

GENDER EQUALITY IN FOREIGN POLICY IN NORTH MACEDONIA

A N A L Y S I S



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ANALYSIS

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Authors: Anamaria Golemac Powell
Sneshka Ilikj
Natasha Dimitrovska

Design: Nita Hadzihamza Gashi

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List of Acronyms

AP	Action Plan
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CoE	Council of Europe
EU	European Union
GAP III	EU Gender Action Plan III
GEF	Gender Equality Facility
GIA	Gender Impact Assessment
FFP	Feminist Foreign Policy
FIAP	Feminist International Assistance Policy
Istanbul Convention	CoE Convention of Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
KI	Key Informants
LGBTQI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, queer, and intersex
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MFEA	Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation, and learning
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SOGIESC	Sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, and sex characteristics
UN	United Nations
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WPS	Women, peace and security

INTRODUCTION



Despite incremental progress in recent years within various countries and international organizations, the representation of women in the realm of politics, particularly in the domains of foreign policy and international security, remains disproportionately low. Overall, globally, the numbers of women in foreign affairs and foreign policy reflect the prevailing gender imbalance.

As of 2023, out of 190 countries surveyed by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, women cabinet ministers holding the foreign affairs portfolio were 25 per cent.¹ Among the 46 member states of the Council of Europe, only 11 had women holding the position of foreign minister.² In 2023, within the European Union-27, there were only seven female foreign ministers, while 16 were Minister's Deputies.³ According to the Women's Power Index, only 25 out of 194 countries had a female head of state or government as of March 2024.⁴ In the EU, in 2023, women accounted for 18 per cent of presidents and prime ministers.⁵ Recently, North Macedonia became one of these countries with the election of the first woman president, which is a positive step forward in promoting and advancing women in high decision-making positions.

In the context of the 32 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members, in May 2024, there are just seven female defence ministers, or 22.5 per cent,⁶ though this figure represents a relatively higher percentage when compared to the global average of only 12 per cent of defence ministers being women.⁷ Within the national militaries of both the European Union (EU) and other G20 nations, 2022 data show that women constitute a minority, with their numbers ranging from less than 4.5 per cent in Finland to just above 20 per cent in Hungary.⁸ When examining the EU military Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions, women comprise just under 7 per cent of military personnel, surpassing the representation seen in UN peacekeeping efforts, which stands at a mere 3.9 per cent.⁹ Even though research has shown that women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution leads to more lasting peace and stability, in 2022, women represented only 16 per cent of negotiators in active peace processes led or co-led by the UN.¹⁰

¹ IPU. 2023. Women in Politics 2023.

² <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cm/members-cm> (situation on 5 June 2024)

³ Ibid.

⁴ <https://www.cfr.org/article/womens-power-index>

⁵ European Women's Lobby, 2023. Taking Stock of Women's Representation in Politics across Europe.

⁶ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/who_is_who_51267.htm

⁷ IPU. 2023. Women in Politics 2023.

⁸ <https://shecurity.info/> (accessed on 10 May 2024)

⁹ Smit, T. 2022. Delivering the Compact: Towards a More Capable and Gender-balanced EU Civilian CSDP. SIPRI. November 2022.

¹⁰ <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/>

In diplomatic services, the situation with gender equality has somewhat improved, yet not without disparities. At the ambassadorial level, no country among those with available data had achieved gender parity by 2021.¹¹ In 2021, only around 23.1 per cent of all ambassador posts were occupied by women, a decrease from the previous two years, resulting in an estimated 38 years, on average, until parity.¹²

In 2023, women held 22.8 per cent of Cabinet positions responsible for leading ministries and policy areas globally.¹³ However, there is a clear division between the soft and hard policy sectors, where men are more likely to hold economic, trade, energy and investment portfolios, while women in Cabinet Minister roles tend to focus on women and gender equality, followed by family and children affairs, social inclusion and development, social protection and social security, and indigenous and minority affairs, all in the human rights, gender equality and social affairs portfolio.¹⁴ This data highlights the need for broader representation of women in various policy domains to address gender imbalances in decision-making.

