

# **Background Note: Scotland's Feminist Approach to Foreign Policy**

# Scotland's Feminist Approach to Foreign Policy

## Purpose

This document sets the scene ahead of the Scottish Government's planned stakeholder engagement to define and shape its feminist approach to foreign policy. It provides a short overview of existing feminist foreign policies and definitions, and outlines the Government's rationale, high-level aims and next steps.

## Introduction

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1. In the [2021-22 Programme for Government](#), the Scottish Government reiterated our commitment to ensuring that our policies and actions abroad are consistent with our focus on fairness and inclusion at home, ensuring that our international work reflects a feminist approach to policymaking. We have since been working on what such an approach could look like for Scotland.
2. Crucial to this work is ensuring that any approach brings together the range of our international activity in a way that is coherent and aligned with the principles set out in our recently published [Global Affairs Framework](#).
3. While foreign policy currently remains the responsibility of the UK Government, there is a clear role for Scotland in being a good global citizen and making a constructive contribution to addressing global challenges. We have a proud record of engaging internationally in Scotland's interests within the current constitutional arrangements in areas such as international development and climate justice. Given the increasingly clear impact that international affairs can have on achieving domestic objectives, it is imperative that Scotland becomes more active internationally. Through our international work, we can reduce gender and other inequalities at home and overseas, and share Scotland's experience in policymaking, while learning ourselves from others.
4. We believe that the Scottish Government – and other regional and devolved governments globally – can make a significant contribution to advancing the core principles of feminist foreign policy. We acknowledge that Scotland's feminist approach to foreign policy will be different in its reach compared to countries with the full powers of an independent state. As we develop our approach, we will want to explore where Scotland, as a devolved government, can add most value.

## Overview of Existing Feminist Foreign Policies

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5. Several states have adopted a feminist foreign policy (FFP) in recent years. These were preceded by developments such as the 1979 United Nations (UN) Convention on

the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women<sup>1</sup> and the four UN conferences on women.<sup>2</sup> In 2000, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security<sup>3</sup> and in 2010 UN Women was formed.<sup>4</sup>

## **Defining feminist foreign policy**

6. There is no single definition of feminist foreign policy. The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) states that:

“Feminist foreign policy is 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.”<sup>5</sup>

7. The Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP) defines FFP as follows:

“A Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) is a political framework centred around the wellbeing of marginalised people and invokes processes of self-reflection regarding foreign policy’s hierarchical global systems. FFP takes a step outside the black box approach of traditional foreign policy thinking and its focus on military force, violence, and domination by offering an alternate and intersectional rethinking of security from the viewpoint of the most vulnerable. It is a multidimensional policy framework that aims to elevate women’s and marginalised groups’ experiences and agency to scrutinise the destructive forces of patriarchy, colonisation, heteronormativity, capitalism, racism, imperialism, and militarism. CFFP believes a feminist approach to foreign policy provides a powerful lens through which we can interrogate the violent global systems of power that leave millions of people in perpetual states of vulnerability.”<sup>6</sup>

8. In the coming months, the Scottish Government will develop its own ‘working definition’ of a feminist approach to foreign policy in Scotland which will be based on our conversations with stakeholders.

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<sup>1</sup> Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 1979.

<sup>2</sup> UN Women. [World Conferences on Women](#) (UN Women), last accessed: 31/10/2022.

<sup>3</sup> Resolution 1325, United Nations Security Council, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> UN Women. [About UN Women](#) (UN Women), last accessed: 31/10/2022.

<sup>5</sup> Thompson, L., Patel, G., Kripke, G., and O'Donnell, M., International Center for Research on Women. *Toward a Feminist Foreign Policy in the United States*, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy. [Feminist Foreign Policy](#) (Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy), last accessed: 31/10/2022.

