not synonymous with pacifism. It is obliged to the humanitarian tradition on which conventional peace policy and arms control draw. At the same time, it recognises the realities of foreign policy and faces up to the dilemmas that arise from them."<sup>15</sup>

### Women must have a say if Ukrainian-Russian ceasefire negotiations take place in the future.

Secondly, a feminist Ukraine policy should look beyond state-centric security policy considerations and focus on human security and the situations of

women and marginalised groups. In this time of war, it means paying particular attention to the needs of women affected by the humanitarian consequences of the war as well as those of women who have fled abroad. In addition, measures are needed to give more weight to the role of women in national defence and Ukrainian politics. The German government, German international cooperation institutions and civil society organisations should urge their Ukrainian partners to ensure that women are involved in all relevant political and security policy processes. Feminist organisations and activists should be specifically supported. Women must have a say if Ukrainian-Russian ceasefire negotiations take place in the future. Not a single woman sat at the table during the negotiations that took place in February and March 2022. Ukraine could set an important example here – and Germany should encourage the Ukrainian leadership as well as other European partners to do so.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, it is strategically important for feminist politics to expand the role and participation of women during the reconstruction and post-war period. Because without gender equality, democratic consolidation will not be possible. Ukrainian society runs the risk of falling into a further spiral of violence due to the trauma suffered, above all by the men who have fought in the war. An effective way to counter this is to ensure that women and other marginalised groups can represent their interests independently: through political empowerment – from the local to the national level – and participation in economic development. It is in these areas that feminist policy can have a transformative effect, in line with the BMZ's strategy for feminist development policy. To this end, gender-transformative and intersectional approaches must be incorporated right at the programming level.<sup>17</sup> However, there is also a need for contact persons on the Ukrainian side, which in turn brings the expansion of the political participation of women and marginalised groups to the fore. The proliferation of small arms, which is taking place in Ukrainian society as a result of the war, must be reversed in order to protect the state's monopoly on the use of force. The rapid and efficient reintegration

13 Federal Foreign Office (FFO), *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy: Federal Foreign Office Guidelines* (Berlin, February 2023), <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2585076/4d2d295dad8fb1c41c6271d2c1a41d75/ffp-leitlinien-data.pdf> (accessed 28 July 2023); Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), *Feminist Development Policy: For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide* (Berlin, April 2023), <https://www.bmz.de/resource/blob/153806/bmz-strategy-feminist-development-policy.pdf> (accessed 28 July 2023).

14 Tailor-made policy elements also need to be developed for Armenia and Azerbaijan, which have been at war over the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh for more than 30 years. For reasons of space, they are not dealt with here.

15 FFO, *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy* (see note 13), 13.

16 The participation of women in inclusive peace processes, which is also the subject of the United Nations "Women, Peace and Security" agenda, can be found in Guideline 1 ("Peace and Security Policy") of FFO, *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy* (see note 13), 20.

17 BMZ, *Feminist Development Policy* (see note 13), 28f.

of refugees — mostly women and children — is another important aspect. State and social organisations in Ukraine are trying to establish structures for the psychological care of war veterans and war invalids. German and European feminist Ukraine policy should actively support these efforts in the coming years. The situation remains precarious and the task enormous.

FFP towards Moldova and Georgia should focus on strengthening the resilience of both societies against anti-feminism, including when it is promoted by Russian propaganda. This means giving different approaches in policy towards these states a specifically feminist thrust. In the areas of propaganda and disinformation, the Russian “Gayropa” narrative can be countered, for example, by Germany and the EU working together with independent media and using public diplomacy measures to convey realistic images of the EU to the respective societies. The active support of feminist civil society actors is another building block. Finally, the political and economic empowerment of women and marginalised groups should become an integral part of bilateral cooperation and the EU’s conditions regarding upcoming accession processes.

Feminist Russia policy also requires two dimensions. As long as an anti-feminist and chauvinist political regime is in power in Moscow, there is no prospect of security cooperation with Russia. Therefore, containment and deterrence are appropriate political strategies vis-à-vis the Russian state. Following the renewed invasion of Ukraine, hundreds of thousands of independent actors from civil society, journalism, academia, the arts and the opposition are likely to have left Russia. A feminist Russia policy must focus on promoting feminist approaches in this new exile community and supporting feminist and queer activists with organising themselves in exile. Although Russia’s liberal political opposition continues to be dominated by men and itself shows anti-feminist tendencies, the shock of the war has changed the thinking among civil society actors. Younger activists in particular are now more open to feminism, LGBTIQ+ and decolonisation concepts than before, because they want to distance themselves from the brutality of the Putin regime. This creates a new space of possibility in which feminist politics can operate. It remains to be seen whether and when such a policy can lead to changes in Russia itself. At present, it is one of the few remaining options, given the collapse of political relations with the Putin regime.

Hürcan Ash Aksoy

# Turkey: Opportunities and Obstacles for a Feminist Foreign Policy

With the re-election of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2023, Turkey has entered a new phase in its political trajectory, which is characterised by an authoritarian consolidation, increasing nationalism, stealth Islamisation and rising anti-feminism. In public life, trends that incrementally undermine the secular and republican foundations of the state and roll back the hard-won rights of women are gaining traction. Feminist and queer activists emphasise that for the first time in Turkey's history, political parties that dispute the fundamental rights of women and girls and advocate gender segregation in public life are represented in the Turkish parliament. The Erdoğan government is pursuing a "masculinist identity politics" that uses misogynist and anti-LGBTIQ+ rhetoric and is making life more difficult for women and the queer community. In addition, the nationalist political atmosphere is threatening the lives of people in disadvantaged groups, especially Kurds and women and girls from refugee communities (Syrians).

Even if Turkey is not explicitly mentioned in the guidelines for a feminist foreign policy<sup>1</sup> (FFP) of the Federal Foreign Office (FFO), starting points for how to engage with the country can certainly be obtained from them. Through projects and cooperation, the FFO wants to promote an FFP by "naming entrenched power structures, overcoming them and thus promoting equitable participation and equality for all people around the world. It takes a transformative and intersectional approach to doing so".<sup>2</sup> The start-

ing point for the German government is the Swedish 3Rs approach (rights, representation and resources). At its core, the approach is about strengthening and empowering disadvantaged groups, especially women and girls. As part of a feminist approach to Turkey, it is important to first consider the ideas, needs and concerns of the social groups working towards gender equality on the ground. This also includes critically questioning where German policy contributes towards reinforcing discriminatory power structures. So, what would a feminist foreign policy towards Turkey look like?

## Between equality and inequality: The gender regime in Turkey

Article 10 Act No. 5170 (paragraph added in 2004) of the Turkish Constitution of 1982 reads: "Men and women have equal rights. The State has obligation to ensure that this equality exists in practice (added in 2010, Act No. 5982). Measures taken for this purpose shall not be interpreted as contrary to the principle of equality."<sup>3</sup> Despite the legal equality of women, gender relations in Turkey today are characterised by significant inequalities. The reasons behind this lie especially in the socio-political developments that have emerged in the country under the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has been in power for more than two decades.

In the AKP's political project "Turkey's second century", gender policy is intertwined with right-wing

<sup>1</sup> In the following, reference is only made to feminist foreign policy (FFP), as there has been no German development cooperation with Turkey since 2008. The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) finances projects in Turkey that benefit Syrian refugees and the host communities.

<sup>2</sup> Federal Foreign Office (FFO), *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy: Federal Foreign Office Guidelines* (Berlin, February 2023), 9, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blueprint/servlet/blob/>

2585076/4d2d295dad8fb1c41c6271d2c1a41d75/ffp-leitlinien-data.pdf (accessed 17 June 2023).

<sup>3</sup> See *Anayasa Mahkemesi* (the official translation published by the Grand National), [https://www.anayasa.gov.tr/media/7258/anayasa\\_eng.pdf](https://www.anayasa.gov.tr/media/7258/anayasa_eng.pdf) (accessed 31 July 2023).

populist authoritarian rhetoric.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, it is about ensuring that male privileges are once again guaranteed under a nationalist-Islamist state ideology and that women “know their place”. On the other hand, gender norms play a key role in the political and cultural polarisation between “us” (AKP supporters) and “the others” (AKP critics).<sup>5</sup> The main obstacles to gender equality are the repressive policies of the AKP government and the associated promotion of religious traditionalism.

## Rights

As part of a radical strategy of modernisation, nationalisation and secularisation (laicism)<sup>6</sup> during the founding years of the Turkish Republic, the elevation of women’s social status became official state policy. The legal equality between the sexes made it possible for women to gain visibility and participate in public life. Nevertheless, patriarchal structures remained in many laws and institutions, and the majority of women and men adhered to traditional values such as “family honour” or women’s chastity and the role of the man as head of the family.<sup>7</sup> Over the years, feminists with a diverse range of political views have campaigned for gender-equitable legislation and achieved a number of successes. In the 2000s, the Erdoğan government introduced numerous gender-sensitive reforms in civil, criminal and labour law as part of the process of rapprochement with the European Union (EU). In the last ten years, however, there has been a shift towards an anti-feminist stance.

Since then, President Erdoğan and leading figures in his AKP have continuously attempted to regulate women’s private lives. Whether it concerns equality

between men and women, the number of children in a family, abortion or the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention (“Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence”), all of these issues have repeatedly been the subject of political discourse. The government has pushed through far-reaching socio-political changes that are primarily geared towards the care and nursing of children and the elderly, while restricting women to the domestic role assigned to them in the traditional understanding of the family. With this in mind, the ministry formerly known as the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs was renamed the Ministry of Family and Social Services in 2013. In addition, there have been increasing encroachments on women’s rights to physical and sexual self-determination. In 2012, the AKP government attempted to ban abortion, which was prevented due to the mobilisation and solidarity campaigns of various women’s groups.<sup>8</sup> The Islamist-nationalist government only promotes women’s rights as long as they do not contradict “Turkish” traditions and “Islamic” values.

### Thanks to the agility of the women’s movement(s), the issue of gender equality remains on the agenda.

Thanks to the agility of the women’s movement(s), the issue of gender equality remains on the agenda. Despite internal differences, the women’s movement as such is an influential oppositional voice against authoritarian and patriarchal structures in politics and society, even if its scope for action (via freedom of expression, association and assembly) has been increasingly restricted in recent years.

## Representation

In Turkey, women are underrepresented in all relevant political decision-making bodies at both the national and municipal levels. After the parliamentary elections on 14 May 2023, the proportion of women rose from 17.1 per cent to 20.2 per cent. There are now 121 women in the 600-member parliament. There is only one woman in President Erdoğan’s new cabinet, the Minister of Family and Social Services Mahinur Özdemir Göktaş. At the municipal level, things looked even bleaker — Turkey ranked

4 See Renate Kreile, “Geschlechterordnung, Macht und politisierte Männlichkeiten in der Türkei”, *Bürger & Staat (100 Jahre Türkei. Die Republik zwischen Tradition und Erneuerung)* 73, no. 1/2 (2023): 61–67, [https://www.buergerundstaat.de/1\\_2\\_23/100jahre\\_tuerkei\\_bf.pdf](https://www.buergerundstaat.de/1_2_23/100jahre_tuerkei_bf.pdf) (accessed 17 June 2023).

5 See Deniz Kandiyoti, “Locating the Politics of Gender: Patriarchy, Neoliberal Governance and Violence in Turkey”, *Research and Policy on Turkey* 2 (2016): 103–18 (106).

6 Laicism was one of the six “pillars” of the newly established Turkish Republic under founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (alongside republicanism, statism, nationalism, populism and revolutionism).

7 See Hürcan Aslı Aksoy, “Gender Regimes in Transition: Historical Development of Gender Equality in Turkey”, in *Patriarchat im Wandel. Frauen und Politik in der Türkei*, ed. idem (Frankfurt and New York, NY, 2018), 13–40 (18).

8 Nevertheless, there is currently a de facto ban on abortion in state hospitals.

last in Europe in this respect. The number of female mayors increased recently from 2 to 11 in the 2024 local elections.<sup>9</sup> The needs and interests of women are largely ignored in male-dominated policy-making and decision-making mechanisms. The underrepresentation of women in politics means, for example, that the gender perspective is not taken into account in the budgeting of ministries and municipalities.

In contrast to politics, women are better represented in certain bureaucratic areas – most notably in the Turkish Foreign Ministry, where women comprise 37 per cent of all positions; 27 per cent of ambassadors working abroad are women.<sup>10</sup> The Ministry of the Interior performs the worst, with women holding only 7.9 per cent of all positions.<sup>11</sup> The leading posts in the ministries, which are usually political appointments, are predominantly held by men.

Women account for up to 40 per cent of the members of the medical and bar associations.<sup>12</sup> Many professional associations and trade unions have women's commissions that work on strengthening the status of women. Despite the state's promotion of traditional gender roles, which stands in the way of women's equal participation in society, their share in public life is increasing.

The UN agenda "Women, Peace and Security" (WPS) is not reflected in official policy, as Turkey is not among the 86 UN member states that have adopted a National Action Plan (NAP) to implement Resolution 1325,<sup>13</sup> although women's and peace orga-

nisations have been calling for this for years. A gender perspective has never been a priority for the Turkish state. After the failed peace process (2013 – 2015) between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) – which is recognised as a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the United States and the EU – thousands of activists and civil society organisations in the Kurdish regions that were campaigning for peace and gender equality were attacked or closed down by the AKP government. Given the lack of political will, the criminalisation of peace-related activities and rising authoritarianism, it can be assumed that the WPS agenda will never be a priority for the AKP government.

## Resources

Although women have significantly caught up with men in the area of education in recent years and now make up almost half of all students, their participation in the labour force is particularly low – compared to the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), of which Turkey is a member. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2022, the female employment rate in Turkey is just under 32 per cent, placing it last among all OECD countries; whereas the male employment rate in Turkey is more than twice as high at 69 per cent.<sup>14</sup> Women often work in the informal sector or as unpaid family members in agriculture. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), the unemployment rate was 12.5 per cent for women and 8.2 per cent for men in August 2022.<sup>15</sup> Youth unemployment affects 15.2 per cent of young men and 28.9 per cent of young women.<sup>16</sup> Women's participation in Turkey's labour market is mainly affected by unpaid care work (for

women's participation in political processes and institutions in the management and prevention of conflicts.

**14** See World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2022* (July 2022), [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2022.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf) (accessed 18 June 2023).

**15** "Labour Force Statistics" (Turkish), *Statistical Institute of Turkey (TÜİK)* (online), August 2022, <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Isgucu-Istatistikleri-Agustos-2022-45654> (accessed 19 June 2023).

**16** "TurkStat: Youth Unemployment Rate Has Risen to 20.1 Per cent in Turkey, for Women This Rate is 28.9 Per cent" (Turkish), *Euronews* (online), 10 May 2023, <https://tr.euronews.com/2023/05/10/tuik-turkiyede-issizlik-orani-martta-degis-meyerek-yuzde-10da-kaldi> (accessed 19 June 2023).

**9** See Burcu Karakas, "Turkey Gains New Wave of Female Mayors after Opposition's Poll Success", *Reuters* (online), 3 April 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkey-gains-new-wave-female-mayors-after-oppositions-poll-success-2024-04-03/> (accessed 19 May 2024).

**10** See Deniz Ayhan, "Diplomacy Is Entrusted to Women" (Turkish), *Sözcü* (online), 21 March 2021, <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2021/gundem/diplomasi-kadinlara-emanet-6322134/> (accessed 17 June 2023).

**11** "Women Have No Place in the State: The Employment Rate in Ministries Is 16 per cent" (Turkish), *Diken* (online), 6 November 2021, <https://www.diken.com.tr/devlette-kadinin-yeri-yok-bakanliklardaki-calis-an-orani-yuzde-16/> (accessed 18 June 2023).

**12** "Number of Lawyers on the Rise: 17,321 New Lawyers in One Year" (Turkish), *Duvar* (online), 20 January 2022, <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/avukat-sayilari-artist-a-bir-yilda-17-bin-321-yeni-avukat-haber-1549969> (accessed 19 June 2023).

**13** The objectives of UN Resolution 1325 are the protection of women and girls in war zones and the expansion of

children and the elderly), fewer opportunities for part-time work, traditional gender roles in the household and difficulties in accessing higher education.

On the one hand, according to the Turkish Higher Education Council (YÖK), the proportion of women in universities (in research and teaching) is 32.5 per cent, which is above the European average (26.1 per cent).<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, according to official figures, 4.1 per cent of Turkish women are illiterate — compared with 0.7 per cent of men (as of 2023).<sup>18</sup>

**With the entry of ultra-Islamist parties into the Turkish parliament, gender equality is under serious threat.**

As part of its progressive populist authoritarianism, the AKP has adopted an ultra-conservative gender discourse and introduced pro-natalist and pro-family policies to reinforce ideals about traditional family roles. The legal status of women is under serious threat with the entry of ultra-Islamist parties into the Turkish parliament following the 2023 elections, as these parties are advocating gender segregation in public life and the abolition of the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence (6284). Feminist and LGBTIQ+ organisations are defending the rights they have fought for by forming coalitions with various democratically-minded social movements, the parliamentary opposition, as well as the independent media and journalists critical of the ruling government. In the face of this anti-feminist backlash, the German/European FFP has an important role to play.

## German policy towards Turkey

Germany's security and economic policy interests in Turkey are undoubtedly diverse. The country's geopolitical location at the crossroads of important regions (Europe, the Middle East, North Africa and the Caucasus), which are constantly exposed to tensions,

makes Ankara a relevant NATO ally and a close security policy partner, especially in matters relating to refugees, migration and counter-terrorism.

As the main destination for refugees from the Middle East, Germany sees itself as being dependent on Turkey and therefore attaches particular importance to bilateral cooperation. In line with the EU-Turkey Statement, it supports Turkey in dealing with refugees in Turkey, which includes some 3.7 million people from Syria.<sup>19</sup> However, the intent of the declaration is perceived by the Turkish population as “keeping refugees away from Europe” and has been heavily criticised. Resentment is also increasing among the Turkish population over the presence of Syrian refugees, similar to the growing anti-refugee sentiment in Europe.

**Europe has lost its political influence over Turkey.**

The EU's externalisation policies on the refugee issue and the war in Ukraine have led to transactional cooperation with Turkey in recent years. Due to the geopolitical calculations of the West, Germany and other European governments have changed their anti-Turkey policies. The EU's current goal of avoiding bilateral crises, renegotiating the terms of cooperation with the Turkish government when necessary and passively waiting for change in Turkey is not sustainable in the long term. Thus, Erdoğan is pursuing a pragmatic and transactional policy towards Europe, engaging on economic, defence and refugee issues, while at the same time distancing Turkey from European values such as the rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights. In addition, German and European policies are causing frustration among Turkey's democratically-minded civil society (and population), which plays a subordinate role in bilateral negotiations. As a result, Europe has lost its political influence on Turkey. This transactional policy not only prevents the 3Rs from being taken into account in

<sup>17</sup> “Women Are Confirmed in the Turkish Academy” (Turkish), *Turkish Higher Education Council (YÖK)* (online), 8 March 2022, <https://www.yok.gov.tr/Sayfalar/Haberler/2022/turk-akademisinde-kadinlar-daha-da-gucleniyor.aspx> (accessed 18 June 2023).

<sup>18</sup> “Statistics for National Education” (Turkish), *Statistics Institute of Turkey (TÜİK)* (online), 2022, <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Ulusal-Egitim-Istatistikleri-2022-49756> (accessed 19 June 2023).

<sup>19</sup> The German government has supported Turkey with around €834 million since 2015. Around €217 million of this is attributable to humanitarian aid from the FFO. Since 2015, the BMZ has provided around €617 million for structural measures to support Syrian refugees and Turkish host communities. See BMZ, “Türkei. Herausforderung Flucht gemeinsam meistern. Deutsches Engagement: Bildung und Beschäftigung”, <https://www.bmz.de/de/laender/tuerkei#anc=Situation> (accessed 31 July 2023).

foreign policy, but it also prevents a “feminist reflex” from developing in foreign policy fields of action.<sup>20</sup>

### Possibilities of a feminist foreign policy in cooperation with Turkey

Germany and other European countries committed to FFP emphasise the importance of structural change to advance gender equality, recognising that it is not enough to support women, girls and LGBTIQ+ people individually. The FFP guidelines provide a framework and direction for action within the ministry. In this sense, Germany needs to adopt an approach that focuses on the rights and safety of women, girls and LGBTIQ+ people. As long as the governments of Germany and other EU member states do not replace transactional cooperation with principled (including gender-sensitive) cooperation, Germany will be contributing towards the consolidation of authoritarian rule and repressive power structures. This contradicts the vision of participation set out in the guidelines.<sup>21</sup> An FFP towards Turkey should set the following priorities:

- 1) The WPS agenda must be implemented: Targeted and expanded funding could support the mobilisation of women for more active participation in conflict resolution (e.g. in the Kurdish or Syrian conflicts). In this context, Berlin — as the coordinator of the WPS agenda in the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation — can support the development of an NAP for the implementation of Resolution 1325.<sup>22</sup>
- 2) The German government should seek to establish close contact with women from Turkish, Kurdish and migrant civil society organisations in Turkey in order to better understand women’s needs. In addition to providing financial resources, political support and systematic civil society’s engagement are crucial given the *shrinking spaces* for women’s and LGBTIQ+ organisations.
- 3) With regard to Turkey’s refugee and asylum policy, Germany and the EU can prioritise improvements in the institutional protection of women and girls within the framework of the EU-Turkey Statement by increasing the corresponding funding and linking it to specific conditions.

