

THE GENDER DIMENSION OF FOREIGN POLICY



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE



The gender dimension of foreign policy

Based on PACE Resolution 2351 (2020)

Rapporteur: Ms Petra Stienen (Netherlands, ALDE)

In past decades, women's rights have progressively been recognised as human rights. However, despite an increase in the political and economic participation of women, full gender equality is yet to be achieved. Indeed, women's economic, political and social rights are being attacked in an organised and widespread backlash. Existing inequalities have been further highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic in which women have experienced a disproportionately negative impact and it has become clear that gender equality must be a priority when responding to crises. Gender inequality is also reflected in international and foreign policies. On average, in Council of Europe member States, only 13% of ambassadors are women, and in national diplomatic services, they are still a minority¹. A growing body of research has shown evidence of the link between women, peace and security, and several countries have taken steps to address foreign policy from a gender perspective.

1. Report on the Balanced participation of women and men in decision-making, Gender Equality Commission of the Council of Europe, 2016.

The gender dimension of foreign policies: pushing forward local and international progress

Feminist foreign policies have been adopted by several States. They demonstrate a commitment to placing gender equality at the centre of action taken and to include an intersectional approach on their agendas.

Promoting better representation of women in diplomacy, development and peace-keeping operations

The participation of women in peace operations has been recognised as having a positive impact in contributing to the sustainability of peace and adopting less confrontational approaches. However, men currently represent 95% of the uniformed personnel in peace keeping operations. In past years, the number of women diplomats has increased, but they have rarely been appointed to the top ranks or to conflict areas.

Feminist foreign policies recognise that an androcentric conception of the diplomatic sphere has previously shaped this field. The characteristics necessary for success have been associated with a traditional vision of masculinity. By adopting an intersectional and inclusive approach, relevant representation of women and people from various backgrounds can be ensured. Promoting this approach is at the heart of feminist foreign policies.

Making gender and inclusion priorities in response to international crises

During the Covid-19 pandemic, expert groups and government task forces were charged with developing a response to the crisis. Although women are over-represented in the health sector, Covid-19 expert groups were predominantly composed of men. Feminist foreign policies aim at pluriformity of expertise and representation and strive for inclusive, coordinated and gender-sensitive response mechanisms.



Good practices in feminist foreign policies

Some countries have been pioneers in including a gender dimension in their foreign policy. Cooperation policies and external action implemented by international organisations such as the Council of Europe also aim to inspire other countries to use this approach as a tool to promote women's rights, inclusion and non-discrimination.

Sweden

Swedish feminist foreign policy is based on the 3 Rs: rights, representation and resources. Support for the adoption of measures to achieve a higher participation of women in economic and political life and the allocation of sufficient resources have been crucial to its success. All Swedish ambassadors are required to promote the policy and report on its implementation. Parity has been reached in managerial positions and around 40% of Sweden's ambassadors are women. Specific programmes have been launched in the fields of women's participation in peace processes and combating sexual violence in conflict.

Canada

Highlighting the importance of women's active role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, Canada made gender equality a priority on the political agenda of the G7 during its presidency in 2018. Each policy linked to its Feminist International Assistance Policy is reviewed through a comparative gender analysis. Half of Canadian diplomats are women, including in high-ranking positions. \$1.4 bn per year are allocated to promoting women and girls' health and rights and Canada has committed to continue doing so over a period of 10 years.



Finland

Finland's foreign policy emphasises the importance of coherence between domestic and foreign policies. During its presidency of the European Union, Finland encouraged all Member States to ratify the Istanbul Convention. The International Gender Equality Prize was created to reward a person or an organisation that has advanced gender equality.

France

France's feminist diplomacy priorities include promoting the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention, responding to the backlash against women's rights, promoting the presence of women in peace-keeping operations and establishing links between women's rights and climate change. Women are encouraged to apply for leadership positions. The number of female French ambassadors has doubled in the past years. In 2021, France, UN Women and Mexico, organised the [Generation Equality Forum](#), including a movement focusing on women, peace and security and gender equality in humanitarian action.

The Netherlands

Dutch foreign policy pursues four main goals: prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls, political and decision-making power, economic empowerment and self-reliance and conflict resolution, peacebuilding and reconstruction. 30% of Dutch ambassadors and 40% of directors at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are women. The number of women participating in operations has been growing steadily over the past years.

Recommended action for Council of Europe member States, national parliaments and media

The implementation of a gender dimension at all levels of foreign policy contributes to a strengthened role and representation of women in decision-making. Denouncing the recent backlash against women's rights and supporting action at international level can be diplomatic means to uphold and protect such rights. To this end, political leadership is essential. The following actions are based on the recommendations of PACE Resolution 2351 (2020) on The gender dimension of foreign policy. They include, but are not limited to:

- ▶ developing an inclusive gender dimension in foreign policies, including the promotion of women's rights and inclusion at all levels.
- ▶ promoting the equal participation of women and men in decision-making and ensuring diversity in panels of events.
- ▶ promoting the participation of women and persons from multiple backgrounds in diplomatic careers, trade missions, peace operations, negotiations and crisis management.
- ▶ promoting, ratifying and implementing the Council of Europe convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).
- ▶ providing political and financial support for programmes protecting women's rights. Using gender budgeting and impact assessments in the preparation and evaluation of legislative measures and policies as well as assistance and cooperation programmes.
- ▶ investing in the collection of gender-disaggregated data and related research.
- ▶ supporting civil society organisations promoting and protecting equality and women's rights.
- ▶ raising awareness on the benefits of an inclusive gender dimension of foreign policy.
- ▶ promoting gender mainstreaming in the functioning of public administrations and providing training on gender equality, diversity, and inclusion and on combating sexism in such administrations.
- ▶ guaranteeing the participation and representation of women in all crisis response planning and decision-making and ensuring gender impact assessments and gender budgeting for all recovery measures and financial packages. Promoting an intersectional approach to recovery plans.



Council of Europe Action

- ▶ PACE [Resolution 2351 \(2020\)](#) on “The gender dimension of foreign policy”
- ▶ [Debate and adoption of the Resolution 2351 \(2020\)](#) during PACE’s enlarged Standing Committee (20/11/2020)
- ▶ PACE [webinar](#) on “The gender dimension of foreign policy in the response to COVID-19”
- ▶ PACE [Recommendation 2157 \(2019\)](#) and [Resolution 2290 \(2019\)](#) on “Towards an ambitious Council of Europe agenda for gender equality”
- ▶ PACE [Resolution 2289 \(2019\)](#) and Doc. 14908 on “The Istanbul Convention on violence against women: achievements and challenges”
- ▶ Recommendation [CM/Rec \(2019\)1](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member States to prevent and combat sexism
- ▶ PACE [Resolution 2120 \(2016\)](#) on “Women in the armed forces: promoting equality, putting an end to gender-based violence”
- ▶ Council of Europe [Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence \(Istanbul Convention\)](#)
- ▶ Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2010\)10](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the role of women and men in conflict prevention and resolution and in peace building
- ▶ PACE [Resolution 1385 \(2004\)](#) on “Conflict prevention and resolution: the role of women”
- ▶ Active work from PACE Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination and creation of sui generis structures such as the [Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence](#), actively promoting the ratification and full implementation of the Istanbul Convention
- ▶ Recommendation [CM/Rec \(2003\)3](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member states on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making

www.coe.int

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE