



Feminist Foreign Policy in the United States: **An Agenda for Action**

COALITION

FOR A FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY
IN THE UNITED STATES

FEMINIST
FOREIGN
POLICY

COLLABORATIVE

ABOUT THE COALITION FOR A FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY IN THE UNITED STATES

The Coalition for a Feminist Foreign Policy in the United States is a collective effort to advance a vision for U.S. foreign policy that promotes overarching goals of gender equality, human rights, bodily autonomy, peace and environmental integrity. Based on years of consultations with countries who have adopted feminist foreign policies, U.S. foreign policy experts, and feminist civil society around the world, the Coalition for a Feminist Foreign Policy in 2020 released its vision for a feminist foreign policy in the United States and articulated concrete policy recommendations for the U.S. Government. Over 80 organizations have endorsed this vision, with more welcome to join our growing movement.

ABOUT THE FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY COLLABORATIVE

The [Feminist Foreign Policy Collaborative](#) (the Collaborative) works to advance feminist approaches to foreign policy worldwide. By curating convenings, conducting field-shaping research and analysis and amplifying expertise, the Collaborative serves as a meeting point for feminists inside and outside of government to work together to ensure feminist FFPs are ambitious, transformative and effectively implemented. The Collaborative works in a secretariat capacity supporting the work of two coalitions: the [Global Partner Network for Feminist Foreign Policy](#) and the [Coalition for a Feminist Foreign Policy in the United States](#). The Global Partner Network for Feminist Foreign Policy is an informal body comprised of more than 70 organizations and governments working on feminist foreign policy around the world; the Coalition for a Feminist Foreign Policy in the United States unites more than 80 organizations advocating for a more feminist foreign policy in the United States. While the focus of each of these coalitions is different, the goal is the same: to ensure wider adoption of feminist foreign policy principles advancing a better future for people, peace and planet.

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Feminist Foreign Policy in the United States: An Agenda

As of the fall of 2023,* more than a dozen countries around the world have adopted a feminist foreign policy, including both of the United States' neighbors and many of its allies. These governments are working together at the United Nations to advance a multilateral agenda on gender equality and human rights, signaling the highest level of ambition for these issues. The absence of the United States in this cohort is increasingly conspicuous, and the remaining months of the Biden-Harris Administration present a clear opportunity to step up global efforts and leadership on this agenda.

Although it has not espoused the mantle, the Biden-Harris Administration has made clear progress in the first half of its term in instituting key aspects of feminist foreign policy, including executive action to advance gender equality, uphold human rights and prioritize diversity, equity and inclusion. This work is not over, however. Recognizing that the process of transforming how the U.S. conducts foreign policy takes time, resources and ongoing leadership, the [Coalition for a Feminist Foreign Policy in the United States](#) has developed this policy paper to guide the Administration's next steps through the end of this current term. This paper outlines concrete recommendations for reforming U.S. foreign policy structures, building the readiness of leaders and personnel within the U.S. Government (USG) to take feminist approaches in their work, and advancing feminist principles in the course of U.S. engagement on three particularly critical issues: **climate change, sexual and reproductive health and rights and crisis response.**

Whether the U.S. embraces the term "feminist foreign policy" or not, the Coalition strongly urges the Biden-Harris Administration to utilize the remainder of its term to advance a more feminist approach to its foreign policy – both by maintaining momentum towards fulfilling outstanding goals and through targeted efforts to institutionalize policy advancements achieved to date for sustainability through future administrations.

Three thematic priorities for US engagement	1 Climate change
2 Sexual and reproductive health rights	3 Conflict response

* NB: This brief was written in September of 2023. Over the course of October and November, a number of major events have reshaped the global landscape for feminist foreign policy, including the reignition of war in Israel and Palestine and electoral losses by a number of FFP governments around the world. We recognize that each of these events are germane to this discourse and the prospect of U.S. efforts under this umbrella, and will explore ramifications and associated recommendations in future publications as time allows for a more thoughtful and substantive response than was possible within the constraints of this publication.

Overview of Feminist Foreign Policy

Feminist and other social justice movements around the world are gaining momentum in challenging inequities, confronting the institutions who perpetuate them and demanding a seat at the table to define new, transformative ways forward. A feminist approach to foreign policy prioritizes equality, inclusion and partnership in driving systemic change and designing solutions that benefit the broader society. It redefines “security” to recognize that problems such as climate change, poverty and humanitarian crises undermine the well-being of the global community as a whole, requiring collaboration and a commitment to peaceful resolution of conflict. Feminist foreign policy also demands the inclusion of people historically excluded from policymaking, ensuring their ability to influence the policies and structures that impact them directly. At its core, a feminist foreign policy seeks to achieve broader stability and prosperity by driving solutions that respect human rights, personal agency and environmental integrity.

Shaped by these movements and informed by years of consultation with feminist activists and organizations around the world, particularly those on the receiving end of U.S. foreign policy, the Coalition for a Feminist Foreign Policy in the U.S. [defines feminist foreign policy](#) as:

*“the policy of a state that defines its interactions with other states, as well as movements and other non-state actors, in a manner that prioritizes peace, gender equality and environmental integrity; enshrines, promotes, and protects the human rights of all; seeks to disrupt colonial, racist, patriarchal and male-dominated power structures; and allocates significant resources, including research, to achieve that vision. Feminist foreign policy is coherent in its approach across all of its levers of influence, anchored by the exercise of those values at home and co-created with feminist activists, groups and movements, at home and abroad.”*¹

Why should the U.S. and other governments embrace feminist foreign policy?

