

Study on Feminist Foreign Policy

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Summary

In recent years more and more countries have followed in the footsteps of Sweden and adopted a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP). They have done so in response to a growing number of academic studies that draw a direct connection between gender equality, economic prosperity and national security.

The Netherlands, which is known worldwide for its efforts in the areas of women's rights and gender equality, has yet to adopt an FFP. This raises the question of whether this might be a good choice for the Netherlands, following on from countries like Sweden, Canada, Spain, France and Mexico. In response to parliamentary questions, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs commissioned this study on the possibilities and opportunities concerning an FFP for the Netherlands based on other countries' experiences and the current Dutch policy context.

The study indicates that an FFP would have significant added value for Dutch foreign policy and for the Netherlands domestically. Experience shows that FFPs can **greatly boost efforts to advance gender equality** and **make gender mainstreaming more systematic**. This is thanks, in part, to the **political weight** of such policy and scope for **a clear, shared, inclusive narrative**.

In the Dutch context, an FFP would offer certain specific opportunities. The Netherlands has already made notable headway in its external gender policy and in the area of diversity and inclusion within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Many of the institutional changes implemented by countries with an FFP in support of this policy are already familiar to the Netherlands. The Netherlands can also build on its strong international record on human rights. A number of the outcomes that countries have attributed to their FFP – for example, more focus on issues such as international corporate social responsibility (ICSR), violence against women and girls relating to the arms trade, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) – are outcomes the Netherlands is already in the process of working towards. These efforts are also valued abroad and help enhance the Netherlands' influence. In this regard, **an FFP would be a logical next step**.

At the same time, there are significant steps the Netherlands could take in the years ahead that would benefit its **effectiveness, authority and reputation** when it comes to gender equality. According to interviews, a recent evaluation by the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) on gender mainstreaming, and other policy documents, it appears that more still needs to be done to **make gender mainstreaming a structural component of all foreign policy**. There is often still a gap between policy and practice; there is not always a sense of urgency, and there is insufficient investment of the necessary time, money and knowledge. Nor are the necessary accountability mechanisms in place. Furthermore, a broader understanding of **gender, intersectionality and power relations** would benefit the quality and effectiveness of the Netherlands' work. The experiences and tips of countries with an FFP tie in perfectly with the follow-up steps and areas for improvement suggested by the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department. A focus on **policy coherence** is also important in the Netherlands. What is more, an FFP could prevent the Netherlands from falling behind other countries.

The experiences of countries with such a policy show that FFPs also benefit **internal work on diversity and inclusion**, drawing greater attention to intersectionality. In addition, FFPs increase the sense of political urgency with regard to **national policy and gender mainstreaming**. Considering the challenges that different ministries have encountered in pursuing more gender-sensitive policy, it is essential to adopt an intersectional, government-wide approach and apply gender assessments in a

systematic way. There is now **public and international momentum**, and an FFP would offer a perfect opportunity to address these issues.

The experiences of countries with an FFP show that **political leadership and ownership** are essential for the development of an FFP agenda. Here too there is an opportunity for the Netherlands, where, in comparison with other countries, political urgency regarding these topics is sometimes lacking. By politically committing to an FFP and developing such policy together with senior civil servants, civil society and other stakeholders, the Netherlands can create a shared narrative and generate broad support. This conversation is important for eliminating potential concerns and creating transparency. It will provide an essential boost to gender mainstreaming and intersectionality in policy, diplomacy and programming, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the Netherlands' foreign policy.

Adopting an FFP could be a strategic move from an international perspective too. Doing so would allow the Netherlands to uphold its reputation as a **leader** in the areas of gender equality and human rights and deliver politically on its support for women's rights organisations. It would help the Netherlands to continue being seen among the growing number of countries with an FFP and to avoid missing the opportunity to be involved in international initiatives and alliances. This is important for both the Netherlands and the wider world, considering the current pushback on issues such as women's rights and gender equality, and the importance of international cooperation.

The experiences of countries with an FFP show that concern that the terminology associated with the policy could have a polarising effect is not entirely well-founded. The term 'feminism' was already more well-accepted in a number of countries, and for some it was at the core of their overall government plans. It should be emphasised, however, that a **clear definition and vision** are important for internal and external support and for communication purposes. An FFP must also be more than just branding; it must provide insight into how focusing on gender equality and power relations can lead to different policy choices.

If the Netherlands were to adopt an FFP, much of the policy's ultimate added value would depend on the specific choices made. Important factors in this regard include how exactly the process is set up, which policy areas it embraces and the extent to which it is optional. The experiences of other countries with an FFP and those of the Netherlands itself (presented below) offer a good sense of what could work for the Netherlands.

Recommendations

Based on the present study, an FFP appears to be a logical option for the Netherlands, provided there is sufficient political support for it to be incorporated into policy and put in practice. If the Netherlands were to decide to develop an FFP, the experiences of countries that have already adopted such a policy and the Netherlands' own experiences with gender mainstreaming and policy coherence would offer important lessons. Based on this study, a series of recommendations has been presented on how to establish an effective FFP.

The primary recommendation is to provide **clarity** from the outset about what an FFP involves and what the term 'feminist' implies in this context. A clear vision, well-defined principles, a long-term strategy and an inclusive process also contribute to a **common narrative** and mutual understanding. The remaining recommendations can be separated into two categories: (1) leadership, ownership and public support; and (2) clarity, structure and practical support.

Leadership, ownership and public support

1. **Commitment at political level** is crucial for generating support and for the steps that must be taken. Political leadership is relevant to all steps of the policy process and all topics that require ongoing attention.

2. Here too, providing clarity, involving people in the process and finding the right gender champions among senior civil servants can increase support, leadership and ownership. The experiences of other countries show that the formation of a new government is an excellent opportunity to achieve this, and that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs can play an active role by creating **international momentum** and **highlighting the opportunities** for other ministries.
3. An **FFP that applies to all foreign policy**, including that of other ministries, stands to provide the greatest added value. This requires greater insight into current gender-related efforts in the various policy areas and a greater emphasis on policy coherence, coordination and the use of instruments such as gender impact assessments as part of the Integrated Assessment Framework. If necessary, it is also possible to refrain from immediately publishing the FFP in regard to all policy areas, and instead doing so in phases, based on a strategy developed together with the various ministries.
4. A **participatory FFP-development process** that includes both civil servants (see, for example, Sweden) and various representatives of civil society (see, for example, Canada) reflects the spirit of feminism and feminist foreign policy and creates ownership. This takes time and human resources but leads to more inclusive, broadly supported, effective policy.
5. An FFP presents an excellent opportunity to start a conversation on gender and women's rights in foreign policy and to increase **awareness and support** by involving the public – including men and boys – in the shared narrative, inviting their participation and giving a face to feminism. In doing so it is important to pay attention to intersectionality, anti-racism and decolonisation within the context of an FFP because these topics are socially relevant and there is international momentum behind them. As Canada and Sweden have shown, courage and leadership on the part of the government can raise awareness and advance feminist themes.

Clarity, structure and practical support

6. It is recommended to have a **guide** such as Spain's FFP or Sweden's **handbook** containing important information, including the **policy's basic principles, working methods and topic areas. Specific examples** of the implications of an FFP for various policy areas would also be useful, both for various directorates-general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and for the work of other ministries, for example (provided that the FFP applies to all foreign policy).
7. **Responsibility for the implementation of the FFP** should lie with the Secretary-General (SG) or the directorates-general (DGs) of the relevant ministries. Make each individual civil servant responsible for their own part and avoid a non-committal approach ('passing the buck').
8. Stimulate people's own ability to learn about what an FFP entails and to incorporate this into their own work. Ensure budget and practical support through gender expertise and training by policy area and, where relevant, use gender analysis with an intersectional lens (see, for example, Canada's government-wide Gender-based Analysis Plus).
9. Pay specific attention to **gender-transformative approaches, intersectionality and power issues**, which are at the heart of FFPs. Include this in gender analyses, monitoring and evaluation efforts and studies, and further scale up ongoing conversations about **North-South relations** within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
10. **Manage on the basis of results**, for example by using an action plan which outlines expected results and relevant indicators that can be updated annually and by making these action plans the focus of annual plans and policy plans. For more on this, see the lessons and recommendations on transformative gender mainstreaming in the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department's recent evaluation on foreign policy and the national-level policy review on emancipation.
11. Incorporate a good **accountability mechanism**, using input from civil society, including Southern partners and women's rights organisations. Gender budgeting can be an additional way to gain good insight at ministerial level into efforts relating to gender and intersectionality.

12. Continue working towards **gender equality and diversity and inclusion within the organisation**, and emphasise their importance when working with other parties. Make women's representation, which includes women from minority groups and from the Global South, a core focus of the FFP.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In recent years more and more countries have followed in the footsteps of Sweden and adopted a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP). There is growing international demand for more gender-transformative, inclusive laws and policy, which is creating momentum for an FFP.¹ This is a response to a growing number of academic studies that draw a direct connection between gender equality, economic prosperity and national security (Aggestam and True 2020; Thompson, 2020). Although the details and definitions differ, an FFP is essentially based on the idea that it is vital to enhance the economic, political and social participation of women in all their diversity, and that this creates a more prosperous and peaceful world for all.

The Dutch government, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, work in support of women's rights and gender equality around the world. In these efforts, they collaborate closely with a number of countries that now have some form of FFP. The Netherlands itself does not currently have an FFP.

The Democrats '66 (D66) parliamentary party has asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to illuminate the experiences of countries like Sweden, Spain, France, Mexico, Luxembourg and Canada with developing and implementing an FFP, and the added value these efforts have yielded.² In response, the government undertook to inform the House in more detail about the benefits and the experiences of these countries, with a view to identifying the opportunities and possibilities that such a policy would present for the Netherlands.

In order to inform the House as fully as possible, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs commissioned this study with the key aim of gaining a better understanding the lessons learned by other countries, the current policy context in the Netherlands and the potential benefits of an FFP (see Terms of Reference, ToR).

The study set out to answer three main questions, which are presented in more detail in the lists in appendix 1:

1. What can we learn from the experiences of countries like France, Canada, Luxembourg, Mexico, Sweden and Spain with developing and implementing an FFP?
2. What is the Netherlands doing to integrate gender into its foreign policy and programmes? What is happening at the foreign ministry, and in the Netherlands itself? What definition of an FFP would be appropriate for the Netherlands?
3. Given the experiences of countries with an FFP and current gender policy in the Netherlands, what would be the added value of an FFP for the Netherlands, and how would the world benefit from a Dutch FFP? How is it recommended that the Netherlands develop an FFP?

The researchers based their work on the description of an FFP as set out in the Terms of Reference (ToR): 'Generally speaking, it is described as a political framework based on the social and economic wellbeing of marginalised people that prompts critical reflection on the hierarchical global systems of foreign policy.' Equality, non-discrimination, transformation of power and intersectionality are among the key values of an FFP. Other aspects of a potential FFP are explored in this study, building on the

¹ <https://www.icrw.org/press-releases/more-than-30-governments-and-organizations-now-working-to-advance-feminist-foreign-policy-around-the-world/>.

² https://www.eerstekamer.nl/eu/behandeling/20210419/verslag_van_een_nader_schriftelijk.

experiences of other countries and the work of knowledge centres, as well as the specific context in the Netherlands.

As regards questions 2 and 3, the study focuses mainly on the various policy areas of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, particularly diplomacy and European cooperation, peace and security, foreign economic relations and development cooperation.³ Since policy coherence is regarded as a significant aspect of an FFP, the internal organisation and national coordination of gender equality and equal rights, as overseen by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, was also included in the analysis.

