

**E-PAPER**

**Feminist Foreign Policy Guidelines of the German Federal  
Foreign Office**

**A statement from a feminist perspective**

# **Feminist Foreign Policy Guidelines of the German Federal Foreign Office**

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## Introduction

We expressly welcome the fact that Annalena Baerbock, Germany's first female Foreign Minister, is advancing a feminist approach to foreign policy. In her foreword to "Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy", the guidelines released by the Federal Foreign Office in 2023, she clearly states: "Feminist foreign policy (...) faces up to historical responsibility, including for our colonial past, and is open to learning from others."

A feminist foreign policy presents a great opportunity to counter the relentless rise of authoritarian regimes around the world by developing democratic structures and spaces. With great respect to the Foreign Minister and her colleagues, we recognise that a feminist reshaping of foreign policy is a complex endeavour that requires enormous personal commitment and dedication due to the multiple crises the world faces – and that on top of the heavy workload the Federal Foreign Office already has. Nevertheless, some German missions abroad have taken steps to proactively integrate feminist expertise into their diplomatic work.

Now the task is to consolidate the involvement of feminist experts that has already begun and to further differentiate it with the help of an intersectional and anti-colonial approach. Only by bringing about the necessary cultural change can feminist civil society be recognised globally as equal partners.

The first ever commitment to gender mainstreaming by the Federal Foreign Office is among the greatest merits of the new guidelines. There is no doubt that Guidelines 7 to 10, which aim to initiate reforms within the ministry, are an important step that is required to establish a feminist foreign policy. Another milestone is the introduction of gender budgeting for the first time at the Federal Foreign Office. In order to strengthen this practice, we recommend creating a roundtable that includes representatives of other ministries and which enables civil society to regularly participate and provide its expertise.

It is also to be welcomed that the guidelines go beyond women's empowerment, such as is evident in the commitment to nuclear disarmament and climate diplomacy as well as in the high priority given to human security. Moreover, it should be noted as positive that the guidelines explicitly recognise the outstanding role that the 1325 agenda plays in feminist foreign policy. Unfortunately, however, there is no proposal on how the Division for Human Rights and Gender Issues (OR06) and the Ambassador for Feminist Foreign Policy will work together. It is also unclear how civil society will participate.

As stakeholders with a sustained – in some cases decades-long – commitment to implementing the 1325 agenda, the structural anchoring of feminist principles in the Federal Foreign Office is close to our hearts. We are very dedicated to this. Unfortunately, the guidelines largely lack concrete objectives. It neither specified what is to be changed nor which indicators are to be used to measure this change. What is also missing are definitions of key terms such as "gender-sensitive", "gender-targeted" and "gender-transformative". Yet we welcome the clear commitment to an intersectional approach, although it remains to be clarified how this approach will be applied in practice.

Feminist foreign policy requires structural change to take place. It is therefore not enough to list lighthouse projects that are already underway. If the desired transformation of foreign policy is to occur, there needs to be a systematic incorporation of feminist expertise and not just one or two flagship projects. With this in mind, the Federal Foreign Office urgently needs to tailor its funding and support instruments to the needs of smaller feminist organisations. To date, such organisations have had little access to funding both in Germany and internationally.

## Guideline 1 – Peace and security policy

Guideline 1 attaches great importance to the Women, Peace and Security agenda (building on UN Security Council Resolution 1325), while emphasising transformative and inclusive approaches. It should also be positively noted that the term “victim” is largely avoided in the context of gender-based violence and that the term “survivor” is used instead. Nevertheless, people affected by violence are in many cases rendered passive and thus re-victimised. This could have been avoided by making a stronger reference to the expertise and options for action that are available to survivors. There is also a lack of reference to the structural causes of gender-specific violence, which create a continuum that extends beyond the context of armed conflict. Yet this is important in order to prevent and overcome violence and to offer survivors long-term, holistic support.