In recent years, global challenges from COVID, to climate change and growing and protracted conflict and displacement, have tested the ability of institutions around the world to keep pace with growing needs and ensure human and planetary flourishing. More countries – including the U.S. – are being confronted with the negative impacts of traditional foreign policy and forced to acknowledge the legacy of colonial and imperial practices. COVID in particular illuminated deep structural and social inequities that have relegated people – especially women, racial and ethnic minorities, and other marginalized groups – to cycles of poverty and oppression for generations. A growing “anti-gender” movement has undermined sexual and reproductive rights, gender equality, and the rights of LGBTQIA+ people within the U.S. and abroad with life-threatening consequences. And the presumption that peace would flow from military and security policies prioritizing the sale of arms over long-term investments in addressing the root causes of conflicts have proven ineffective. The collective impact of these pressures over time has put democracy at risk, destabilized nations, degraded our environment, and deepened humanitarian crises.

As the United States and others stand at an inflection point, one lesson is clear: the “business as usual” approach has not worked for the majority of the world’s population. To break this pattern, the current global context demands new approaches to endemic challenges and a shift away from policymaking that is heavily rooted in inequitable structures and discriminatory norms. At their core, good governance and feminist policymaking go hand in hand.

Feminist Foreign Policy in the United States

Since assuming office, the Biden-Harris Administration has had ample occasion to apply a feminist lens in responding to current challenges both in the U.S. and abroad. Multiple complex and interconnected foreign policy issues such as the wars in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Sudan and Ethiopia, the crackdown on women's rights in Iran, as well as acute food insecurity driven by climate change and conflict, have arisen against the backdrop of heightened domestic political polarization and threats of economic crisis. The **Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization**² decision and a growing anti-transgender lobby has emboldened several U.S. states to legislate away sexual and reproductive rights and the rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals in the United States, with implications overseas too.

Setting the tone for a progressive policy agenda, the Biden-Harris Administration committed early on that U.S. policies and actions would be inclusive, intersectional and accountable for the well-being of people both domestically and internationally. Executive actions such as establishing the White House Gender Policy Council³ (WHGPC), launching the National Gender Equity and Equality Strategy⁴ (NGS) and other initiatives noted in the Coalition's previous analysis⁵ have demonstrated this commitment and substantial progress towards articulating and implementing a more feminist approach to foreign policy.

Additionally, since the Coalition drafted its midterm evaluation⁶ of the Administration's efforts to integrate feminist principles within its foreign policy, Congress confirmed the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues and the Administration rolled out a range of new policy measures related to gender equality, including the:

- U.S. Strategy on Global Women's Economic Security (January 2023)⁷
- FY24 President's Budget Request and Congressional Budget Justification (March 2023)⁸

- USAID Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy (March 2023)⁹
- U.S. National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence (May 2023)¹⁰
- U.S. Strategy to Respond to the Effects of Climate Change on Women (August 2023)¹¹
- USAID LGBTQI+ Inclusive Development Policy (August 2023)¹²
- Bilateral and multilateral responses to the ongoing situations in Iran and Ukraine

Despite this progress, the Administration still has notable objectives from the NGS yet to achieve, including ensuring that ambitious goals set forth in the strategy take root across the whole of government. For instance, the lack of a meaningful focus on gender in the National Security Strategy was a missed opportunity to mainstream this approach.

To promote the sustainability of achievements made to date and to maintain momentum for onward progress, the next stage of work requires further action to embed feminist principles more firmly in U.S. foreign policy structures. The Administration should eliminate siloes that undermine the integration of feminist principles across the full range of foreign policy levers (diplomacy, development, trade, defense and immigration); ensure strong internal capacity to implement feminist foreign policy; build sustainable accountability and transparency mechanisms; and develop an effective gender budgeting system to ensure adequate resources for this work.

The Coalition further recommends that the Administration sharpen its policy posture on priority issues highly relevant to feminist foreign policy, particularly sexual and reproductive health and rights, climate justice and peace, security and humanitarian response.

Next Steps: Recommendations for Action

The Coalition in its vision [for a U.S. feminist foreign policy](#)¹³ and [recommendations to the then-incoming Biden-Harris Administration](#)¹⁴ outlined four interrelated pillars: (1) policy articulation; (2) leadership/structures; (3) funding; and (4) accountability.

While the Administration has demonstrated progress in each of these pillars since it took office, the Coalition calls on the U.S. to prioritize the following measures:

	POLICY ARTICULATION	LEADERSHIP/STRUCTURES	FUNDING	ACCOUNTABILITY
1	Articulate goals, policy positions, redlines and language templates related to gender equality, SRHR and DEIA for bilateral and multilateral forums	Appoint a second co-chair of WHGPC	Set a benchmark of no less than 20 percent of U.S. international affairs funding to be dedicated to initiatives with gender equality as a primary objective	Publicly release agency-specific action plans and progress reports
2	Adopt a gender analysis requirement to apply to all agency-level programming, policies and initiatives	Establish a feminist civil society advisory council	Increase direct funding to women's rights organizations and women-led organizations (WROs/WLOs)	Institute a system for agencies to track and share data/information on progress towards feminist foreign policy objectives
3	Develop agency-specific gender policies that guide the integration of gender equality in each agency's work	Increase gender expertise in foreign policy agencies and offices	Seek funding for internal gender capacity-strengthening and expertise within agencies	Regularize civil society engagement and co-creation of USG policies/priorities
4	Retool internal personnel policies to align with feminist principles, including guidelines related to access to health care; hiring and promotion practices; and workplace harassment	Codify the WHGPC, S/GWI Ambassador, USAID Senior Gender Coordinator and other relevant positions and offices		

Policy Articulation

U.S. foreign policy should advance gender equality and broader diversity, inclusion and representation through an intersectional feminist approach. Translating this vision into action requires clear articulation of measures intended to transform the internal structures and external policy priorities of each of the responsible U.S. agencies to align with feminist approaches.¹⁵

Recommendation #1: Articulate goals, policy positions and redlines related to gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) and establish minimum standards/language templates for bilateral and multilateral forums or convenings

Interagency coherence on inclusive and equitable language/policy positions related to gender, SRHR and DEIA is critical to reinforcing intersectional feminist messages, particularly in a multilateral environment where some influential states regularly seek to erode LGBTQIA+ rights, gender equality and inclusion. Key convenings such as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), Commission on Population and Development (CPD), UN General Assembly (UNGA) and UN Human Rights Council provide significant opportunity to advance feminist multilateral cooperation – U.S. delegations should leverage these moments to include civil society representatives and build coalitions in support of feminist positions in outcome documents, resolutions and other agreements and alliances.