- 4) Given the increasingly patriarchal and repressive politics in Turkey, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development should expand its support to municipalities and city administrations in the areas of migration and the integration of women from the refugee community (Syrian women).
- 5) In its cooperation in municipal, educational and cultural policies, the FFO should make compliance with human and women’s rights a prerequisite.

<sup>20</sup> FFO, *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy* (see note 2), 14.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

Muriel Asseburg

# The Palestinian Territories: Structural Hurdles and Pragmatic Entry Points for a Feminist Foreign and Development Policy\*

The documents on feminist foreign and development policy published by the Federal Foreign Office (FFO) and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) at the beginning of March 2023 do not contain any specific guidance on how to deal with the Palestinian territories. Neither Israel nor the Palestinian territories are mentioned in the documents. This is astonishing, as the FFO guidelines refer to “historical responsibility”, which in German discourse is usually understood to mean the specific responsibility stemming from the genocide of German and European Jews and the German wars of aggression in the 20th century. In the two papers, however, historical responsibility is only referred to in the context of “our colonial past”.<sup>1</sup> This is an odd omission, not least because Germany’s specific historical responsibility largely determines its policy in the Middle East in general and towards the Palestinian territories in particular.

Nevertheless, the FFO and the BMZ guidelines do provide starting points for a feminist foreign and development policy for the Palestinian territories. This is because both documents declare “equal participation by all people in social, political and eco-

nomical life” to be the objective.<sup>2</sup> This goal is to be achieved by “naming entrenched power structures, overcoming them and thus promoting equitable participation and equality for all people around the world” using gender-sensitive and gender-transformative development cooperation and humanitarian aid, among other approaches.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, a 3R approach is to be pursued, focusing on the “rights, representation and resources” of disadvantaged population groups, especially women and girls.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, it is emphasised that feminist foreign and development policy is human rights-centred, that it prioritises human security over national security and that previously marginalised groups should be included in decision-making and peace processes. Moreover, civil society is supposed to play a prominent role and, as a rule, the “do no harm” principle should apply in development cooperation.

Now that the ministerial documents have been published, it is time to concretise and operationalise a feminist foreign and development policy. Such considerations should be incorporated in any revision of Germany’s Palestine policy, which is urgently needed, not least in view of the atrocities committed on 7 October 2023 and the ensuing war in the Gaza Strip. This raises the following questions: To what extent can we speak of the equal participation of all people in the Palestinian territories today? What are the most serious structural impediments to achieving

\* This article is based, among other things, on an exchange with Palestinian women’s rights activists on 13 April 2023 in Ramallah, organised by the Women’s Affairs Technical Committee and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. My thanks also go to Dorte Siegmund, head of the Heinrich Böll Foundation’s office in Ramallah, for her helpful comments on the article.

1 Federal Foreign Office (FFO), *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy: Federal Foreign Office Guidelines* (Berlin, 2023), 3, ([auswaertiges-amt.de](https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de)) (accessed 25 March 2024). See also Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), *Feminist Development Policy: For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide* (Berlin, 2023), 16, [bmz.de/resource/blob/153806/bmz-strategy-feminist-development-policy.pdf](https://www.bmz.de/resource/blob/153806/bmz-strategy-feminist-development-policy.pdf) (accessed 25 March 2024).

2 Quoted here from BMZ, *Feminist Development Policy* (see note 1), 21.

3 FFO, *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy* (see note 1), 9.

4 See *ibid.*, 11f.; BMZ, *Feminist Development Policy* (see note 1), 22–28. FFO and BMZ also emphasise the promotion of diversity and equality for LGBTIQ+ people. In this contribution, the focus is on equality for women and girls. Due to the social stigmatisation of LGBTIQ+ people in the Palestinian territories, specific, particularly context-sensitive approaches would be required for them.



such participation? How can German policy towards the Palestinian territories be described thus far, and what could serve as the entry points for a feminist foreign and development policy?

## Limited participation in the Palestinian territories

Women and girls (and other marginalised groups) in the Palestinian territories are severely restricted in terms of legal equality, political, economic and social participation, and access to resources.<sup>5</sup> In addition, women and girls in areas affected by violence and displacement suffer in particular from (physical) insecurity. The main obstacles to improving the situation are a conservative, patriarchal Palestinian society, the repressive policies of the two Palestinian governments in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as Israeli occupation policies.

### Rights

Of fundamental importance for the legal situation of Palestinian women and girls, disadvantaged population groups and the population in the occupied territories (the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip) as a whole is that the right to self-determination has not yet been achieved. The institutions of the “State of Palestine” do not have sovereignty or effective control over the territory and population. Rather, Palestinians have lived under military occupation since 1967 and endured the closure of the Gaza Strip since 2006. The political participation of *all* Palestinians in the occupied territories is drastically restricted because they do not have the right to vote for the body that actually exercises control: the Knesset, on whose majority the Israeli government relies, which, in turn, appoints the military command

<sup>5</sup> The United Nations (UN) identifies as disadvantaged population groups, in particular, adolescent girls, Bedouin and herder communities, persons with disabilities, refugees and urban workers – even more so if they live in marginalised areas (especially in the C areas of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Hebron’s H2 zone, East Jerusalem or the border area between the Green Line and the separation barrier). United Nations Country Team. *Occupied Palestinian Territory, Leave No One Behind: A Perspective on Vulnerability and Structural Disadvantage in Palestine*, Common Country Analysis (Jerusalem, 2016), 41–50, [https://unsco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/ccca\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://unsco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/ccca_report_en.pdf) (accessed 25 March 2024).

der for the occupied territories. In addition, the Palestinian population in the occupied territories is subject to Israeli military law, which sets strict limits on political and civil rights.

What is more, the Palestinian authorities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have become increasingly repressive. As a consequence, opportunities for participation within the framework of self-administration have been steadily reduced. Since 2007, the Palestinian territories have been divided into two territories with different authorities: the West Bank with the Palestinian Authority (PA), and the Gaza Strip with the de facto government of Hamas, which is not recognised by the United States or the European Union, both of whom consider Hamas to be a terrorist group. The last national elections were held in 2006. The Legislative Council did not meet after 2007 and was dissolved in 2018. The independent judiciary has been effectively dismantled. And although an active civil society exists – including a progressive women’s movement – it has suffered from shrinking spaces. In general, in recent years, freedom of expression, association and assembly have been steadily curtailed by Israel, the PA and the de facto government through legislation and authoritarian practices.<sup>6</sup>

The specific rights of women are also restricted. Article 9 of the Palestinian Basic Law emphasises the equality of all Palestinians before the law, regardless of race, gender, skin colour, religion, political views or disabilities. The State of Palestine acceded to the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2014. Yet, Palestine has neither signed the additional protocol on an accountability mechanism, nor has the convention been transposed into national law, meaning that it does not provide any legally binding rights. As with many countries in the region, in the Palestinian territories matters concerning personal status are settled by the courts of the respective religious communities. There is no equality between the sexes before these courts, for example in inheritance law. Moreover, traditional forms of dispute resolution are widespread – these generally aim to achieve a settlement between the families involved in order to restore “family honour”. In this context, the rights of the individual are subordinated to those

<sup>6</sup> This also includes Israel’s designation of six Palestinian non-governmental organisations – including prominent human rights organisations – as terrorist organisations in October 2021.

of the group, and there is no legal certainty or equality for those affected.

### **Women are massively underrepresented in all relevant political decision-making bodies in the Palestinian territories.**

## **Representation**

Palestinians are generally proud of the prominent role played by women in society and in the national liberation struggle, for example during the First Intifada. And yet, in the Palestinian territories today, women are massively underrepresented in all relevant political decision-making bodies in the PA, the de facto government in Gaza, the PLO, and in Fatah and Hamas, both at the national and local levels. This also applies to leadership positions in the foreign service and the public sector in general as well as in professional associations, trade unions and companies. Not least for this reason, the specific concerns of women in politics and business are largely ignored. Male-dominated decision-making bodies should hardly be expected to be committed to the abolition of patriarchal norms, nor to the implementation of concrete measures such as protecting against sexual harassment in the workplace. In addition, in Palestinian society, demands for equality are often dismissed as particularistic, as national liberation takes precedence.

The Palestinian leadership nominally supports the UN agenda “Women, Peace and Security” (WPS), which aims, among other things, to ensure the adequate representation of women in peace processes. It has so far presented two National Action Plans for its implementation. Yet, strategy papers on the advancement of women mostly serve to impress Western donors; the expansion of political participation and gender equality is by no means at the top of the agenda. As a result, the WPS agenda has so far had little practical impact. Women hardly play a role in Palestinian delegations for crisis management or national reconciliation, for example.

## **Resources**

Although women have caught up significantly in terms of education in recent decades in the Palestinian territories and (at almost two-thirds) are now clearly overrepresented among students, the labour force participation of women has remained low even by regional standards: It is only 18.6 per cent, com-

pared to 70.7 per cent for men.<sup>7</sup> Palestinian women are predominantly working in the household and in family businesses (often in agriculture) and generally do not have their own independent income, which would allow them a minimum level of autonomous decision-making or the opportunity to engage in unpaid political or civic activities. More than 45 per cent of working women are in the informal sector<sup>8</sup> and therefore have neither job security nor entitlement to a minimum wage, health insurance or maternity protection. At the same time, unemployment among women is significantly higher than among men: In 2022, it was 40.4 per cent overall (20.3 per cent for men), 67.4 per cent in the Gaza Strip and as high as 87 per cent among 15- to 24-year-old women there.<sup>9</sup> This precarious situation comes as a result of the restrictions on the Palestinian labour market in the context of occupation, blockade and conflict, of an underfunded public sector and of patriarchal gender roles.

## **Human security**

The Palestinian population faces particularly great strains with regard to human security. This is all the more true in those areas heavily affected by military and/or settler violence or where Palestinians are threatened with displacement, house demolitions and forced evictions. This insecurity and fear affects the entire civilian population.<sup>10</sup> Since 7 October 2023, women and girls in the Gaza Strip have been particularly affected by war, internal displacement and the collapse of the healthcare system, not least because they are forced to give birth in unsanitary and dangerous conditions. In addition, there has been violence directed specifically against women; domestic violence is widespread and has increased significantly in recent years. Gender-based violence within the family also often replicates political violence: An increase in domestic violence can regularly be observed following armed conflicts.<sup>11</sup> To date, there is no legal

<sup>7</sup> Figures for 2022. See International Labour Organization, *The Situation of Workers of the Occupied Arab Territories: Report of the Director-General – Appendix* (Geneva, 2023), 21, <https://bit.ly/3Vupl73> (accessed 25 March 2024).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>10</sup> At the same time, Palestinian armed groups and individuals also commit violence against Israelis, as was demonstrated in a particularly gruesome manner on 7 October 2023.

<sup>11</sup> See Ayesha AlRifai et al., *Gender Analysis: USAID/West Bank and Gaza – Final Report. Governance Integration for Stabilization*

(or other effective) protection against violent fathers, husbands or other family members in the Palestinian territories. Due to the closure, it is particularly difficult for women in the Gaza Strip to find places where they are safe from such attacks.

## German policy towards the Palestinian territories

To date, German development cooperation in the Palestinian territories has largely been subordinated to foreign policy objectives. The declared aim (since the Oslo Accords of the 1990s) has been to work towards a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through diplomacy and development cooperation, or at least to maintain a two-state settlement as an option, and to prevent violent destabilisation. Germany's support for the Palestinian territories is thus also seen as a contribution to Israel's security. It therefore serves to underpin Germany's commitment to Israel's right to exist and security, which former German Chancellor Angela Merkel characterised as "raison d'état". Gender equality for women and girls, on the other hand, has not been a focus of German development cooperation to date. Still, in the early summer of 2023, the proportion of gender-sensitive projects in the Palestinian territories already exceeded the quota targeted in the strategy papers on feminist foreign and development policy. At the same time, only one regional project was classified as gender-transformative.

### German policy has prioritised resilience over self-determination.

Against the backdrop of the failure of all previous efforts to settle the conflict; recurring armed clashes with ever-increasing numbers of victims and massive destruction; Israel's transition to annexing the West Bank; the cementing of the internal Palestinian divide; and the PA's increasing authoritarianism, German (and European) development cooperation has for some time been unable to work towards sustainable development, a democratic Palestinian entity and a two-state settlement. On the one hand, Germany has

been reluctant to make aid to the PA conditional on progress in governance and the establishment of efficient, citizen-oriented institutions. On the other hand, Germany has de facto consistently prioritised Israel's national security over the human security of Palestinians and tried to shield Israel from legal accountability. As a result, German policy has in effect largely abandoned the aim of conflict transformation and good governance in favour of maintaining the status quo. It has been merely engaged in harm reduction, prioritising the resilience of the Palestinian population over its self-determination and subordinating its political and economic participation to a purported stabilisation.

What is more, in its cooperation with Palestinian non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Germany has supported civil society primarily in its function as a service provider and less as a pluralistic forum for debate that could also inspire its own policies. At the same time, the NGO scene – which is severely restricted due to repressive measures on the part of Israel, the PA and the de facto government – has suffered from additional restrictions within the framework of German cooperation. Germany's refusal to cooperate with NGOs that support the BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions) movement, for example, further restricts the space, as even non-violent approaches to advocating for Palestinian self-determination are not considered legitimate<sup>12</sup> – without any viable alternatives being offered. This can hardly be considered to be in line with the "do no harm" principle. And even though representatives of civil society are routinely consulted in the run-up to negotiations between the German and Palestinian governments, those consultations play at best a subordinate role when it comes to shaping the approaches and priorities of Germany's Palestine policy.

Germany's prioritisation of Israel's national security became particularly pronounced after the massacres and hostage-takings carried out by Hamas and other militant groups on 7 October 2023. Despite the enormous number of civilian casualties, the catastrophic humanitarian situation (caused, among other things, through the far-reaching blockade), and the widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure and

*and Resilience in the Middle East and North Africa (GISR MENA)* (Arlington, VA: United States Agency for International Development, 16 March 2023), 9, [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PA00ZX95.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00ZX95.pdf) (accessed 25 March 2024).

<sup>12</sup> This statement must not be read as an endorsement of BDS. The BDS movement seeks to build international political and economic pressure on Israel and to mobilise solidarity with Palestinians in order to enforce their rights and demands.

homes in Israel's military campaign in Gaza,<sup>13</sup> the German government has supported Israel's use of military force in the Gaza Strip as the exercising of its right to self-defence against Hamas. Although the German government has repeatedly demanded that Israel show more consideration for the civilian population in the Gaza Strip and allows for better humanitarian access, it has continued to support and justify Israel's war aims. For almost six months, it consistently spoke out against a ceasefire, and it has continued to shield Israel from accountability for war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law.

### Starting points for a feminist foreign and development policy

An increase in the proportion of gender-sensitive and gender-transformative development cooperation projects will hardly generate new opportunities for participation if the structural hurdles to their realisation are not addressed at the same time. In this sense, considerations on how German development cooperation can contribute to reconstruction and sustainable development in the Palestinian territories after the shock of 7 October and the Gaza war should be based on an approach that focuses on human rights and human security for Israelis and Palestinians — which are mutually dependent — and explicitly aims to reduce power imbalances and structural violence. This cannot succeed without a political commitment to a sustainable conflict settlement. As long as this is not the case, German engagement runs the risk of reinforcing patriarchal and repressive power structures. This contradicts not only the formulated vision of participation, but also conflict-sensitive development cooperation, as envisaged in the German government's guidelines.<sup>14</sup> And it runs counter to the historical responsibility that Germany has not only towards the Jews, but also — due to the historical linkages between the Holocaust and the Nakba — towards the Palestinians.

Even if Germany is not prepared to adopt a fundamentally different approach towards Israel and the

Palestinian territories, a pragmatic approach to feminist foreign and development policy should at least give much greater weight to the WPS agenda than has been the case to date. This applies in particular to the support provided for gender-responsive crisis prevention and inclusive peace and decision-making processes, protection against gender-based violence and needs-based humanitarian aid.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the following three starting points would be recommended for expanding the participation of women and girls. In that endeavour, it may be helpful to adapt the terminology to the local context so as not to provoke resistance from conservative population groups.

- German development cooperation should specifically promote girls and women by focusing on increasing the proportion of women in the workforce and formal employment, working towards gender equality in inheritance law and expanding the representation of women in political and economic decision-making bodies. This requires not only close cooperation with feminist actors and progressive and conservative women's groups, but also creating social awareness in society at large with the support of male allies.
- German development cooperation should not only view Palestinian (and Israeli) civil society as a service provider, but also support it in its functions as a *watch dog*, bridge builder, and forum for pluralistic decision-making and the search for strategies regarding the peaceful pursuit of self-determination (and democracy). This includes continuing to oppose Israel's criminalisation of parts of civil society by classifying them as terrorist organisations as well as systematically involving Palestinian civil society in consultations on shaping Germany's Palestine policy — even more so as long as there are no elections that could lead to the creation of representative Palestinian bodies.
- Support for the PA should be linked to improvements in governance, respect for human rights and a gradual return to democratic procedures. In this context, free and fair elections (insofar as possible under occupation) are indispensable.

<sup>13</sup> Archie Bland, "The Numbers That Reveal the Extent of Destruction in Gaza", *The Guardian*, 8 January 2024, <https://bit.ly/3zl7pUM> (accessed 11 January 2024).

<sup>14</sup> See Federal Government of Germany, *Guidelines on Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace* (Berlin, September 2017) ([auswaertiges-amt.de](https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de)) (accessed 25 March 2024).

<sup>15</sup> See *The German Federal Government's Action Plan for the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda, 2021–2024* (Berlin, February 2021), 19, Third Action Plan of the Federal Government on the Implementation of the United Nations Security Council's Agenda on Women, Peace and Security ([auswaertiges-amt.de](https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de)) (accessed 25 March 2024).

Azadeh Zamirirad

# Iran: The Test Case for Feminist Foreign Policy\*

In September 2022, the violent death of the young Iranian-Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini at the hands of the “morality police” in Iran triggered an unprecedented wave of protests, in which women stood at the forefront from the very beginning. For the first time, there was talk of a feminist uprising in the country, and the contribution of Iranian women to the resistance was clearly recognised. This was reflected in the Kurdish slogan “Woman, Life, Freedom”, which the demonstrators adopted as their collective leitmotif. The nationwide mass protests and their violent suppression by the security apparatus put Germany’s Iran policy to the test. Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock called Iran’s treatment of its own citizens “inhuman” and declared that there could be “no ‘business as usual’” in bilateral relations.<sup>1</sup>

Domestic developments in Iran and the foreign minister’s proclamation of a new policy vis-à-vis Tehran called for an approach that would respond to the feminist uprising in the Islamic Republic with a feminist shift in German foreign policy. In their coalition agreement, the German government had already expressed an inclination to “strengthen the rights, resources and representation of women and girls worldwide” in the spirit of a *feminist foreign policy* (FFP).<sup>2</sup> With the new guidelines published in March 2023, the Federal Foreign Office (FFO) eventually com-

mitted itself to feminist principles for a revision of German foreign policy.<sup>3</sup> However, even more than a year after the outbreak of the protests, it is still unclear how the commitment to an FFP will be implemented in practice in the case of Iran.

## Reaction of the federal government to the protests

The German government responded to the protests that broke out in 2022 with unusually blunt language and a series of highly symbolic steps. In coordination with European allies, it put together several packages of measures. Based on the global sanctions regime established by the European Union (EU) in 2020, there have been 10 sanctions packages imposed on individuals and entities since October 2022 in response to severe human rights violations. They are aimed at members of the paramilitary Revolutionary Guards, leading figures within the morality police, governors of provinces, parliamentarians and members of the cabinet, among others. Sanctions have also been imposed on state media outlets and communications authorities that use spyware against Iranian citizens. As a result, accounts were frozen, entry bans to the EU were issued, and business relations with sanctioned individuals and entities were prohibited.

\* I would like to thank Barbara Mittelhammer and the participants of the SWP workshop on “Feminist Foreign and Development Policy” for their valuable suggestions and advice.

1 Federal Foreign Office (FFO), “Außenministerin Baerbock zur Lage im Iran”, press release, 26 October 2022, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/-/2560410> (accessed 26 October 2022).

2 Die Bundesregierung, *Mehr Fortschritt wagen – Bündnis für Freiheit, Gerechtigkeit und Nachhaltigkeit. Koalitionsvertrag 2021–2025 zwischen der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands (SPD), Bündnis 90/Die Grünen und den Freien Demokraten (FDP)* (Berlin, 7 February 2021), 114.