Box 1: Definitions

Feminism	The collective term for social and political movements that are critical of unequal relations between men and women – in all their diversity – and that campaign for equal rights and opportunities for all. Feminism is also often regarded as a political position that aims to abolish systemic inequality and power relations. It is not the intention of this report or an FFP to choose a particular current within feminism.
Gender	The social interpretation of characteristics, features, talents and expectations assigned to women and men, boys and girls. This interpretation changes over time and in different social and cultural contexts. Gender is not the same as 'sex', which refers to the biological and physical characteristics of women, men and intersex people.
Gender equality	The equal valuation by society of people of different sexes, genders or sexual orientations, and truly equal conditions, rights, opportunities and possibilities for everyone to exercise self-determination in their life, live in dignity and have the opportunity to contribute according to their full potential, including economic, social, cultural and political development.
Gender mainstreaming	A strategy of including as a whole the priorities and experiences of men, women, boys, girls and transgender people in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policy and programmes. The aim is to achieve effective policy and programming, promote gender equality and prevent the inadvertent compounding of inequalities, discrimination and unequal power relations.
Gender-transformative approach	Tackling the underlying causes of gender inequality, resulting in changed power relations. A focus on gender often encompasses a spectrum ranging from gender inequality (harmful; promoting gender inequality), via gender-neutrality (or gender-blindness: a lack of attention to gender-related factors, which generally leads to inadvertent compounding of inequalities), gender-sensitivity (focus on the roles and position of women without effecting systematic change), gender-responsiveness (recognising gender inequality and focusing on the specific needs of men and women) to a gender-transformative approach. A gender-transformative approach requires gender norms to be addressed, and it is essential to it that both men and women are involved.

³ This report uses development cooperation and international cooperation interchangeably, in line with the countries that have an FFP and with Dutch practice.

Intersectionality	The interconnection of different social factors such as class, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and gender (identity), disability, religion and other forms of identity at multiple levels, leading to social discrimination or privilege. In the context of this study: overlap between gender, class and other forms of identity, impacting on people's social status and wellbeing.
Intersectional approach	Awareness and tackling of discrimination on the basis of the combined forms of identity of all people.

1.2 Methodology

A desk-based study was performed and interviews conducted remotely for the purposes of this study. The desk-based study examined documentation provided by the Social Development Department (DSO) at the Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS), which included a number of evaluations by the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), advisory reports from the Social and Economic Council (SER) and the most relevant Ministry of Foreign Affairs policy documents. The researchers also looked through other IOB evaluations and read background documents, such as the most relevant documents produced by the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP) and the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). Finally, the desk-based study included examination of the feminist policies of the countries consulted. See appendix 2 for a full list.

Sixteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with:

- Interviewees from four countries with an FFP (Canada, France, Spain, Sweden)
- Interviewees from the four Directorates-General (DGs) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Deputy Secretary-General
- Interviewees at the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science's Equal Opportunities Department (OCW-DE)
- Experts from international centres of excellence (CFFP and ICRW)
- Interviewees from WO=MEN, the Dutch Gender Platform.

The four countries with an FFP were chosen on the basis of similarities with the Dutch situation. The choice of international knowledge centres and WO=MEN was based on their specific areas of research and knowledge (in the case of CFFP and ICRW) and the relevance of their role and large network of member organisations in the Netherlands (in the case of WO=MEN).

The researchers developed several lists of questions for the interviews, based on the main questions set out above: for countries with an FFP, for the Directorates-General, for the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, for ICRW and CFFP and for WO=MEN. See appendix 1 for the lists of questions.

DSO set up an FFP project group to oversee this study, which included staff from several Directorates-General. They gave feedback on the draft report. The final report will be presented to the project group and any other interested parties at a meeting planned for early September 2021.

1.3 Constraints

This exploratory study was subject to strict time limits and had to take place on a limited number of days. It is not therefore an academic study of the added value of an FFP in general, but a practical study considering the potentially relevant best practices of other countries in the Dutch policy context, based on a limited number of interviews and documents. Not all policy areas and themes were examined in detail. It is not therefore possible to give a full picture of the work other countries are

doing with their FFP, and the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in relation to gender.

Interviews were held mainly with representatives of the public sector, particularly foreign ministries, so the study mainly gives a sense of 'insider' experiences and views. Most of the interviewees were positive about developing an FFP, though some expressed certain reservations. The majority of interviewees were women. No embassies or other ministries (apart from the Equal Opportunities Department of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science) with policy and programmes that are relevant from a gender perspective, and which might play a major role in the successful development and implementation of an FFP, were consulted for the study.

A small number of civil society organisations were also consulted. The experiences and views of various civil society actors, including the groups concerned, would certainly be useful for a more complete impression of gender policy and practice both in the Netherlands and in countries with an FFP.

Given the schedule and the availability of interviewees, most of the interviews with the Directorates-General and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science took place before those with representatives of countries with an FFP. This meant there was less opportunity to discuss certain experiences of these countries with the Directorates-General. Such questions were however posed on the basis of the desk-based study. The interviews with CFFP, ICRW and WO=MEN took place at the end of the process, and were partly intended to verify a number of findings and fill any gaps.

2 Experiences of countries with a feminist foreign policy

2.1 Introduction

France, Canada, Luxembourg, Mexico, Sweden and recently also Spain have been profiling themselves as countries with an FFP. Like the Netherlands, these countries were already actively pursuing gender equality in their foreign policy before they adopted an FFP. The details of the policy are different in each country.

This chapter describes what the Netherlands can learn from the experiences of Canada, France, Spain and Sweden in particular, based on policy documents and interviews. It examines the experiences and best practices of these countries in developing and implementing their policy, and any recommendations these might entail for the Netherlands.

Spain and Sweden both have an FFP that involves all policy areas of their foreign ministries, including diplomacy, European relations, security, trade and international cooperation. Canada has an official FFP focused only on international cooperation, although during the Canadian interview it was explained that in practice there is also an FFP for the rest of the ministry. This is now being fleshed out in a 'Foreign Policy Paper' for publication. France has expressed a verbal commitment to an FFP, and the country's international strategy for gender equality (2018-2022) is now being used as a guide. It focuses mainly on diplomacy and international cooperation. The intention is to extend this to trade, security and the economy.

2.2 Development and approach

2.2.1 Steps towards development

In Canada, Spain and Sweden the FFP was announced when a new government took office. In all three countries it was announced by a minister or the prime minister, who was also the primary change agent. In Canada and Sweden, in particular, it came as a surprise. It was less so in Spain, where the adoption of the policy was seen as a result of political commitment on the part of the minister, combined with a wealth of experience with gender equality at national level, a leadership role at international level and a dynamic civil society. The gender balance of the government and parliament may also have also played a role.

In France the FFP followed a strong feminist mandate from the president at national level, which was subsequently reflected in an FFP. As in Spain, the adoption of an FFP was the result of political commitment on the part of the president and ministers and a strong civil society, backed up by public expectations.

According to the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), the first five FFPs (in Canada, France, Luxembourg, Mexico and Sweden) all came as a surprise and resulted from a window of opportunity presented by progressive political leaders. Besides political commitment at a high level, the organisation described how a positive political climate, the personal values of political leaders and a suitable moment for the announcement all played a role. The growth in interest in FFPs globally was also a relevant factor.

Civil society did not have a direct role in the announcement of the first FFPs. However, IWDA concluded that civil society organisations played a vital part in creating the positive political climate.

The decision to adopt either a full FFP or an FFP focused on several policy areas was a political one. As explained above, Canada and France are currently working on developing or presenting a full FFP.

2.2.2 *Engagement, support and external factors*

The degree to which **consultation** with others took place before the policy was developed differs from country to country. In Canada it was a highly participatory process, with 15,000 people taking part in 65 countries. In Spain, on the other hand, the policy was developed largely on the basis of knowledge drawn from years of experience and an active leadership role at international level. The interviewee remarked that the policy must however be implemented in a participatory way. The policy document itself is a useful guide that operates as a set of instructions as to what to do, and provides an overview of principles, instruments, actors and the monitoring mechanism.

In Canada the 'mandate letter' from the prime minister to the international cooperation minister provided the basis for consultations. Any component of society was able to submit suggestions through online platforms. Particular efforts were made to involve organisations that would normally be excluded. The prime minister did a number of road shows. The diplomatic missions channelled active input from think-tanks and other organisations, including women's rights organisations from the Global South. Civil society also organised its own consultation sessions.

Outcomes of the consultations included Canada's backing of women and girls, a rights-based approach and intersectionality. The government also decided to refer to itself as activist. In security policy and other policy being revamped at the same time, there was a clear focus on inclusion, among other things. Some 400 people were consulted for the Foreign Policy Paper, half of them from civil society.

In Sweden the co-creation process is also regarded as one of the successful aspects of the process of developing the FFP. The focus there was mainly on civil servants. A letter from the deputy secretary general in 2014 made it clear what the focus of the FFP would be, by presenting the '3Rs' (representation, resources, rights), the 4th R (reality check) and the five objectives of the policy. Civil servants were asked to respond as a team to the question of what the policy would mean for their policy area. This elicited more than 100 joint responses, often resulting from participatory processes in which the views of, for example, local embassy staff and gender focal points were heard. The open question proved to be a positive and creative stimulus and created ownership, because people were involved in shaping the policy.

Although France's FFP is currently only a political commitment, the development of the gender strategy, which is used as a guide for international work, resulted from consultations with French NGOs and, indirectly, their partners. Cooperation with civil society is also an explicit goal of the strategy.

Clear communication on the focus of the FFP from the outset is regarded as vital for generating support, including within the ministries. This is a matter of clear communication on the policy's focus, goals, themes and principles.

The term **feminism** was nothing new in the four countries concerned, and although different views exist with regard to feminism, it is generally accepted. When France and Spain announced their FFPs there was already a strong feminist mandate from their national governments, linked to a strong civil society and related public expectations. The term feminism was already being used by civil society.

The fact that the government is now also using it has helped it become more broadly accepted. In Canada and Sweden the FFP was part of a vision of a 'feminist government'. In the countries with an FFP, use of the term has helped deepen efforts towards gender equality and feminist values, with more focus on stereotypes, structures and the root causes of inequality.

The FFP was on the whole welcomed by civil servants in the countries in question. Clarity – and the associated awareness – about what an FFP is (in Canada, Spain and Sweden) helped in this respect. In France and Sweden it was also a matter of **pragmatism** for ministers. The goal was more important than the term feminism, and while the FFP represented an opportunity and aroused the curiosity of other players, it was also acceptable not to use the term feminism in other contexts.

France's FFP can certainly be regarded as 'pragmatic', and for the time being is mainly a motto and a form of 'branding'. Compared with some other countries, France is only beginning its international work on gender equality.

In all the countries, feminism concerns:

- political commitment
- gender equality
- women's rights
- intersectionality
- inclusion

With regard to **intersectionality**, in response to a question at a Generation Equality Forum webinar, Sweden has highlighted the importance of decolonisation, and indicated that it was finding it difficult to tackle this effectively. According to CFFP, Sweden is being criticised because its focus is too male-female, rather than intersectional.

Spain has drawn attention to anti-racism and specific minorities such as indigenous groups, LGBTQI+ persons⁴ and people with a disability. It is consulting partner countries about how to better coordinate the gender and LGBTQI+ agendas, for example.