The USG must also uphold internal alignment on gender-, SRHR- and DEIA-related redlines and positions in other multilateral and bilateral settings such as the UN Security Council, World Health Organization, G-7 and G-20, trade negotiations and discussions on global health, climate action, humanitarian response, economic cooperation and defense. The Administration should ensure that all U.S. delegation members have at least a baseline understanding of these redlines/positions and engage agency gender and DEIA experts in the process of developing their goals and policy posture.

Priority actions:

- Develop central policy guidance on redlines/positions/language and disseminate this guidance as required reading for all members of any U.S. delegation to multilateral or bilateral convenings
- Integrate policy guidance into training and pre-deployment briefings for relevant personnel, including U.S. representatives to multilateral bodies and international organizations
- Require delegations to have briefings with agency gender/DEIA experts ahead of multilateral or bilateral engagements and consult them throughout negotiations
- Join the Feminist Foreign Policy Plus group – a cohort of nations who have adopted feminist foreign policies or centralized gender equality in their foreign policy initiatives – to demonstrate support for feminist multilateral cooperation and solidarity with like-minded states advancing strong gender equality policies

Recommendation #2: Adopt a gender analysis requirement to apply to all agency-level programming, policy and initiatives related to foreign policy or international assistance

Intersectional gender analysis aims to identify and address gaps or harmful impacts of policies and programs on different groups based on identity factors such as gender, race, age, or economic status. U.S. interventions abroad should be designed and implemented in a way that responds to the differential needs and barriers within a community, mitigating unintended negative consequences and catalyzing systemic change so that no one is left behind – intersectional gender analysis supports meeting this aim.

Although some U.S. foreign policy agencies have adopted a gender analysis requirement,¹⁶ progress and consistency is uneven across the interagency. Resource constraints, insufficient expertise and support and poor understanding of the impact of gender inequality on policies and programs contribute to inadequate gender integration. Senior leadership must reinforce robust implementation by

providing the resources, support and oversight needed for this tool to be effective.

While the Coalition strongly recommends the Administration expand the practice of gender analysis across all foreign assistance programs, policies and initiatives and support agencies in their implementation of it, we recognize that instituting gender analysis can be time- and labor-intensive and stretch already limited resources, particularly if it is an unfunded directive. As such, the Coalition urges agencies to build incrementally towards fully incorporating gender analysis, starting with an assessment of its own current capacity to implement this model and establishing a common understanding across the interagency of core requirements for gender analysis.

Priority actions:

- Seek an audit – potentially a Government Accountability Office (GAO) review – of agency-level capacity and resources to implement gender analysis to identify practical challenges in effectively carrying out this work across the agency
- Establish minimum standards and common metrics for intersectional gender analysis across foreign policy activities. The development of these minimum standards should be led by an interagency working group in partnership with civil society experts, practitioners and advocates.
- Require and support agencies to develop agency-specific gender analysis tools based on the minimum standards and tailored to their own functions within a set timeframe, ideally within the first quarter of 2024
- Prioritize building localized capacity and expertise to deliver context-relevant gender analysis, particularly by investing in mission-level national staff such as foreign service nationals (FSNs) or locally-employed staff (LES) and community-based partners to conduct the analysis and inform program design accordingly.
- Reduce administrative and resource burdens of instituting a gender analysis requirement, such as by:
 - Developing gender analyses by sector and region to inform program design within that area

- Designing a simple, user-friendly intersectional gender marker to guide program design and implementation when formal or comprehensive gender analyses are not feasible
- Requiring that program proposals identify context-specific gender-related barriers in their problem statements and account for such barriers in the program’s activities and indicators
- Streamlining existing directives, e.g., environmental impact analysis requirements, to incorporate intersectional gender considerations
- Establish an ad hoc working group comprised of agencies with established gender analysis frameworks to advise other agencies on best practices and key considerations, including staffing, budget and oversight mechanisms. Foreign governments already utilizing gender analysis, such as [Canada’s Gender-Based Analysis Plus framework](#)¹⁷ could also provide best practices to consider.
- Ensure resources to robustly implement gender analysis are included in each agency’s FY25 and FY 26 budget requests and advocate for OMB’s support and prioritization of such requests
- Require annual reporting on agencies’ efforts to mainstream gender analysis using common SMARTIE (specific, measurable, answerable, relevant, time-bound, inclusive and equitable) indicators

Recommendation #3: Develop agency-specific gender policies that guide the integration of intersectional gender equality across the agency’s work

In order to effectively contextualize the vision set forth in the NGS across all levers of foreign policy, the Administration should articulate clear standards for integration of intersectional gender equality and other aspects of feminist foreign policy within individual agencies. This can take form either through a standalone gender policy or by incorporating gender into the agency’s governing policy. Each agency should outline key principles and objectives, as well as the internal structures, resources and accountability mechanisms necessary to achieve those goals. They should also clearly articulate agency requirements for a gender analysis

underlying all foreign policy programming and activities/initiatives (see Recommendation #2) and delineate measures to operationalize this requirement. In developing or updating gender policies, there should be ample opportunity for internal and external consultation/co-creation and effective rollout once finalized. Several federal agencies including [USAID](#) and the [Millennium Challenge Corporation](#) have already adopted standalone gender policies or strategies; however all agencies should ensure that their existing internal governance guidelines are up to date to adequately reflect current authorities, evidence and standards.