3 FFO, *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy: Federal Foreign Office Guidelines* (Berlin, 2023), <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/service/publikationen/foreign-policy-women-2169820> (accessed 2 March 2023). In March 2023, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) also published a strategy paper for a feminist approach entitled *Feminist Development Policy: For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide*. However, as the Islamic Republic is not a partner country of German development cooperation and does not appear in the document, this article refers exclusively to the FFO’s guidelines.

Due to previous EU human rights sanctions, the provision of equipment that can be used to repress and monitor the Iranian population is already officially banned. At the international level, the German government, together with Iceland, initiated a special session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, which took place in Geneva on 24 November 2022. The participating states strongly condemned the violent crackdown on the protesters and agreed to establish a United Nations mechanism to investigate the human rights violations during the suppression of the protests and to secure evidence. The fact-finding mission was extended in 2024.

In addition to these multilateral steps, the German government pledged to provide spots in protection programmes for particularly vulnerable people and suspended instruments for foreign trade promotion, such as the German-Iranian Energy Dialogue, the foreign trade fair programme and, since January 2023, formal export credit guarantees as well.

## Feminist principles for German foreign policy

In its March guidelines, the Federal Foreign Office lists the measures taken in response to the suppression of the Iranian protests as a practical implementation of Feminist Foreign Policy.<sup>4</sup> However, it remains unclear to what extent these differ from the non-feminist approaches of previous German policy. Although Germany's current Iran policy is linked to feminist principles in places, it ignores them in key respects.

FFP can be understood as an approach that prioritises peace, gender equality and environmental protection; actively promotes and protects human rights; and aims to eliminate structural inequalities resulting from colonialism, racism and patriarchy.<sup>5</sup> It is based on a broad understanding of security and attaches great importance to peacebuilding measures, including in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation. Notwithstanding the great diversity of feminist theories, FFP aims to be inclusive and intersectional.<sup>6</sup> It

<sup>4</sup> FFO, *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy* (see note 3), 39.

<sup>5</sup> Lyric Thompson et al., *Toward a Feminist Foreign Policy in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: International Center for Research on Women, 2020), 4, [https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FFP-USA\\_v11-spreads.pdf](https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FFP-USA_v11-spreads.pdf) (accessed 28 May 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Claudia Zilla, *Feminist Foreign Policy: Concepts, Core Components and Controversies*, SWP Comment 48/2022 (Berlin: Stif-

calls the state-centric nature of foreign policy approaches into question and encourages the active involvement of marginalised groups in foreign policy in processes of decision-making.

If Germany were to follow a feminist approach, a change of perspective would be required, namely one that no longer focuses on the Iranian state but on Iranian society. A feminist Iran policy could follow these four principles: (1) overcoming the traditional concept of "national security" in favour of a people-centred approach, (2) paying attention to and including marginalised groups in foreign policy decision-making, (3) strengthening social movements and civil society organisations and expanding their capacities and (4) protecting societies from the unintended consequences of policy measures, such as sanctions that disproportionately affect oppressed sections of society and weaken their means of resistance.

Giving priority to these principles in German foreign policy in no way means ignoring the Iranian state or its actions. Clearly naming and condemning human rights violations remains just as important as imposing targeted sanctions on the individuals and entities involved in them. Such sanctions packages help to keep attention focused on the situation on the ground and send a constant signal to Tehran that the human rights situation will remain on the political agenda, regardless of existing or future security arrangements. However, if such sanctions are not accompanied by concrete steps to support civil society actors, they run the risk of turning into mere rituals without political impact. Short-term sanctions must therefore be accompanied by sustainable support mechanisms.

## Feminist approach in practice

FFP offers many opportunities to go beyond short-term, symbolic steps in dealing with authoritarian regimes. In practice, any Iran policy should include free technical support to help citizens circumvent internet censorship, the acceleration of visa and asylum procedures, and a committed effort to secure the release of political prisoners, including German citizens who are imprisoned in Iran and used by Tehran as bargaining chips.

tung Wissenschaft und Politik, August 2022), doi: 10.18449/2022C48.

## FFP focuses on empowering social actors to claim their own rights.

German policy is already addressing these issues to some extent. However, a dedicated FFP would furthermore devote political resources towards expanding the capacities of social actors and especially marginalised groups in Iran. FFP focuses not only on the protection of human rights, but also on empowering social actors so they can claim their own rights. It is through these social actors that the transformative goal of feminist approaches<sup>7</sup> can be put into practice.

One of the biggest obstacles for civil society actors in Iran — who campaign for ecological issues, women’s and minority rights, and the abolition of the death penalty, among many other things<sup>8</sup> — is the dire economic situation of the general population. This is primarily the result of state mismanagement, widespread corruption and the intransparent role played by economic actors such as religious foundations and companies run by the Revolutionary Guards. Broad, sectoral US sanctions imposed as part of the “maximum pressure policy” under the Trump administration — and still largely in place under President Joe Biden — have further exacerbated an already tense situation. In contrast to targeted sanctions against individuals and entities that have been imposed for human rights violations, blanket US sanctions have affected the Iranian population as a whole.

This can be seen in the banking and financial sector, for example, where sanctions are preventing the Iranian diaspora from transferring money to their relatives in the country. Yet, financial support is urgently needed in order to provide legal assistance for prisoners, strengthen civil society organisations, go on strikes or even just manage everyday life. The current economic conditions leave little room for

Iranian civil society to develop its capacities and also make it difficult to stage a general strike. So far, Germany and the EU have done little to establish reliable financial channels for the Iranian population. Such channels could be set up via European state banks, which would not be readily affected by US secondary sanctions.

Another cornerstone of any feminist approach is the active inclusion of marginalised groups in policy-making. This requires a structured dialogue with the human rights and women’s rights communities in the Iranian diaspora, including ethnic and religious minorities. Many diaspora human rights activists have worked in Iran for decades, often as lawyers defending political prisoners. They are not only familiar with the structures within the country, but also have access to well-established networks in the country. The potential of this community has so far only been used selectively; there is no formalised exchange with German decision-makers. However, such an exchange would be important in order to test future sanctions for undesirable outcomes that could affect the general population, thus preventing harm. Involving such groups would be one of many ways to do justice to the feminist approach of inclusion in processes of foreign policy decision-making.

In addition, civil society networking in the region should be promoted, both financially and logistically. With regard to the FFO’s feminist foreign policy guidelines, priority could be given to paving the way for the Iranian women’s rights movement in particular to escape the national isolation that it has been lamenting for years. This can be achieved when Iranian women’s right activists have the chance to share their experiences with other women’s rights movements in the region and develop joint strategies for social resistance.

<sup>7</sup> Karin Aggestam, Annika Bergman Rosamond and Annica Kronsell, “Theorizing Feminist Foreign Policy”, *International Relations* 33, no. 1 (March 2021): 23–29 (26).

<sup>8</sup> For insights into civil society engagement in these areas, which has often been accompanied by progress, see, among others, Leila Alikarami, *Women and Equality in Iran: Law, Society and Activism* (London and New York, NY, 2019); Simin Fadaee, “Environmentalism and Social Change in Iran”, in *Human Rights and Agents of Change in Iran. Towards a Theory of Change*, ed. Rebecca Barlow and Shahram Akbarzadeh (Singapore, 2018), 143–55; Sahar Shakiba, Omid Ghaderzadeh and Valentine M. Moghadam, “Women in Iranian Kurdistan: Patriarchy and the Quest for Empowerment”, *Gender & Society* 35, no. 4 (2021): 616–42.

## A feminist perspective on security

Feminist approaches criticise the conventional conception of “national security”, which mainly focuses on issues of border security and state sovereignty. Instead, they put an emphasis on “human security”, including economic integrity, food security and healthcare.<sup>9</sup> However, feminist research often goes

<sup>9</sup> Randolph B. Persaud, “Human Security”, in *Contemporary Security Studies*, ed. Alan Collins (Oxford and New York, NY, 2016), 139–53 (144).

even beyond the concept of human security, providing a view that emphasises the importance of intersectionality, gender and power structures.<sup>10</sup> The “feminist security” approach is based on an understanding of security that is not characterised by the mere absence of physical violence or military conflict. Instead, it includes issues such as gender and climate justice and seeks to break down sexist, racist and colonial structures. Structural inequality is therefore seen as a driver of insecurity. This approach suggests expanding the understanding of security in German foreign policy and questioning the country’s own institutional processes with regard to inclusivity and representation.

At the international level, FFP advocates a diplomatic, multilateral and generally anti-militaristic approach to international relations. Protecting human rights and ensuring national security are not mutually exclusive. Contrary to the assumption that supporting a feminist uprising in Iran would preclude nuclear negotiations or any kind of security arrangements with Tehran, feminist policies strongly emphasise the need for non-proliferation and arms control agreements, their importance for international peace and the right of societies to live free from nuclear threat.<sup>11</sup>

International efforts to find a solution to the nuclear crisis with Iran therefore remain essential. There is an urgent need for a political agreement, both on the technical limitation of nuclear activities in Iran and on monitoring and verification measures. Restoring the International Atomic Energy Agency’s comprehensive supervision of Iran’s nuclear programme is the most pressing aspect of the current nuclear crisis, which would have far-reaching consequences for the entire Middle East in case of an escalation. However, the rapidly advancing nuclear programme is just one of many security challenges, which include Iran’s regional policy – particularly towards the Israeli state – its ballistic missile pro-

gramme and Tehran’s drone exports to Russia for use in Moscow’s war against Ukraine.

The German government is therefore faced with difficult trade-offs. In view of the threat posed to Europe’s security by Iran’s nuclear, missile and drone programmes, including the serious humanitarian consequences, an intensive political commitment to de-escalation is essential. Against this backdrop, however, questions concerning human rights standards continuously risk being pushed to the backburner. Despite the ongoing nuclear crisis and the potential dangers of Iranian drone technology, Germany and the EU should not focus their political attention solely on these areas. The nuclear issue in particular has overshadowed other political concerns for more than two decades.

This is where feminist approaches have raised concerns, criticising that human rights and other relevant fields such as environmental and health policies have played subordinate roles in national security considerations, when in fact there are many opportunities to take account of the importance of these sectors for peace and security. As an example, the agreement reached between Iran and Saudi Arabia in March 2023 to restore diplomatic relations and the cautious regional trend towards reconciliation in the Persian Gulf<sup>12</sup> both offer starting points for greater cooperation. In view of the enormous challenges facing the region – even beyond military conflicts, including water scarcity and air pollution – Germany could promote intraregional trade as well as support and promote technical cooperation in the environmental sector by providing its own expertise.

**FFP does not offer simple solutions for dealing with autocracies, nor do feminist approaches eliminate political conflicts of interest.**

## Outlook

Authoritarian regimes pose considerable challenges for German foreign policy, arising both from systematic human rights violations and transnational

<sup>10</sup> Eric Hogan, *Human Security vs. Feminist Security Approaches to Human Trafficking in the Mediterranean* (London: Atlas Institute for International Affairs, 7 November 2020), [https://www.internationalaffairshouse.org/human-security-vs-feminist-security-approaches-to-human-trafficking-in-the-mediterranean/#\\_ftnref15](https://www.internationalaffairshouse.org/human-security-vs-feminist-security-approaches-to-human-trafficking-in-the-mediterranean/#_ftnref15) (accessed 21 February 2023).

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Mittelhammer and Cornelius Adebahr, “*Woman. Life. Freedom*”: A German Feminist Foreign Policy towards Iran (Berlin: Heinrich Böll Foundation, January 2023), <https://www.boell.de/en/2023/01/02/woman-life-freedom-german-feminist-foreign-policy-towards-iran> (accessed 4 February 2023).

<sup>12</sup> Sanam Vakil and Neil Quilliam, *Will Reconciliation across the Middle East Bring Lasting Change?* Expert Comment (London: Chatham House, 14 April 2023), <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/04/will-reconciliation-across-middle-east-bring-lasting-change> (accessed 30 April 2023).



security threats. FFP does not offer simple solutions for dealing with autocracies, nor do feminist approaches eliminate political conflicts of interest. However, feminist concepts provide a new point of view and offer a reassessment of foreign policy priorities. They also encourage a review of foreign policy decision-making processes with regard to inclusivity and representation.

Although the protests in Iran have largely shifted away from the streets to less visible forms, popular resistance continues. However, the formation of a powerful opposition movement in the country will take time. An Iran policy based on feminist principles should prioritise human security and give more attention to marginalised groups that are disproportionately affected by discrimination and repression. This could be done, for example, in international fora such as the United Nations, where intersectional perspectives are still given minimal consideration in human rights protection and documentation programmes, and marginalised groups are insufficiently represented.

A German feminist Iran policy would only be credible and sustainable if it supplemented measures to contain the nuclear crisis or deal with the Iranian drone programme with substantial support for marginalised actors and could also anchor them regionally beyond Iran. A reassessment of previous German policy in dealing with human rights violations in the Persian Gulf and German arms export policy in this region would thus be unavoidable. Ultimately, there can be no feminist Iran policy without a feminist Gulf policy.

# Policy Areas and International Instruments



Bettina Rudloff and Peter-Tobias Stoll

# Trade Policy: What Gender Equality Means and What It Could Mean

Guideline 5 of the Federal Foreign Office (FFO) guidelines on feminist foreign policy (FFP) is dedicated to international economic policy. It addresses in detail the findings, goals, individual topics and areas of action such as multilateral trade policy in the World Trade Organization (WTO), supply chain regulations and human rights.<sup>1</sup> With its strategy on feminist development policy (FDP), the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) builds on this, but without defining its own economic or trade focus. Instead, corresponding individual aspects are assigned to the guiding criteria of the 3R approach (rights, representation and resources).<sup>2</sup>

Trade policy has traditionally served to liberalise the exchange of goods and services through negotiation and regulation – at the multilateral level in the WTO, in the form of plurilateral and bilateral agreements, and through unilateral or autonomous measures. In addition to open trade, it is increasingly also aimed at *fair* trade. It has therefore long had links to economic development and the marginalisation and discrimination of various groups such as rural populations, indigenous peoples and local stakeholders and small businesses. However, the main focus and mechanism remains economic exchange, which is

why trade policy does not offer a comprehensive international development, economic or social policy.

The terms “gender and trade” and “women and trade” have been used for around 15 years in multilateral (WTO, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, UNCTAD) and bilateral trade regulations to address the concerns of feminist foreign policy, although the conceptual connections have not yet been developed more broadly to date: In principle, these initiatives are about overcoming the disadvantages women face in the economy as entrepreneurs, employees and consumers, but also in economic and trade policy, and thus they are about changing existing power structures.<sup>3</sup> The basic starting points lie in the impact analysis and impact assessment of the gender-equitable participation of women in trade and trade policy, in the reduction of discriminatory trade measures and the introduction of trade measures that promote women.

Trade policy for gender equality has close links to other policy areas, such as those addressed by UNCTAD. With regard to the protection of human rights, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979) and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (2012) are particularly relevant.<sup>4</sup> The latter are

1 Federal Foreign Office, *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy: Federal Foreign Office Guidelines* (Berlin, February 2023), <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blueprint/servlet/blob/2585076/4d2d295dad8fb1c41c6271d2c1a41d75/ffp-leitlinien-data.pdf> (accessed 10 May 2023).

2 Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), *Feminist Development Policy: For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide* (Berlin, April 2023), <https://www.bmz.de/resource/blob/153806/bmz-strategy-feminist-development-policy.pdf> (accessed 16 June 2023); see also BMZ, *Wirtschaftliche Stärkung von Frauen, Gleichberechtigte Teilhabe am wirtschaftlichen Leben*, <https://www.bmz.de/de/themen/frauen-rechte-und-gender/frauen-staerkung-wirtschaftliche-teilhabe> (accessed 26 June 2023).

3 Romy Klimke and Christian Tietje, “Feminist Foreign Trade Policy Is a Demand of the EU Treaties”, *Verfassungsblog*, 6 March 2023, <https://verfassungsblog.de/feminist-foreign-trade-policy-is-a-demand-of-the-eu-treaties> (accessed 10 May 2023).

4 United Nations Human Rights Council, *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, Res. 14/4*, 16 July 2011, [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr\\_en.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr_en.pdf) (accessed 13 February 2024); see also United Nations Development Programme, *Gender Dimensions of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights* (22 November 2019), <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/RBAP-2019-Gender-Dimensions->

the starting point for more recent German and European legislation on due diligence obligations in supply chains, the implementation of which was already envisaged in Germany in the National Action Plan for Business and Human Rights.<sup>5</sup> Finally, some international labour standards of the International Labour Organization (ILO) that are frequently cited in other regulations, such as trade agreements, are relevant to gender issues. These include ILO Convention No. 100 on Equal Remuneration (1951), No. 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) (1958), No. 183 on Maternity Protection (2000) and No. 190 on the Elimination of Violence and Harassment in the World of Work (2019).

## Status: Gender equality in existing trade regimes

### The multilateral level: The WTO

The WTO has been dealing with gender issues for around 15 years, initially focusing on technical assistance (aid for trade, AfT) to expand trade capacity in developing countries, which should also serve gender equality. A task force set up during the 2006 WTO Ministerial Conference explicitly emphasised this aspect and called for gender-equality to be taken into account in the regular reviews of AfT projects.<sup>6</sup> At the 2017 WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires, 118 WTO members and observers issued a “Joint Declaration on Trade and Women’s Economic Empowerment”, which called for the removal of barriers and the promotion of women’s empowerment and requested an exchange of best practices to build a knowledge base. To further implement the declaration, an informal working group was set up at the WTO in 2020.<sup>7</sup> It presented an initial report on the

situation of women in international economic relations in 2021 and identified a need for improvements.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the WTO set up a “Gender Research Hub”.<sup>9</sup> As chair of the informal working group, Iceland, Botswana and El Salvador issued a statement at the 2022 WTO Ministerial Conference in which they pointed out that gender equality promotes economic growth. It was therefore important for the WTO to address the issue of gender equality. Furthermore, a work plan was announced, including *gender-responsive policy-making*, a “gender lens” for a general gender perspective in all WTO activities, further research work and gender-related AfT measures to increase the participation of women in trade.<sup>10</sup>

### Plurilateral and bilateral agreements

Of 557 regional and bilateral trade agreements, gender equality is explicitly addressed in 83, or around 20 per cent, of all free trade agreements. However, the specific form that this topic takes varies.<sup>11</sup> Chilean free trade agreements with Uruguay (2016), Argentina (2017) and Brazil (2018) play a pioneering role, offering specific chapters on “trade and gender” for the first time. In 2019, the Chilean agreement with Canada and the agreement between Canada and Israel followed this example with their own specific chapters on “Trade and Gender”.<sup>12</sup> With regard to European Union (EU) agreements, 36 out of 46 contain at least one explicit mention of gender equality, but mostly

[docs.wto.org/dol2fe/Pages/SS/directdoc.aspx?filename=q:/WT/L/1095R1.pdf&Open=True](https://docs.wto.org/dol2fe/Pages/SS/directdoc.aspx?filename=q:/WT/L/1095R1.pdf&Open=True) (accessed 10 May 2023).

<sup>8</sup> WTO, *Progress Report on WTO Members and Observers Technical Work on Women’s Economic Empowerment* (Geneva, 9 November 2021), <https://docs.wto.org/dol2fe/Pages/SS/directdoc.aspx?filename=q:/INF/TGE/R1.pdf&Open=True> (accessed 10 May 2023).

<sup>9</sup> See “WTO Gender Research Hub”, [https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/womenandtrade\\_e/gender\\_research\\_hub\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/womenandtrade_e/gender_research_hub_e.htm) (accessed 10 May 2023).

<sup>10</sup> WTO, *Statement on Inclusive Trade and Gender Equality from the Co-Chairs of the Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender: Twelfth WTO Ministerial Conference* (Geneva, 12 June 2022), <https://docs.wto.org/dol2fe/Pages/SS/directdoc.aspx?filename=q:/WT/MIN22/7.pdf&Open=True> (accessed 10 May 2023).

<sup>11</sup> Pavese, “Gender Impact” (see note 6), 30.

<sup>12</sup> Valerie Hughes, “Gender Chapters in Trade Agreements: Nice Rhetoric or Sound Policy?”, *Mainstreaming Gender in Trade Agreements* (October 2019), [https://www.cigionline.org/articles/gender-chapters-trade-agreements-nice-rhetoric-or-sound-policy/?utm\\_source=twitter&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=genderandtrade](https://www.cigionline.org/articles/gender-chapters-trade-agreements-nice-rhetoric-or-sound-policy/?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=genderandtrade) (accessed 10 May 2023).

[Guiding-Principles-Business-and-Human-Rights.pdf](#) (accessed 7 February 2024).

<sup>5</sup> Die Bundesregierung, *Nationaler Aktionsplan. Umsetzung der VN-Leitprinzipien für Wirtschaft und Menschenrechte, 2016–2020* (Berlin, September 2017), [http://www.csr-in-deutschland.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/NAP/nap-im-original.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=3](http://www.csr-in-deutschland.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/NAP/nap-im-original.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=3) (accessed 14 July 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Carolina Pavese, “Gender Impact of Interregional Trade: The Case of EU-Mercosur Relations”, *Latin American Journal of Trade Policy* 4, no. 11 (2021): 25–46 (28).