From a feminist perspective, what is key are restrictive arms export controls and the strengthening of disarmament initiatives. This goes beyond the “humanitarian” arms control mentioned in the guidelines. If feminist foreign policy is to contribute to creating “a safe world without nuclear weapons”, the German government must end nuclear sharing in the medium term. It is a step forward that the Federal Foreign Office intends to incorporate “gender-sensitive approaches” into arms export controls. However, to date arms exports are only supposed to take into account the risk that the weapons could be used to “directly” commit gender-based violence. However, international law also outlaws the “indirect” use of violence. In this case, it would be better to adhere to the international standard.

## Guideline 2 – Humanitarian assistance and crisis management

In Guideline 2, the Federal Foreign Office commits to deploying humanitarian assistance in a fully gender-sensitive manner. This is very welcome, yet it is unclear how “gender-sensitive” and “gender-targeted” are defined. Also unclear are the influence of historically evolved power structures and the role of gender-transformative approaches in humanitarian assistance. Rights-based, needs-based aid that is oriented towards humanitarian principles must be transformative in order to do justice to a feminist foreign policy.

Overall, the guidelines fail to define how the “3 Rs” (rights, resources and representation) should be implemented in humanitarian assistance. Women’s rights and women-led organisations do not play a role. The guidelines also missed the opportunity to address the present gaps in the localisation debate with regard to gender equality.

The announced humanitarian strategy as well as the gender strategy for humanitarian assistance should urgently close the above-mentioned gaps.

## Guideline 3 – Human rights policy

In Guideline 3, the Federal Foreign Office expresses its clear support for compliance with the “Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence” (also known as the Istanbul Convention) and pledges to rigorously defend standards that have been achieved and advocate for their further advancement. These are important and welcome aims that underline the norm- and rule-based approach of feminist human rights policy.

It is therefore all the more disappointing that the right to safe abortion is not explicitly mentioned. In view of the dire and often deadly consequences of improperly performed abortions, this is a glaring omission. The realisation of sexual and reproductive health and rights is obligatory under international law. Refraining from commenting on this issue contradicts the statement that the government intends to resolutely confront anti-feminist movements.

It is consistent and very important to understand the commitment to the rights of LGBTIQ+ people as an integral part of feminist foreign policy. So it is essential to examine every measure to make sure it actually strengthens the rights of LGBTIQ+ people.

We call on the Federal Foreign Office to also work towards ensuring that reparations are made for the human rights violations committed under German colonial rule. This applies in particular to the genocide of the Herero and Nama in Namibia, which has already been recognised as genocide by the German government.

## Guideline 4 – Climate diplomacy and external energy policy

Guideline 4 recognises the special role of women and marginalised groups as both stakeholders in and as parties affected by the climate crisis, and it reaffirms the need to phase out fossil fuels. This is to be welcomed. However, instead of stopping at a gender-sensitive climate-conflict analysis, the guidelines should shine a light on the devastating consequences of a conservative and pro-fossil fuel climate security policy, while also identifying transformative solutions and moving forward with steps towards greater climate justice.

Germany's responsibility for past and current CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, the commitment to ambitious climate financing including the financing of loss and damage, the protection of climate migrants and displaced persons, as well as the protection of climate and environmental activists, are not mentioned at all in the guidelines.

A feminist climate diplomacy and external energy policy must also advance an anti-colonial energy transformation and work to ensure that marginalised groups in general and those affected by the climate catastrophe in particular are systematically involved in decision-making on combating the consequences. Initiatives such as the JETPS and AOSIS rescue programmes must be supported.

Finally, there must be no further "securitisation" of climate diplomacy. There must be a clear recognition of the links between climate and conflict, and interventions should address the causes of conflict. Local and feminist solutions must be brought to the fore and actively supported.

## Guideline 5 – Foreign trade and investment policy

Guideline 5 mentions important measures, such as economic empowerment, that are aimed at enabling “women and marginalised individuals” to achieve equal economic participation. We expressly welcome the fact that the Federal Foreign Office recognises existing economic inequality as a security risk. However, it is unfortunate that there is no mention of the need to strengthen employee representation.

