Moving Commitments to Action:
Gender Data as a Cornerstone of Feminist Foreign Policy

In 2014, Sweden announced the world's first feminist foreign policy (FFP). A decade later, international momentum around FFP continues to grow—though not without political hurdles and challenges in implementation. As of June 2024, fifteen additional countries from across Europe, Africa, and the Americas have either launched or committed to adopt FFPs, including eleven in just the past three years. This period has also seen a proliferation of research and analysis regarding the state of FFP and the various policies adopted to date. Yet, the topic of gender data remains largely absent from the discourse on FFP, and from many of the policies currently in place. This inattention to gender data limits the ability of governments and other stakeholders to understand the impact of FFPs, accurately measure progress, ensure accountability, and make informed decisions.

Gender data is a core part of a feminist approach to foreign policy, and essential for the implementation of inclusive and effective FFPs. The collection, analysis, and use of gender data as part of FFP frameworks can help governments to identify and respond to the inequalities faced by women, girls, and gender-diverse people, and enable critical monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL). In order to be truly feminist, governments must go beyond the gender disaggregation and analysis of data for FFP, and examine the power dynamics embedded within data systems, processes, and practices. They must also ensure that gender data is used to reduce inequalities and inform better foreign policy programs, investments, and decision making.

WHAT IS GENDER DATA FOR FFP?

Gender data is data that captures information on the different lived experiences of women, men, and gender-diverse people. It includes data that is disaggregated by sex or gender; data that pertains to women, girls, and gender-diverse people exclusively or primarily; and data that reflects gender issues, including roles, relations, and inequalities. It can be both quantitative and qualitative and come from a variety of sources (e.g., household surveys, national censuses, administrative records, research studies, big data sources, citizen-generated data, private sector data, etc.).

In the FFP context, the collection and analysis of gender data can help governments to:

- Identify the inequalities experienced by women, girls, and gender-diverse people;

- Monitor and evaluate the impact of foreign policy programs and investments;

- Report progress and maintain accountability, especially to those most impacted by FFPs;

- Develop targeted foreign policy programs and investments; and

- Enable evidence-based decision making.

In this sense, gender data is relevant for tracking both the *external* work of agencies responsible for implementing FFPs (e.g., the gender impact of foreign policy programs and investments), as well as their *internal* policies and practices (e.g., gender representation and leadership within the foreign service). This includes the collection and analysis of gender data across the full range of priority areas that FFPs may focus on, such as international development, diplomacy, security, peace, trade, migration, climate justice, and more.

GENDER DATA IS MISSING FROM FFP COMMITMENTS

Current feminist foreign policies and commitments largely ignore and exclude gender data. Frequently, information on the type of data that governments intended to collect as part of their FFPs is either vague or unavailable entirely.[1] In several cases, the only type of gender data or indicator listed within FFPs is around official development assistance (ODA) performance and spending targets for gender equality activities.[2] For example, this includes the amount/share of ODA spent on projects with gender equality as a principle or significant objective, or the amount/share of ODA directly supporting women's rights organizations and institutions. While laudable, ODA for gender equality is an extremely narrow and imperfect indicator for measuring the success of a country's FFP.[3]

Where data collection plans are included, most FFPs fall short of developing strong MEAL frameworks to track and report progress. They often lack clearly identified objectives and indicators, responsible agencies and timelines for reporting, and mandates to publicly report progress.[4,5,6] Moreover, under existing data collection plans, progress is often captured by counting the number of women a foreign policy project or investment has reached, rather than by impact, such as the extent to which women, girls, and gender-diverse people have benefited. Information about the systems, processes, and practices that countries use to collect data for FFPs, and whether they adhere to feminist principles, is virtually non-existent.

> Gender data is relevant for guiding and tracking both the external work of agencies responsible for implementing FFPs, as well as their internal policies and practices. But information about the systems, processes, and practices that countries use to collect data for FFPs—and whether they adhere to feminist principles—is virtually non-existent.