<sup>7</sup> World Trade Organization (WTO), *Interim Report Following the Buenos Aires Joint Declaration on Trade and Women’s Economic Empowerment*. Revision (Geneva, 25 September 2020), <https://>

as part of the sustainability chapters.<sup>13</sup> In 2019, the EU and Canada adopted a “Trade and Gender Recommendation” as part of their free trade agreement (Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, CETA).<sup>14</sup>

In regional trade agreements, gender issues are addressed in the United States – Mexico – Canada Agreement (USMCA) as well as in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. Based on the Inclusive Trade Action Group (ITAG) of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), in 2022 Canada, Chile and New Zealand negotiated the Global Trade and Gender Arrangement (GTGA). This non-binding agreement aims to mutually support the promotion of trade and gender policies. In the meantime, Colombia, Mexico and Peru have also joined the GTGA.

The contents of the regulations in the individual trade agreements differ: In addition to pure cooperation objectives, reference is also made to relevant human rights conventions and international labour protection. In the EU’s agreements, however, these obligations cannot be sanctioned by suspending the tariff concessions granted. Some agreements also provide for special bodies to focus on gender issues.

### Unilateral or autonomous approaches

The EU in particular is also increasingly relying on unilateral (“autonomous”) instruments: These include EU tariff preferences vis-à-vis developing countries that are linked to certain human rights, environmental protection and governance conditions. The Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) and the more far-reaching GSP+ also include the Women’s Rights Convention and ILO Conventions 100 and 111.

Other unilateral approaches include corporate due diligence obligations with regard to sustainability and human rights in the supply chain. These include the German Supply Chain Act and a similar, but more far-reaching EU directive, which is in the final stage

<sup>13</sup> See also “European Parliament Resolution of 13 March 2018 on Gender Equality in EU Trade Agreements (2017/2015 (INI))”, *Official Journal of the European Union* 62, no. C 162 (10 May 2019): 9–23.

<sup>14</sup> Government of Canada, *CETA Trade and Gender Recommendation: EU-Canada Work Plan 2020–2021* (16 September 2020), [https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/agr-acc/ceta-aecg/CETA\\_work\\_plan-AECG\\_plan\\_travail-2020-2021.aspx?lang=eng](https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/agr-acc/ceta-aecg/CETA_work_plan-AECG_plan_travail-2020-2021.aspx?lang=eng) (accessed 23 March 2023).

of adoption. Both refer to ILO Conventions 100 and 111 with their rules on non-discrimination. However, they do not take into account the more recent standards set out in ILO Conventions 189 and 190.<sup>15</sup> The German Supply Chain Act makes no reference to CEDAW.

## Starting points for more gender equality in trade policy

### Trade policy impact assessments

Gender-responsive trade policy depends on precise knowledge about the forms, effects and causes of disadvantages.<sup>16</sup> Impact assessments such as the EU’s Sustainability Impact Assessments are important for this, although gender aspects have so far been left out of these. In contrast, Canada has introduced a specific impact assessment and consultation procedure in this respect (Gender-based Analysis Plus, GBA+).

### General analyses show that women are specifically affected by poverty.

General analyses beyond Sustainability Impact Assessments show that there are particular risks for women in poverty situations (intersectionality). Worldwide, 319 million women suffered from extreme poverty in 2021 – compared to 207 million men.<sup>17</sup> Women are therefore particularly affected by

<sup>15</sup> See Deutscher Juristinnenbund e.V., “Stellungnahme zur Notwendigkeit einer Geschlechterperspektive auf unternehmerische Sorgfaltspflichten in Lieferketten”, press release (Berlin, 21 March 2023), [https://www.djb.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/presse/stellungnahmen/st23-09\\_Lieferketten.pdf](https://www.djb.de/fileadmin/user_upload/presse/stellungnahmen/st23-09_Lieferketten.pdf) (accessed 14 July 2023).

<sup>16</sup> A comprehensive stocktaking is provided: World Bank and WTO, *Women and Trade: The Role of Trade in Promoting Gender Equality* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 30 July 2020), doi: 10.1596/978-1-4648-1541-6. See also the project of a Trade and Gender Toolbox of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, e.g. UNCTAD, *Trade and Gender Toolbox: How Will the Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the East African Community Affect Kenyan Women?* (s.l., 2017), [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ditc2017d1\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ditc2017d1_en.pdf) (accessed 13 July 2023).

<sup>17</sup> “Gender Poverty Gaps Worldwide in 2020 and 2021 (with a Forecast to 2030), by Gender”, *Statista Research Department*, 20 October 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1219896/gender-poverty-gaps-worldwide-by-gender> (accessed 16 June 2023).

the general effects of poverty. If trade leads to lower prices, women especially could benefit from this. If, at the same time, changes in trade flows lead to certain sectors losing ground and the associated employment opportunities, women are more likely to lose their livelihoods as a result.

### Avoidance of gender-detrimental approaches

Before new gender-promoting measures are considered, the harmful effects of existing trade policy measures should be understood and reduced. The term “pink tariffs” refers to the potential for discrimination through tariffs or other trade-restrictive measures. However, there are in fact hardly any gender-related differences in the tariff burden: Although estimates of various levels of national pricing show isolated differences in local markets, these may be the result of purely individual sales strategies. Yet, there is no discernible disadvantage for women due to higher tariffs for products that are predominantly used by them.<sup>18</sup> But even a gender-neutral burden by tariffs can particularly affect women, as they are exposed to a higher risk of poverty due to increasing prices.

### Promotion of gender-positive approaches

A gender-supportive trade policy aims at the comprehensive and non-discriminatory participation of women in the economy and economic policy, namely as consumers, employees, managers, entrepreneurs, diplomats and politicians. In this way, it simultaneously serves to implement Sustainable Development Goal 5 – gender equality – and to realise the gender equality requirement in Article 8 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU as well as in Article 3, para. 2, second sentence of the German Basic Law.

Trade policy is particularly relevant here because it may use forms of cooperation and sanctions of the international trade system to disseminate and enforce the international agenda of gender and human rights. Trade policy must ensure that human rights and labour standards for women are safeguarded in the entire trade context. It is also required to create scope for further concrete measures, for example through:

- the full utilisation of the exceptions under Article XX (a) of the General Agreement on Tariffs and

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 26.

Trade (GATT) in favour of national policies on gender equality;<sup>19</sup>

- the gender-related analysis and use of anti-dumping instruments and protection against unfair subsidies;
- the completion of commitments to effectively implement human rights and labour standards in sustainability chapters in trade agreements, including possible enforcement and sanctions, which are currently only provided for in an agreement between Canada and Israel.<sup>20</sup>

The issue of trade and gender is also about participation in trade policy itself. It concerns the entire process – from negotiation to implementation – and all national, European, bilateral and multilateral structures involved. The potential for improvement goes beyond the greater participation of women within existing institutional structures. It is also conceivable and advisable to set up new advisory structures that are specifically geared towards problems associated with participation difficulties. Examples include the Canadian “Gender and Trade Advisory Group” on the part of the Canadian government and the establishment of “Trade and Gender Committees” within the governance structures of free trade agreements.<sup>21</sup>

### Recommendations for gender equality in (German) trade policy

It would be desirable to encourage other responsible ministries, such as the Federal Ministry of Economics and Climate Protection (BMWK) and the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS), to take up the strategy process now being initiated by the FFO and make their own contributions to it. This would give German policy a greater degree of coherence.

<sup>19</sup> Amrita Bahri and Daria Boklan, “Not Just Sea Turtles, Let’s Protect Women Too: Invoking Public Morality Exception or Negotiating a New Gender Exception in Trade Agreements?”, *European Journal of International Law* 33, no. 1 (2022): 237–70.

<sup>20</sup> Government of Canada, *Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement*, 2018, <https://bit.ly/3UuLrY7> (accessed 5 April 2023), chap. 13, art. 13.6 (2): “If the Parties cannot resolve the matter [...] they may consent to submit the matter to dispute settlement [...]” (own emphasis).

<sup>21</sup> See Government of Canada, *Trade and Gender in Free Trade Agreements: The Canadian Approach* (17 February 2023), <https://bit.ly/480STNY> (accessed 4 April 2023).

As a substantive priority, the FFO had called for the ratification of ILO Convention 190, the Violence and Harassment Convention of 2019, which was achieved in May 2023.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, corresponding references and, where appropriate, commitments for ratification should be included in trade agreements. But there should also be references in unilateral measures such as the GSP in the upcoming reform and in due diligence obligations.

Furthermore, the guidelines mention in particular textile and agricultural supply chains as being especially deficient areas. In this regard, corresponding regulations or unilateral approaches to intersectionality could be emphasised more explicitly in agreements than has been the case to date. Existing provisions often go beyond pure gender equality anyway and already take intersectionality into account. For example, the protection of particularly vulnerable groups – such as small-scale producers and indigenous groups – is at least addressed in many agriculture-related provisions in trade agreements and the more recent supply chain regulations. This existing intersectionality could therefore be extended to protect human rights as a whole beyond gender-related human rights and labour standards.

**Trade policy initiatives for the equitable participation of women must be embedded in other policy areas.**

The broadening of trade policies to include non-dedicated trade and economic issues such as sustainability, human rights and labour standards is to be welcomed in terms of a value-based foreign policy. But it cannot be overlooked that the instruments of trade policy are restricted in this respect and can therefore only contribute to the comprehensive realisation of these values in a limited manner. Trade policy initiatives for the equitable participation of women must be embedded in other policy areas – such as sustainability, human rights and occupational health and safety policy – if they are to have the desired effect. However, this requires coordination, especially as unilateral or autonomous measures are now being used alongside multilateral and plurilateral or bilateral levels of action.

Due to this multitude of new human rights-related, trade-effective approaches in the EU, special efforts must be taken to ensure that they cohere.

Furthermore, a crucial starting point for any improvement is providing more evidence of gender impacts in business and trade. In order to draw up concrete analyses of individual problems, such as women's access to financial and other resources, the relevant data must be collected in all areas of the economic system. Only then can the gender impact of trade policy measures actually be assessed using the impact analyses foreseen for this purpose – something that has largely been neglected to date, including with regard to human rights issues. For effective implementation, it is even more important than with other sustainability goals in trade regimes that concepts on gender equality are adapted to cultural contexts and meet with acceptance by trading partners. This will only succeed in the form of partnership-based agreements and implementation – both in relation to the EU and its partner countries as well as to the respective actors involved in trade policy and trade activities. This is all the more true as the increasing number of unilateral measures being taken by the EU is already fuelling concerns among partners that their sovereignty is being curtailed.

<sup>22</sup> International Labour Organization, *Ratifications of C190 – Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190)* (Geneva, 2021), <https://bit.ly/3vZppTk> (accessed 10 May 2023).



Martha Stolze

# Digital Policy: Approaches Against Gender-Based Digital Violence and Gendered Disinformation

The German government adopted its international digital strategy in February 2024. It was drafted across several ministries and based on a broad consultation process with civil society, industry and researchers.<sup>1</sup> Thus far, the strategies in the field of digital policy at the federal level have either had a primarily domestic focus, such as the government’s digital strategy (2022)<sup>2</sup> and cybersecurity strategy (BMI, 2021),<sup>3</sup> or they have focussed on development cooperation, such as the “Digitalisation for Development” (2019).<sup>4</sup> A more encompassing international strategy was needed to account for the blurred borders in digital space. It follows the development of international digital strategies in other European countries such as Denmark, France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland as well as those outside Europe – for instance Australia, the United States and China.<sup>5</sup> The timing of the strategy also neatly aligns with the Global Digital Compact (GDC) currently being developed at the United Nations (UN) level to increase the

convergence of international regulations in the area of digital policy.<sup>6</sup>

From a feminist foreign policy (FFP) perspective, the question arises as to what a feminist digital policy can look like and to what degree it is enshrined in Germany’s new international digital strategy. Officially, the German government has sought to follow a feminist digital policy approach, although it did not name any concrete measures in its digital strategy of 2022. Still – in line with a feminist understanding of digital policy – it has stated the goal of shaping digitalisation in a gender-equitable, non-discriminatory, human-centric and value-based manner. Germany thus seeks to expand the digital literacy of women and girls, foster their participation online and enable digital access for all while protecting vulnerable groups.<sup>7</sup> Its National Security Strategy<sup>8</sup> also aims at higher levels of global compliance with human rights standards in cyberspace and the expansion of digital, data and media literacy to increase resilience against disinformation.

However, past strategies have not taken into account gendered disinformation and gendered violence online, despite the importance of these issues for a feminist digital policy endeavour. This shortcoming was also prominently pointed out in 2021 within the German government’s third gender equality report<sup>9</sup> as

1 Federal Ministry for Digital and Transport (BMDV), “BMDV Launches Process for International Digital Strategy”, press release (Berlin, 23 March 2023), [t.ly/QvW9H](https://t.ly/QvW9H) (accessed 30 July 2023).

2 Federal Foreign Office (FFO), “The Federal Government’s New Digital Strategy” (Berlin, 13 September 2022), <https://t.ly/XOMuj> (accessed 30 July 2023).

3 Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (BMI), *Cyber Security Strategy for Germany* (Berlin, August, 2021), <https://t.ly/aVKgS> (accessed 30 July 2023).

4 Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), *Digitalisierung für Entwicklung: Den digitalen Wandel gemeinsam gestalten* (Berlin, May 2019), [rb.gy/akt3o](https://t.ly/akt3o) (accessed 30 July 2023).

5 Daniel Voelsen, *Deutschlands erste Strategie zur Internationalen Digitalpolitik: Vorschlag zur thematischen Ausrichtung*, SWP-Aktuell 79/2022 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, December 2022), doi: 10.18449/2022A79.

6 “Global Digital Compact”, *United Nations Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Technology*, [rb.gy/ermnm](https://t.ly/ermnm) (accessed 30 July 2023).

7 FFO, “The Federal Government’s New Digital Strategy” (see note 2).

8 German Federal Government, *Integrated Security for Germany: National Security Strategy* (Berlin, June 2023), <https://t.ly/fcRis> (accessed 30 July 2023).

9 Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, *Dritter Gleichstellungsbericht: Digitalisierung*

well as in the UN's GDC report "Our Common Agenda"<sup>10</sup> and the corresponding policy brief<sup>11</sup> — not least because those affected are pushed out of the public discourse. Only a digital space that is truly inclusive can enable the free exchange of opinions and democratic participation in online political discussions for all. Therefore, after a general outline of feminist digital policy demands, this paper focuses on both areas. It is argued that from an FFP perspective — and recognising the cross-border nature of the actors and communication flows involved — Germany's international digital strategy falls short of integrating approaches to combat both gendered violence and gendered disinformation online. While gendered disinformation falls broadly within the strategy's scope, specific measures to counter it need to be formulated. Efforts to address gendered violence and gendered disinformation should also be reflected in Germany's GDC position.

### Conceptual requirements of feminist digital policy

The principles of FFP and feminist digital policy can inform Germany's international digital strategy. A shared imperative of feminist theories is a gender-independent protection of human rights as well as the representation and inclusion of women, girls and marginalised groups, including their equal access to resources.<sup>12</sup> Building on this, initiatives such as HateAid, Netzforma\* e. V. and the Superr Lab demand equal access to digital content and accessible software, as well as protection against gender-based discrimination and violence online. In addition, they call for the special recognition of severe online insults, an improvement in protection against digital violence and the mandating of platform cooperation

to facilitate criminal prosecution.<sup>13</sup> Feminist digital policy initiatives also advance an intersectional approach that takes into account the interconnection and mutual reinforcement of various forms of discrimination and inequality. They advocate for civil society initiatives to be incorporated to a greater extent, and for women and marginalised groups to be more actively involved in the development and regulation of digital technologies.<sup>14</sup> Feminist cyber policy actors focus on human security instead of state security, and call for a human-centred definition of critical infrastructure and cyber defence. This leads them to call for protecting particularly vulnerable people and their data, for example by securing the digital infrastructure of hospitals, schools and women's shelters.<sup>15</sup>

### Digital technologies are not gender-neutral, but reflect existing asymmetries.

These demands are based on several empirical findings. The term "digital gender gap" (also known as the "gender digital divide") denotes that women on average have more limited access to digital technologies than men, use them less and rate their own digital skills more modestly.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, instead of being gender-neutral, digital technologies have been found to reflect, and thus reinforce, existing asymmetries. For instance, the Amazon recruitment tool used algorithmic decision-making in application processes. But it proved to be discriminatory, as it was based on the training data of previous applications, which were

*geschlechtergerecht gestalten* (Berlin, 21 June 2021), [rb.gy/5h5vd](https://rb.gy/5h5vd) (accessed 30 July 2023).

<sup>10</sup> United Nations, *Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary-General* (New York, NY, 2021), [rb.gy/g5m2v](https://rb.gy/g5m2v) (accessed 30 July 2023).

<sup>11</sup> United Nations, *Our Common Agenda: Policy Brief 5* (New York, NY, May 2023), [rb.gy/s0u7i](https://rb.gy/s0u7i) (accessed 30 July 2023).

<sup>12</sup> Claudia Zilla, *Feminist Foreign Policy: Concepts, Core Components and Controversies*, SWP Comment 48/2022 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, August 2022), doi: 10.18449/2022C48.

<sup>13</sup> HateAid, "HateAid works: Our political demands", <https://t.ly/TyUBS> (accessed 15 January 2024); Netzforma\* e. V., "Leitbild", 20 December 2022, [t.ly/io-ff](https://t.ly/io-ff) (accessed 30 July 2023); Superr Lab, "Feminist Digital Policy", <https://t.ly/hmw6p> (accessed 30 July 2023).

<sup>14</sup> Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein, *Data Feminism* (Cambridge, MA, 2022); Francesca Schmidt, *Netzpolitik: Eine feministische Einführung* (Opladen, 2021).

<sup>15</sup> Veronika Datzler and Jennifer Menninger, "Die Notwendigkeit feministischer Cyberpolitik", *49security* (online), (20 September 2023), [rb.gy/fl6rr](https://rb.gy/fl6rr) (accessed 30 July 2023); Nina Bernarding and Vivienne Kobel, *Feminist Perspectives on the Militarization of Cyberspace* (Berlin: The Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, 2023), [rb.gy/r2lyx](https://rb.gy/r2lyx) (accessed 30 July 2023).

<sup>16</sup> Barbara Schwarze and Hannes Schwaderer, eds., *Digital Gender Gap. Lagebild zu Gender(un)gleichheiten in der digitalisierten Welt* (Initiative D21, January 2020), [rb.gy/0bgrn](https://rb.gy/0bgrn) (accessed 30 July 2023).

predominantly from men. Consequently, the algorithm favoured male applicants.<sup>17</sup> This is not an isolated phenomenon. White men are disproportionately represented in a large number of data sets (“gender data gap”), which leads to characteristic distortions in the data, including those used to train artificial intelligence (AI) models.<sup>18</sup> The provision of digital services also reveals global asymmetries. For example, 90 per cent of women in Europe have internet access, in contrast to a global average of only 65 per cent, which is due to various factors such as patchy network connectivity and high prices for digital services as well as a lack of gender-neutral digital education.<sup>19</sup> In addition, global inequality is inherent in the checking of violent content that has been reported on social media. Reported content is predominantly reviewed in countries in the “Global South” by women on low wages and with modest levels of occupational health and safety<sup>20</sup> – illustrating the international dimension of digital policy.

Taken together, feminist digital policy examines these power relations in existing digital technologies, encourages human-centred technological innovations for the benefit of all and looks for ways to shape digital change in an inclusive way.

## Gender-related violence and gendered disinformation online

Building on these considerations, two central issues of digital discrimination are discussed below, namely, gendered disinformation and violence online.

### Gender-related digital violence

Forms of digital violence include defamation, blackmail and threats, including threats of rape, identity theft, stalking and the disclosure of personal informa-

tion (*doxing*).<sup>21</sup> The Covid-19 pandemic saw a sharp rise of such cases.<sup>22</sup> Digital violence is primarily directed against women. Female public figures such as politicians, journalists and human rights activists are particularly affected. At the same time, intersectional discrimination leads to women and girls of colour, those with disabilities and queer women being disproportionately targeted.<sup>23</sup> Gender stereotypes and the spread of violent messages have, moreover, been exacerbated due to the recommendations offered by algorithms on social media.<sup>24</sup>

The effects of such gendered digital violence are manifold. Digital violence not only violates the personal rights of those affected, but also leads them to withdraw from social media, thus being pushed out of online political discourses (*silencing*).<sup>25</sup> This dynamic especially impedes the expression of the online opinions given by women and queer people; this is especially concerning since the digital space has developed into an important forum for opinion-forming and democratic participation.<sup>26</sup>

Since the coming into force of the German Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG, 2017)<sup>27</sup> and in particular the EU Digital Services Act (DSA, 2022),<sup>28</sup> social

21 Netzforma\* e. V., “Digitale Gewalt”, [rb.gy/bwsz1](https://rb.gy/bwsz1) (accessed 30 July 2023).

22 UN Women, *Online and ICT-Facilitated Violence against Women and Girls during COVID-19* (2020), [rb.gy/h8q67](https://rb.gy/h8q67) (accessed 30 July 2023).