In Canada a rich debate has arisen within the ministry and in civil society about intersectionality, with more focus on anti-racism, LGBTQI+ persons, North-South dynamics and local ownership. One practical challenge is the paucity of tools and targets for intersectionality. The OECD-DAC gender marker, for example, does not consider intersectionality.

Various interviewees said that an academic definition of feminism is not necessary, and it is not a bad thing that different views exist as to what it is. It is however useful to set out a clear view of feminism as part of an FFP.

2.2.3 Principles, focus and themes

Canada, Spain and Sweden set out principles to guide the implementation of the FFP. In all cases, the following principles were included:

- Human rights or a rights-based approach
- Transformative change
- Intersectionality

Other principles applied by one or more of the countries with an FFP are:

- Gender-based analysis plus
- Evidence-based and thorough contextual analysis

⁴ LGBTQI+ is used as an acronym in this report to refer to lesbian women, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender, queer, intersex and other gender nonconforming people.

- A participatory approach
- Collaboration with women's rights organisations
- Committed leadership
- Ownership
- A broad approach
- Gender mainstreaming

In Sweden, the FFP was further clarified thanks to the focus on the four Rs policy.

- Rights: human rights and tackling violence against women
- Representation of women in decision-making
- Resources: access to resources and equal opportunities
- Reality check: careful analysis and context-specific approaches to ensure that the approach is based on the actual situation of the people concerned.

The first three Rs tie in directly with the goals of Canada's gender policy, which underlies its FFP. However, one of the French interviewees suggested that more clarity as to what an FFP actually is, and more specific details, would be useful.

All four countries also identified specific (and different) priorities, such as gender and climate. They all have in common a focus on violence against women and girls, participation (political and otherwise), economic rights, and women, peace and security. In Spain and Canada, these are above all central focuses of international cooperation, whereas Sweden has indicated that they are also central themes in its other work abroad.

2.2.4 National level

In all four countries the adoption of an FFP reflected considerable interest in gender equality and women's rights at national level, from both government and civil society. Canada and Sweden are said to have a vision of 'feminist government', while in Spain and France government has a 'feminist mandate'.

The countries also highlight collaboration with their national gender ministry or the ministry responsible for coordination on gender issues. They see this as useful, a way of learning together, achieving policy coherence between their national and international work, including the 'practise what you preach' principle and, in some cases, of sharing tools. In Canada, for example, the federal government-wide requirement for gender-based analysis has already been expanded to 'gender-based analysis plus', including intersectionality.

The FFP is coordinated by the foreign ministries, not on an interministerial basis, despite the emphasis on policy coherence.

2.3 Implementation and results

2.3.1 Organisational level

People with extensive experience and international experts underline the need for institutionalisation, in addition to the political commitment already mentioned above. This is important to ensure continuity in the implementation of the FFP in the event of changes of personnel or political leadership. The key elements are identified as **ownership, leadership, guidance and support**.

Ownership was developed mainly through consultations (in Sweden and Canada) and prior work

(Spain). An evaluation by Sweden after three years of its FFP found that clear and consistent political leadership was spreading to other layers of management. This underlined everyone's responsibility. Good communication by leaders and clear responsibilities at management level are important elements of this process.

Guidance and support in the various countries included the following elements:

- A clear handbook giving a detailed explanation of what the FFP entails, the principles, and instructions for different policy areas with concrete examples of gender mainstreaming (Spain and Sweden)
- An annually updated plan of action for the implementation of the FFP that is interwoven into all of the ministry's planning processes (Sweden)
- Gender included in the Country Partnership Frameworks (Spain)
- Mandatory gender-based analysis (Spain, Sweden) and a central government-wide requirement for gender-based analysis plus for every new policy or major programme, as well as for smaller international cooperation programmes (Canada)
- Annual gender impact analysis linked to the budget of the entire ministry (Spain)
- Gender-budgeting throughout the ministry (Canada, Sweden)
- Guidance note on what a feminist approach entails (Canada)
- A women's rights ambassador (France, Spain, Sweden)
- Teams of gender specialists (Canada)
- Gender experts in the fields of trade, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and women, peace and security, and within central government implementing organisations (Sweden)
- Gender focal points (France, Spain, Sweden)
- Senior civil servants working on gender-related themes (France)
- An equality unit considering internal matters (Spain)
- Training and capacity building (Canada, France, Spain, Sweden)
- Sharing and development of tools like factsheets (Canada, Spain, Sweden).

In France the policy is still a commitment. It is included in communication, and is an interministerial undertaking. The challenge now is to make it concrete, with goals, results planning and accountability mechanisms. The gender strategy that is used as a guide does have specific goals and an accountability framework based on indicators, clear responsibilities and regular evaluation. Canada's experience shows that the envisaged results (outcomes) must be clear from the outset.

There is also a focus on gender and diversity **within the ministries**. France, Spain and Sweden are all working on a better gender balance in management and senior positions and France and Sweden are actively working on issues like pay disparities. In most cases this is also explicitly stated as a goal in the FFP or the gender strategy.

2.3.2 Results

Canadian, Spanish and Swedish interviewees indicated that they had achieved major results. Although no external evaluations have yet taken place, they highlighted the big increase in efforts to achieve gender equality, particularly in terms of gender mainstreaming. CFFP said it was impressed by the improvement in policy coherence in Sweden. A study in Sweden found that all civil servants said the FFP had made a big difference (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020).

Spain and Sweden say there has been an internal culture change and a change of mindset, with a shift from just a number of people working on gender – mainly gender-specific activities or as part of international cooperation – to everyone doing so, in all areas of foreign policy. Several interviewees

indicated that the FFP was a daily reminder to consider factors like gender and intersectionality, and to seek to understand them better.

Examples of specific changes in policy and results include:

- More policy coherence (both between different aspects of foreign policy and between national and international work; Canada, Sweden)
- A ministerial declaration on gender and trade and/or more attention to gender in trade agreements (Canada, Sweden)
- Greater focus on corporate social responsibility, in the mining industry for example (Canada)
- Much greater focus on violence against women and girls in relation to the arms trade (Canada, Sweden)
- Discussion of the extra impact on women and girls of atomic weapons testing (Sweden)
- More consular work on female genital mutilation and forced marriage (Sweden)
- Research into how algorithms disadvantage women (Sweden)
- More money and support for women's rights organisations (Canada, France, Sweden)
- More attention to women, peace and security both through gender-specific work and as a factor integrated into other work (France, Sweden)
- Integration of gender issues into climate funds (Sweden)
- Scaling up of efforts in support of SRHR (Sweden)
- Systematically improved focus on gender in international cooperation programmes and more projects with gender equality as an important or main objective (all four countries)
- UN resolution on the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls (Spain)
- Generation Equality Forum (organised by France)

At the same time, civil society has heavily criticised the countries for their lack of policy coherence. Their criticisms mainly concern militarisation, arms exports, mining and failure to sign the new treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons, which addresses threats to women and indigenous peoples. The countries acknowledged that much remains to be done in these areas. Despite the fact that feminist principles are often crucial in setting priorities, the countries acknowledged that these principles do not always override national interests, on issues of militarisation for example.

France highlighted the benefits of a critical interim evaluation of its gender strategy. The feedback is being used in the development of the next gender strategy, with sectors of foreign policy currently omitted being incorporated into the FFP, and a greater focus on effectiveness rather than pragmatism. France also intends to change its goal from 50% to 85% of international cooperation projects with gender as an important or main goal. This higher target is in line with the goal of the new EU Gender Action Plan.

2.3.3 Budget

The main budget changes have involved the reallocation of resources to gender mainstreaming. By way of illustration, in 2019 Canada and Sweden had gender mainstreaming in 92% and 79% of their commitments for international cooperation respectively. In Spain and France the figure was still below 50%, though rising. Thanks to gender budgeting, Canada and Sweden now have more idea of the extent to which money is used for gender equality in other policy areas.

In Canada, Sweden, Spain and France 25%, 21%, 19% and 6% respectively of total funding committed to international cooperation was targeted at gender-specific work.⁵ This included funding for both NGOs and women's rights organisations. Canada and the EU, in particular, have launched major women's rights funds in collaboration with the United Nations. AWID warns, however, that in

⁵ https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=DV_DCD_GENDER.

2019 only 1% of the money for gender equality went to women's rights organisations.⁶

Sweden indicated that larger budgets are not needed, either externally or internally, provided money is properly allocated where it is needed. France (both the foreign ministry and the development agency AFD) has made more resources available for gender equality support, to provide more staff and training. Spain would also welcome such an increase.

2.3.4 *Accountability, monitoring and evaluation*

Spain, France and Sweden all have an internal monitoring system for their FFP:

- Every year Sweden updates its action plan, which is integrated into all planning processes at the ministry.
- In Sweden there is an annual dialogue with ministries and Swedish NGOs.
- Spain performs an annual gender impact analysis linked to the ministry's budget.
- Spain will report to parliament annually on its FFP and discuss findings with civil society.
- France's gender strategy includes a clear accountability framework based on indicators, well-defined responsibilities and regular evaluation.

ICRW and CFFP both indicated that accountability is an issue. In Sweden the FFP is monitored on a voluntary basis. According to ICRW, Canada has no monitoring system for its FFP. Nor have any external evaluations of an FFP taken place. Sweden planned to commission its first external evaluation soon, and France had recently had an interim evaluation of its gender strategy (see section 2.3.2). Women's rights organisations from the Global South are not included in the accountability mechanisms. Canada is however applying participatory feminist evaluation methods.

ICRW indicated that, given the lack of external evaluations, a quick glance at the OECD/DAC gender marker allocations is currently one of the best ways of understanding the funding of international cooperation programmes. However, the gender marker takes no explicit account of intersectionality.

The countries also indicated that it helps to have an official FFP because this prompts civil society to spur them to be more self-critical. Political commitment has drawn the attention of academics. Academics in Canada, for example – the country with the most consultative approach – have questioned whether the Canadian FFP is sufficiently political and sufficiently inclusive of Southern NGOs (Rao, 2020).

⁶ <https://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/only-1-gender-equality-funding-going-womens-organisations-why>

3 Integrating gender into Dutch policy

3.1 Introduction

A focus on women's rights and gender equality lies at the heart of an FFP. To obtain some understanding of how the Netherlands currently stands in relation to a potential FFP, this chapter describes what it is currently doing to integrate gender into its foreign policy and programmes, so that this can be compared with what would be needed for an FFP. It also considers what the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an organisation and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science are doing to integrate gender into national policy and programmes, particularly in terms of the national coordination mechanism. Finally, the term 'feminist' will be considered, as well as a definition of an FFP that is appropriate for the Netherlands.

3.2 Gender in Dutch foreign policy

3.2.1 *Gender in programmes and policy*

Policy themes and goals

The Netherlands has a three-pronged policy for integrating gender into its foreign policy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (IOB, 2021; BHOS policy document, 2018):

- gender mainstreaming
- gender diplomacy
- gender-specific programmes

In development cooperation, the ministry has four explicit targets for advancing gender equality and strengthening the position of women and girls as a cross-cutting goal across all parts of its foreign trade and development cooperation policy (BHOS). These four targets are (BHOS policy document 2018):

- to increase women's participation in political and other decision-making and women in leadership
- to increase economic empowerment and improve the economic climate for women
- to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls
- to strengthen the role of women in conflict prevention and peace processes, and to protect them in conflict situations

These targets are consistent with the 3 Rs that Sweden – and Canada, indirectly – have embraced as part of their FFP: representation, resources, rights.