Priority actions:

- Update existing agency governing documents such as the State Department’s Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM), USAID’s Automated Directives System (ADS), or the Defense Department’s operating policies to reflect new executive orders, strategies and other policy authorities relevant to feminist foreign policy (e.g., the U.S. Strategy on Women’s Economic Security)¹⁸
- Clearly define gender responsibilities/authorities within the mandates of offices and bureaus across the agency, particularly for leadership offices, regional/functional/issue-specific bureaus and policy planning offices.¹⁹ Particular emphasis should be placed on articulating the roles/responsibilities of offices beyond the usual gender stakeholders within the agency to incorporate feminist foreign policy objectives into their work.
- Outline clear reporting lines and oversight measures to ensure implementation of the policy, including by integrating responsibilities into job descriptions and performance appraisals of senior leaders and managers
- OMB should adopt a uniform non-discrimination standard in the performance of all foreign assistance contracts, grants and cooperative agreements across U.S. agencies with foreign assistance budgets based on the State Department’s nondiscrimination provision

Recommendation #4: Retool internal personnel policies to align with feminist principles, including guidelines related to access to health care; parental leave and childcare; hiring and promotion practices; and workplace harassment.

Recognizing the importance of coherence between internal and external policies and practices, the Coalition supports the Biden-Harris Administration’s emphasis on ensuring an inclusive and equitable federal workforce. The Administration has taken positive measures to incorporate these feminist principles into internal policies affecting personnel directly, including [Department of Defense guidance ensuring access to reproductive health care](#)²⁰ for members of military, [Department of Labor policies on gender identity](#)²¹ and the recent [executive order addressing sexual violence and other GBV in the military](#).²² The Coalition recommends further review of personnel policies at each federal agency not only to conform with legal prohibitions on discrimination, but to also promote equity in practice. For example, agencies should take proactive measures to identify and close pay equity gaps, ensure that taking parental leave does not disadvantage female employees in receiving promotions or pay raises and institute safeguards to prevent workplace harassment and remediate harm swiftly and fairly. For further recommendations on specific actions the USG should take, see the Coalition’s original policy paper, [Towards a Feminist Foreign Policy in the United States](#).²³

Leadership/Structures

Recommendation #1: Appoint a second co-chair of WHGPC

[Executive Order 14020](#)²⁴ empowers two co-chairs to jointly lead and oversee the work of the White House Gender Policy Council and the implementation of the National Gender Equity and Equality Strategy. While the WHGPC has achieved strong progress under the leadership of one co-chair since May 2022, the Coalition calls on the President to appoint a second co-chair and delineate the division of responsibilities so that one primarily

leads on domestic policy and one on foreign policy. Doing so would maximize expertise, ensure parity in domestic and foreign policy development, support the ongoing implementation and oversight of the WHGPC's work and broaden the WHGPC's ability to effectively integrate tenets of feminist foreign policy across the interagency.

Recommendation #2: Establish a civil society advisory council to advise on policymaking with a feminist lens

Building on the Administration's extensive consultation with civil society in the development of various policies to date, the Coalition strongly urges the WHGPC to formalize this effort by establishing a new civil society advisory body to provide ongoing analysis, input and advice throughout the policy and program formulation, implementation and evaluation process. Examples include advisory councils established by the governments of France, Spain and Colombia²⁵ to advise on the development and implementation of their feminist foreign policies, as well as the International Security Advisory Board established by the Secretary of State.²⁶ This advisory council should:

- Include regionally balanced feminist representatives from diverse backgrounds, including from a range of sector or subject-matter areas and functional backgrounds (e.g., academia, program implementers and service providers, advocates, activists, etc.). These representatives should also be connected to broader networks in their home countries/regions to foster engagement with wider civil society.
- Hold a mandate designed for substantive opportunities to engage and advise, including to:
 - Consult in the development of policy initiatives and provide feedback on implementation and progress reporting related to U.S. foreign policy
 - Engage directly with U.S. policymakers beyond the WHGPC and gender leads within federal bodies (e.g., Congressional offices; Trade, Homeland Security and Defense officials; issue-specific envoys; leaders of regional bureaus; representatives to multilateral bodies)

- Serve on U.S. delegations with a substantive role in the development of policy positions and negotiations
- Offer expertise and background for responses to specific crises (e.g., Afghanistan, Haiti, etc.) or on particular issues (e.g., gender-based violence, global health)
- Connect USG representatives with broader civil society networks in their home countries/regions for wider consultation and collaboration
- Be regularly and frequently engaged by U.S. policymakers, including through ongoing consultation with U.S. mission staff in their home countries/regions and visiting USG officials
- Have adequate resources for effective, meaningful engagement, including for travel to participate in international/regional/national convenings; stipends and/or honoraria; and translation and accessibility accommodations

Recommendation #3: Increase gender expertise in all relevant foreign policy agencies and offices

The Coalition strongly encourages the Administration to appoint dedicated gender focal points within each agency and expand existing staff to embed gender advisors in key agency sub-structures (e.g., policy planning bureaus, procurement offices, overseas missions). Expanding gender expertise at multiple levels within each agency supports the genuine integration of gender across sectors and contributes to strengthening internal capacity to implement feminist approaches to policy and programs. It is also critical to ensuring effective communication and accountability and fostering coherence across the interagency. Several agencies have senior-level positions like this, such as USAID's Senior Coordinator for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and the State Department's Ambassador for Global Women's Issues.