23 Plan International, *The State of the World’s Girls 2020: Free to Be Online?* (2020), [t.ly/FHEJ7](https://t.ly/FHEJ7) (accessed 30 July 2023).

24 Anabela Brandao, Sabine Marxen and Anne Rütten, *Rollenbilder in den Sozialen Medien und ihre Auswirkungen auf die Gleichberechtigung* (Hamburg: Plan International Deutschland, 2019), [rb.gy/md4fx](https://rb.gy/md4fx) (accessed 30 July 2023); Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk, *Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist Moment* (Oxford and New York, NY, 2022).

25 Johann Illgner, “Hass-Kampagnen und Silencing im Netz”, in *Antifeminismus in Bewegung. Aktuelle Debatten um Geschlecht und sexuelle Vielfalt*, ed. Juliane Lang and Ulrich Peters (Hamburg, 2018), 253–73.

26 Die Medienanstalten, ed., *Medienvielfaltsmonitor 2020-I* (Berlin, August 2020), [rb.gy/9v48x](https://rb.gy/9v48x) (accessed 30 July 2023); Deutscher Juristinnenbund e.V., “Mit Recht gegen Hate Speech. Bekämpfung digitaler Gewalt gegen Frauen”, press release (Berlin, 4 November 2019), [rb.gy/o4r2n](https://rb.gy/o4r2n) (accessed 30 July 2023).

27 Federal Ministry of Justice (BMJ), *Gesetz zur Verbesserung der Rechtsdurchsetzung in sozialen Netzwerken* (Berlin, 2017), [rb.gy/zpk8c](https://rb.gy/zpk8c) (accessed 30 July 2023).

28 European Commission, “Digital Services Act: EU’s Landmark Rules for Online Platforms Enter into Force”, press

17 HateAid, “Coded Bias: Wenn der Computer Vorurteile hat”, 6 October 2023, [t.ly/LUm1B](https://t.ly/LUm1B) (accessed 24 October 2023).

18 Jaana Müller-Brehm, “Diskriminierung begegnen, Fairness stärken”, *Missing Link. Magazin für vertrauenswürdige Künstliche Intelligenz*, no. 3 (May 2023): 13.

19 “Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2023” (Geneva: International Telecommunication Union, 2023), [rb.gy/sbw03](https://rb.gy/sbw03) (accessed 8 February 2024); United Nations, *Our Common Agenda: Policy Brief 5* (see note 11).

20 Kate Crawford, *The Atlas of AI. Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence* (New Haven, CT, 2021).

network providers have been obliged to take decisive action against harmful content. The German international digital strategy only broadly commits to ensuring fundamental and human rights online, while referring to the national cyber strategy to combat online hate, without identifying the issue of online violence or its gendered dimension.

However, in May 2024, the EU adopted its first directive combating violence against women.<sup>29</sup> The most common forms of cyber violence will now be punishable, such as the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, including deep fakes, cyberstalking, cyber-bullying and hate speech. Accordingly, the German government is drafting a law against digital violence. It aims to make it easier for affected individuals to enforce their rights, obtain information about the authors of illegal content and request the removal of their accounts.<sup>30</sup> Although protecting anonymous and pseudonymous online activity stands in tension with disclosing this data, from the perspective of those affected, criminal prosecution takes precedence over protecting the anonymity of perpetrators online. The German government should therefore commit itself to persuading other countries to adopt similar regulations in order to facilitate the cross-border prosecution of digital violence.

## Gender-related disinformation online

Empirical studies show that women have increasingly become targets of gender-related disinformation. This disproportionately affects women of Colour as well as those with diverse sexual orientations.<sup>31</sup> Disinformation is understood as intentionally disseminated false

information. It can be used by state and non-state actors to influence public opinion (informational/illegitimate influence).<sup>32</sup> Russia is one of the main actors using the information space to exert international influence, as clearly formulated in its foreign policy concept, security strategy and military doctrine.<sup>33</sup> Concerning gendered disinformation, for instance, Ukrainian women and LGBTIQ+ have been discredited as part of Russian disinformation narratives throughout its war against Ukraine.<sup>34</sup>

### The spread of queer and misogynistic disinformation can weaken social cohesion.

The spread of queer and misogynistic disinformation is not only discriminatory, but can reinforce social exclusion and thus weaken social cohesion. The strategic denigration and instrumentalisation of gender-specific traits goes beyond individual effects such as silencing and instead extends to entire groups. Gender-specific disinformation should therefore be perceived as an issue in its own right alongside digital violence and brought to the forefront of political attention.

The distribution of such content on social media is facilitated by effortless sharing and algorithmic amplification. Inauthentic clicks, likes and comments can further amplify the reach of certain information — despite the potential short-term effects of de-amplifying specific messaging, such as limiting the reach of pro-Russian content in 2022.<sup>35</sup>

release (Brussels, 16 November 2022), <https://t.ly/ashtA> (accessed 30 July 2023).

<sup>29</sup> European Commission, “Ending Gender-based Violence”, press release (Brussels, 7 May 2024), <https://t.ly/uarDu> (accessed 24 May 2024).

<sup>30</sup> BMJ, *Eckpunkte für ein Gesetz gegen digitale Gewalt*, April 2023, [rb.gy/bgwqj](https://rb.gy/bgwqj) (accessed 30 July 2023).

<sup>31</sup> Celia Davies et al., *Malign Creativity: How Gender, Sex, and Lies Are Weaponized against Women Online* (Washington, D.C.: Wilson Center, 2021); Lucina di Meco and Saskia Brechenmacher, “Tackling Online Abuse and Disinformation Targeting Women in Politics” (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace [online], 30 November 2020), [rb.gy/zx7f0](https://rb.gy/zx7f0) (accessed 30 July 2023); Kristina Wilfore, *The Gendered Disinformation Playbook in Germany Is a Warning for Europe*, Brookings Tech Stream (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 29 October 2021), [rb.gy/e6m7h](https://rb.gy/e6m7h) (accessed 30 July 2023).

<sup>32</sup> Diego A. Martin, Jacob N. Shapiro and Julia Illhardt, *Trends in Online Influence Efforts*, Policy Report (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2020), [rb.gy/hz2m8](https://rb.gy/hz2m8) (accessed 30 July 2023); Samantha Bradshaw and Amélie Henle, “The Gender Dimensions of Foreign Influence Operations”, *International Journal of Communication* 15 (2021): 4596–618.

<sup>33</sup> Aiden Hoyle, Helma van den Berg, Bertjan Doosje and Martijn Kitzen, “Portrait of Liberal Chaos: RT’s Antagonistic Strategic Narration about the Netherlands”, *Media, War & Conflict* 16, no. 2 (2023): 209–27; Martin et al., *Trends in Online Influence Reports* (see note 32).

<sup>34</sup> Olha Bilousenko et al., “‘Prostitution Will Save Ukraine from the Default’. Investigating Russian Gender Disinformation in Social Networks”, *Detector Media* (online), 28 September 2022, [rb.gy/o8ouzg](https://rb.gy/o8ouzg) (accessed 30 July 2023); idem, “‘You Are Either Russian or Gay’. Exploring Russian LGBTIQ+ Disinformation on Social Media”, *Detector Media* (online), 18 November 2022, [rb.gy/psg9m](https://rb.gy/psg9m) (accessed 30 July 2023).

<sup>35</sup> Rolf Fredheim, *Generative AI and Its Implications for Social Media Analysis*, Virtual Manipulation Brief, 2023/1 (Riga:

Gendered disinformation is largely overlooked in Germany's international digital strategy. It identifies the problem of increasing disinformation campaigns but lacks objectives concerning its gendered dimension. It is hence not recognised that women and queer people are particularly affected by this form of messaging and should be brought into focus. This shortcoming is also evident in Germany's 2023 National Security Strategy. Although it identifies manipulative communication as a security issue and aims at identifying it at an early stage, it fails to mention its gender-related dimension.<sup>36</sup> The DSA only partially addresses the issue. To mitigate adverse effects, the DSA (Art. 34) requires providers of very large online platforms and search engines (VLOPs) to conduct annual assessments of the risks associated with the use of their services.<sup>37</sup> It demands that there be respect for human dignity and non-discrimination, and it requires VLOPs to report on the adverse effects of gender-based violence. From the perspective of feminist digital policy, it is unfortunate that the issue of gendered disinformation is not mentioned in the DSA, and hence not tackled.

Given that gendered disinformation triggers online and offline assaults – with detrimental effects on the participation and mental health of those affected – as well as defames entire groups, it should be specifically considered. The current case-by-case analysis of content is not appropriate to evaluate gendered disinformation. Individual cases may not be harmful enough to reach the threshold of criminal liability. Their harm unfolds and multiplies when examined collectively.

**Digital education, a high-quality network connection for all, accessible software and measures to eliminate gender-specific discrimination are required.**

The challenges of gender-based violence *and* gender-based disinformation must therefore be addressed through concrete measures as part of the implementation of Germany's international digital strategy and in its forthcoming law against digital violence. These

efforts are essential to guarantee fundamental rights and enable democratic participation for all online, while countering manipulation efforts.

**Outlook: Shaping international digital policy in a feminist manner**

Overall, Germany's international digital strategy anchors a feminist, human rights-based digital policy more firmly across ministries. It seeks to protect fundamental and human rights online and to bridge the digital gender divide. However, in addition to digital education and internet access for all, more measures to abolish gender-specific discrimination online are required. In particular, the strategy falls short of integrating approaches both against gendered violence *and* gendered disinformation online.

As a signatory to the “European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade”,<sup>38</sup> Germany has committed to ensuring protection against gender-based disinformation and other forms of harmful content, including digital violence. It is time to deliver on this promise. The systematic disparagement of groups based on gender-specific traits should be regarded as illegal content and subject to criminal prosecution – matters the federal government can integrate in its law against digital violence, and advocate for both at the EU level and in negotiations for the Global Digital Compact.

Consultations concerning the GDC process have ended and intergovernmental negotiations have commenced. The German government should use these negotiations to demand inclusive digital spaces. However, as agreements among 193 UN member states typically result in minimum standards, Germany should also work bilaterally to encourage ambitious state regulations that compel digital platforms to uphold their human rights obligations. The following measures can be anchored in the GDC:

1. expanding the accountability of digital platforms and establishing common transparency and security standards, including a rapid, human rights-based response to reported content and comprehensive

NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, June 2023).

<sup>36</sup> German Federal Government, *National Security Strategy* (see note 8).

<sup>37</sup> European Commission, “Digital Services Act” (see note 28).

<sup>38</sup> European Parliament, Council and European Commission, “European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade”, *Official Journal of the European Union*, no. C 23 (23 January 2023): 1–7, t.ly/TPaEZ (accessed 30 July 2023).

- disclosure obligations, also regarding gender-specific disinformation;
2. supporting international initiatives aimed at protecting against digital violence and assisting affected individuals, exposing gender-specific disinformation and political manipulation, and enhancing media literacy;
  3. encouraging diverse participation in the technology sector to mitigate the discriminatory impacts of digital technologies;
  4. advancing methodologies for measuring, tracking and combating gender-based digital violence and gendered disinformation, such as increased research funding and publicly accessible “*human rights impact assessments*”.<sup>39</sup>

**39** Paula Köhler and Daniel Voelsen, *Content Moderation in autoritären Staaten*, SWP-Aktuell 39/2022 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, June 2022), doi: 10.18449/2022A39.

Nadine Knapp and Anne Koch

# Migration: Intersectional Discrimination in Labour Migration\*

Migration has been a constant in human history: Rather than being an exception, the temporary or permanent relocation of individuals or groups has always been a normal part of human existence. At the same time, many of today's migratory movements – including unregulated forms, which are usually not welcomed by destination countries such as Germany and are often at the centre of political controversy – are a consequence of colonial-induced economic power imbalances between states as well as domestic political upheavals.<sup>1</sup>

Although cross-border migration movements have clear relevance to foreign and development policy, the management of immigration primarily falls under domestic policy. In the guidelines for a feminist foreign policy (FFP) of the Federal Foreign Office (FFO), migration is therefore only mentioned in passing.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the feminist development policy (FDP) of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) formulates several policy-specific goals. These include protecting migrant workers from exploitation and promoting the equal social, political and economic participation of women in contexts of displacement and migration.<sup>3</sup> What might a feminist

foreign and development policy approach to migration entail? Insights from (critical) migration research offer a fruitful starting point.

## Intersectional-feminist approaches in migration research

Migration has historically been viewed as a male-dominated phenomenon: Based on a traditional gender order, women were relegated to the domestic sphere and therefore not considered independent initiators of migration processes. However, in the 1970s and early 1980s, an understanding of the independent *agency* of female migrants began to emerge.<sup>4</sup> This brought into focus the complexity of migration movements and the ways in which the mobility of people is restricted or enabled by gender-specific discourses, practices and rules. At the same time, migration can alter gender relations within households and communities, impacting gender-specific identities and relationships. Migration can both disrupt and reinforce gender roles. For instance, women who migrate independently may generate the majority of the household income through remittances, disrupting traditional roles. However, migrant women may also be denied the opportunity to learn the language in the destination country and be restricted to the domestic sphere to a greater extent than in their country of origin. From an intersectional perspective, the interactions between gender and other forms of discrimination – such as skin colour, class, ethnicity,

\* This article was written as part of the project “Strategic Refugee and Migration Policy”, funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

1 See, among others, Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez, “Das postkoloniale Europa dekonstruieren. Zur Prekarisierung, Migration und Arbeit in der EU”, *Widerspruch: Beiträge zu sozialistischer Politik* 25, no. 48 (2005): 71 – 84 (71).

2 Federal Foreign Office (FFO), *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy: Federal Foreign Office Guidelines* (Berlin, 2023), 48, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blueprint/servlet/blob/2585076/4d2d295dad8fb1c41c6271d2c1a41d75/ffp-leitlinien-data.pdf> (accessed 3 March 2024).

3 BMZ, *Feminist Development Policy: For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide* (Berlin, 2023), 21, 25, 27, <https://www.bmz.de/resource/blob/153806/bmz-strategy-feminist-development-policy.pdf> (accessed 3 March 2024).

4 Simone Prodolliet, “Ohne Migrantinnen geht wirtschaftlich nichts. Frauen – der blinde Fleck in der Migrationsforschung”, *Widerspruch: Beiträge zu sozialistischer Politik* 19, no. 37 (1999): 95 – 106 (95ff.); Stephanie J. Nawyn, “Gender and Migration: Integrating Feminist Theory into Migration Studies”, *Sociology Compass* 4, no. 9 (September 2010): 694 – 823 (750).

religion, sexual orientation, age, generation, geographical location, legal status and nationality – are increasingly being examined to better understand the realities of migrants' lives.<sup>5</sup>

**Intersectional-feminist approaches have hardly been considered in the mainstream of broader migration research.**

However, these intersectional-feminist approaches have yet to be widely adopted in the mainstream of broader migration research.<sup>6</sup> Existing gender and power relations and their effects on migration are still rarely the subject of analysis; instead, gender is usually understood as a biological gender category and as a demographic, binary variable.<sup>7</sup>

In recent years, research on critical migration and border regimes has provided important impetus for an intersectional-feminist view of migration processes. With its power-critical analysis of relations of domination and violence in the context of human mobility, it questions established assumptions about statehood, borders and the agency of migrants.<sup>8</sup>

The notion of methodological nationalism, for example, criticises that classical migration research regards the nation-state as a quasi-natural, homogeneous unit or “closed container”, and that it accepts associated concepts such as national borders, citizenship and national culture without question.<sup>9</sup> As a result, new arrivals are primarily perceived as a deviation from the norm and a security risk, or as a burden on national labour markets and social systems.<sup>10</sup>

5 Anastasia Christou and Eleonore Kofman, *Gender and Migration: IMISCOE Short Reader* (Cham, 2022), 2, 15ff.

6 See Gioconda Herrera, “Gender and International Migration: Contributions and Cross-Fertilizations”, *Annual Review of Sociology* 39, no. 1 (2013): 471–89.

7 Nawyn, “Gender and Migration” (see note 4), 749–65 (752).

8 See Susanne Arens et al., eds., *Migrationsforschung als Kritik? Spielräume kritischer Migrationsforschung* (Wiesbaden, 2013).

9 See Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick-Schiller, “Methodological Nationalism, the Social Sciences, and the Study of Migration: An Essay in Historical Epistemology”, *International Migration Review* 37, no. 3 (2003): 576–610.

10 See, e.g., Stephan Scheel, “Das europäische Grenzregime und die Autonomie der Migration: migrantische Kämpfe und die Versuche ihrer Regulation und Kontrolle”, in *Migration. Bildung. Frieden. Perspektiven für das Zusammenleben in der post-*

Critical migration and border research views borders not as fixed lines or obstacles, but as a complex system of “limitation, differentiation, hierarchisation and partial inclusion”<sup>11</sup> that allows for the categorisation of different migrants and distinctions between “legal/regular” and “illegal/irregular” or “good” and “bad” newcomers. This makes visible the fact that, in addition to enabling or preventing mobility, border practices involve a process in which rights, participation and belonging are recognised and denied by degree.<sup>12</sup> In critical migration research, migrants are not reduced to passive objects, but are included in the analysis of border and migration regimes as independently acting political subjects. Such an understanding of migrants as *agents of change* is a prerequisite for developing and implementing effective forms of representation and political participation.

Building on these considerations, the following section uses the example of labour migration to demonstrate the consequences of overlapping forms of discrimination and the potential fields of action available to a feminist-oriented migration policy that pursues an emancipatory and power-critical claim in line with FDP and FFP.

## Intersectional inequality, violence and exploitation in the field of labour migration

In contrast to displacement or migration for educational or family reasons, labour migration encompasses all cross-border migration that is undertaken – whether legally or irregularly – primarily for the purpose of gainful employment. This type of migration is often due to the persistent economic imbalances between wealthy industrialised countries and those of the so-called Global South.

*migrantischen Gesellschaft*, ed. Bettina Gruber and Viktorija Ratković (Münster, 2017), 15–30.

11 Manuela Bojadžijev and Serhat Karakayalı, “Autonomie der Migration. 10 Thesen zu einer Methode”, in *Turbulente Ränder. Neue Perspektiven auf Migration an den Grenzen Europas*, ed. TRANSIT MIGRATION Forschungsgruppe, Kultur und soziale Praxis (Bielefeld, 2007), 203–10 (204).

12 See Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Durham and London, 2013).



## Structural power imbalances manifest in labour migration.

In industrial countries — especially those with ageing populations due to demographic shifts — there is a continual demand for migrant workers with varying levels of qualification. At the same time, labour migration is plagued by structural power imbalances that result in gender-specific and intersectional discrimination. For instance, highly qualified workers usually have access to legal immigration channels; this is often not the case for less-qualified people, despite their labour being also in demand. In addition, there is both anecdotal<sup>13</sup> and quantitative evidence<sup>14</sup> that visas granted by wealthy countries, such as Germany, are often influenced by racist prejudices, leading to systematic discrimination against people from sub-Saharan Africa.

Due to these structural power imbalances and limited legal immigration options, a substantial proportion of labour migration is irregular. The informal employment relationships often associated with this status exacerbate inequality and discrimination because informal workers are denied rights. In the low-wage sector in particular, however, even formalised employment relationships do not protect against exploitation: This applies, for example, when migrant seasonal workers in asparagus, strawberry and vegetable cultivation have to accept high wage deductions for accommodations and inadequate (health) insurance.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, non-state intermediaries frequently require unethically high placement fees from migrant care workers.<sup>16</sup> Overall, migrant

workers are overrepresented in employment arrangements for what are commonly referred to as “3D jobs” in English-speaking countries due to their unattractive and often risky nature (“dirty, dangerous and difficult”).<sup>17</sup> This applies to jobs in construction, catering, agriculture, the cleaning sector, care, childcare and other household-related services in particular.

Against this backdrop of structural disadvantages, especially for low-skilled workers, labour migration is also characterised by gender-specific burdens and risks that have consequences not only for the migrants themselves, but also for their families and communities in the country of origin. On the one hand, private household work, such as childcare or domestic care, which is mostly carried out by migrant women, is largely outside the control of the state and particularly susceptible to exploitation. At the extreme, this can take the form of modern slavery, which, although not limited to professions that are commonly associated with a female workforce, is most frequently found in the context of human trafficking for the purpose of forced prostitution.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, employment opportunities are not only determined by the labour market in the destination country, but also by the conditions in the home country. For example, if women face difficulties in accessing education, men may have an advantage in the competition for limited work visas. In other cases, traditional cultural roles have a greater impact on the employment prospects of female migrant workers than their human capital characteristics.<sup>19</sup>

Empirical research on migrants’ remittances to relatives or other caregivers in their countries of origin, which can have an important development impact, shows that these are also characterised by gender-specific dynamics. On average, women send

13 See, e.g., “Missio erneuert Kritik an Visaablehnung für junge Afrikaner. ‘Gängige diskriminierende Praxis’”, *domradio.de* (online), 30 September 2022, <https://www.domradio.de/artikel/missio-erneuert-kritik-visaablehnung-fuer-junge-afrikaner> (accessed 20 September 2023); Abdullahi Tsanni, “The Uncomfortable Truths about Visa Discrimination and Global Health Conferences”, *BMJ Global Health* 380 (2023): 78.