Gender mainstreaming and gender-specific work

The Netherlands has a good international reputation as a champion of equal rights and opportunities for women and girls all over the world in its international cooperation work and diplomatic activity. Its gender-specific work attracts particular praise, including from countries that have an FFP.

Examples include:

- Political and financial support for women's rights organisations through Leading from the South (€80 million) and Power of Women (€75 million).
- 12% of commitments for international cooperation earmarked for gender-specific work (2019). By way of comparison: this is a substantial proportion, but much less than in Canada, Spain and Sweden (see section 2.3.3).

- Co-leadership with Canada and Malawi of the action coalition Investing in Feminist Movements at the Generation Equality Forum.

The interviews with Directorates-General (DGs) suggested a growing focus on **gender mainstreaming**, and particularly on women and girls, though the degree of attention given to these issues still varies considerably. Box 2 lists a number of examples, opportunities and challenges which illustrate the fact that more attention needs to be devoted to these matters. The analysis in several evaluations (see box 3), however, and the recent IOB evaluation (2021) found that less is known about gender mainstreaming in areas outside development cooperation.

Interviewees from various DGs suggested that it appears to be less difficult to mainstream gender in international cooperation. Given that the entire policy is concerned with equality, it is easier to make the link with gender equality. By contrast, interviewees explained that gender mainstreaming in political instruments and in partnerships with industry is sometimes less self-evident and thus requires more resolve.

The IOB evaluation (2021) focused primarily on development policy, and found that a gender action plan had been drawn up in response to the IOB evaluation in 2015.⁷ The steps taken to incorporate women's rights and gender into the work of various departments, particularly within the Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS), had led to greater knowledge of, attention to and appreciation of the issues. The most recent OECD/DAC report, in 2019, also showed that 76% of DGIS programmes had gender as an important or main area of focus, compared to some 60% of programmes in the preceding two years.⁸ By way of comparison, this is considerably more than in France and Spain, slightly lower than in Sweden, and much lower than in Canada (see section 2.3.3).

Despite the big steps taken in recent years, IOB concluded (2021) that gender mainstreaming had not been implemented consistently, either in the development of policy nor in the implementation of programmes and projects. IOB listed a host of mainly institutional challenges that need to be tackled to make gender mainstreaming a systematic part of the theory of change, actual approach, and monitoring and evaluation. All DGIS policy theme departments, for example, highlighted gender-specific approaches, but analysis is not always reflected in the 'theory of change' or the approach. This applies to private sector development and to agriculture and food security, for instance. IOB also concluded that, between 2015 and 2019, gender was included in only one in three evaluations (of IOB, policy theme departments and embassies), and that there is a great variety of approaches to gender. IOB underlined the fact that the focus on women and girls is impeding a broader understanding of gender and power relations. More commitment, a larger budget and more expertise are regarded as important prerequisites for gender mainstreaming to be improved.

One of the conclusions of the IOB report is particularly relevant to an FFP, not only for development cooperation policy but for all policy areas: 'Gender mainstreaming should move beyond the "add women and stir" approach where women are invited to participate in interventions, the design of which has not changed. If gender mainstreaming aims to be transformative, a more comprehensive approach is needed.'

Box 2: Examples of various DGs' work on gender

In the Directorate-General for Foreign Economic Relations (DGBEB), the International Enterprise Department (DIO) runs a programme for female entrepreneurs which aims to redress the disparities manifest in the relatively low proportion of Dutch female entrepreneurs and encourage

⁷ For instance, IOB (2015) concluded that little attention was given to the interests and needs of women, particularly in terms of economic development, and of peace and security. Monitoring and accountability were also found wanting.

⁸ https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?DataSetCode=DV_DCD_GENDER.

use of their unexploited potential. The programme focuses on lowering barriers to market entry, improving the accessibility of trade instruments and optimising access to national and international networks, market knowledge and know-how. DIO has set itself the goal of integrating gender into all its policy development over the coming period. It also intends to mainstream the subject of female entrepreneurship within the broad remit of the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO). This topic is also to be incorporated permanently into RVO's main remit and become an integral part of its activities and programmes, in order to strengthen the Netherlands' international earning capacity.

The International Corporate Social Responsibility Department (also part of DGBEB) has indicated that it has a policy of actively encouraging companies to comply with the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, which give some attention to gender issues. As the guidelines are not very specific on how gender should actually be considered, a handbook has been written in collaboration with the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Task Force and Women Win. This online handbook is now being brought to the attention of companies, with the idea that its use should be monitored. The department is also considering whether gender can be included in the remit of its new ICSR Support Centre (which is external, but funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Finally, gender has been incorporated into three of the ten Agreements on International Responsible Business Conduct.

The Security Policy Department (DVB) in the Directorate-General for Political Affairs (DGPZ) supports the Dutch National Action Plan (NAP-IV) on Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2021-2025) in collaboration with the Ministry of Defence, which bears final responsibility for the NAP. This is a notable example of interministerial collaboration on women's rights. DGPZ also focuses on women, peace and security in UN peacekeeping missions, as part of training for example. The extent of gender mainstreaming also depends on the degree to which the department regards it as effective. It is, for example, effective in the 3D approach to the peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan, but not in the protection of an airfield in Iraq. Efforts are made to send roughly as many women as men on civilian missions, too. When it comes to the arms trade, the risk of violence against women is explicitly considered. The link between gender and non-proliferation is overlooked, except for acknowledgement of the fact that there are few women at the negotiating table. Gender is not listed as one of the considerations or part of the assessment framework for the deployment of military missions.

The Directorate-General for European Cooperation's (DGES) European Integration Department (DIE) indicated that it had been devoting considerable attention to gender issues recently. Multiple negotiations are taking place in the EU in which the Netherlands presses for gender equality, SRHR and equal rights for LGBTQI+ persons, with the idea of preventing any backsliding. Much of the work is meant to ensure there is no weakening of internationally accepted standards and definitions. DIE works with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and DSO (DGIS) to ensure that Dutch central government-wide ambitions for gender equality and SRHR are on everyone's radar in EU negotiations, to prevent EU member states from attempting to strategically weaken or remove gender provisions/agreed language.

In DGIS – alongside the gender-specific priorities already mentioned – a number of departments are actively concerned with gender, including the Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid Department (DSH). It was pointed out that one of the four priority areas of the Central Emergency Response Fund of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) focuses on women and girls, and includes special attention for women and girls with a disability. Although there is the option to choose another strategic objective, the choice is often to combine the women and girls objective with another one. Reference was also made to the explicit focus on women in the Peacebuilding Fund and the fact that World Bank migration programmes focus on female entrepreneurship and young people. Finally, at least 50% of the people who receive help under security and the rule of law programmes are women and girls. On the other hand, the interviews highlighted the fact that there are challenges in many other projects, including a lack of proper gender analysis.

Box 3: IOB evaluations of other DGs

A review of IOB evaluations targeting other DGs:

- confirmed the conclusion that gender mainstreaming does not receive much attention in peace and security projects (IOB, 2020; IOB, 2018; IOB, 2015) except in respect of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (IOB, 2021);
- revealed that an impact evaluation of economic diplomacy (IOB, 2019) did not consider gender;
- showed there was more attention to gender in policy on international corporate social responsibility (ICSR). The evaluation highlighted the integration of gender into several Agreements on International Responsible Business Conduct, the OECD Guidelines, a request to take on female staff as part of two RVO projects, and the impact of the ILO's Better Work Programme in preventing practices like forced labour and sexual harassment and tackling gender pay disparities (IOB, 2019);
- showed that there has been little gender work in European cooperation, with the exception of the embassy in Georgia, for example, as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (IOB, 2019).

Instruments and action plans

The importance of policy coherence and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was highlighted in both documents and interviews: the 'effects on gender equality' quality requirement is part of the SDG check in the Integrated Assessment Framework. The purpose of this quality requirement is to identify the nature and scale of the impacts of planned policy and legislation on gender equality in the Netherlands. However, according to the government's response in 2021 to reports on five years of Dutch efforts to achieve the SDGs, 'visible and timely application' of this quality requirement, 'including to some of the SDGs', is a challenge.⁹ This was also highlighted by several interviewees at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

One interviewee remarked that there are many more instruments for gender integration at DGIS than at other DGs, and that they would not all be appropriate for other departments. For instance, the Netherlands supports the third EU Gender Action Plan (2021-2025), including efforts to ensure that 85% of all external activities contribute to gender equality and that at least 5% have gender equality as their main objective by the end of 2025. The Ministry uses the OECD/DAC gender marker to record the extent to which activities focus on gender equality. Activity appraisal documents are also used in programming, which involves both use of the gender equality marker and a focus on gender analysis. DSH and the Inclusive Green Growth Department (IGG) have indicated that the information for these appraisals must come from implementing partners, and that simply 'ticking boxes' is no longer an option. It was however pointed out that projects are set up so quickly that information on gender analysis and targets is often incomplete. This makes it difficult to provide gender marker information and, in humanitarian assistance, the assessments of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). Properly informing BZ's own new staff is important in this respect.

Proper implementation (and monitoring) of the gender impact assessment in the Integrated Assessment Framework, alongside a more central focus on gender throughout policy as a whole, could be helpful in improving gender mainstreaming at non-DGIS departments and other ministries (see also section 3.3). In a recent letter, foreign minister Sigrid Kaag mentioned that compartmentalisation must also be tackled, and an integrated national SDG strategy with broad support would be helpful in this respect. The experiences of the Netherlands and the EU with policy coherence for development hold important lessons for coherence and gender mainstreaming in the

⁹<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2021/02/15/kamerbrief-inzake-kabinetsreactie-op-rapporten-ten-behoeve-van-evaluatie-en-bijstelling-van-vijf-jaar-nationale-sdg-uitvoering>.

various policy areas.¹⁰

The degree to which gender is considered in planning instruments varies, and outside DGIS this occurs to only a limited extent. There is little consideration of gender budgeting, and gender is not included as a matter of course in the embassies' Multiannual Country Strategies. The plans of embassies in developing countries (which fall under DGIS) do mention gender equality and women's rights as priorities, however (IOB 2019). The interviews revealed that some departments do not necessarily consider gender in their annual plans because 'standard matters' do not need to be explicitly mentioned. Others (including DSH and IGG) do explicitly state that they have a vision of gender equality. The IOB evaluation also found that DGIS departments and the Multilateral Organisations and Human Rights Department (DMM) have had gender action plans for several years. The report points out, however, that women (and men) from the Global South are not involved in the development and implementation of programmes.

Capacity building and coordination

Support for capacity building, coordination and diplomatic efforts is provided by the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Task Force (TFVG) and an Ambassador for Women's Rights and Gender Equality. There is also a network of gender focal points (GFP) and gender contact persons which stay in touch through calls every six weeks, a WhatsApp group and workshops.

The interviews and the recent IOB evaluation brought to light the fact that the mandate of GFPs is often insufficiently clear, so they are unable to fulfil their potential. A ToR for GFPs was drawn up recently, however. Some departments, such as DVB, have opted to allocate fewer staff hours to the role, and therefore have only a gender contact person rather than a GFP.

To support GFPs and other staff, three online gender training courses have been developed, as well as an online platform with tools and factsheets. The gender training course is voluntary in most departments, and the degree to which staff are encouraged to take the course varies. At DSH it is mandatory. The first finding is in line with the IOB evaluation, which underlines the importance of a higher priority for gender, more knowledge and a less voluntary approach. IOB also called for the TFVG's mandate to be strengthened, and for a better accountability mechanism and cooperation on gender mainstreaming.

3.2.2 Gender and representation at organisational level

Coherence between external and internal policy and practice – 'practising what you preach', in other words – is important for the credibility and effectiveness of an FFP. Representation of women in foreign policy is a core element of FFP.¹¹ The Social and Economic Council's (SER) advisory report 'Diversity in the Boardroom: Time to Accelerate' (2019) underlines that 'diversity pays off, encourages talents and promotes inclusion and social cohesion. Equal opportunities help create a society in which everyone feels at home.' This section therefore considers **gender, diversity and inclusion** at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an organisation.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a policy on diversity and inclusion and, since January 2021, a related action plan. The policy and action plan devote considerable attention to gender parity and to removing obstacles to inclusion more broadly.

¹⁰See for example <https://ecdpm.org/publications/promoting-policy-coherence-lessons-learned-eu-development-cooperation/> and <https://www.buildingchange.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Reactie-Building-Change-op-jaarrapportage-beleidscoherentie.pdf>.

¹¹ See example https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/FFP_Framework_EN_June2021update.pdf and <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/report-feminist-foreign-policy-for-the-eu>.

In response to the SER report and a related report by the Vinkenburg Committee (2021), **gender parity in the senior ranks of central government, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs**, has been designated a key priority for the government's term in office.

The goal of parity policy is to ensure the organisation better reflects society, and to create a more diverse team. Under the Ministry's D&I Action Plan, by 2025 50% of all managers should be women. Women's advancement into management positions currently presents a challenge, and women in certain pay scales systematically receive lower scores. Internal documents show that roughly 33% of heads of mission (ambassadors and consuls-general) and 48% of directors are women. However, while some 80% of directors at DGIS are women, the figure is only approximately 30% at DGPZ and 40% in the Deputy Secretary-General (PSG) sector. The situation is different at lower levels of management (DGIS: 35%, DGPZ: 53%; PSG: 39%).

Besides a focus on women in senior roles, consideration is also given to people with a bicultural background, in line with the SER report and a government-wide minimum requirement for recruitment. Interviews revealed that the proportion of people with a bicultural background in more senior positions is still low. The prohibition on registering cultural background makes it difficult to pursue a targeted policy and monitor differences in success.

Active efforts are being made to recruit women, by the Advisory Committee on High-Level Placements, for example. An active search is also underway for female honorary consuls. Work is being done as well to improve the promotion and mentoring of women, the membership of recruitment committees, the wording of job vacancies and the number of hours staff are expected to work. Interviewees also highlighted the consideration being given to changing the standard 'white male' profile to a profile focused on filling gaps in the team rather than rewarding individual sets of characteristics. The role of men in creating a more inclusive culture or other more transformative approaches was not mentioned.

Departments including DIE (DGES) focus on women for secondment and appointments to partner organisations. This applies, for example, to staff seconded to EU institutions, including a gender adviser. The proportion of women selected by the EU remains below 50% in many cases. The proportion of women involved in EU military missions is low.

Besides gender parity in senior positions, another focus of consideration is **broader inclusion**, based on the Participation Act, for example, designed to ensure that more people with a work disability are recruited government-wide. The targets for this have not quite been achieved over the past few years.

Efforts are also being made to remove obstacles experienced by people with an LGBTQI+ background. Sexual orientation may not be registered, just as a person's cultural background may not be. There is therefore no policy with targets. According to interviewees, gay men are fairly well represented in senior positions, but LBTQI+ persons are not, and there are no LGBTQI+ members on the Senior Management Board.

The DGs **report** to the Senior Management Board on promotions. Diversity and inclusion are the direct responsibility of the Deputy Secretary-General, in order to give them added weight. Interviewees also reported that one section head had recently won an award for inclusion.

Efforts to promote diversity and inclusion also include:

- a focus in DGIS on working together, and team discussions specifically about inclusion. In other DGs discussion of inclusion takes place mainly in the management team;
- diversity and inclusion training for the entire Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which covers a safe and supportive working environment and inclusion, including a module on unconscious bias.

Many staff take this training course, and all new managers must do so. The Senior Management Board has also completed this training;

- an Inclusion Plaza run by the Academy for International Relations;
- diversity and inclusion as a standard topic discussed in all performance interviews;
- several task forces, working groups and an interministerial gender diversity steering group. Two diversity and inclusion strategic advisers will soon join the diversity and inclusion coordinator.

There is general enthusiasm about diversity policy. A number of staff who are not enthusiastic were recently approached, to ascertain their motives. One interviewee would welcome more statements by senior management on the issue, to make it more visible in the ministry and encourage debate. The Deputy Secretary-General should for example increase the visibility to all staff of the work of the Bicultural Network for Diversity (BiND, a bicultural group at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). There should also be more consideration of the diversity of cultural backgrounds rather than the 'basically, everyone is Dutch' approach.

3.2.3 *Intersectionality and a gender-transformative approach*

With a view to the possible introduction of a feminist foreign policy, intersectionality and gender-transformative approaches also require extra consideration. As the recent IOB evaluation of gender mainstreaming (IOB, 2021) pointed out, it is more than simply a matter of 'add women and stir'. Intersectionality can be defined as tackling discrimination on the basis of each individual's combined identity characteristics. A gender-transformative approach can be defined as tackling the root causes of gender inequality, resulting in changed power relations.

The interviews and policy documents did not suggest there is a strong focus on **intersectionality**. However, it is noteworthy that several departments are actively working on inclusion issues and others mainly on gender issues. Efforts are also made to promote inclusion at the level of the organisation as a whole. In both cases, however, it is separate groups that are considered, without highlighting combined identity characteristics within groups.

The 2018 foreign trade and development cooperation policy document still referred largely to women and girls, on the one hand, and to vulnerable groups, on the other. An increase in attention to intersectionality by DGIS has however been noted. More recent letters to parliament do for example address intersectionality, mainly in reference to work by various strategic partnerships. The TFVG is also well acquainted with the subject. In addition, as part of SRHR policy, for example, there is collaboration with sex workers, many of whom are discriminated against because of a combination of identity characteristics.

The recent IOB evaluation also concluded that DGIS is focusing more attention on the link between gender equality, women's rights, inclusion and intersectionality, but found that this is not consistently addressed in key policy documents. The fact that IOB conducted such a broad-ranging evaluation of gender mainstreaming, including consideration of gender fluidity, intersectionality and gender-transformative approaches, is a big step forward, and yielded many insights and recommendations that can be built on, including by non-DGIS departments.

In response to questions from parliament, the government has pointed out that the Netherlands has called upon the European Commission to explicitly consider intersectionality in its policy and programming. Finally, the Netherlands supports the third EU Gender Action Plan (2021-2025), which aims to tackle gender inequality where it intersects with other forms of discrimination, with a focus on intersectionality.

At organisational level, targets mainly concern male/female differences, and work is also being done

to improve diversity and tackle racism. There are no targets for intersectionality, due in part to the fact that characteristics like cultural background may not be registered.

The third EU Gender Action Plan is committed both to intersectionality and to a **gender-transformative approach**, in addition to the existing human rights-based approach. According to the recent IOB evaluation (2021), there is little or no evidence of efforts to address power structures and their underlying causes, either by DGIS or – above all – by other parts of the organisation. The evaluation has this to say on the matter: ‘Addressing the power dynamics between men and women is still challenging, even more so within a broader agenda of inclusiveness addressing other dimensions of inequality.’

It was clear from the interviews that the focus is often on numbers, such as how many women and girls are involved in a programme, or the number of women appointed to posts in organisations.

Nevertheless, this is often based on a more transformative approach:

- Parity policy focuses on the idea that more diversity in the workplace leads to better results for both women and men. The role of – and opportunities for – men, in terms of new forms of leadership for example, is not explicitly highlighted.
- DIE (DGES) indicated that the factor of power relations is not mentioned in EU negotiations, but that fear of change in power relations between men and women – and particularly of more power for LGBTQI+ persons – lies behind the pushback that the Netherlands is countering.
- DIO (DGBEB) would also like to target policy more towards a gender-transformative approach, in collaboration with the Ministries of Economic Affairs & Climate Policy, Social Affairs & Employment, and Education, Culture & Science. This would involve a shift away from tackling symptoms and removing obstacles that affect female entrepreneurs to changing entrenched social norms and power relations between men and women.
- DSH (DGIS) is actively committed to viewing women as resilient and strong rather than vulnerable. Women’s agency, empowerment and participation are a key focus of discussions with organisations. DSO, which runs the Women’s Rights and Gender Equality Task Force, is very knowledgeable about and makes great efforts to support gender transformation.
- Finally, the interviews revealed that several departments place human rights at the centre of all or much of their work. This is an important starting point, provided it is combined with the factors mentioned above. A rights-based approach was also mentioned, though its application was not investigated.

3.3 Gender in Dutch domestic policy

Although an FFP is of course primarily a matter of foreign policy, the literature emphasises the importance of national policy on gender equality and women’s rights in ensuring both an FFP’s credibility and its effectiveness.¹² Furthermore, there are lessons to be learned from the Netherlands’ years of efforts in support of equal opportunities for women and minorities, and the coordinating role of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science on gender mainstreaming in the Netherlands. For the purposes of this study, therefore, interviews were also conducted with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, and several major policy documents were examined. The central focus was on the questions of how these issues have been dealt with nationally, and what challenges and opportunities exist for the integration of gender into national policy and programmes.

3.3.1 *The coordination mechanism*

The Netherlands has committed to the UN Convention on Women, which stipulates that a country’s

¹² https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/FFP_Framework_EN_June2021update.pdf

legislation should not only be non-discriminatory but also ensure that other parties (companies, political parties, etc.) do not discriminate against women. The Netherlands has made an international commitment to gender mainstreaming as well.

All ministers and state secretaries in the Dutch government are themselves responsible for gender equality in their policy areas, and thus also for gender mainstreaming. They do not have any statutory obligation, but they must report on the matter. Besides specific equal opportunities policies, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science also plays a role in guiding equal rights and gender mainstreaming efforts at other ministries and local authorities. This is the responsibility of its Equal Opportunities Department (OCW-DE), which coordinates an interministerial network and also plays a role in agenda setting, knowledge, support and monitoring (EIGE, 2019).

The equal opportunities policy review (2018) emphasised that, despite these efforts, various ministries did not give enough consideration to gender, and that there was no government-wide approach. Often, the gender perspective is not considered in the entire process from the development to the implementation of policy. The reasons given included lack of political commitment, resources and clout for gender mainstreaming. The same picture emerged in the interviews, with interviewees remarking that support and collaboration with other ministries depend on individual relationships, and laying the blame on the erosion of and frequent changes to structures, which hamper efforts.

The policy review on equal opportunities showed that the role of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science as a coordinator and catalyst of efforts to make various policy areas gender sensitive will be effective only if sufficient resources, capacity, specialist guidance (including monitoring) and political weight are given to the issue at OCW-DE and at other ministries. The crucial importance of a combination of political commitment and close collaboration with other ministries was highlighted in recent successes such as the introduction of partner leave and the women in senior management quota (see section 3.3.2), as well as joint action plans on discrimination at work.

Interviewees suggested that, as at the European Commission, it might be more effective to place responsibility for coordination directly with the Prime Minister; at the Ministry of General Affairs, in other words. They also highlighted the need for gender and diversity to be more explicitly included in government policy and in the coalition agreement. More tools are not a solution if the ministries continue to push gender and diversity onto the back burner. The national women's movement is also calling for more political commitment, pointing out that the Netherlands seems to regard gender equality above all as an export product (i.e. considered in foreign policy, less so in domestic policy).