The announced commitment to a gender-equitable and non-discriminatory digital world is also important. However, a feminist foreign trade policy must also advocate for gender-sensitive international regulations that extend beyond digital issues. Making an ambitious commitment to the UN Binding Treaty, to a gender-equitable European supply chain law, to gender-equitable trade agreements and to the implementation of ILO conventions is absolutely essential.

There is no reference to the G7’s commitment, made in 2022, to move towards a feminist trade policy. The urgently needed revaluation of care work and social systems goes unmentioned as well.

The overcoming of (post-)colonial power and dependency structures in the global trade and financial systems is also not addressed. As a result, the aim of Guideline 5 is too vague and based on an analysis that ignores structural issues.

## Guideline 6 – Cultural and societal diplomacy

Guideline 6 stipulates that there should not only be better visibility of marginalised people in arts, culture, media and sport, but also better protection of vulnerable people in these sectors. The Federal Foreign Office wants Goethe-Institut branches to increasingly serve as safe spaces for vulnerable groups, while continuing to carry out its existing protection programmes. These are important measures to ensure that programmes dedicated to the international promotion of arts and culture remain effective despite funding cuts. The protection programmes need to be made less bureaucratic at the very least, and at best expanded.

The announcement that discriminatory language will be removed from teaching materials and that academics from former German colonial regions will receive funding to research German colonial history addresses important demands of feminist-oriented civil society.

Another decisive factor for a feminist reorientation of cultural and societal diplomacy will be whether gender- and class-specific barriers as well as racism and ableism are systematically analysed and dismantled using an intersectional approach. It is long overdue to ensure that people with care responsibilities can also take advantage of scholarship, residency and educational opportunities. This is the only way to make a decisive move away from androcentric, patriarchal and racialised funding in arts and culture.

## The missing guideline: migration, refugee and border policy

In view of the fact that the number of refugees has been growing for years, it is shocking that the guidelines fail to either mention the challenges posed by this situation or articulate positions on a human rights-oriented migration policy.

War, violence, poverty and the consequences of the climate catastrophe are causing more and more people to flee their homes, to be forcibly displaced or to be persecuted. The inhumane border regimes at the EU's external borders, which are also widely supported by Germany, prevent people seeking protection from legally applying for asylum while creating zones of lawlessness and impoverishment. Many thousands of people lose their lives as they journey to the European Union. Making common cause with repressive regimes undermines the aim to strengthen democracy around the world and is in blatant contradiction to a feminist foreign policy. It is also well known that women and marginalised groups are exposed to tremendous gender-specific risks in situations of displacement, flight and migration.

As part of a feminist foreign policy, the Federal Foreign Office has a responsibility to strive for greater co-operation with the Ministry of the Interior in order to facilitate a human rights-based asylum and migration policy.

## Conclusion

It is absolutely to be welcomed that the Federal Foreign Office, under the leadership of Federal Minister Annalena Baerbock and through the dedication of numerous employees, has set out to further dismantle discriminatory structures both internationally and within its own organisation. As feminist experts, we take seriously the statement that the guidelines are not the end, but the beginning of sustainable change. Future strategies, such as the announced humanitarian strategy, should be used to formulate how the feminist approaches outlined in the guidelines can be bindingly incorporated into the Federal Foreign Office's work.

We would like to point out that a serious advancement of feminist foreign policy requires a systematic and adequately funded integration of intersectional feminist expertise – drawn from international experts and especially from marginalised regions of the world, but also increasingly from marginalised groups in Germany.

## Imprint

Published by the signatories (see cover)

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Date of publication: July 2023

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The remarks and positions expressed in this statement are supported by the signatories in accordance with their respective activities and aims. The signatories are united in their commitment to a joint statement on feminist foreign policy from a civil society perspective. Nevertheless, not all the signatories can fully support every assessment, recommendation and demand made herein.