## Rationale and Aims

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### Rationale

9. Scotland is determined to be a good global citizen, making a constructive contribution to addressing global challenges and achieving fairer outcomes. Our approach to our international work is rooted in:
  - The key values of fairness, equality, inclusion;
  - A commitment to international human rights standards;
  - Securing a fair and just global transition to a net zero and climate-resilient future; and
  - An internationalist outlook based on cooperation and the rule of law.
10. We have a strong commitment to advancing feminist policies internationally, which we want to build on as we adopt a feminist approach to foreign policy. We have already:
  - ✓ Partnered with UN Women to launch the [Glasgow Women's Leadership Statement on Gender Equality and Climate Change](#) at COP26.
  - ✓ Trebled the Climate Justice Fund to £36 million over this parliamentary term, of which £2 million is dedicated to addressing loss and damage, recognising those least responsible for the global climate emergency are being affected first and most severely by it. The fund aims to tackle existing inequalities such as wealth disparity and discrimination based on gender, age, disability or indigenous status, as the impact of climate change can be made worse by these factors.
  - ✓ Contributed to the international Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda since 2016, through the [Women in Conflict 1325 Fellowship](#).
  - ✓ Provided funding to Comic Relief to support programmes that empower women and girls through sport to challenge and address social issues such as violence against women experienced by vulnerable communities in Zambia, Rwanda and Malawi.
  - ✓ Undertaken a [review of our International Development programme](#) with commitments to: take a human-rights based approach to development; establish a new Equalities Programme, including a Women and Girls' Empowerment Fund; decolonise our International Development programmes; support partner country-led development; and ensure that Global South voices continue to be heard beyond the review by establishing an advisory Global South Programme Panel.
  - ✓ Committed to increase the International Development Fund from £10m to £15m per annum during this parliamentary term to contribute to sustainable development and the fight against poverty, injustice and inequality internationally.
  - ✓ Provided, as part of our current International Development portfolio, some targeted funding to support women and girls in our partner countries. This includes funding to the British Council for women and girls education scholarships in Pakistan, and funding to Comic Relief to support programmes that empower women and girls through sport to challenge and address social issues such as violence against

women experienced by the most vulnerable communities in Zambia, Rwanda and Malawi.

- ✓ Recognised the importance of gender in our [Vision for Trade](#) and in our first [Annual Report](#) when considering the differential impacts of trade on society. In doing so, the Vision for Trade identified some of the actions the Scottish Government can take to make trade more inclusive and to address the impacts of trade liberalisation on women such as building links between our domestic policies and our trade principles to support gender equality and remove barriers to participation in trade faced by women in Scotland and internationally.
- ✓ Supported the [Women's Environment Development Organisation](#) to address gender equality in climate action in the Global South and directly support gender equality at the annual Conference of Parties.
- ✓ Showcased our world-leading (and award-winning) action to address period poverty through investing over £33 million since 2017 to fund access to free period products.

11. However, there is more that we can do. The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a harsh light on, and exacerbated, structural inequalities within Scotland and globally. For example, workers in the sectors most impacted by the lockdown and subsequent restrictions were more likely than those elsewhere to be young, low-paid and women.<sup>7</sup> Minority ethnic groups were overrepresented in jobs with a higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 and they were more likely to lose their jobs as a result of the pandemic.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, disabled people have been more likely to face redundancy during the crisis.<sup>9</sup> We also know that the pandemic has heightened the risks to women and children living with domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence globally.
12. Similarly, women across the world face continued systemic issues such as economic insecurity, barriers to accessing education, gender-based violence, harmful stereotypes, the gender pay gap and the unequal burden of caring responsibilities. We must work towards systemic change to achieve our ambition of gender equality.
13. The global climate emergency and need for a [just transition to net zero](#) have also sharpened the focus on women's and marginalised groups' place in society and the global economy. As concerns about women, children and marginalised groups in Ukraine, Afghanistan and other countries affected by war continue to grow, the impact of conflict on women is ever clearer.

## Aims

14. Our approach to international activity will put the rights and empowerment of women and girls, and other marginalised groups at its heart. Listening to, and learning from, others we will take an intersectional approach<sup>10</sup> seeking to understand how multiple

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<sup>7</sup> Scotland's Wellbeing: The Impact of COVID-19. Scottish Government, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>10</sup> Using intersectionality to understand structural inequality in Scotland: evidence synthesis. Scottish Government, 2022.

interconnected social categories, such as gender, sexual orientation, race, disability, religion and socio-economic status, interact. While this approach sets out high-level goals, its specifics will need to be adapted when engaging with other countries due to the different challenges faced by each of them. Ultimately, we want our work in this area to:

- Complement domestic policy that aims to address gender inequality in Scotland. The Scottish Government is working to reduce and remove barriers for women and girls as well as marginalised groups in Scotland to mainstream equality and human rights. We will ensure that these progressive steps are mirrored in our international activity.
- Guide us as we review Scottish Government policies and programmes that have an international dimension, to ensure that they reflect this approach, recognising the limitations of reserved policy areas.
- Help us to explore ways to continue supporting efforts to ensure appropriate representation and diversity of input, including from the Global South and civil society, for an international system that works for all.
- Apply a feminist lens to all elements of our international policy considerations.