14 See, e.g., Andrew S. Rosenberg, “Racial Discrimination in International Visa Policies”, *International Studies Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (2023): 1–13.

15 See Tim Zahn and Steffen Vogel, “‘We’re Not in Europe Here’: Exploitation in Germany’s Asparagus, Strawberry, and Vegetable Farms”, *oxfam* (online), May 2023, <https://bit.ly/3VwzsZ1> (accessed 3 March 2024).

16 See Olaya Argüeso and Frederik Richter, “An Unsettling Business: How Agents Are Commoditizing Foreign Nurses for German Healthcare”, *Correctiv* (online), 25 November 2020,

<https://correctiv.org/en/current/2020/11/25/nurses-for-sale/> (accessed 3 March 2024).

17 See Holger Kolb, Franziska Loschert and Franziska Schork, *Precarious Employment – Precarious Participation: Foreign Workers in the German Low-wage Sector*, Study (Expert Council on Integration and Migration, June 2023), <https://www.svr-migration.de/en/publication/precarius-employment/> (accessed 3 March 2024); *Responsible Sourcing Tool*, “Understand Risk” (2023), <https://www.responsiblesourcingtool.org/understandrisk/risks> (accessed 10 August 2023).

18 Patricia Graf and Antonia Kupfer, “Moderne Sklaverei und extreme Ausbeutung in globalisierten Arbeits- und Geschlechterverhältnissen — ein Blick auf Deutschland. Einleitung”, *FEMINA POLITICA – Zeitschrift für feministische Politikwissenschaft* 25, no. 1 (2016): 9–23 (10).

19 Nawyn, “Gender and Migration” (see note 4), 753.

a larger proportion of their income home than men, and they do so more regularly and in smaller amounts. Among other things, this means that they are disproportionately burdened by transfer fees. In addition to gender-specific differences, occupation, social class, level of education and monthly per capita expenditure also determine remittance behaviour.<sup>20</sup>

Changes in gender roles in recent decades have led to an increase in female employment in many wealthy countries, creating a strong demand for female care and domestic workers.<sup>21</sup> As a result, migrant women from poorer countries are meeting the demand for *care work* in wealthier countries, but they are no longer able to fulfil their own care obligations. This sometimes results in so-called *global care chains*. In other instances, a care gap persists in the migrant worker's country of origin, and children or elderly people are left without support.<sup>22</sup> The lack of social appreciation of female domestic or care work also means that these activities are usually poorly paid. Particularly in the context of large refugee movements, migrants who have completed vocational training often replace the unpaid work previously carried out by local women due to a lack of other income opportunities. If this situation persists, it can lead to a development-inhibiting process of *deskilling* for the people concerned.<sup>23</sup>

## Elements of a feminist foreign and development policy

An FFP and FDP that aim to reduce the structural disadvantages and intersectional discrimination outlined

above in the context of migration must first adopt a perspective that is critical of engrained power hierarchies before questioning the state-centred orientation of existing migration policies. This entails a recognition that the privileges associated with citizenship in wealthy industrialised countries constitute a legal construct, and that upholding them does not justify human rights violations and structural discrimination against less-privileged people. Instead, actions in this field should aim to reduce intersectional inequalities and promote social participation.

### The inclusion of development and foreign policy criteria is particularly relevant for the recruitment of foreign workers.

In practical terms, this means taking into account the demand for low-skilled workers when assessing current and future labour market needs, and calling into question the rationale that labour migration should be regulated with the sole aim of addressing the economic needs of the receiving countries. The inclusion of development and foreign policy criteria is particularly relevant for the recruitment of foreign workers: The German government should consider the interests of partner countries and potential migrants more systematically than in the past and work to ensure that existing normative standards for fair recruitment are adhered to and developed further.<sup>24</sup> This includes precautions against brain drain – particularly in the health and care sectors in countries of origin – and measures to protect migrants from exploitative working conditions or long-term financial dependency on private recruitment agencies. Reducing remittance fees can not only have a positive impact on the development of the country of origin, but it can also make an important contribution towards reducing gender-specific inequalities. All these efforts should be accompanied by a commitment to the adequate representation of migrant organisations in relevant international fora, for example in the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Sandhya R. Mahapatro, “Why Do They Remit? Examining Factors Influencing Migrant Remittances in India”, *Journal of Development Policy and Practice* 2, no. 2 (2017): 225–35.

<sup>21</sup> Monika Mattes, “Migration und Geschlecht in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Ein historischer Rückblick auf die ‘Gastarbeiterinnen’ der 1960/70er Jahre”, *FEMINA POLITICA – Zeitschrift für feministische Politikwissenschaft* 28, no. 1 (2008): 19–28 (28).

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., Helma Lutz and Ewa Palenga-Möllenbeck, “Das Care-Chain-Konzept auf dem Prüfstand. Eine Fallstudie der transnationalen Care-Arrangements polnischer und ukrainischer Migrantinnen”, *GENDER – Zeitschrift für Geschlecht, Kultur und Gesellschaft* 3, no. 1 (2011): 9–27.

<sup>23</sup> See Dita Dobranja, “Global Care Chains, Refugee Crisis, and Deskilling of Workers”, *Exploring Economics*, 27 July 2017, <https://www.exploring-economics.org/fr/decouvrir/global-care-chains-deskilling/> (accessed 20 September 2023).

<sup>24</sup> See Steffen Angenendt, Nadine Knapp and David Kipp, *Germany Is Looking for Foreign Labor: How to Make Recruitment Development-orientated, Sustainable and Fair*, SWP Research Paper 3/2023 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, March 2023), doi: 10.18449/2023RP03.

The newly established BMZ Centres for Migration and Development, which are dedicated to promoting fair and ethical labour migration to Germany and Europe, create further opportunities. Here, advisory services for women and other marginalised groups ought to be expanded, providing information on opportunities, rights and problems in destination countries or imparting financial literacy. In this context, it would be useful to work with transnational trade union associations to expose and gradually dismantle discriminatory structures. In order to reduce global inequality, the criterion of climate justice should also be taken into account when selecting partner countries for the recruitment of workers. In line with FFP and FDP, the FFO and BMZ could work to ensure that people from regions in which large climate-related refugee movements are to be expected are given preferential access to legal labour migration in the future, in line with the concept of *migration as adaptation*.

However, it will not be possible to implement feminist approaches to (labour) migration using foreign and development policy instruments alone. Instead, a coherent whole-of-government approach is needed that encompasses the realm of interior policy: The exploitation of migrant workers can only be prevented if existing discriminatory structures in destination countries such as Germany are reformed – including through appropriate remuneration for care work and the regulation of domestic care. This requires financial resources as well as an expansion of the rights of those affected, enabling them to represent their interests collectively. In terms of migration and integration policy, this requires regularisation programmes, an accelerated continuation of temporary residence permits and the removal of structural barriers, particularly with regard to language skills and the recognition of qualifications. The revised Nationality Act, which simplifies the path to German citizenship, and the new Skilled Immigration Act, which aims to facilitate the immigration of workers from third countries, are steps in the right direction. However, the need for low-skilled workers from abroad continues to be ignored in the public debate; the same applies to gender-specific discrepancies in the employment of immigrants, which are not systematically addressed by the promotion of gender-equitable working conditions alone.

Nadine Biehler and Amrei Meier

# Forced Displacement: Prerequisites for a More Feminist Approach to Humanitarian Aid and Development Cooperation\*

In Germany and Europe, forced displacement is perceived primarily as immigration to one's own territory. Issues such as the protection of the European Union's (EU) external borders, irregular arrivals, search and rescue at sea, and the challenges of integration are discussed almost daily in the media and among the public. However, this Eurocentric perspective ignores the fact that the vast majority of the more than 108 million refugees, internally displaced persons and asylum seekers live in the so-called Global South.<sup>1</sup> This number will continue to grow in the coming years: New and ongoing conflicts as well as climate change and the associated extreme weather events and environmental changes will cause even more people to flee.

In Germany and the EU, the political response to these global crises and their consequences is centred on the goal of reducing the number of arrivals seeking protection. To achieve this, governments in the EU and Germany accept that regularly reported massive human rights violations at the EU's external borders remain largely inconsequential; that search and rescue is not only being questioned, but obstructed in practice; and that integration debates in EU member states are increasingly characterised by racist sentiments.

Both academics<sup>2</sup> and human rights activists<sup>3</sup> have been criticising these developments for years. Fem-

nists have pointed out the special needs of vulnerable people and those who suffer multiple forms of discrimination, such as women, children, queer or racialised people in a differentiated manner.<sup>4</sup> This criticism has not yet led to any political changes.

Even the guidelines for a feminist foreign policy (FFP) presented by the Federal Foreign Office (FFO) in March 2023 and the strategy for a feminist development policy (FDP) of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) from the same month can only provide limited relief here. German and, in particular, European asylum and migration policies are mainly the responsibility of the interior ministries. However, the FFO and BMZ are responsible for humanitarian aid and development cooperation – instruments designed to support forcibly displaced people, particularly in developing countries. The basis for this is, among other things, the global refugee regime.

(2020), <https://germanlawjournal.com/volume-21-issue-3/> (accessed 31 July 2023).

3 See, e.g., Pro Asyl, *Für Menschenrechte, Rechtsstaat und starker Flüchtlingsschutz: notwendige rote Linien der Bundesregierung für die Verhandlungen zum New Pact on Migration and Asylum* (Frankfurt, 21 February 2023), [https://www.proasyl.de/wp-content/uploads/Kurzposition-PRO-ASYL\\_Rote-Linien-New-Pact-on-Migration-and-Asylum.pdf](https://www.proasyl.de/wp-content/uploads/Kurzposition-PRO-ASYL_Rote-Linien-New-Pact-on-Migration-and-Asylum.pdf) (accessed 31 July 2023).

4 Bündnis Istanbul-Konvention, "Bündnis Istanbul-Konvention lehnt GEAS-Entwurf ab. Gemeinsames Statement zu den Konsequenzen des geplanten EU-Asylkompromiss [sic] für schutzsuchende Frauen und Menschen auf der Flucht, die Mehrfachdiskriminierung erfahren (müssen)", 24 July 2023, <https://www.proasyl.de/wp-content/uploads/BIK-Stellungnahme-GEAS.pdf> (accessed 31 July 2023).

\* This article was written as part of the project "Strategic Displacement and Migration Policy" funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

1 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2022* (Copenhagen, 2023),

2, <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/global-trends-report-2022.pdf> (accessed 10 July 2023).

2 See, e.g.: *German Law Journal, Special Issue Border Justice: Migration and Accountability for Human Rights Violations* 21, no. 3

## Feminism and the global refugee regime

For most states, the international refugee regime set out in the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol provides the binding framework for dealing with forced displacement. Intersectional feminism, which goes beyond discrimination based on gender and sexual identity, does not play a central role. The Refugee Convention does not even refer to disadvantages and discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation as possible grounds for protection. Gender-based violence is also not mentioned as a basis for fear of persecution.<sup>5</sup> Only legal practice has changed over the decades: In the 1980s, for example, people persecuted because of their sexual orientation were recognised as refugees.<sup>6</sup> Since 1993, gender-based violence has also been recognised as a criterion for refugee status.<sup>7</sup>

The consultations to draft the 2016 “New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants” and the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) have come closer to reflecting a feminist process design, which aims to be dialogue-based, transparent and non-hierarchical<sup>8</sup> through the participation of women’s groups, civil society and UN agencies (such as UN WOMEN).<sup>9</sup> However, the concrete commitments that emerged from this remained largely rooted in a binary understanding of gender. The New York Declaration, among other things, includes access to sexual and reproductive health services; combating of sexualised and

gender-based violence; and the promotion of gender equality;<sup>10</sup> while the GCR includes the individual registration and issuance of (refugee) papers for women and girls, regardless of their marital status.<sup>11</sup>

In terms of practical support for refugees, however, these conceptual advances have gone largely unnoticed. According to a 2020 audit report, 85 per cent of pledges made to the Global Refugee Forum – which serves as a review mechanism for the GCR – made no reference to gender issues or gender equality.<sup>12</sup> Despite increasingly progressive legal practices, processes and language from a feminist perspective, implementation is lagging. This means that the impact on affected refugees will be limited.

## Humanitarian aid and development cooperation

Similar implementation challenges are faced by the FFO and BMZ – whose humanitarian aid and development cooperation are directed towards people in situations of forced displacement in the so-called Global South. Forced displacement is mentioned in both policy documents, but it does not play a central role. Whereas the FFP guidelines emphasise that climate-induced displacement affects women and members of marginalised groups in a particular way,<sup>13</sup> the FDP strategy mentions displacement contexts more frequently. However, it only explicitly states the intention of supporting the establishment of social systems in these contexts, facilitating women’s access to formal financial systems and promoting their equal participation in peace processes.<sup>14</sup> By promoting gen-

5 UNHCR, *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees of July 28, 1951*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-relating-status-refugees> (accessed 20 September 2023).

6 Ben Dalmatiner, *Sexuelle Orientierung als Fluchtgrund* (Linz: Johannes Kepler University, October 2016), 35, <https://epub.jku.at/obvulihs/download/pdf/1514320?originalFileName=true> (accessed 22 May 2023).

7 Amalia Hadas Rubin, Jeni Klugman and Elena Ortiz, *Key Challenges for Refugee Policies and Programs: A Gender Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, January 2022), 9, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/447911643215960323/pdf/Key-Challenges-for-Refugee-Policies-and-Programs-A-Gender-Perspective.pdf> (accessed 4 May 2023).

8 Marieke Fröhlich and Anna Hauschild, “Feministische Außenpolitik. Hintergründe und Praxis”, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte. Zeitschrift der Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* 73, no. 17 (2023): 34–39.

9 Jenna L. Henneby and Allison J. Petrozziello, “Closing the Gap? Gender and the Global Compacts for Migration and Refugees”, *International Migration* 57, no. 6 (2019): 115–38 (115).

10 United Nations General Assembly, *Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on September 19, 2016, New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants* (New York, NY, 3 October 2016), 6.

11 United Nations (UN), *Global Compact on Refugees* (New York, NY, 2018), 6, 22, <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/5c658aed4.pdf> (accessed 4 May 2023).

12 UNHCR, *Global Refugee Forum Pledge Stock-taking* (Geneva, 2021), 3, <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/6092bcbf4.pdf> (accessed 4 May 2023).

13 Federal Foreign Office (FFO), *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy: Federal Foreign Office Guidelines* (Berlin, 2023), 46, 48, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blueprint/servlet/blob/2585076/4d2d295dad8fb1c41c6271d2c1a41d75/ffp-leitlinien-data.pdf> (accessed 20 September 2023).

14 BMZ, *Feminist Development Policy: For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide* (Berlin, 2023), 10, 25–27, <https://www.bmz.de/resource/blob/153806/bmz-strategy-feminist-development->

der equality or gender mainstreaming in their displacement-related activities, both ministries are already taking into account the fact that, although men and women are displaced in roughly equal proportions,<sup>15</sup> they suffer from different effects. Factors such as gender-based violence throughout the entire forced displacement cycle and restrictions on women's and girls' access to protection play a role here. In practice, the intended improvements for those affected often fall short of what is required.

Overall, the humanitarian and development policy challenges in the area of forced displacement are enormous; in the view of FFP and FDP, feminist, intersectional and post-colonial<sup>16</sup> perspectives need to be taken into account to bring about substantial positive change.<sup>17</sup> In order to achieve this, a number of smaller reforms can help the FFO and BMZ to ensure a more equitable design of forced displacement-related humanitarian aid and development cooperation: collecting disaggregated data, organising decision-making processes in a participatory manner, reducing power asymmetries among staff and improving the measurement of progress and success.

### Collecting disaggregated data

In order for international organisations to develop and implement needs- and evidence-based feminist aid and development programmes for forcibly displaced people, it is essential to break down data to a greater extent. If intersectional considerations are to be taken into account, it is helpful to record social characteristics such as socio-economic status or ethnic minority affiliation in addition to gender.

policy.pdf (reference to situations of forced displacement in the German version replaced by humanitarian settings in the English one).

<sup>15</sup> UNHCR, *Global Trends* (see note 1), 3.

<sup>16</sup> Representatives of the postcolonial school of thought point to the central influence of colonialism and imperialism on the world and the continuity of colonial power relations. In view of their fundamental criticism of both development as a concept and development policy and cooperation as a practice, which goes so far as to fundamentally question both, the claim of postcoloniality formulated by the ministries raises the question of how this contradiction can and should be dealt with.

<sup>17</sup> BMZ, *Feminist Development Policy* (see note 14), 15ff; FFO, *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy* (see note 13), 9f.

### Recording mobile and potentially persecuted people is often a challenge.

Until now, detailed data has rarely been available. This is because it is often difficult to track mobile and potentially persecuted people at all, and the data is often considered to be sensitive. In other cases, data protection capacities are not sufficiently available or the terminology and methodologies differ.<sup>18</sup> As a result, the availability of gender-disaggregated data varies greatly depending on the country context and the capacity of the national authorities.<sup>19</sup> This lack of information not only makes it difficult to gain an overview of the needs that exist in the context of forced displacement, but also to address them in accordance with the requirements of FFP or FDP. The FFO and BMZ should therefore ensure that forcibly displaced people are included in data surveys and panel studies in the host countries, for example by asking questions about their status as well as the reason for and duration of their displacement. At the level of individual households, gender disaggregated data should be collected for each person in order to capture both the situations of each household member and their interdependencies. General, gender-specific disadvantages for women in displacement situations can at least be approximated by the variable "female-headed household".<sup>20</sup>

When gender and displacement status are collected together with other key variables such as age, family structure, etc., and then combined with other existing data sources, the data sets allow for a more nuanced view of specific vulnerabilities than has been the case to date.<sup>21</sup> Organisations collecting data must ensure that both qualitative and quantitative data are always collected, analysed and stored in a context-specific

<sup>18</sup> *Mapping Gender Data Gaps in Human Security* (Washington, D.C.: Data2X, 2020), [https://data2x.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/MappingGenderDataGaps\\_Security.pdf](https://data2x.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/MappingGenderDataGaps_Security.pdf) (accessed 4 May 2023).

<sup>19</sup> According to the UNHCR, data on gender and age was available for 76 per cent of refugees and people in refugee-like situations at the end of 2022; UNHCR, *Global Trends* (see note 1), 17.

<sup>20</sup> Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement, *The Gender Dimensions of Forced Displacement: Findings from New Empirical Analysis* (Copenhagen, December 2021), 10ff., [https://www.jointdatacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Quarterly-Digest\\_-December-2021\\_Final.pdf](https://www.jointdatacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Quarterly-Digest_-December-2021_Final.pdf) (accessed 4 May 2023).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 4f.

manner and in accordance with a “do no harm approach”. Only then can the knowledge gained in this way provide a reliable basis for project planning and ensure effective support in displacement situations.

## Participatory design of decision-making processes

The call by the FFP and FDP for participatory decision-making processes also applies to dealing with situations of forced displacement. For international actors (such as the organisations commissioned by the FFO and BMZ), this means involving refugees, internally displaced persons, and members of host communities as knowledge carriers in the planning and design of projects from the outset and involving them in decisions on the use of funds. The equal representation of women is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for the development of feminist-oriented projects – other groups (that may be subject to multiple forms of discrimination) must also be involved in a context-sensitive manner. Aid and development agencies need to be aware that the decision as to who is involved in planning often depends on which of these groups are well-organised and have access to networks and resources. Wherever possible, they should avoid reproducing power hierarchies.<sup>22</sup>

Local non-governmental organisations, trade unions and development-oriented civil society in transit and host countries should also be involved in the project planning done by international humanitarian and development agencies in displacement situations, especially where governments are unwilling or unable to provide basic services to refugees and internally displaced persons. Their local expertise can often make projects more successful. In addition, local organisations are often better able to reach vulnerable groups such as the forcibly displaced and can contribute to the emergence of social movements that seek (intersectional-feminist) changes in existing power structures.

## Reducing power asymmetries among staff

In the interest of a feminist implementation of humanitarian aid and development cooperation, personnel issues should also be assessed and addressed in

<sup>22</sup> Columba Achilleos-Sarll et al., “The Past, Present, and Future(s) of Feminist Foreign Policy”, *International Studies Review* 25, no. 1 (2023), doi: 10.1093/isr/viac068.

more detail. These are rarely discussed on a broader scale, but their importance should not be underestimated, especially in situations of forced displacement.