The state of affairs in North Macedonia mirrors the broader worldwide patterns. While there is a shortage of research on gender mainstreaming within North Macedonia's foreign policy, particularly concerning the endeavours and consequences of integrating gender equality into foreign policy, the available evidence indicates that women's participation in critical foreign policy decision-making positions is still restricted. In 2022, there were 198 women out of 440 employed in the MoFA (45 per cent), 9 women out of 39 total ambassadors (23 per cent), and only one woman general consul out of a total of 8.¹⁵ Key diplomatic roles, such as the Permanent Representative to NATO and the Ambassador to the USA, are held mainly by men. Furthermore, participation of women in significant diplomatic negotiations, like the Prespa Agreement, has not been well-documented, and women diplomats were notably absent from the official signing ceremony. This is not surprising given that political leadership in North Macedonia is predominantly male, with no major political party led by a woman.¹⁶ In the category of military personnel in the Ministry of Defence and the Army, men are predictably dominant, with 17.7 per cent women officers, 5.9 per cent women professional soldiers, and 10.8 per cent women of the overall personnel in the Army.¹⁷

¹¹ <https://shsecurity.info/> (accessed on 10 May 2024)

¹² Ibid.

¹³ IPU. 2023. Women in politics: 2023.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. 2023. Annual report on the activities and advancements in gender equality in North Macedonia in 2022.

¹⁶ In the Parliamentary structure 2020-2024, there were two parties with women presidents – Maja Moracanin (MP) from the Democratic Renewal of Macedonia (DOM) and Monika Zajkova (MP) from the Liberal Democratic Party.

¹⁷ Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. 2023. Annual report on the activities and advancements in gender equality in North Macedonia in 2022.

Overall, women's representation and participation in foreign policy in North Macedonia remains partial, and although there have been notable achievements when women have been involved, further emphasizing the importance of greater gender inclusion in diplomatic and foreign policy endeavours is needed. The inclusion of women in foreign policy has had positive impacts. The country achieved EU candidacy status during Ilinka Mitreva's tenure as Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the historic NATO accession was led by Radmila Shekerinska, the first woman Minister of Defence. The current Minister of Defence, Slavjanka Petrovska, continues to promote gender equality within the military, and the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Fatmire Isaki, has been a staunch advocate for women in diplomacy, organizing annual conferences on Women in Diplomacy to highlight women's contributions to the field. It remains to be seen how the first woman president of North Macedonia will use her role to promote gender equality, besides the positive aspect of having a female figure at the top position of governance.

Within this context, this analysis, prepared within the Gender Equality Facility Project,¹⁸ aims to examine women's meaningful participation in foreign policy and international relations in North Macedonia, whilst reviewing the implementation of gender equality legislation, policies, and standards in the government's efforts to integrate gender equality into its foreign policy. The purpose of the analysis is to provide an overview of the current situation, extract main findings, and prepare a succinct set of recommendations for areas of improvement, with a focus on the advancement of gender mainstreaming both in the country's foreign policy and its structures.