Despite the challenges, interviewees at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs underline the value of and the ministry's close collaboration with OCW-DE. There is a great deal of collaboration by the Directorate-General for European Affairs in particular, where the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is regarded as the go-to organisation on gender. This is a good thing, if the development of a future FFP is to be shared by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. DIO (DGBEB) also works with that ministry on female entrepreneurship, and would like to expand this to an ambition to work in a more transformative way. Effectiveness could for instance be enhanced by actively informing young people about female entrepreneurship and through more sharing of care responsibilities (which would for example make it easier for women to travel for work).

3.3.2 Gender in national policy and programmes

Gender pay disparities persist in the Netherlands as in other countries, and equal representation of women in politics and senior management roles remains a challenge, as does stereotyping, violence and bullying aimed at LGBTQI+ people in particular. One of the interviewees mentioned the recent court case over free contraceptive pills as a sign that there is also room for improvement on SRHR in the Netherlands – an topic on which we are regarded as international leaders. There are great challenges for the rest of the EU as well.

Nevertheless, over the past few years some significant successes have been achieved on priority issues. The policy of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW, 2018) focuses mainly on:

- gender diversity and equal treatment: everyone should be free to shape their own identity;
- the labour market: financial independence for women;
- social safety: LGBTQI+ persons and women should feel safe;
- education: pupils should be free to be themselves.

The choice of these priority issues rather than full gender mainstreaming was based on past experience, and is designed to achieve the maximum effect. The most recent Equal Rights Monitor shows that female labour participation and economic independence have improved, that important steps have been taken in terms of LGBTQI+ rights – including the Rainbow Agreement signed by a number of political parties prior to the last general election – extended partner leave for fathers, and the work currently being done to end unnecessary gender registration. A quota has also been adopted for women in private sector senior management positions, and a similar effort is planned for the public and semi-public sector, as discussed in section 3.2.2. Equal representation is an important FFP issue, particularly within the public sector, which has adopted the goal of setting a good example (OCW, 2018). Collaboration within the EU (see section 3.2.1) also warrants a mention.

At the same time, the documents clearly show that, across central government, gender mainstreaming falls short, and several ministries are not succeeding in focusing in their policies on the right groups. The 2018 policy review, for example, found that ‘recent experiences have shown that gender-sensitive regular policy is lacking in several areas, and without targeted pressure by the Equal Opportunities Department to encourage such policies, mainstreaming will not be enshrined in regular policy’.¹³ This applies, for example, to social safety, and according to some interviewees much remains to be done in terms of economic affairs, climate, finance and defence as well. However, NAP 1325 is a strong driving force for gender-sensitive policy at the Ministry of Defence.

The 2018 policy review showed that, despite the results achieved in healthcare, the results in terms of social safety are disappointing. It also stated that ‘in a decentralised policy area and without any specific tools for promoting gender-sensitive policies, it has proven particularly difficult to encourage local and national parties to develop gender-sensitive safety policies. There is no comprehensive, central government-wide vision on this issue (safety), nor do we have any understanding of what works and what support local authorities need. Experiences with gender stereotyping in education have been similar. Gender mainstreaming alone does not yet carry enough weight to get the actors moving.’

The Netherlands received a reprimand from the EU because the policy review found that its policy on domestic violence and social safety was not sufficiently in line with international agreements. International sources have also highlighted challenges for the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in coordinating this, given the fact that responsibility lies primarily with other ministries (in this case the Ministries of Health, Welfare & Sport and Justice & Security) (EIGE, 2019). According to our interviewees, several ministries have deliberately opted for gender-neutral policy, which means the implications for women and minorities are overlooked and potentially ignored.

Looking at the tools available, there are challenges:

- In many policy areas, no gender-specific analyses and evaluations are performed. As a result, there is often little awareness of the state of affairs, which makes it more difficult to develop policy.
- The Minister of Education, Culture and Science recently concluded that the gender impact assessment mentioned above is rarely used as part of Dutch efforts to achieve the SDGs. An

¹³ <https://www.rijksbegroting.nl/system/files/379/rapport-beleidsdoorlichting-bevorderen-van-emancipatie-25.pdf>.

analysis conducted by the ministry found that ‘there was no explicit reporting on the gender impact assessment in any of the policy documents [between 2019 and 2020]. There is however no obligation to explicitly include the gender impact quality requirement.’¹⁴ The minister did however underline the importance of this.

- Though gender budgeting has been discussed, it is not deployed as an instrument.

3.3.3 *Intersectionality and a gender-transformative approach*

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has indicated that it is focusing increasingly on intersectionality. This seems to amount largely to a combined focus on women and LGBTQI+ persons and their opportunities on the labour market (in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment).

The various documents do not often explicitly refer to the significance of intersectionality and combined identity characteristics. There is however more consideration of people with disabilities, and on involving men in tackling gender inequality. A recent Equal Rights Monitor highlighted the need for more consideration of intersectionality among refugees, LGBTQI+ persons and issues affecting migrants. Some of the work can be regarded as gender-transformative, though issues of power are rarely explicitly highlighted.

3.4 *Feminism and a definition of an FFP appropriate for the Netherlands*

3.4.1 *Feminism and alternatives*

Countries with an FFP have all opted for a foreign policy described as ‘feminist’. The question is whether this term can also be used in the Netherlands and, if not, what might be a suitable alternative.

Most Dutch interviewees stated that they themselves have neutral or positive feelings about the **term feminism** or are indeed very keen on use of this term. Some indicated that the term has less positive connotations for some relative to its actual meaning. They expect resistance from the Dutch public (see chapter 4), likely based on the idea of feminism as anti-man or on a stereotypical image of what a feminist is, though nowadays feminism generally aims for inclusion. It was emphasised in any case that LGBTQI+ persons, women’s rights groups and younger people have a particularly positive view of the term. This was confirmed, for example, by WO=MEN’s *Gelijk=Anders* (‘Equal = Different’) campaign, which specifically targeted young people between the ages of 18 and 35.

A number of reservations were also expressed about the use of ‘feminism’ as a term at the ministry. A previous survey of the views of a number of civil servants at the ministry found some people were guarded or reticent about the term. Some regarded it as too activist, rather than motivating, and thus less appropriate for a public sector organisation. This raises the question of how ‘activist’ should be defined. Canada, for example, opted for political commitment to an activist government, and Dutch gender-specific and human rights work is already regarded as activist by other countries with an FFP.

In the context of economic diplomacy, it was noted that many female entrepreneurs emphasise that they wish to be treated as entrepreneurs, not as women. The question is whether the term will have a polarising affect on them. The importance for policy to be clear and specific – and the effect of this in terms of awareness-raising – was highlighted in this regard in particular. Some mentioned that the

¹⁴ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2020/10/29/motie-van-de-leden-ozutok-cs-over-toepassing-van-de-kwaliteitseis-gender-in-het-integraal-afwegingskader>.

term and the discussion it prompts can help identify supporters and persuade those who are on the fence: people who are interested but will not participate unless they know there is real commitment.

Several interviewees mentioned the importance of image. They suggested, for example, that feminism needs a 'face' – a Dutch celebrity who does not conform to the standard image of an activist. Some also highlighted the powerful impact of male heads of government in Canada and France identifying as feminists, and of Obama's video 'this is what a feminist looks like'.

Suggested **alternatives for the term feminism** included 'equal rights', 'gender equal foreign policy', 'gender-transformative rights-based foreign policy', 'rights-based and inclusive' and 'inclusive and diverse', or an 'equality-driven' foreign policy. Some said they felt that 'gender equality' and 'equal opportunities' had more resonance. One international interviewee regarded these alternatives as fine if the alternative were no FFP at all. However, others concluded that it is too late for the Netherlands to adopt another term now that other countries have already opted for the term feminist, or that there are no good alternatives.

3.4.2 *Appropriate definition*

Interviewees supported the suggestion from countries with an FFP that clarity regarding the term is helpful in generating enthusiasm and preventing resistance. It also aids the process of developing and implementing an effective policy.

In line with the principles of a feminist foreign policy, as put forward by the countries that have one, the interviewees agree that feminist is a good general term to denote a political commitment to:

- gender equality
- rights and equality
- a gender-transformative approach
- consideration of intersectionality (as well as diversity and inclusion)
- a participatory approach

Several interviewees also supported the idea that a feminist policy should consider:

- North-South relations
- decolonisation processes
- anti-racism

Knowledge centres recommend incorporating these dimensions immediately, to prevent any discrimination, and because it is always more difficult to add them later. Several interviewees mentioned the importance of these themes to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Some systems, mindsets and fields of work (such as visa applications) at the Ministry still showed colonial tendencies, according to some interviewees. More attention also needs to be focused on equality and prominent positions for people from the Caribbean Netherlands, and on the Netherlands' historical involvement in slavery and colonialism. One interviewee wondered whether the Netherlands is actually ready to actively engage with a decolonisation agenda.

DGIS is already increasingly devoting attention to power relations. DSH is proactively engaged in the decolonisation of aid, including tackling attitudes about who sets the agenda, with a focus on participatory monitoring and evaluation of programmes involving people from the target group itself.

There are various definitions of an FFP that the Netherlands might explore. The following definition, coined by ICRW and partners is a good starting point, though intersectionality requires more attention: 'Feminist Foreign Policy is the policy of a state that defines its interactions with other states and movements in a manner that prioritizes gender equality and enshrines the human rights of women

and other traditionally marginalized groups, allocates significant resources to achieve that vision and seeks through its implementation to disrupt patriarchal and male-dominated power structures across all of its levers of influence (aid, trade, defense and diplomacy), informed by the voices of feminist activists, groups and movements.'

4 Added value of an FFP

4.1 Added value for the world

This chapter considers the potential added value of a Dutch FFP for the rest of the world, defined here as the extent to which an FFP makes foreign policy more effective and fit for purpose. It should be noted that the added value will depend on the details of the policy and the political commitment to its implementation. In other words: what actually changes relative to what the Netherlands is doing currently. The more ambitious the policy, the greater the Netherlands' contribution to women's rights and gender equality on a global scale, and thus to efforts to tackle the root causes of poverty, inequality and conflict.

The countries with an FFP have shown that adopting an FFP boosts work on gender equality, both by increasing funding for women's rights organisations and by ensuring an earlier focus on the gender dimensions of all foreign policy work. As a result, gender is more systematically integrated into policy, as well as trade, security and economic diplomacy, sometimes with an intersectional dimension. This makes policy more effective for all (men, women and others).

The Netherlands is already doing a great deal for gender equality, but in many cases it is still not taking a systematic, more transformative approach. The main benefit of an FFP is thus **putting women's rights and gender equality at the heart of all foreign policy**. International experts also underline the added value of an FFP in terms of improved or full gender mainstreaming, including a **more gender-transformative and intersectional approach**. This would be an effective response to the various evaluations which have found that gender mainstreaming is not taking place systematically. The countries with an FFP have enhanced their gender-based analysis, guidance and accountability, which would also be appropriate for the Netherlands. In addition, an FFP provides an opportunity to scale up gender-specific work, including the financial resources and involvement of women's organisations.

The experiences both of other countries and of WO=MEN and its members highlight the importance of **policy coherence**, which an FFP can significantly enhance, particularly if applied to the foreign policy of all relevant ministries. In other words: the more policy areas and ministries are involved, the greater the added value of an FFP. Given the challenges the Netherlands is experiencing in terms of policy coherence and an **integrated approach to the SDGs** and gender, an FFP would also provide great opportunities in this regard.