The power asymmetry that exists between those affected and the staff of German or German-funded aid and development organisations is particularly striking. Refugees, internally displaced persons as well as destitute members of host communities are highly vulnerable to the abuse of power and exploitation, and they often have no access to protection mechanisms or justice due to their marginalised social status. The scandals involving sexualised violence and the exploitation of displaced people by international staff members of humanitarian organisations<sup>23</sup> show that their protection must be better and more comprehensively facilitated – on the one hand through preventive measures such as effective complaint mechanisms, flat hierarchies and diversity among staff, and on the other hand by offering survivor-centred support.

Power asymmetries also exist between local and expatriate (German/international) staff in humanitarian and development organisations. These can manifest themselves, for example, in massive disparities in salaries, different employment rights and unequal treatment in contingency planning and evacuations. In fragile countries affected by violent conflict and displacement, this type of power asymmetry is particularly relevant – especially when it involves staff with a history of displacement, as they often suffer additional marginalisation.

**The effectiveness of applying FFP or FDP in displacement contexts will have to be measured by whether it actually improves the situation of those affected.**

Without a fundamental cultural change in German humanitarian aid and development cooperation, these power asymmetries cannot be completely eliminated. However, they can at least be mitigated by raising awareness of the problem, offering training in

<sup>23</sup> Jessica Alexander and Hannah Stoddard, “Then and Now: 25 Years of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. A Timeline of Repeated Scandals, Reform Pledges and Impunity”, *The New Humanitarian* (online), 11 February 2021, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2021/2/11/25-years-of-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse> (accessed 19 June 2023).

post-colonial and anti-racist working methods, increasing the diversity of staff and, in practical terms, including local staff in emergency plans and evacuations.

## Improving monitoring and evaluation

The effectiveness of applying FFP or FDP in situations of forced displacement contexts must be measured by whether it actually improves the situation of those affected. To date, the existing instruments of the ministries have primarily been aimed at the promotion of women and girls and have hardly done justice to the intersectional claim.<sup>24</sup>

In order to implement the transformative feminist agenda, the FFO and BMZ must therefore revise their bureaucratic and technical monitoring and evaluation instruments. These fundamentals of performance measurement are not only relevant for evaluations, but also for the planning and management of activities.

Particularly in situations of forced displacement, it is important to take account of discrimination beyond sex and gender, for example on the basis of nationality or ethnicity. In order to ensure that intersectionality is firmly anchored, this revision should therefore draw on comprehensive expertise from a broad social spectrum in partner countries and Germany – including marginalised perspectives such as those of refugees and internally displaced people.

## Outlook

FFP and FDP are transformative in the sense that they aim to challenge and overcome existing unequal and discriminatory power structures. In the area of forced displacement, politics and policy are especially far removed from intersectional-feminist, post-colonial, anti-racist and power-critical demands. This is because German and European asylum and migration legislation is based on the fundamental power asymmetry between (often racialised) people seeking protection and their destination countries, which is partly due to colonialism. Humanitarian aid and development

cooperation – regardless of whether they are feminist or not – can only provide limited relief here. What is needed instead is a feminist *whole-of-government approach* that transcends the departmental boundaries between domestic, foreign and development policies, puts people at the centre, and ensures that protection is given the highest priority – something that cannot be expected given the current political discourse.

In the absence of this, the strategies presented by the FFO and BMZ can only help to shape their main instruments for displacement situations – humanitarian aid and development cooperation – in such a way that they come closer to the demands of FFP and FDP. To achieve this, it is not enough to give a greater voice to women or other marginalised groups, such as refugees and internally displaced persons. Rather, the aid systems themselves need to be fundamentally rethought in a power-critical way and, as has long been demanded, better interlinked than in the past.

<sup>24</sup> OECD-DAC Network on Gender Equality (GenderNet), *Definition and Minimum Recommended Criteria for the DAC Gender Equality Policy Marker* (December 2016), <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/Minimum-recommended-criteria-for-DAC-gender-marker.pdf> (accessed 12 July 2023).



Gerrit Kurtz

# Stabilisation: Rethinking Pragmatic Conflict Management in Fragile Contexts with a Feminist Foreign Policy Lens

Stabilisation in fragile contexts poses a particular challenge for feminist foreign policy (FFP). The declared aim of stabilisation is to make constructive contributions to conflict resolution even in the most difficult situations of violent conflict and terrorist threats. This often means working with and within the existing local power structures in order to achieve short-term and pragmatic improvements in the security situation.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, it is the essence of feminist approaches to foreign and development policy to critically examine patriarchal, neo-colonial and other power structures, and to strive for a transformation of social conditions.

The feminist critique of international efforts towards stabilisation problematises various aspects. Against the backdrop of a post-colonial perspective, it addresses the motives of those external actors who strive for stabilisation in other parts of the world. The rhetorical commitment to peace, democracy and human rights obscures unilaterally defined national interests, such as the containment of irregular migration.<sup>2</sup> There are also questions concerning whose security should be at the forefront of stabilisation projects if they rely on cooperation with patriarchal, exploitative local elites, whose struggle for dominance is responsible for violent conflicts.<sup>3</sup> Gender

roles and the safety concerns of women and other marginalised groups may be overlooked, despite goals to the contrary. Furthermore, feminist activists warn of a militarisation of the humanitarian space by linking the political goals of conflict management too closely with humanitarian support.<sup>4</sup> The state-centric nature of stabilisation approaches is also worthy of discussion from a feminist perspective, as it is often the state that perpetrates violence, for example by deploying abusive security forces instead of protecting women and the civilian population in general.

## The status quo in German stabilisation policy

Since 2017, Germany has been the world's largest donor country in the field of civil conflict transformation.<sup>5</sup> In 2024, the Federal Foreign Office (FFO) had €400 million at its disposal for the three pillars of its integrated peace engagement: crisis prevention, stabi-

1 German Federal Foreign Office (FFO), *Shaping Stabilisation: Foreign and Security Policy Concept for an Integrated Action for Peace* (Berlin, December 2022), <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2586726/4810ccb8aa4d2140817311f68afe74/aussen-und-sicherheitspolitisches-konzept-fuer-ein-integriertes-friedensengagement-data.pdf>.

2 Nina Bernarding et al., *Wie militarisiert ist die deutsche Außenpolitik?* (Berlin: Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, 2021), 18.

3 Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, "The Relationship of Political Settlement Analysis to Peacebuilding from a Feminist Perspective", *Peacebuilding* 4, no. 2 (2016): 151–65.

4 Bernarding et al., *Wie militarisiert ist die deutsche Außenpolitik?* (see note 2), 16f.

5 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC), "Creditor Reporting System", sector "civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution", 2022 (last available year), <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=crs1> (accessed 11 January 2024). The OECD's DAC does not distinguish between crisis prevention, stabilisation and peacebuilding when identifying expenditure. The same applies to the corresponding budget titles of the FFO and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The expenditure mentioned therefore does not relate to a narrow definition of stabilisation only, but is internationally comparable.

lisation and peacebuilding.<sup>6</sup> Other departments, in particular the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), also support projects that serve stabilisation in fragile contexts in a broader sense. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Federal Government's somewhat broader global expenditure on "civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution" totalled US\$960 million (around €875 million) in the last reporting year of 2022.<sup>7</sup>

Only the FFO uses the term "stabilisation" in the German context. It understands it as a contribution to "support political processes to contain violence, strengthen legitimate governance structures and facilitate initial steps towards reconciliation between conflict parties".<sup>8</sup> Stabilisation includes a range of instruments such as strengthening state institutions; security sector reform (SSR); disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes; rule of law; and peace mediation.<sup>9</sup> Important partner countries and regions that the FFO repeatedly mentions are Ukraine, the Lake Chad region and north-eastern Syria. The German government often works together with other donors and international organisations, for example within the framework of the stabilisation facilities of the United Nations Development Programme.

### Gender issues have long played a role in German peace work.

Gender issues have long played a role in German peace work. The National Action Plan for the implementation of the "Women, Peace and Security" agenda is an expression of this.<sup>10</sup> In its guidelines on FFP, the Federal Foreign Office mentions stabilisation in the second guideline: "We systematically include women and marginalised groups in crisis Prevention, stabilisation and peacebuilding measures and take into account gender-specific risks. We want to achieve

progress towards more gender-equitable societies and design our international crisis management to be gender transformative."<sup>11</sup>

Specifically, the FFO primarily mentions projects to expand the rights, resources and representation of women (e.g. the training and deployment of "gender experts" by the Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF)).<sup>12</sup> In its efforts to improve the position of women and marginalised groups, the FFO thus continues to operate within the existing system of conflict resolution without fundamentally questioning its own approaches. However, the impact of experts trained in gender transformation remains limited if there is a lack of political will to embed the resulting viewpoints and perspectives within a more comprehensive strategy.

Although both the FFP guidelines and the stabilisation concept of the FFO contain feminist principles that go beyond the 3Rs (rights, representation and resources), their practical significance is also sometimes limited. One example: The stabilisation concept aims to use "gender-sensitive conflict analyses" to "help identify new approaches, scope for action and actors". However, "conflicting goals" exist, especially where "male-dominated power players" need to be involved. Here, the FFO intends to present its principled position and "systematically weigh up short-term goals (e.g. a ceasefire) with medium- to long-term goals of societal transformation".<sup>13</sup> This statement could suggest that gender justice is a medium- to long-term task that stands in contrast to other stabilisation goals. However, the quoted paragraph also shows that the FFO explicitly acknowledges tensions between the goals of stabilisation and FFP, and that it at least makes an attempt to systematise its approach in critical situations. This is a step forward compared to earlier government documents, in which normative goals were given equal status and trade-offs were simply mentioned in abstract terms without specifying solutions.

In terms of resources made available for gender equality, German expenditure has fluctuated greatly in recent years. In the last reporting year of 2022, 50

6 Bundeshaushalt 2024, Einzelplan 05, Titel 687 34-029. The title was cut by more than 29 per cent compared to 2023.

7 For the various data sources in this area, see Philipp Rotmann et al., *Die 9-Milliarden-Euro-Frage. Was und wie investiert Deutschland in Krisenprävention?* (Berlin: Global Public Policy Institute, December 2021).

8 FFO, *Shaping Stabilisation* (see note 1), 22.

9 Ibid.

10 FFO, *The German Federal Government's Action Plan for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda 2021 to 2024* (Berlin, February 2021).

11 FFO, *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy: Federal Foreign Office Guidelines* (Berlin, 2023), 33.

12 Ibid., 33f.

13 FFO, *Shaping Stabilisation* (see note 1), 27.

per cent of official development assistance funds<sup>14</sup> for civil conflict transformation were used for projects that pursue gender equality as a significant objective (score 1 of the OECD Development Assistance Committee) and 2.8 per cent for those with gender equality as the principal objective (score 2). By 2025, the FFO would like to achieve a funding level of 85 and 8 per cent, respectively, for these categories.<sup>15</sup> Contrary to the corresponding equation of these indicators in the FFO guidelines, they are not congruent with the objectives of a gender-sensitive or gender-transformative design. For example, a project can be aimed at women as the main target group (score 2) without questioning gender relations per se.

### Some power-critical approaches of feminist research can be particularly beneficial for stabilisation projects.

#### Possible contributions of feminist foreign policy

A critically defined FFP can contribute to making stabilisation measures more effective, more resilient and more inclusive than before. It offers points of reference, assumptions, concepts and approaches that are already being discussed among stabilisation experts in order to examine previous practices in more detail and, in some cases, to find new answers. Some power-critical approaches of feminist research can be particularly beneficial for stabilisation projects.

#### FFP can help overcome one-sided liberal peacebuilding

Both in feminist research and in research on stabilisation and peacebuilding, there is widespread criticism of “liberal peace”, that is, the idea that market reforms, a democratic opening and the resolution of armed conflicts are always mutually supportive.<sup>16</sup> The focus on such long-term processes marginalises the

agency of civil society,<sup>17</sup> the political economy of the violence of wars<sup>18</sup> and the mechanisms of exclusion that affect women in particular,<sup>19</sup> to name just a few points of criticism.

The FFP perspective helps to identify structural aspects that lead to the continuation of violence. The one-sidedness of liberal peacebuilding can also be seen in the 3Rs in the context of peace processes: Involving women (representation), expanding their (nominal) rights by changing legislation or funding institutions with a high proportion of women (resources) is important, but it is not enough. Women’s groups might be involved in peace processes despite their concerns not being taken into account. Often-times not even the agreed representation quotas are met. For example, the Juba Peace Agreement of 2020 stipulated a women’s quota of 40 per cent at all political levels in Sudan.<sup>20</sup> This was never realised: The implementation of the peace agreement, on the other hand, strengthened the male-dominated security sector in Sudan and exacerbated the political crisis before the coup.<sup>21</sup>

An intersectional approach that combines feminist and post-colonial perspectives raises the question for whom and what should actually be stabilised. External actors can only successfully pursue stabilisation if they support local efforts by legitimate authorities. The relationship between state institutions and the population is often fractured in fragile situations. State security forces in Nigeria, for example, sealed off villages because they suspected that insurgents were there; this was done instead of protecting the civilian population from looting and forced recruitment by armed groups such as Boko Haram. It is therefore the declared aim of German stabilisation

<sup>14</sup> In Germany, funds that donors report to the OECD as official development assistance include funds from both the FFO and the BMZ.

<sup>15</sup> FFO, *Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy* (see note 11), 80.

<sup>16</sup> Roland Paris, *At War’s End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict* (Cambridge, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Oliver P. Richmond, “The Problem of Peace: Understanding the ‘Liberal Peace’”, *Conflict, Security & Development* 6, no. 3 (2006): 291 – 314.

<sup>18</sup> Meredith Turshen, *Gender and the Political Economy of Conflict in Africa: The Persistence of Violence* (New York, NY, 2016); Mats Berdal and Dominik Zaum, eds., *Political Economy of Statebuilding: Power after Peace* (New York, NY, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> Fionnuala Ní Aoláin et al., *On the Frontline: Gender, War, and the Post-Conflict Process* (Oxford, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> *Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan between the Transitional Government of Sudan and the Parties to Peace Process*, 3 October 2020, article 1.20.

<sup>21</sup> Gerrit Kurtz, *The Spoilers of Darfur: Sudan’s Protracted Political Crisis and the Intensifying Violence in Darfur Are Closely Connected*, SWP Comment 53/2022 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, September 2022), doi: 10.18449/2022C53.

efforts in north-eastern Nigeria to strengthen the legitimacy of state institutions, for example by enabling communities to secure the supply of basic goods and services such as water, food, health and education.<sup>22</sup> The feminist perspective helps to recognise that state institutions can only successfully implement stabilisation efforts if the population accepts them as legitimate.

## Analysis of power and security

Stabilisation projects require a continuous context and conflict analysis that takes account of the causes, actors and dynamics of armed violence. As experts in power-critical analyses, feminists can make decisive contributions. Gender-sensitive conflict analyses<sup>23</sup> can reveal key dynamics that go far beyond the lack of participation of women. Moreover, some gender roles also contribute to violence,<sup>24</sup> for example by making it easier for armed groups to recruit, as the FFO also mentions.<sup>25</sup>

A feminist understanding of security challenges the common assumptions of liberal stabilisation practices. All too often, international actors pursue agreements with (often male-dominated) elites, even if they do not demonstrably curb violence or improve the population's sense of security.<sup>26</sup> "Stability and durability can simply mean that the men with guns continue to run the show and that the 'trains run on time'", writes Ní Aoláin.<sup>27</sup>

Instead of clinging to the next fragile elite deal, a feminist stabilisation policy could measure security using the concrete perceptions of women and other marginalised population groups regarding their daily lives. Surveys of those affected and other methods of regularly recording the perceptions of the local population should become important instruments for stabilisation projects.<sup>28</sup> Only when all people feel safe in

a place can they develop trust in local institutions and refrain from joining armed groups.

## A feminist approach to conflict resolution

FFP offers alternatives to the *Realpolitik* of elite deals and to excessive liberal interventionism as common approaches to conflict management. Such alternatives are based on a "feminist ethic of care", which can be helpful in the search for new approaches to conflict resolution. It stems from "care" because it combines moral action with attentive, patient listening and is open to continually balancing conflicting goals and adapting assumptions – instead of propagating a universalistic justice that is defined by its supposed contrast from presumably backward-looking local ideas.<sup>29</sup> This ethic is feminist because it questions the (authoritarian) "script of patriarchy".<sup>30</sup>

Feminist stabilisation based on such an "ethic of care" does not come from outside to resolve local conflicts, but instead deals with the global, regional and local relationships in which these conflicts arise. It is not just about involving women more in political processes because they would be more peaceful per se, but about questioning the hierarchisation between groups – for example men and women, elites and the population, young and old people – and the modes of action attributed to them in society in general. Feminist stabilisation policy pays particular attention to the local context and accepts that the effectiveness and moral clarity of measures are often fraught with uncertainty.<sup>31</sup>

## Self-reflection and learning processes

Finally, feminist approaches can make an important contribution to monitoring, evaluation and learning processes through empathic self-reflection. These are particularly important in highly volatile stabilisation contexts, which need to be managed closely in order to adapt projects to rapidly changing circumstances. In the absence of a universally applicable stabilisation

22 FFO, *Shaping Stabilisation* (see note 1), 40.

23 Ibid., 27.

24 Cynthia Cockburn, "Gender Relations as Causal in Militarization and War: A Feminist Standpoint", *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12, no. 2 (2010): 139–57.

25 FFO, *Shaping Stabilisation* (see note 1), 27.

26 Sharath Srinivasan, *When Peace Kills Politics: International Intervention and Unending Wars in the Sudans* (London, 2021).

27 Ní Aoláin, "Relationship" (see note 3), 163.

28 See UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *Understanding and Integrating Local Perceptions in Multi-dimensional UN Peacekeeping* (New York, NY: United Nations, 2013).

29 Fiona Robinson, "Feminist Foreign Policy as Ethical Foreign Policy? A Care Ethics Perspective", *Journal of International Political Theory* 17, no. 1 (2021): 20–37 (31).

30 Ibid.; see also Carol Gilligan, *Joining the Resistance* (Cambridge, 2013).

31 See Robinson, "Feminist Foreign Policy" (see note 29), 31f.

strategy, the constant testing and adjustment of measures is crucial.<sup>32</sup>

FFP can help local and international stabilisation actors to reflect on all kinds of power structures as well as on their own roles. International stabilisation actors, for example, bring their own gender norms to fragile contexts and sometimes display an “international fraternity” with local male elites.<sup>33</sup> For example, sometimes there are ambassadors who proudly refer to their relationship with the authoritarian president of their host country during a civil war and hug him at every opportunity. However, diplomats and other stabilisation actors should not confuse their required empathy in political processes with sympathy for warlords. In addition, from the view of FFP, the habitual rhetorical commitment of many stabilisation actors to cooperation with local organisations should also be taken seriously in practice – for example, by involving local grassroots organisations as early as possible in the design of projects.

**FFP can provide a fresh approach, especially in contexts where it goes beyond the promotion of gender equality.**

## Conclusion

FFP helps to make stabilisation better, fairer and more context-sensitive by questioning traditional assumptions in the overall approach, analysis, processes, project design and impact assessment. In particular, it can provide a fresh approach, especially in contexts where it goes beyond the promotion of gender equality. With its FFP guidelines, the FFO still falls short in fully embracing the possibilities of a feminist approach. Feminist analyses reveal the unequal, often conflict-driven power structures that arise due to a lack of gender equality, but also the biased gender roles and mechanisms of exclusion along with other differentiating characteristics.

The further development and implementation of feminist efforts towards stabilisation is not just about normative human rights issues. Instead, the inclusion of feminist perspectives can also contribute to the

pragmatic claim of stabilisation in fragile contexts<sup>34</sup> – when it comes to placing empathy instead of arrogance at the centre of conflict management, for example.

It is in the nature of stabilisation to focus on the status quo because situations are almost impossible to change in the short term and restoring order is the priority. Diplomats also act according to this logic, which is an expression of an intergovernmental system that often finds it difficult to build sustainable partnerships in fragile contexts that extend beyond national governments that are often detached from their populations. Implementing aspects of feminist foreign and development policy that are critical of power is therefore no easy task. However, feminist arguments can encourage ongoing processes of reflection in the direction of stabilisation that is aimed at improving the relationship between the population and the government.

<sup>32</sup> Cedric de Coning, “Adaptive Peacebuilding”, *International Affairs* 94, no. 2 (2018): 301 – 17.

<sup>33</sup> Ní Aoláin, “Relationship” (see note 3), 160.

<sup>34</sup> There are already concrete examples of what feminist foreign policy projects can look like in this area, see Niklas Balbon et al., *Building Peace, the Feminist Foreign Policy Way: Good Practices* (Berlin: Global Public Policy Institute, August 2023).