1 Thompson, L., Ahmed, S. & T. Khokhar. (2021). Defining Feminist Foreign Policy: A 2021 Update. ICRW. https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/FFP-2021Update_v4.pdf

2 Thompson, L., Ahmed, S., Silva, B. & J. Montilla. (2023). Defining Feminist Foreign Policy: The 2023 Edition. Feminist Foreign Policy Collaborative. https://www.ffpcollaborative.org/defining-ffp-2023-edition

3 Farley, A., Smyth, F., Buschmann, M. & H. Malinga Apila. (2024). Opinion: Gender Equality Funding Data is a Mess. How do we Fix it? Devex. March 8. https://www.devex.com/news/opinion-gender-equality-funding-data-is-a-mess-how-do-we-fix-it-107187

4 Thompson, L. & R. Clement. (2019). Defining Feminist Foreign Policy. ICRW. https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/

ICRW_DefiningFeministForeignPolicy_Brief_Revised_v5_WebReady.pdf

5 Papagioti, F. (2023). Feminist Foreign Policy Index: A Quantitative Evaluation of Feminist Commitments. ICRW. https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/FFP-Index.pdf

6 IWDA. (2020). Comparative Analysis of Feminist Foreign Policies. https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/Comparative-analysis-of-feminist-foreign-policies.pdf

Spain Leads the Way in Gender Data for FFP

In 2021, the Government of Spain published its *Guide to Feminist Foreign Policy* (the Guide), becoming the sixth country in the world to adopt an FFP. The Guide identifies the principles and instruments through which Spain's FFP will be executed, as well as the elements and resources necessary for effective governance, implementation, and monitoring. In 2023, to further support the articulation and implementation of the Guide, Spain published its inaugural *Action Plan for a Feminist Foreign Policy 2023-2024* (the Action Plan).

Spain's Action Plan stands out for its ambitious approach to gender data for FFP. It outlines a robust and comprehensive MEAL Framework, which links core FFP objectives to specific process and outcome indicators, responsible agencies, and reporting timelines. For example:

▪ **Objective 1: A Feminist Foreign Policy Agenda:** includes indicators relevant to Spain's promotion of gender equality in the European Union and in bilateral and multilateral forums. For example, the "Number and annual percentage of scheduled journeys and visits, consultations, political dialogues, negotiations of agreements, and political declarations that are sponsored by Spain (or in which Spain participates) that include gender issues and/or dialogue with feminist movements and women's organisations." Under this objective, Spain also commits to "a progressive increase to 15% of bilateral ODA to projects that support gender equality as a principal objective."

▪ **Objective 2: Promoting Equality in the Foreign Service:** includes indicators relevant to women's entry and retention in diplomatic careers, support for more safe and equitable workplaces, and awareness raising efforts around FFP. For example, the "Number and percentage of women in leadership positions within the Foreign Service" and the "Number and percentage of completed gender training courses, by subject area."

▪ **Objective 3: Coordination and Harmonization of Actors:** includes indicators relevant to strengthening coherence and unity among the parties involved in implementing Spain's FFP. For example, the "Number and percentage of Advisory Group recommendations adopted/ incorporated to improve FFP application effectiveness" and the "Number of knowledge products/ events supporting FFP implementation."

▪ **Objective 4: Accountability:** commits to quantitative and qualitative monitoring of the FFP through a matrix of indicators, reports submitted to multilateral entities like the United Nations and OECD Development Assistance Committee, independent evaluations of plans, programs, and strategies, and strengthened data collection processes—all to feed into the development of an Annual Monitoring Report that will be presented to Parliament.

Throughout the Guide and Action Plan there are a handful of references to the collection of disaggregated data and to feminist principles of gender transformation, inclusion, and intersectionality. It is hoped that Spain will continue to elaborate and implement these principles as part of its approach to gender data within future Action Plans.[7] The inclusion of gender data tracking the impact of Spain's foreign policy programs and investments could also be strengthened, especially with respect to the women, girls, and gender-diverse people most affected.

Although there is still room for improvement, Spain's FFP Guide and Action Plan demonstrate an ambitious approach to gender data for FFP, serving as a helpful starting point and a blueprint for other countries. Its leadership in this area should inspire other governments to give more urgent attention and priority to gender data within their FFP policies and frameworks.

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7 Notably, outside of the Action Plan, the Government of Spain also supported civil society organizations to develop an evaluation tool to assess the extent to which a state is integrating (or not) a feminist and intersectional approach in its FFP.