All the interviews and the literature suggest that an FFP helps add much-needed political weight to gender equality and gender mainstreaming. **Commitment at a high level** (Prime Minister or minister) is therefore essential for the necessary steps to be taken, from placing gender at the heart of all policy areas to the serious application of the gender impact assessment. Sweden has demonstrated that political commitment at a high level has a great impact in a country and organisation with a fairly non-hierarchical structure. Accountability will however be an important issue.

More than half of the Dutch interviewees at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science indicated they would welcome the introduction of an FFP because:

- it would make gender mainstreaming more successful as a result of the **daily reminder** to take gender issues seriously. An FFP is **more powerful than gender mainstreaming alone** and – provided it is concrete and clearly defined – requires less explanation on a day-to-day basis than is currently the case;

- an FFP helps to boost the **internal diversity and inclusion agenda**.

WO=MEN also underlined the fact that an FFP can help initiate **conversations and alliances for gender equality**.

The other interviewees wondered whether civil servants and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are ready for an FFP, specifically whether:

- civil servants and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs believe that the motto 'women's rights are human rights' is enough in itself, that it is only a relatively small number of people who find gender equality important, and that men will feel threatened;
- it would have sufficient added value relative to countries with an FFP in terms of security, given the limited military deployment for this purpose compared with countries like Canada and Sweden;
- 'gender fatigue' might set in among other countries, as Sweden is currently experiencing;
- opting for an FFP might lead to further polarisation in the EU;
- civil servants have the knowledge required and recognise and experience the relevance of an FFP to the various policy areas.

Sweden had similar concerns prior to the introduction of its FFP. This is why the co-creation process (see chapter 2) was so important. It placed the responsibility with entire teams, but gave people the opportunity to put forward ideas for their policy area, express their concerns and learn. France is keen about adopting an FFP because the political commitment and daily reminder have produced a **snowball effect** of more attention for gender, generating more awareness. Spain highlighted the importance of political commitment, proper instruction, examples and training to enable a better understanding of the motivation and intrinsic reasoning behind an FFP. In all cases, the FFP was found to **make a major contribution to awareness of and support for the issue**.

In this connection, alternative **options for an FFP** in the form of a two-track policy were mentioned, such as an FFP that is not actively promoted within the EU, or the Canadian variant of a public FFP for international cooperation and a 'behind-the-scenes' FFP for other policy areas. CFFP and ICRW confirmed that, if a complete FFP is not possible, an FFP for international cooperation can be a good first step. Several interviewees mentioned that implementation is more important than what the policy is called, and that Netherlands could decide to use another term, or to implement its FFP without publicising the fact.

At the same time, the experiences of other countries and the literature show that two of the important benefits of an FFP are the **signal to the world and international gender diplomacy**. It could for example be very useful for other progressive EU member states if the Netherlands went public about having an FFP. Furthermore, experts say that publicly announcing an FFP can bring **clarity** and create opportunities to enter into **debate** with any vocal opponents, from individuals to faith-based organisations. It is essential to develop good strategies, knowledge and communication techniques for this. In the Canadian version of an FFP, the benefits in terms of policy coherence are of course a greater challenge. Furthermore, CFFP has highlighted (2020) the risk that results in one area might be undermined by 'business as usual' in other policy areas.

4.2 Added value for the Netherlands

We consider the added value of an FFP for the Netherlands in two ways:

- a) The added value in terms of putting gender policy and implementation in order'at national level
- b) The added value in terms of the credibility and reputation of the Netherlands in its international work to promote gender equality and women's rights, and the potential for

forming coalitions with other countries.

4.2.1 *Putting gender policy and implementation in order at national level*

The experiences of other countries show that adopting an FFP can give domestic gender policy a boost. Interviewees remarked that this would give the Netherlands an opportunity to **improve gender mainstreaming and put it more firmly on the map across central government**, from an intersectional perspective where possible. A Dutch FFP will not be credible if we do not put our own house in order. An FFP can generate the political weight needed to strengthen the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science's coordinating role and address the current non-binding character of gender mainstreaming at the different ministries (section 3.2). It could draw increased **attention to intersectionality and power relations**, which is essential for effective policy on gender equality. It could also strengthen the **central government-wide agenda for inclusion and diversity in public authorities**, such as the quota for women in senior management roles.

Again, **commitment at a high level** is important. Some interviewees expect little resistance, while several think there may well be some, particularly if it is also presented as a domestic policy. They believe that society in the Netherlands is more conservative than in many of the countries with an FFP, which also have stronger national women's movements.

Nevertheless, some pointed out that there is **momentum** in the Netherlands. The MeToo and BlackLivesMatter movements and debates on the childcare benefit scandal have highlighted the importance of an intersectional policy on gender and inclusion. WO=MEN highlighted the positive results of its Equal=Different (*Gelijk=Anders*) campaign and recommended starting a public debate on feminism and an FFP. Several universities and a wide range of civil society organisations have already expressed interest. If politicians explicitly commit to such a policy, this could **act as a catalyst and generate support**.

This was also found to be the case in countries with an FFP. Consultative processes give people an opportunity to contribute and organise. An FFP that includes a focus on the national level thus has **social relevance**: it shows the public – in all their diversity – that they can have a say. An intersectional approach considers all forms of discrimination, from sexism to racism, and from homophobia to age discrimination.

4.2.2 *The Netherlands' credibility and reputation*

Interviewees responded in two ways to the question of how an FFP would benefit the credibility and reputation of the Netherlands in its international work to promote gender equality and women's rights and the potential for forming coalitions with other countries.

On the one hand, interviewees from countries with an FFP indicated that the Netherlands is an ally with a **good reputation** when it comes to promoting women's rights and gender equality. That reputation is unlikely to change, and other countries will continue to be keen to work with the Netherlands.

On the other hand, however, knowledge centres indicated that an FFP is very good for credibility. It also became clear from the conversations that countries with an FFP **make mutual arrangements and coordinate among themselves**. The Netherlands is no longer always invited to take part. Given the increase in countries developing an FFP and a recently launched global FFP partnership, the Netherlands is likely to miss out on more invitations.¹⁵ The Netherlands could lose its reputation as a

¹⁵ CFFP and ICRW reported that Switzerland, Cyprus, Germany and the United States are considering an FFP or currently developing a strategy. Libya also announced at the Generation Equality Forum that it intends to develop an FFP. Moreover, 30

leader and miss out on major diplomatic and sparring opportunities. There is also a risk that the Netherlands will fall behind countries which – partly as a result of their FFP – place gender more at the heart of their policies and take a more intersectional approach.

Several international respondents said that the Netherlands should lay **claim** to its work on the international stage by calling its policy feminist. Although it is difficult to compare the results of different countries, the desk-based study and interviews showed that on many fronts France does much less for gender and inclusivity than the Netherlands (see, for example, its lower score on gender markers).

Finally, countries with an FFP pointed out how a Dutch FFP would benefit them. The European countries, in particular, see the added value of the signal that would be given if more countries were to adopt an FFP. We are **stronger together**, after all.

countries and organisations recently launched an FFP Global Partner Network: <https://www.icrw.org/press-releases/more-than-30-governments-and-organizations-now-working-to-advance-feminist-foreign-policy-around-the-world/>.

5 Conclusions and recommendations for the Netherlands on developing an FFP

5.1 Conclusions

The Netherlands is known worldwide for its efforts on women's rights and gender equality. These issues have been garnering increasing attention in the realm of foreign policy, especially – but not only – in the area of development cooperation. This raises the obvious question of whether adopting an FFP would also be a good choice for the Netherlands, following on from Sweden, Canada, Spain, France, Luxembourg and Mexico. The present study looks at the experiences of countries with an FFP and the current Dutch policy context regarding gender mainstreaming.

The study indicates that an FFP could have significant added value for Dutch foreign policy and for the Netherlands domestically. Experience shows that FFPs **greatly boost efforts to advance gender equality** and make **gender mainstreaming** more systematic. This is thanks, in part, to the **political weight** of such policy and the scope for **a clear, shared, inclusive narrative**.

Considering the Dutch context in particular, an FFP would offer certain specific opportunities. The Netherlands has already made notable headway in its external policy and in the area of diversity and inclusion within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Many of the institutional changes implemented by countries with an FFP in support of this policy (section 2.3.1) are already familiar to the Netherlands. The Netherlands can also build on its strong international record on human rights. A number of the outcomes that countries have attributed to their FFP (section 2.3.2) – for example, an increased focus on issues such as ICSR, violence against women and girls relating to the arms trade, and SRHR – are outcomes the Netherlands is already working towards. These efforts are also valued abroad and help enhance the Netherlands' influence. In this regard, **an FFP would be a logical next step**.

At the same time, there are significant steps the Netherlands could take in the years ahead that would benefit its **effectiveness, authority and reputation** when it comes to these issues. According to interviews, the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department's recent evaluation (IOB, 2021) and other policy documents, it appears that more still needs to be done to **make gender mainstreaming a structural component** within **all DGs**. There is often still a gap between policy and practice; there is not always a sense of urgency, and there is insufficient investment of the necessary time, money and knowledge. There are also not enough accountability mechanisms. Furthermore, a broader understanding of gender, intersectionality and power relations would benefit the quality and effectiveness of the Netherlands' work. The experiences and tips of countries with an FFP tie in perfectly with the follow-up steps and areas for improvement suggested by the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (section 3.2.1). A focus on policy coherence is also relevant for the Netherlands. An FFP could prevent the Netherlands from falling behind other countries.

The countries with an FFP indicate that FFPs further benefit **internal work on diversity and inclusion**, drawing greater attention to intersectionality. In addition, FFPs can increase the sense of political urgency with regard to gender mainstreaming in **national policy**, the need for an intersectional, government-wide approach and the structural application of gender assessments. This is necessary given the major challenges faced by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in promoting gender policy among the various other ministries. There is now momentum, and an FFP would offer a perfect opportunity to address these topics.

The experiences of countries with an FFP show that **political leadership and ownership** are essential for the implementation of an FFP agenda. Here too there is an opportunity for the Netherlands where, in comparison with other countries, political urgency on these topics is sometimes lacking. By politically committing to an FFP and developing such policy together with government leaders, civil society and other stakeholders, the Netherlands can create a shared narrative with broad support. This conversation is important for eliminating potential concerns and creating transparency. It will provide an essential boost to gender mainstreaming and intersectionality in policy, diplomacy and programming, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the Netherlands' foreign policy.

Adopting an FFP could be a strategic move from an international perspective too. Doing so would allow the Netherlands to uphold its reputation as a **leader** in the areas of gender equality and human rights, and deliver politically on its support for women's rights organisations. It would help the Netherlands to continue being seen among the growing number of countries with an FFP and avoid missing the opportunity to be involved in international initiatives and alliances. This is important for both the Netherlands and the wider world, considering the current pushback on issues such as women's rights and gender equality, and the importance of international cooperation.

The experiences of countries with an FFP show that concern that the terminology of the policy could have a polarising effect is not entirely well-founded. The term 'feminism' was already more well-accepted in a number of countries, and for some it was at the core of their general government plans. It should be emphasised, however, that a **clear definition and vision** are important for internal and external support and for communication purposes. An FFP must also be more than just branding; it must provide insight into how focusing on gender equality and power relations can lead to different policy choices.