Judith Vorrath

# Sanctions: Requirements and Starting Points for a Protective Sanctions Policy\*

On 7 March 2023, the Council of the European Union (EU) imposed sanctions on nine individuals and three entities for their responsibility in serious human rights violations, in particular sexual and gender-based violence. This move, taken shortly before International Women's Day, banned officials in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Russia and South Sudan from travelling to the EU under the Union's global human rights regime, which has been in place since 2020. In addition, their assets were frozen, as were the financial resources of one institution each in Iran, Myanmar and Syria.<sup>1</sup> This step, which Germany initiated together with France and the Netherlands, came shortly after the Federal Foreign Office (FFO) presented its guidelines on feminist foreign policy (FFP) – labelled as “feminist foreign policy in action”.<sup>2</sup>

Sanctions can clearly be a means that is applied in the name of FFP; however, there are also reservations about using them as an instrument. If FFP primarily stands for demilitarisation, inclusion and cooperation, “soft” instruments such as mediation should be used primarily.<sup>3</sup> Due to the economic interests underlying sanctions and the negative – for example crimi-

nalising – effects of this coercive instrument, it has been subject to repeated and fundamental criticism, which in some cases goes as far as describing sanctions as “economic warfare”.<sup>4</sup> The problematic side of sanctions from a feminist perspective is particularly evident when they are used by powerful states against weaker ones and harm potentially uninvolved parties, especially the civilian population in the target area.

**Sanctions are potentially transformative and, in their targeted use, can be linked to the concept of human security.**

On the other hand, sanctions are an instrument that lies somewhere between diplomacy and war and can be used for the purposes of promoting peace and/or protecting human rights. Sanctions, such as those imposed by the United Nations (UN), are generally not intended to punish, but rather to bring about a certain change in the target's behaviour, to restrict and/or stigmatise undesirable behaviour, such as the violation of international norms.<sup>5</sup> They are therefore potentially transformative and, in their targeted use, can be linked to the concept of human security, as they can have a preventative effect and hold individuals or organisations accountable for specific behaviours that do not (only) endanger state security. This approach is also reflected in the FFP guidelines of the FFO and the aforementioned decision by the Council of the EU. If sanctions are to be used for applying an inclusive and intersectional

\* I would like to thank Sascha Lohmann, Sonja Schiffers and Claudia Zilla for their very helpful comments and advice.

1 Council of the EU, “Violence against Women and Girls: EU Sanctions Nine Individuals and Three Entities under Its Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime”, press release, 7 March 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/03/07/violence-against-women-and-girls-eu-sanctions-nine-individuals-and-three-entities-under-its-global-human-rights-sanctions-regime/> (accessed 4 May 2023).

2 Tweet @AuswaertigesAmt, 7 March 2023, <https://twitter.com/AuswaertigesAmt/status/1633160477533433880> (accessed 4 May 2023).

3 Claudia Zilla, *Feminist Foreign Policy: Concepts, Core Components and Controversies*, SWP Comment 48/2022 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, August 2022), doi: 10.18449/2022C48.

4 R. T. Naylor, *Economic Warfare: Sanctions, Embargo Busting, and Their Human Cost* (Boston, MA, 1999), 1ff.

5 Thomas J. Biersteker, Marcos Tourinho and Sue E. Eckert, “Thinking about United Nations Targeted Sanctions”, in *Targeted Sanctions: The Impacts and Effectiveness of United Nations Action*, ed. Thomas J. Biersteker, Sue E. Eckert and Marcos Tourinho (Cambridge, 2016), 22. This also generally applies to EU sanctions.

understanding of FFP, they must be weighed up with regard to three aspects: sender, objectives and effects.

### Sender of sanctions: Legitimacy and representation

The first relevant question for assessing sanctions from the perspective of an FFP is who imposes them. In principle, multilateral channels are preferable to unilateral ones, as the involvement of several states gives sanctions a broader scope and potentially a higher degree of legitimacy. For German foreign policy, the UN and the EU are the relevant frameworks for action. Unlike the United States or the United Kingdom, for example, Germany does not generally use this means of coercion unilaterally. Autonomous EU sanctions bind all member states through joint decision-making; non-EU members or other actors have at most indirect and selective influence on the respective decision-making process. Yet, unlike the African Union, for example, which mostly sanctions its own members, the EU's "restrictive measures" – as they are officially called – are aimed at external targets.

In fact, autonomous sanctions are also referred to in EU documents as being subsidiary to UN sanctions.<sup>6</sup> The latter are based on resolutions of the UN Security Council, and thus binding for all UN member states. Although all regions of the world are represented by states on the Security Council, there is a clear imbalance of power due to the dominance of the five permanent members (United States, United Kingdom, France, China and Russia) and their right of veto. However, if an agreement is reached on a UN sanctions regime, the relevant sanctions committees, as subsidiary bodies of the Security Council,<sup>7</sup> work under the principle of consensus. Elected members can therefore also prevent decisions – for example on the designation of certain persons and entities.<sup>8</sup> Of course, this does not change the fact that certain social perspectives and groups are hardly represented among the member states at the table.

6 Clara Portela and Katharina Meissner, "The European Approach to Multilateral Sanctions: Are EU Sanctions 'Replacing' UN Sanctions?" in *Multilateral Sanctions Revisited. Lessons Learned from Margaret Doxey*, ed. Andrea Charron and Clara Portela (Montreal et al., 2022), 81–98 (84).

7 The committees are made up of the same 15 states that are members of the Security Council.

8 The case may then be referred back to the Security Council.

### The UN sanctions system has been made fairer and more transparent overall since the 1990s.

Nonetheless, various reforms have made the UN sanctions system overall fairer and more transparent since the 1990s. Among other things, "panels of experts" have been introduced to support the relevant sanctions committee in monitoring the implementation of measures. Today, almost all UN sanctions regimes include such a panel of experts, which on the one hand ensures that monitoring is as independent and systematic as possible; on the other hand, it is commonly part of the group's mandate to collect and analyse information not only from states, but also from international and regional organisations and non-state actors. This means that the positions and insights of different groups are incorporated into the process, provided the experts can gain access to them.

However, gender aspects were only taken into account relatively late in the UN system. A workshop funded by the Canadian government in Nairobi in 2019 came to the conclusion that the world of sanctions is largely male-dominated.<sup>9</sup> Women were significantly underrepresented in the composition of UN panels, with a share of less than 30 per cent. In addition, they were not only repeatedly subjected to sexual harassment in the groups, their work was also devalued, especially as human rights and gender issues were often considered marginal topics.<sup>10</sup> Concrete steps for a greater consideration of gender-related threats and violence as well as an adequate level of participation by women in UN sanctions policy and its implementation were outlined, but the need for a cultural change was also emphasised. In a "Best Practices Guide for the Chairs and Members of United Nations Sanctions Committees", which was supported by Germany and others, gender competence and balance continue to be identified as areas that urgently require more attention.<sup>11</sup> Apart from further necessary reforms, the question arises as to what happens if the path to UN sanctions is blocked, for example

9 Government of Canada/Compliance & Capacity Skills International LLC (CCSI), *Report of the Consultations on "UN Sanctions and Gender-Related Issues"* (2019), 15, <https://ccsi.global/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Final-Report-Consultations-on-Sanctions-and-Gender.pdf> (accessed 6 March 2023).

10 Ibid., 15f.

11 CCSI, *Best Practices Guide for Chairs and Members of United Nations Sanctions Committees*, Final Version (New York, NY, December 2020), vii.

due to impasses in the UN Security Council. The extent to which autonomous EU sanctions are then a legitimate means, from FFP's perspective, partly depends on the assessment of the second relevant aspect of sanctions: their objective.

## Objectives of sanctions: Between state and human security

In principle, UN sanctions are aimed at maintaining or restoring peace and international security.<sup>12</sup> From an FFP's perspective, it is particularly important to clarify which and whose security is concretely being addressed. In fact, the objectives of sanctions have been increasingly expanded – from their original focus on cross-border aggression to include the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, combating terrorism, the resolution of internal armed conflict, the protection of human rights and governance aspects.

The design of the sanctions regimes has also evolved significantly. In 2008, a criterion was added for the inclusion of individuals on the sanctions list concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo: It refers to “the targeting of children or women in situations of armed conflict, including killing and maiming, sexual violence, abduction and forced displacement”.<sup>13</sup> Today, there are similar listing criteria in eight<sup>14</sup> – and thus the majority of – conflict-related UN sanctions regimes, most of which focus on the planning, management and implementation of sexual and gender-based violence in the context of armed conflict.<sup>15</sup> This has direct consequences for the

monitoring process, as the panels report on this type of violence accordingly. Together with the UN Secretary-General's reports on conflict-related sexual violence that were first published in 2012<sup>16</sup> and the work of the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, this has improved the information base and raised awareness. But there are also other criteria of today's sanctions regimes that reflect an expanded understanding of peace and security. In conflict-related regimes, for example, human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law, the obstruction of humanitarian aid, or the recruitment and exploitation of children can be sanctioned.

Yet, a closer look reveals that attempts to move towards a broader understanding of security remain controversial in the UN Security Council. In fact, more than ten years ago, a split in the body had already become visible on issues such as women, peace and security as well as the protection of civilians<sup>17</sup> – and this fissure has clearly deepened since then. Thus, the aforementioned criteria are rarely and inconsistently applied. By the end of March 2021, for example, only 28 out of the 720 listings of 9 sanctions regimes referred to sexualised and gender-based violence or human trafficking.<sup>18</sup> Some members of the Security Council, particularly China and Russia, generally insist on narrow interpretations of threats to peace and security. Such reservations tend to be combined with a fundamental scepticism towards sanctions, which are seen as interference in internal affairs and – particularly by some elected members of the Security Council – as an expression of Western dominance. In addition, there are conflicting objectives and bureaucratic obstacles in the UN sanctions system.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See article 39 of the UN Charter: <https://legal.un.org/repository/art39.shtml> (accessed 12 May 2023).

<sup>13</sup> UN Security Council, *Resolution 1807 (2008)*, 31 March 2008, para. 13(e), <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n08/288/63/pdf/n0828863.pdf?token=tAXyW4cBljWf8wmZ&fe=true> (accessed 3 May 2023).

<sup>14</sup> As of mid-2023: the Mali sanctions regime of the UN was not extended afterwards (31 August 2023).

<sup>15</sup> Conflict-related sexual violence refers to “rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, trafficking in persons when committed in situations of conflict for the purpose of sexual violence/exploitation and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict”. See “Our Mandate”, *Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict*,

<https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/our-work/our-mandate/> (accessed 14 May 2023).

<sup>16</sup> See the most recent edition: Report of the UN Secretary-General, *Conflict-related Sexual Violence, S/2023/413*, 6 July 2023, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/SG-REPORT-2023SPREAD-1.pdf> (accessed 28 March 2024).

<sup>17</sup> Security Council Report, *Women, Peace and Security: Sexual Violence in Conflict and Sanctions*, Cross-cutting report, no. 2/2013, 10 April 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Loraine Rickard-Martin, “United Nations Sanctions: Through a Gender Lens”, in *Multilateral Sanctions Revisited*, ed. Charron and Portela (see note 6), 163–76 (169).

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed discussion of the reasons, see Sophie Huvé, *The Use of UN Sanctions to Address Conflict-Related Sexual Violence* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2018), 14ff.



At the EU level there is a greater level of – albeit not unlimited – agreement when it comes to promoting or defending democracy, the rule of law and human rights by using sanctions. In principle, the objectives of EU sanctions<sup>20</sup> are similarly set and distributed to those of UN sanctions, albeit with a stronger emphasis on governance and conflict resolution.<sup>21</sup> The country-specific regimes and the global human rights regime in particular offer starting points for an FFP. Unlike the regime on cyberattacks, for example, where the focus is primarily on protecting the EU, its member states and its citizens, such sanctions are intended to contribute towards improving human security in other world regions.

**It is particularly important that EU sanctions be part of a political process that is inclusive and clearly focused on specific objectives.**

As already mentioned, the process of imposing and/or implementing restrictive measures ultimately is in the hands of the EU member states. Therefore, different motives come into play when decisions are taken, which can lead to selective application, among other things. It is therefore particularly important that EU sanctions be part of a political process that is inclusive in various respects and clearly focused on specific objectives. Furthermore, the impact of sanctions must be considered if they are to be used as an instrument of FFP.

### Effect of sanctions: More harm than good?

The negative consequences that comprehensive economic sanctions, such as those against Iraq and Haiti in the 1990s, have had for civilian populations – especially women and children – have given rise to widespread criticism.<sup>22</sup> In fact, there is clear evidence that the UN sanctions against Iraq, for example, hit women and girls especially hard, partly because the task of ensuring the survival of their families fell

<sup>20</sup> In addition to autonomous EU sanctions, this includes those that implement UN sanctions resolutions.

<sup>21</sup> Portela and Meissner, “European Approach” (see note 6), 89f.

<sup>22</sup> Margaret Doxey, “Reflections on the Sanctions Decade and Beyond”, *International Journal* 64, no. 2 (2009): 539–49 (543).

predominantly on them.<sup>23</sup> The reforms towards more targeted sanctions ultimately have led to most UN sanctions regimes today containing a combination of arms embargoes, travel bans and freezing of assets, sometimes supplemented by further sanctions such as export or import bans on certain goods. In some contexts, the latter have been applied so broadly that they were or are in fact comprehensive, for example in the case of North Korea.<sup>24</sup>

Accordingly, in addition to diplomatic sanctions, targeted financial sanctions against individuals and institutions, such as the freezing of assets, appear to be preferable from the point of view of FFP.<sup>25</sup> However, these also have problematic side effects if the financial sector and humanitarian organisations restrict their activities in relation to certain countries or actors – for fear of violating sanctions or incurring excessive compliance costs. As a result, some countries are almost completely cut off from the global financial system, which hinders poverty reduction and economic growth. In turn, vulnerable population groups such as women, children, the elderly and refugees suffer the most.<sup>26</sup>

Against this backdrop, the UN Security Council issued a standing humanitarian exemption for financial sanctions in December 2022.<sup>27</sup> An ongoing multi-stakeholder process aims to minimise the overall negative humanitarian consequences of sanctions, for

<sup>23</sup> Lori Buck, Nicole Gallant and Kim Richard Nossal, “Sanctions as a Gendered Instrument of Statecraft: The Case of Iraq”, *Review of International Studies* 24 (1998): 69–84 (83).

<sup>24</sup> Korea Peace Now, *The Human Costs and Gendered Impact of Sanctions on North Korea* (October 2019), <https://koreapeacenow.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/human-costs-and-gendered-impact-of-sanctions-on-north-korea.pdf> (accessed 3 March 2023).

<sup>25</sup> A. Cooper Drury and Dursun Peksen, “Women and Economic Statecraft: The Negative Impact International Economic Sanctions Visit on Women”, *European Journal of International Relations* 20, no. 2 (2014): 463–90.

<sup>26</sup> Erica Moret, “Time to Act: Harmonizing Global Initiatives and Technology-based Innovations Addressing De-risking at the Interfacing Sanctions-counterterrorism-humanitarian Nexus”, in *International Sanctions: Improving Implementation through Better Interface Management*, ed. Sascha Lohmann and Judith Vorrath, SWP Working Paper, International Security Division, 1/2021 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, August 2021), 74–82 (76).

<sup>27</sup> UN Security Council, *Resolution 2664 (2022)*, S/RES/2664 (2022), 9 December 2022, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/736/72/PDF/N2273672.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed 12 February 2023).

example through a “*code of conduct*”.<sup>28</sup> When it comes to sanctions outside the UN system, however, the debate has become charged at times. In the area of human rights, for example, the work of the “Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights” in affected countries<sup>29</sup> has been met with criticism. For example, there are calls from Iranian civil society to hold authoritarian governments accountable for human rights violations.<sup>30</sup>

**Ultimately, sanctions serving as an instrument of FFP must be assessed in light of their benefits for objectives such as human rights protection.**

Ultimately, sanctions serving as an instrument of FFP must be assessed in light of their benefits for objectives such as human rights protection, as it can never be completely ruled out that they will have effects beyond the target persons and their immediate environment. The exact effectiveness of measures is difficult to assess – especially as the purposes of sanctions are diverse and cannot be reduced to changing the behaviour of target persons or groups. The focus therefore has to primarily be on the output and the (potential) outcome of measures. In order to achieve tangible effects beyond signalling,<sup>31</sup> sanctions must be implemented comprehensively.<sup>32</sup> Further efforts to improve their implementation by the member states – of both the UN and the EU – particularly in the case of targeted sanctions, should be coupled with measures that help to assess and contain the negative consequences for societies in the respective

target areas. Approaches such as systematic exchanges between the senders of sanctions and the implementing states with the private sector can be used in the interests of both concerns.

## Conclusion

The benchmark for an FFP should be a protective sanctions policy aimed at promoting peace and improving human security, especially for marginalised groups. Of course, there can be conflicts between different foreign policy objectives. In view of increasing controversy concerning human rights issues and “gender policy” in international bodies, as well as over the use of unilateral sanctions in particular, such an approach will certainly meet resistance. This makes it all the more important to have criteria that can be used in individual cases to assess whether sanctions make sense, where German FFP can make a contribution, but also how far-reaching these measures should be and how quickly they should be adopted in order to have a possible preventive effect. In general, it is important to work towards making the processes of the EU and UN sanctions systems fairer, more transparent and more inclusive. For the sanctions to be credible, achieve concrete goals and have more balanced effects from the point of view of an FFP, it is also important to include other perspectives in these processes, for example from civil society in the target regions and countries where sanctions are being applied. They should be used flexibly to support the overarching political objectives and be consistently linked with other, “soft” instruments. Moreover, seeking dialogues with partner countries that unilaterally impose far-reaching sanctions – in particular the United States and the United Kingdom – is essential in order to address the undesirable consequences of sanctions as well as possible approaches in line with an FFP.

28 “Advancing Humanitarianism through Sanctions Refinement (AHSR)”, <https://ahsrproject.org> (accessed 14 May 2023).

29 “Unilateral Sanctions Particularly Harmful to Women, Children, Other Vulnerable Groups”, *UN News*, 8 December 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/12/1107492> (accessed 4 May 2023).

30 Golnaz Esfandiari, “Visit to Iran by Controversial UN Rapporteur Provokes Concerns”, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (online), 13 May 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/airan-un-rapporteur-propaganda/31848567.html> (accessed 25 July 2023).

31 This can be very important in itself, for example to deter (further) breaches of rules.

32 Sascha Lohmann and Judith Vorrath, “Introduction: Interface Challenges – Identifying and Addressing Pitfalls for Implementation”, in *International Sanctions*, ed. idem (see note 26), 3–12 (5).

# Annex

## Abbreviations

3R	Rights, Representation, Resources	TÜİK	Turkish Statistical Institute (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu)
AfT	Aid for Trade	UN	United Nations
AI	Artificial Intelligence	UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
BDS	Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions	WPS	Women, Peace and Security
BMAS	Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales)	WTO	World Trade Organization
BMDV	Federal Ministry for Digital and Transport (Bundesministerium für Digitales und Verkehr)	YÖK	Turkish Higher Education Council (Yükseköğretim Kurulu)
BMI	Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat)		
BMJ	Federal Ministry of Justice (Bundesministerium der Justiz)		
BMVg	Federal Ministry of Defence (Bundesministerium der Verteidigung)		
BMWK	Federal Ministry of Economics and Climate Protection (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Klimaschutz)		
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung)		
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women		
DAC	Development Assistance Committee		
DAS	Digital Services Act (EU)		
EaP	Eastern Partnership		
EU	European Union		
FDP	Feminist Development Policy		
FFO	Federal Foreign Office		
FFP	Feminist Foreign Policy		
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees		
GDC	Global Digital Compact		
GIZ	German Society for International Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit)		
GSP/GSP+	Generalized System of Preferences		
GTGA	Global Trade and Gender Arrangement		
ICRW	International Center for Research on Women		
ILO	International Labour Organization		
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans- and intersex, queer and people of other orientations		
NAP	National Action Plan		
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization		
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation		
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development		
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe		
PA	Palestinian Authority		
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands)		

## The Authors

### **Dr Hürcan Aslı Aksoy**

Head of the Center for Applied Turkey Studies (CATS) at SWP

### **Dr Muriel Asseburg**

Senior Fellow in the Africa and Middle East Research Division

### **Nadine Biehler**

Associate in the Global Issues Research Group

### **Dr Sabine Fischer**

Senior Fellow in the Eastern Europe and Eurasia Research Division

### **Nadine Knapp**

Associate in the Global Issues Research Division

### **Dr Anne Koch**

Associate in the Global Issues Research Division

### **Dr Gerrit Kurtz**

Associate in the Africa and Middle East Research Division

### **Dr Amrei Meier**

Associate in the Global Issues Research Division

### **Pauline Marie Reineke**

Former Research Assistant to the Director

### **Dr agr. Bettina Rudloff**

Senior Associate in the EU/Europe Research Division

### **Prof. Dr Dr h. c. Peter-Tobias Stoll**

University of Göttingen, Visiting Fellow in the Global Issues Research Division

### **Martha Stolze**

Research Associate in the research group “Platform Algorithms and Digital Propaganda” at the Weizenbaum Institute, Berlin

### **Dr Judith Vorrath**

Senior Associate in the Security Policy Research Division

### **Dr Azadeh Zamirirad**

Deputy Head of the Africa and Middle East Research Division

### **Dr Claudia Zilla**

Senior Fellow in The Americas Research Division