The Coalition recommends establishing new or formalizing current gender focal point roles and ensuring they have a clearly defined scope of work to:

- Advise on the integration of gender into the agency's functions and planning, particularly in bureaus and offices that historically have not held gender responsibilities, such as the regional bureaus under the U.S. Trade Representative
- Engage in the development of agency budgets and resource allocations, as well as strategic planning at agency and sub-agency levels
- Oversee/implement internal accountability measures, including tracking towards common metrics, training of personnel and implementation of intersectional gender analysis

To ensure sufficient authority within the agency, the gender focal points should hold senior-level designation and report on implementation directly to the agency's senior leadership and the WHGPC. To the extent possible, they should not be dual- or triple-hatted and should have adequate staffing and support to fulfill their mandate.

The Coalition also recommends expanding qualified gender specialists on staff to provide further technical expertise internally, such as the gender advisors at the Department of Defense (DOD) and USAID who are embedded in regional bureaus and functional units. For agencies with more decentralized programming, gender advisors should be hired at mission level overseas to provide locally-relevant expertise across the program cycle. Advisors' roles should be tailored to their agency's functions, but should generally support teams in identifying and reducing gender gaps in programming or operations, conducting intersectional gender analysis and analyzing data.²⁷ To further buttress this internal capacity, the Coalition recommends investing in on-demand technical assistance on gender integration, such as USAID's GITA II project, which supports missions and bureaus on conducting gender analysis and effectively building gender considerations into the design and implementation of programs and MEL plans.²⁸

Recommendation #4: Codify the WHGPC, Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues, USAID Senior Gender Coordinator and other relevant positions and offices via legislation and prioritize ratification of CEDAW

Given the importance of sustainable leadership to achieving the goals of feminist foreign policy, the Coalition recommends that the Administration prioritize making permanent key positions/bodies critical to this work. We urge the President and other Administration leaders to advocate for Congressional champions to include authorizing language in relevant legislation such as the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), the State Department Authorization Act, or other bills to codify these roles.

Recognizing that this may be a longer-term process requiring significant bipartisan backing within Congress, the Coalition proposes interim measures to build support for codification:

- Maintain high-level briefings with Congressional leadership (both Majority and Minority) to underscore the scope, impact and value of these offices/roles
- Continue seeking increased resources in the President's Budget Request to support and expand the offices' work and demonstrate the efficacy of resources to achieve high-impact initiatives
- Engage non-traditional leadership (e.g., senior Defense officials) to advocate on behalf of the WHGPC, S/GWI and USAID Senior Coordinator with Congress
- Develop a targeted strategy and timeline for achieving CEDAW ratification

Funding

Recommendation #1: Set a benchmark of no less than 20 percent of U.S. international affairs funding to be dedicated to programs and activities with gender equality as a primary objective

Given its central importance to sustainable development, environmental integrity, justice, security and economic prosperity, implementing a feminist foreign policy requires adequate resources and intentionality in how existing funds are allocated and expended. The Biden-Harris Administration has recognized this need, noting in the NGS its intention to “elevate gender in strategic planning and budgeting” across the whole-of-government.²⁹

The Coalition strongly recommends that no less than 20 percent of total U.S. international affairs funding be dedicated to promoting gender equality as a primary goal and 100 percent to be gender-sensitive. While we commend the Administration for making an historic ask in its FY23 President’s Budget Request – \$2.6 billion for global gender equality efforts³⁰ – and increasing this further in its FY24 ask to \$3.1 billion,³¹ the U.S. still lags behind other developed countries in the percentage of resources it allocates to gender equality, particularly those with feminist foreign policies.³² Currently, only six percent of the overall FY24 foreign operations budget request includes gender (both gender-primary and other gender-mainstreamed programs and operations).³³ While gender is represented well in some areas, such as development assistance (29 percent of DA is allocated for gender), other foreign policy levers continue to severely underfund and ignore gender, including international security assistance and multilateral assistance (both only one percent). (See Annex)

Recognizing the critical groundwork already laid down via the upward trending FY23 and FY24 requests, the Coalition urges the Biden-Harris Administration to take the opportunity in the FY25 and FY26 budget requests to prioritize meeting the 20 percent benchmark in specific areas of foreign assistance and declare its intention to reach the

overall threshold across all international affairs funding in the next three to five years with a defined strategy and timeline for doing so. To ensure that 100 percent of funding is eventually gender-sensitive, the Coalition recommends all funding be subject to a gender analysis, consistent with executive actions committing the United States to gender budgeting.

Priority actions:

- In the FY25 and FY26 Congressional Budget Justification for the Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs, clearly state a commitment to allocate at least 20 percent of enacted appropriations for development assistance (DA), economic support (ESF), bilateral and multilateral global health and peace and security towards gender-primary activities. Pledge to extend this commitment to additional international affairs programs over the next three to five years to reach the overall 20 percent benchmark.
- Seek significantly increased funding (new standalone money, not attributed) for the Gender Equity and Equality Action Fund (GEEA) to use for gender-primary programming
- At agency and key sub-agency levels, ensure gender equality objectives are prominently integrated into the strategic plans of high-priority program areas such as democracy promotion, food security and climate/environment, economic growth, humanitarian aid, international law enforcement, military assistance and support for international organizations
- Strengthen gender expertise and capacity within agencies’ budget planning and legislative affairs teams to ensure gender equality resource requirements are well-understood and prioritized

Recommendation #2: Increase direct funding to women’s rights organizations and women-led organizations (WROs/WLOs) operating in countries/regions receiving foreign assistance

In line with the commitment by USAID Administrator Samantha Power to dedicate 25 percent of programming funds to local partners by FY25, the Coalition suggests further benchmarking to ensure at least 20 percent of these funds is directed towards women's rights or women-led organizations (WROs/WLOs). Similarly, other agencies funding programs overseas, such as the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the Department of Labor, should develop and implement commensurate targets. This direct funding should be designed to support WROs'/WLOs' core functions to ensure flexibility and sustainability.