GENDER DATA IS CRITICAL FOR THE SUCCESS OF ANY FFP

The absence of gender data in FFP policies and frameworks leaves governments unable to understand the impacts of these policies, accurately measure progress, ensure accountability, or make well-informed decisions regarding foreign policy programs and investments. This undermines both the effectiveness and credibility of FFPs.

Beyond the inclusion of gender data, a feminist approach to foreign policy necessitates that the collection, analysis, and use of gender data is also guided by feminist principles. Building on the concept of _Data Feminism_,[8] principles of gender data for FFP can be characterized as inclusive, participatory, multiply disaggregated, decolonial, accountable, reflexive, and action oriented. They emphasize the importance of going beyond gender disaggregation and analysis to examine the **power dynamics** embedded within data systems, processes, and practices, and to ultimately ensure that data is used to reduce inequalities and inform better foreign policy programs, investments, and decision making.

PRINCIPLES OF GENDER DATA FOR FFP	
Inclusive	Start from the standpoints and lived experiences of women, girls, and gender-diverse people. Adopt data collection processes that recognize and represent diverse gender identities, moving away from binary approaches to gender disaggregation and analysis.
Participatory	Meaningfully engage women, girls, and gender-diverse people in decision-making and processes for collecting data about their own lives, experiences, and communities.
Multiply Disaggregated	Ensure that data is adequately disaggregated by gender and other relevant characteristics (e.g., age, race, disability, sexual orientation, migration status, indigeneity, etc.) to enable intersectional analysis of identities and inequalities.
Decolonial	Commit to non-extractive data collection processes that reject colonial ideas about who owns knowledge. Promote access to and ownership of data by those who participated in its collection.
Accountable	Adhere to the principle of "do no harm." Collect data responsibly by maintaining ethical guidelines around participant safety, informed consent, and confidentiality, and by implementing robust data security measures.
Reflexive	Examine the power dynamics embedded within data systems, processes, and practices. Identify where improvements could be made to ensure more equitable and just data collection practices.
Action Oriented	Prioritize the publication and use of data in ways that enable more effective, tailored policies and programming, ultimately benefiting the women, girls, and gender-diverse people most impacted by FFPs.

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7 D'Ignazio, C. & L.F. Klein. (2020). Data Feminism. The MIT Press. https://data-feminism.mitpress.mit.edu/

To be fully transformative, these principles need to be applied consistently across all of the policies and practices that influence how governments collect, analyze, and use gender data for FFP. They are not a means to an end, but rather, they focus on the systems, processes, and practices for producing gender data as much as the outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS

In a sea of urgent crises including climate change, conflicts, and rising economic inequality, governments must balance competing resource demands. They may also face difficulties implementing gender data collection, analysis, and use as part of FFP, including those related to technical capacity and institutional coordination. Yet now more than ever, gender data is needed to monitor the full scale of challenges being faced by women, girls, and gender-diverse people around the world.

> Principles of gender data for FFP emphasize the importance of going beyond gender disaggregation and analysis to examine the power dynamics embedded within data systems, processes, and practices, and to ultimately ensure that data is used to reduce inequalities and inform better foreign policy programs, investments, and decision making.

There is no singular approach to integrating gender data within FFP policies and frameworks, and governments should explore different strategies that align with their specific context, priorities, technical capacity, and resource availability. However, we call on governments—particularly the foreign ministries developing and implementing FFPs—to be ambitious and adopt the following recommendations to help realize their feminist commitments.

- **Push for the inclusion of gender data as part of national FFP policies and commitments.** Develop strong MEAL frameworks, including clearly identified objectives and indicators, responsible agencies and timelines for reporting, and mandates to publicly report progress.

- **Ensure efforts to integrate gender data within FFP policies and commitments are developed through meaningful consultation and engagement.** Key stakeholders should include feminist activists, academics, and civil society partners, particularly those who will be most impacted by FFPs.

- **Outline and adopt feminist principles for the collection, analysis, and use of gender data.** Go beyond gender disaggregation and analysis to also examine the power dynamics embedded within data systems, processes, and practices.

- **Put in place financing for FFP gender data collection, capacity building, and use.** Ensure this financing is sustainable and well-integrated within FFP policies and commitments.

- **Champion the importance of gender data for FFP in international and multilateral forums and convenings.** This can include the G7, G20, UNGA, CSW, and OECD DAC, as well as designated FFP spaces and convenings.