## **Stakeholder Engagement**

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15. We will develop our feminist approach in an accessible and inclusive way. This means listening to and learning from:

- Those already pursuing feminist foreign policies, as we learned from the successful Finnish model on the [Baby Box](#), and aligning with our commitment to international knowledge exchange and policy partnerships.
- Those most affected by global challenges such as climate change, poverty and insecurity, for example through our new Global South Programme Panel for International Development.
- Women and girls in Scotland, including through the First Minister's National Advisory Council for Women and Girls.

16. In the coming months, the Scottish Government will organise workshops with key stakeholders, such as community and third sector organisations, experts by experience and academics amongst others – including from the Global South. This stakeholder engagement will help us answer key questions about how best to develop and deliver a feminist approach to foreign policy.

### **Intended outcomes & structure of engagement**

17. The intended outcomes of workshops are to:

- Inform the development of a feminist approach to foreign policy for Scotland;
- Build an evidence base and fill gaps in knowledge;

- Seek views on a definition that would work in the Scottish context;
- Identify key priority areas of Scotland's approach;
- Help inform measurable policy outcomes; and
- Build relationships with key actors in the field and develop long-term networks.

## Areas of focus

18. While there are a range of different areas that we could focus on as we develop our approach and speak with stakeholders, initially our intention is to focus on three key areas with a view to expanding these as our policy develops: a just transition to net zero, economic justice, and peace. All these themes will be underpinned by human rights and gender equality. This list is not exhaustive and we hope that through these initial conversations will enable us to identify other potential areas of focus and help us prioritise our work in this area.
19. Just climate change – The twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss are amongst the biggest global challenges of our time. While the poor and vulnerable are often the first to be affected by climate change, and will suffer the worst, they have done little or nothing to cause the problem. Moreover, the voices of those communities – including in the Global South – are too often ignored. In this decisive decade for climate action, the Scottish Government is committed to working with and supporting our international partners to help secure a global transition to a net zero and climate-resilient future in a way that is fair and just for all.
20. Economic justice – The Scottish Government's ambition is to build an economy based on the principles of equality, sustainability, prosperity and resilience. We strive to build a society in which everyone can participate and where economic success is shared by everyone, in every community and region. We want our international activity to mirror this domestic vision.
21. Peace – Peaceful relations between countries, groups and people lead to more prosperous relationships whereas conflict drives inequality and poverty. As a good global citizen, Scotland has a strong and enduring commitment to securing democracy, the rule of law and fundamental human rights across the world.

## Next Steps

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22. The upcoming workshops will allow us to develop a policy statement, underpinned by an action plan. Our conversations with stakeholders will continue following the publication of the policy statement as we continue to listen to others and review our activity and contribution. There is no easy fix and change will not happen overnight, but our track record demonstrates our commitment. That commitment and the effort behind it will be re-doubled as we seek to make sure Scotland plays its part effectively and shares its experience internationally.

## **Annex I: Questions for Stakeholder Engagement**

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1. What should the core principles of a feminist approach to Scotland's international activity be?
2. Where should the Scottish Government focus its efforts to ensure our actions have most impact?
3. What does it mean in practice to look at international work through a feminist lens?
4. Which policies or programmes that Scotland is already delivering domestically or internationally should we build on?
5. Should Scotland take a feminist approach to international development? If so, what would this look like?
6. How can Scotland ensure that human rights are at the core of its approach and that we play our part in building international capacity to advance human rights?
7. What is the one action you want the Scottish Government to take as part of its approach?
8. How can our approach be monitored and evaluated effectively? How do we know that our policies are having the desired impact?
9. What should the future role of stakeholders be as Scotland's feminist approach to foreign policy is being implemented?





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