Priority actions:

- In the FY25 and FY26 Congressional Budget Justification for the Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs (SFOPS), articulate a target of no less than 20 percent of funding going to local partners be directed at WROs/WLOs
- Allocate at least 20 percent of GEEA funding for grants directly to WROs/WLOs
- Simplify logistics of directly funding WLOs/WROs via USG contracts and other funding mechanisms and develop guidance for program managers and contracts and grants officers to implement the simplified system³⁴
- Ensure mission-level staff (e.g., program managers) are aware of and utilize this guidance in their planning, requests for proposals and public engagement with local service providers. Within the local context, urge mission staff to take proactive steps to broadcast direct funding opportunities to a diverse range of WROs/WLOs and support their capacity to submit proposals.
- Expand existing initiatives providing direct funding to WROs/WLOs, such as the partnership with the Global Fund for Women, and extend peer-to-peer support to broaden the range and diversity of local WROs/WLOs as partners
- Provide special grants for WROs/WLOs to participate in regional/international convenings and donor conferences

Recommendation #3: Seek funding for internal gender capacity-strengthening and expertise through effective hiring, training and oversight mechanisms

Effective integration of feminist approaches within U.S. foreign policy requires personnel at multiple levels and across all bureaus/offices within an agency to understand their role in advancing intersectional gender equality, including gender analysis and other tools. Developing a workforce and system equipped to mainstream gender, particularly within functions and issue areas where gender equality is not a primary objective, requires investments to hire and retain qualified staff with gender expertise to provide support and technical assistance. Extending gender training and other capacity building measures across the agency, particularly training tailored to different functions such as program design and evaluation, procurement and management, also supports this objective.

Priority actions:

- Include sufficient resources dedicated to internal capacity building and accountability in agency-specific FY25 and FY26 budget requests, including funding for full-time gender advisor positions and mandatory training. Ensure resources for internal capacity-building are drawn from operating expenses rather than program funds.
- Include dedicated funding to support the operations of the WHGPC and a new civil society advisory body to work with the WHGPC as described above
- Build relationships with key stakeholders in OMB and in Congress, particularly Appropriations Committee members, to ensure resources for strengthening agency readiness for gender integration are effectively understood and prioritized

Accountability

The Coalition supports transparency, oversight and regular communication with external actors as tools for accountability on adopting and implementing feminist approaches within U.S. foreign policy.

Recommendation #1: Publicly release agency-specific action plans and progress reports and seek civil society feedback on implementation

The Coalition strongly urges the Administration to publicly release agency-specific action plans – including strategic objectives, staffing plans and resource mobilization targets – for open comment on both the goals and the implementation. It is imperative that civil society actors have the opportunity to engage directly with policymakers as priorities are determined and the work unfolds – doing so fosters ongoing accountability, evidence-based policymaking and co-creation and co-ownership of these initiatives. It also enables stronger civil society advocacy in support of the Administration’s work, particularly with Congress.

Recommendation #2: Institute a system for agencies to track and transparently share data/information on progress towards objectives, including implementation of the NGS and other USG strategies and policies related to feminist foreign policy

Goals set under a feminist foreign policy framework should be SMARTIE and designed to monitor and evaluate outcomes rather than inputs. The Coalition supports the Administration’s stated commitment to “ensur[ing] rigorous measurement of progress ... and government-wide efforts to strengthen data collection and analysis and close gender gaps.”³⁵ The [first NGS progress report](#)³⁶ released in February 2023 committed to developing cross-cutting metrics to measure and assess progress. The Coalition recommends robust investment in this effort, co-designed with civil society actors and other experts.

Priority Actions:

- Establish an ad hoc working group to design a transparent framework to measure...

- ...implementation of gender mainstreaming initiatives and other feminist foreign policy objectives across the whole-of-government
 - This central working group should be comprised of a range of experts within and external to the government, including agency-level gender focal points and MEL experts, local and international program implementers, data measurement and management experts and others with relevant expertise.
- At agency-level, establish an internal working group to adapt centralized guidance for agency-specific metrics and tracking tools
- Make training and technical assistance on the effective integration of gender into program activities and monitoring frameworks available to all program managers and others involved in design, implementation and MEL
- Commit to periodic external evaluations of progress towards NGS and other intersectional gender equality metrics³⁷
- Make indicator tracking and measurement tools publicly available³⁸

Recommendation #3: Regularize civil society engagement and co-creation on USG policies/priorities

The Coalition urges maximum collaboration and transparency between the USG and civil society on the development and implementation of strategies, action plans, budgets and guidance to advance gender equality and feminist foreign policy. The Biden-Harris Administration set a positive precedent through the extensive civil society consultation process for the NGS, as well as several related policy documents such as the U.S. Strategy for Women’s Economic Security and the update of the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally. To ensure ongoing cooperation, we urge the USG to build on this culture of consultation to enable meaningful co-creation of policy with civil society actors, including feminists and those directly impacted by U.S. foreign policy.

The Coalition's recommendation to establish a standing civil society advisory body would serve to regularize and institutionalize consultation and co-creation on feminist foreign policy. In addition to that forum for feedback, the USG should also continue to build on previous efforts to consult with a broad range of civil society actors and reflect their input in policies to hold itself accountable for advancing stated objectives and meeting its own commitments inclusive and equitable policymaking.

Priority Actions:

- Publicly release agency action plans and progress reports on the NGS and other policies/strategies and proactively invite feedback from civil society, e.g., through listening sessions hosted by U.S. embassies and missions abroad
- Transparently share a notional timeline for upcoming policy development processes and work with civil society partners, U.S. embassies and missions and other networks to ensure widespread understanding of when and how to engage

Thematic Priorities

In addition to the policy articulation, leadership and structural reform necessary to integrate a feminist lens in U.S. foreign policy, the Coalition recommends targeted action on several thematic priorities: sexual and reproductive health and rights; climate justice; and peace, security and humanitarian response.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

The lasting legacy of the Trump Administration and the Dobbs decision have accelerated attacks on abortion care domestically and compounded the perception that the U.S. is not a reliable leader or partner on sexual and reproductive rights globally. Those opposing SRHR – including the right to abortion, contraception, comprehensive sexuality education and gender-affirming care – continue to drive this agenda globally, gaining traction in multilateral policy spaces and with foreign governments newly emboldened to curtail these rights nationally. The Biden-Harris Administration must scale up its leadership and collaboration with allies to uphold sexual and reproductive health and rights and bodily autonomy and reinforce its commitment to global health.

The Coalition recommends the following priority measures:

- Articulate USG redlines and minimum standards for negotiated language at multilateral convenings on SRHR
- Leverage landmark events such as the 30th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) to reaffirm U.S. support for the ICPD Programme of Action and SRHR, including with representation from Vice President Harris and Secretary Blinken
- Robustly amplify the [statement prepared by the Department of Health and Human Services](#)³⁹ in June 2023 reaffirming the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to advancing SRHR globally and clarifying the parameters of U.S. foreign assistance funds for family planning services, evidence-based counseling and referrals and abortion care. This guidance should be widely disseminated, including to U.S. missions and civil society partners abroad.
- Ensure U.S. senior leaders leverage bilateral discussions, official travel, media and other channels to publicly reiterate the Administration's stance on SRHR to a global audience, including its disavowal of the Geneva Consensus Declaration

- Meet with global partners impacted by SRHR restrictions and include substantive participation of representatives from sexual and reproductive rights organizations on U.S. delegations to multilateral convenings
- Participate in the Feminist Foreign Policy Plus Group at the United Nations to demonstrate solidarity with like-minded countries vigorously in support of gender equality, including SRHR
- In the budget and appropriations process, including the FY25 and FY26 President's Budget Requests, reinforce the Administration's support for robust bilateral and multilateral family planning and reproductive health programs globally; support for UNFPA; striking/modifying funding conditions and restrictions such as the Helms Amendment and Siljander Amendment

Climate Justice

Although the Biden-Harris Administration made strides in elevating climate action as a prominent aspect of its policy agenda, feminist advocates and frontline impacted communities continue to call on the U.S. to show leadership in the global arena on climate justice proposals. Core issues with the Administration's approach to climate justice include: (1) falling short of the climate finance commitments it has already made and failing to strengthen and scale those pledges to effectively reach the U.S.'s fair share of climate-related loss and damage; (2) sidelining feminist civil society and impacted communities in climate policy discussions and failing to adequately prioritize climate issues disproportionately harming women, girls and other marginalized communities, particularly in climate financing; and (3) failing to end fossil fuel investments at home and abroad. While the Administration's notable climate policy developments such as the Inflation Reduction Act have targeted the domestic dimensions of climate change, they fell short in addressing the global and foreign policy aspects, including trade, defense and multilateralism.⁴⁰

The Coalition, guided by demands articulated by feminist climate justice actors and frontline communities impacted by the climate crisis, urgently calls on the Administration to:

- Declare a climate emergency, unlocking new executive powers such as the ability to access loans for renewable energy and suspend offshore oil drilling leases and firmly end new fossil fuel projects, including investments in fossil fuel infrastructure
- Fulfill existing commitments to international climate finance and demonstrably scale up contributions to at least \$800 billion between 2021-2030 (\$100 billion annually), equally split among mitigation, adaptation and for the loss and damage caused by irreversible climate change (\$267 billion each)⁴¹
- Establish clear and consistent mechanisms for meaningful participation of civil society in climate policy and programming discussions, particularly feminist groups and communities impacted by the climate crisis
- Include gender experts with relevant experience on U.S. delegations to international climate processes, such as the upcoming UN Climate Change Conference (COP 28) in November 2023
- Convene interagency strategy sessions to support the integration of gender and climate considerations into policy and programming, including within the Departments of Treasury, Commerce, Agriculture, Labor and Transportation
- Ensure funding levels are maintained for federal, public, grants-based finance for adaptation, mitigation and loss and damage and prioritize gender-responsive climate financing that is accessible to grassroots, Black and Indigenous women's groups

Peace, Security and Humanitarian Response

Armed conflicts, disasters and climate-related fragility have caused unprecedented humanitarian need that disproportionately impacts women, girls and other marginalized groups. While the Biden-Harris Administration has elevated attention to the gendered aspects of crisis and conflict, including through policy initiatives on conflict-related sexual violence⁴² and gender-based violence in humanitarian settings,⁴³ more action is necessary. Although the U.S. quickly mobilized resources to assist those displaced by the Ukraine conflict, other crises such as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan,

Yemen and Haiti are hardly on the radar despite credible reports of sexual violence and other impacts primarily affecting women and girls. The ongoing oppression of Afghan women, girls and LGBTQIA+ individuals signals a deep failure to prioritize their human rights in discussions about Afghanistan's future. On the U.S.'s own southern border, measures to stem migration have effectively limited access to asylum and continue to drive humanitarian need, human rights abuses and insecurity, particularly for LGBTQIA+ people, women and girls who are the target of violence and discrimination.⁴⁴

The Coalition strongly urges the Biden-Harris Administration to do more to ensure that gender equality is at the forefront of its response to conflict and crisis and calls on the U.S. to elevate feminist approaches to peace, security and humanitarian assistance:

- Proactively promote the participation of feminist actors and women and girls, in all their diversity, impacted by crisis in discussions related to conflict prevention or resolution, peacebuilding and humanitarian response – including diplomatic exchanges outside of regular debates on the WPS agenda – such as UN Security Council discussions on Afghanistan, Ukraine and Sudan
- Increase direct, flexible funding to community-based organizations, particularly WROs/WLOs, to design and deliver gender-sensitive humanitarian assistance and meaningfully engage in conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities. Ensure their engagement in preparedness planning and post-crisis reconstruction processes, as well.
- Increase overall contributions to UNFPA to fulfill its mandate on GBV in humanitarian settings, including as the lead of the GBV Area of Responsibility under the cluster approach, and to other agencies involved in the protection of women, girls and other marginalized groups during crises (e.g., UNICEF, UN Women, etc.)
- Ensure requests for supplemental funding for crisis response include resources to identify and mitigate gaps that affect marginalized groups, such as adolescent girls and persons with disabilities, and prioritize access to SRHR and GBV services
- Make commitments at the upcoming Global Refugee Forum in December 2023 reinforcing the rights of women, girls and marginalized people in crises, including support for refugee self-reliance initiatives; age, gender and diversity, including disability, considerations in humanitarian response; and measures to prevent and respond to GBV in emergencies
- Leverage multilateral convenings such as the UN General Assembly's high-level week to mobilize resources and collective action to address food and resource insecurity and climate-related displacement, including their disproportionate impacts on women and girls
- Certify that new refugee referral mechanisms, including direct NGO referrals and private sponsorship referrals, are LGBTQIA+-inclusive and gender-sensitive and institute measures to safely to collect data on, track and resettle LGBTQIA+ refugees who come through these and other referral mechanisms with sensitivity to their identity and orientation
- Follow through promises to protect vulnerable LGBTQIA+ refugees and asylum seekers by: 1) halting the use and defense of the Administration's "Circumvention of Lawful Pathways" rule⁴⁵ and 2) finally rescinding the Trump-era "Procedures for Asylum and Withholding of Removal; Credible Fear and Reasonable Fear Review" rule.⁴⁶ Both rules threaten the lives of LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers.

Conclusion

The Biden-Harris Administration has made progress in driving U.S. foreign policy in a more feminist direction with clear commitment to intersectional gender equality and diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility in its policy initiatives. However, the longer-term efficacy of the Administration's efforts requires concerted action now to shore up gains and maintain momentum. For sustainable progress and a lasting legacy of gender equity and equality around the world, the United States must join its allies in embracing feminist approaches to foreign policy – both in terms of how policy is made and what it seeks to achieve. The Coalition for a Feminist Foreign Policy in the U.S. urges the Biden-Harris Administration to scale up its investment in feminist policymaking, including by transforming foreign policy structures and strengthening the USG's own capacity to drive progress.

Endnotes

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Annex: Snapshot of Gender in U.S. Foreign Operations Budget Requests - FY23 and FY24

	FY23 Foreign Operations Request (Total)	Gender + WPS Request (Total)	Gender/WPS % of Request	FY24 Foreign Operations Request (Total)	Gender + WPS Request (Total)	Gender/WPS % of Request
Overall	47,338,735	2,747,156	6%	52,235,271	3,209,794	6%
Bilateral economic assistance	29,586,741	2,626,623	9%	31,958,747	3,072,526	10%
Global Health Programs (GHP-USAID + GHP-State)	10,576,000	567,503	5%	10,928,000	840,051	8%
Development Assistance (DA)	4,769,787	1,464,746	31%	5,425,697	1,584,629	29%
International Disaster Assistance (IDA)	4,699,362	0	0%	4,699,362	0	0%
Transition Initiatives (TI)	102,000	0	0%	102,000	0	0%
Complex Crises Fund (CCF)	40,000	0	0%	60,000	0	0%
Economic Support Funds (ESF)	4,260,231	400,109	9%	5,391,491	418,077	8%
Democracy Fund (DF)	290,700	86,200	30%	290,700	102,400	35%
Assistance for Europe, Eurasia, and Central Asia (AAECA)	984,429	58,065	6%	1,049,497	57,369	5%
Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA)	3,912,000	50,000	1%	3,912,000	70,000	2%
Emergency Migration and Refugee Assistance (ERMA)	100,000	0	0%	100,000	0	0%
Independent Agencies	1,416,500	0	0%	1,666,000	0	0%
Department of Treasury	105,000	0	0%	112,000	0	0%
International Affairs Technical Assistance	38,000	0	0%	45,000	0	0%
International Security Assistance	8,959,780	98,783	1%	9,036,079	102,518	1%
International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE)	1,466,000	87,983	6%	1,484,400	79,188	5%
Non-Proliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs (NADR)	900,247	2,800	0.3%	921,247	9,330	1%
Peacekeeping Operations (PKO)	463,559	2,000	0.4%	420,458	5,000	1%
International Military Education and Training (IMET)	112,925	6,000	5%	125,425	9,000	7%
Foreign Military Financing (FMF)	6,057,049	0	0%	6,124,549	0	0%
Multilateral Assistance	4,706,715	19,750	0.42%	4,411,208	34,750	1%
International Organizations and Programs (IO&P)	457,200	19,750	4%	485,850	34,750	7%
Multilateral Development Banks and Related Funds	4,249,515	0	0%	3,925,358	0	0%
International Monetary Fund (IMF)	20,000	0	0%	0	0	0%
Export & Investment Assistance	451,049	0	0%	584,860	0	0%
Related International Affairs Accounts	109,322	0	0%	130,010	0	0%
Department of Agriculture	1,970,112	0	0%	2,043,331	0	0%



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