If the Netherlands were to adopt an FFP, much of the policy's ultimate added value would depend on the specific choices made. Important factors in this regard include exactly how it is set up, which policy areas it embraces and the extent to which it is optional. The experiences of other countries with an FFP and those of the Netherlands itself presented above offer a good sense of what could work for the Netherlands.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the present study, an FFP appears to be a logical option for the Netherlands, provided there is sufficient political support for it to be incorporated into policy and put in practice. If the Netherlands were to decide to develop an FFP, the experiences of countries that have already adopted such a policy and the Netherlands' own experiences with gender mainstreaming and policy coherence would offer important lessons. Based on this study, a series of recommendations has been presented on how to establish an effective FFP.

The primary recommendation on the development of an FFP is to provide **clarity** from the outset about what an FFP involves and what the term 'feminist' implies in this context. A clear vision, well-defined principles, a long-term strategy and an inclusive process also contribute to a **common narrative** and mutual understanding. The remaining recommendations can be separated into two categories: (1) leadership, ownership and public support; and (2) clarity, structure and practical support.

Leadership, ownership and public support

1. **Commitment at political level** is crucial for generating support and for the steps that must be taken. This applies not only to the leadership within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the

Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, but also to the Prime Minister and the rest of the government. Political leadership is relevant at all steps of the policy process and for all topics that require ongoing attention.

2. Here too **providing clarity, involving people** in the process and finding the right gender champions among senior civil servants can increase support, leadership and ownership. The experiences of other countries show that the formation of a new government is an excellent opportunity to achieve this and that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs can play an active role by creating **international momentum** and **highlighting the opportunities** for other ministries.
3. An **FFP that applies to all foreign policy**, including that of other ministries, stands to provide the most added value. This requires greater insight into current gender-related efforts in the various policy areas and greater emphasis on policy coherence, coordination and the use of instruments such as assessments of the Sustainable Development Goals and gender equality. If necessary, it is also possible to refrain from immediately publishing the FFP in regard to all policy areas, instead doing so in phases, based on a strategy developed together with the various ministries.
4. A **participatory FFP-development process** that includes civil servants (see, for example, Sweden) and various representatives of civil society (see, for example, Canada) respects the spirit of feminism and feminist foreign policy and creates ownership. This takes time and human resources but leads to more inclusive, broadly supported, effective policy. It is advisable to begin discussions with the DGs, embassies, other ministries and civil society organisations as early as possible, especially in the Global South. To this end the Ministry of Foreign Affairs can build on existing relationships with feminist and women's rights organisations around the world and with other stakeholders, such as faith-based organisations, that have extensive experience in promoting inclusion.
5. An FFP presents an excellent opportunity to start a conversation on gender and women's rights in foreign policy and to increase **awareness and support** by involving the public – including men and boys – in the shared narrative, inviting their participation and giving a face to feminism. In doing so it is important to pay attention to intersectionality, anti-racism and decolonisation within the context of an FFP because these topics are socially relevant and there is international momentum behind them. As Canada and Sweden have shown, courage and leadership on the part of the government can raise awareness and advance feminist themes.

Clarity, structure and practical support

6. It is recommended to have a **guide** such as Spain's FFP or Sweden's **handbook** containing important information, including the **policy's basic principles, working methods and topic areas. Specific examples** of the implications of an FFP for various policy areas would also be useful, both for the various directorates-general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and for the work of relevant ministries (provided that the FFP applies to all foreign policy).
7. **Responsibility for the implementation of the FFP** should lie with the SG or the DGs of the relevant ministries. Make each individual civil servant responsible for their own part and avoid a non-committal approach ('passing the buck'). Ensure a clear accountability structure from top to bottom and ensure that resources are available to implement gender mainstreaming and other aspects of the FFP.
8. Stimulate people's own ability to learn about what an FFP entails and to **incorporate this** into their own work. Ensure budget and practical support through **gender expertise and training** by policy area and using gender analysis with an intersectional lens (see, for example, Canada's government-wide Gender-based Analysis Plus). Study the implications of an FFP for the various policy areas in order to better understand where there are opportunities and how to make the most of them. Encourage the informal exchange of information among colleagues in the Netherlands and with colleagues in countries that have an FFP.
9. Pay specific attention to **gender-transformative approaches, intersectionality and power**

issues, which are at the heart of FFPs. Include this in gender analyses, monitoring and evaluation efforts, and studies, and further scale up ongoing conversations about **North-South relations** within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

10. **Manage on the basis of results**, for example by using an action plan which outlines expected results and relevant indicators that can be updated annually, and by making gender the focus of annual plans and policy. For more on this, see the lessons and recommendations on transformative gender mainstreaming in the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department's recent evaluation and the national-level policy review on emancipation.
11. Incorporate a good **accountability mechanism**, using input from civil society, including Southern partners and women's rights organisations. Do this for the monitoring (internal) and the evaluation (external) of the FFP, and for the application of tools such as the Integrated Assessment Framework's gender impact assessment. Gender budgeting can be an additional way to gain good insight at ministerial level into efforts relating to gender and intersectionality.
12. Continue working towards **gender equality and diversity and inclusion within the organisation**, and work together with other parties to put them into practice. Make women's representation, which includes women from minority groups and from the Global South, a core focus of the FFP.

Appendix 1 – Lists of questions

List 1: countries with FFP

Development and approach

- What steps has your country taken to develop a feminist foreign policy?
- What has been successful in this process?
- What has been challenging?
- What lessons have been learned?
- Who was involved? Who was responsible? Any particularly important change agents?
- What are key elements and principles that the government put at the heart of their FFP?
- To what extent was action taken at the national (domestic) level?
- How has sufficient support been mobilised for the policy? What were the challenges?
- Have budgets been released? What has been the experience with them?
- Have there been any internal or external factors that had a major impact on the FFP process of these countries?

Implementation and results

- What steps did your country take with regard to the implementation of an FFP?
- What is successful with regard to implementation? Any examples?
- What is challenging? Examples?
- What lessons can be learned (that might be relevant for the Netherlands)?
- What concrete actions and results do you see since the adoption of the FFP in your country?
- How is accountability of the FFP regulated?
- How did you set up the Monitoring and Evaluation of the FFP?

Recommendations

- What do you see as the added value of an FFP? (e.g. on themes of security, politics, trade and international cooperation)
- Do you have any particular recommendations for the Netherlands, in case the Netherlands would adopt an FFP?

List 2: BZ-PSG

- What is HDPO/PSG doing to integrate gender into programmes and policy, both within HDPO and more broadly at the Ministry?
 - How is this reflected in the various phases of policy development and implementation?
 - Consider, for example, policy development, policy action plans, policy implementation/programmes, planning, monitoring and evaluation, coherence and accountability.
 - And (possibly through PSG departments) organisational development, organisational culture, capacity building.
 - How do you view the role of different stakeholders in that process?
- To what extent does PSG/HDPO receive guidance from OCW/DE on gender mainstreaming and equal opportunities?
- What do you regard as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' biggest challenges in terms of gender

- policy (both internally and externally)?
- To what extent do you think the approach taken by HDPO/ PSG is intersectional**? What aspects, if any, do you think are intersectional?
- What is needed for gender to be better integrated into foreign policy as a whole?
- Could the term 'feminist' be used in the Dutch context? Why/why not? Can you think of an alternative?
- What might be the benefit(s) of an FFP?
- And the challenges?
- What steps would need to be taken to adopt and implement an FFP?

** In this context intersectionality is defined as tackling discrimination on the basis of each individual's combined identity characteristics.

List 3: other DGs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- What is your DG doing to integrated gender into programmes and policy?
 - How is this reflected in the various phases of policy development and implementation?
 - Consider, for example, policy development, policy action plans, policy implementation/programmes, planning, monitoring and evaluation, coherence and accountability.
 - And (particularly by the DG itself, and possibly also through PSG departments) organisational development, organisational culture, capacity building.
 - How do you view the role of different stakeholders in that process?
- To what extent does PSG/HDPO receive guidance from OCW/DE on gender mainstreaming?
- What do you regard as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' biggest challenges in terms of gender policy (both internally and externally)?
- To what extent do you think the approach taken by your DG is intersectional**? What aspects, if any, do you think are intersectional?
- What is needed for gender to be better integrated into foreign policy as a whole?
- Could the term 'feminist' be used in the Dutch context? Why/why not? Can you think of an alternative?
- What might be the benefit(s) of an FFP?
- And the challenges?
- What steps would need to be taken to adopt and implement an FFP?

*(Political Affairs, European Cooperation, Foreign Economic Relations, International Cooperation)

** In this context intersectionality is defined as tackling discrimination on the basis of each individual's combined identity characteristics.

List 4: Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (Equal Opportunities Department/ coordination)

On gender mainstreaming in Dutch policy:

- Can you give us some details about the coordination mechanism for mainstreaming gender in national policy?
- What are the objectives?

- What are the challenges?
- How much progress has been made as regards proportional representation of women in decision-making?
- What (roughly) is being done to integrate gender into national policy and programmes?
 - To what extent is there a gender-sensitive approach across central government?
 - Is there an intersectional approach?
- On which topics does the Netherlands score well for gender equality? What are the main areas where more work and attention are needed?

Definition of an FFP in the Dutch context:

- Could the term 'feminist' be used in the Dutch context? Why/why not? Can you think of an alternative?

Added value of an FFP

- What might be the benefit(s) of an FFP, both within the Netherlands and internationally?
- And the challenges?
- What steps would need to be taken to adopt and implement an FFP?

List of questions 5: Knowledge Centres

Results

- To what extent do countries with an FFP do more on gender equality than 'like-minded countries' (such as the Netherlands)?
- To what extent are they more ambitious?
- To what extent are they more effective?

Accountability and M&E

- How is M&E and/or accountability of FFPs organised?

Budgets

- To what extent have budgets been released (other than for direct funding to WROs)?
- To what extent is it needed?

Structure for gender expertise and capacity building

- To what extent is extra capacity building of civil servants required?
- How has gender expertise been organised (interdepartmental, departmental, taskforce etc)?

Institutionalisation versus political commitment

- What is the influence/relevance of good institutional embedding?
- What is the influence/ relevance of tools and instruments such as the OECD gender marker, GBA+ requirements, requirement through yearly plans, higher level commitments etc.?

A Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) (as a focus of international development cooperation) versus FFP

- Would you recommend a FIAP if an FFP might seem a bit too much?
- Or rather: just adopt an FFP and hopefully strengthen it over time?

Gender transformation

- To what extent are current FFPs gender-transformative (in reality)?
- To what extent do they apply an intersectional lens?
- To what extent do they promote policy coherence?

The term feminism

- Does the option exist not to use 'feminist' but to use an alternative term, bearing in mind that all countries so far have used the word 'feminism' in their policy?
- If so, what alternatives might exist?

Decolonisation, anti-racism

- To what extent do governments with an FFP address white supremacy/patriarchy, decolonisation, North-South equality, etc?

Recommendations for the Netherlands

- What may be the benefit of an FFP for domestic policy and implementation?
- What may be the benefit of an FFP for the credibility and reputation of the Netherlands in its work as a gender ally?

List 6: WO=MEN

Added value:

- Evaluations and our interviews have shown that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs does a great deal of gender-specific work but that there is little gender mainstreaming in the various areas of foreign policy (trade, security, etc. and for example in food security projects). To what extent would an FFP help the Ministry introduce more/better gender mainstreaming, in a gender-transformative way?
- What other benefits do you think there are? Are there any risks?

Support and terminology:

- How much support is there in the Netherlands for an FFP? (Is the Netherlands ready to embrace an FFP?)
- How would Europe (the EU) view a Dutch FFP?
- What would be the response to the term 'feminism' (in the Netherlands)? Are there any alternatives?

Inclusion and participation:

- What would be the best way to get civil society involved in the development/adoption and implementation of an FFP?

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