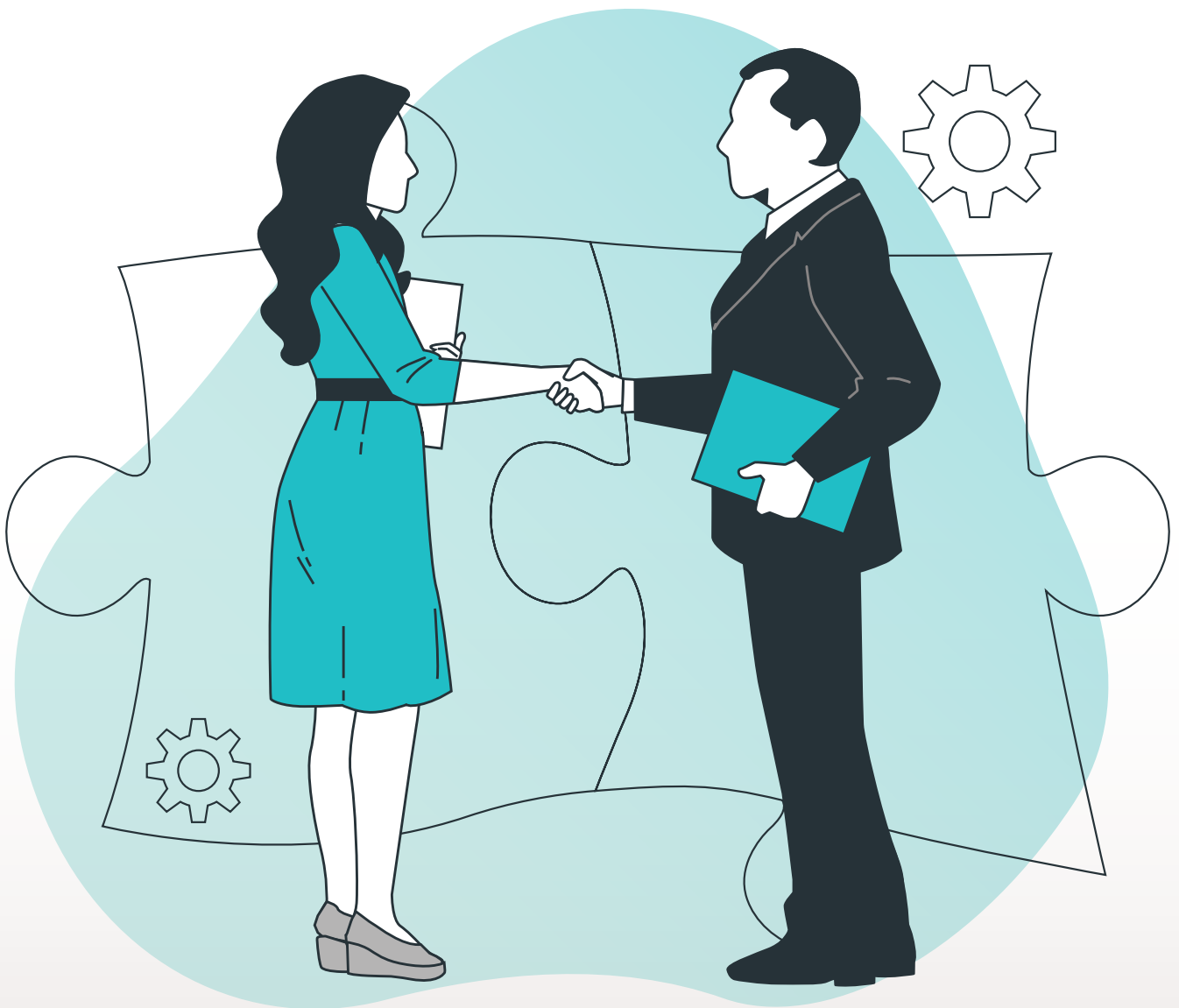
This analysis focuses on gender equality in foreign policy in North Macedonia and addresses several key aspects:

- **Historical threads and modern realities:** It briefly explores the historical context of North Macedonia's transformation after gaining independence from Yugoslavia and the manner in which gender relations have evolved in line with broader societal changes. The analysis also considers the impact of gender dynamics on conflict resolution, specifically addressing gender-based violence in the context of the Balkan conflicts and government initiatives to address it.
- **Gender equality lens:** It evaluates gender equality within North Macedonia, covering women's participation in politics, education, economic opportunities, healthcare, legislative frameworks, and policies promoting gender equality.
- **Women on the diplomatic stage:** It examines the representation of women in diplomatic positions and high-level decision-making roles, including ambassadors, negotiators, and experts in international affairs.
- **Global commitments:** It assesses North Macedonia's adherence to international agreements and conventions related to gender equality, particularly in the context of EU accession negotiations.
- **Mainstreaming gender:** This aspect evaluates how gender considerations are integrated into various aspects of foreign policy, including development assistance, humanitarian efforts, trade agreements, and security strategies. It also examines mechanisms for conducting gender impact assessments (GIAs).

The overall goal of the analysis is to provide an overview of the situation and provide recommendations for improving gender-responsive policies, promoting capacity-building, and raising awareness among diplomats and policymakers. The broader aim is to align North Macedonia's foreign policy with the principles of gender equality, contributing to the national and global efforts to address gender disparities.

¹⁸ GEF is funded by the government of Sweden, and implemented in cooperation with the Secretariat for European Affairs and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, with the aim of supporting the Government of North Macedonia in transposing the EU Gender Equality acquis, strengthening the effective implementation of national and international legal frameworks on gender equality and women's rights, mainstreaming gender equality into EU integration and planning processes for pre-accession assistance, and strengthening institutional mechanisms for gender equality in line with EU standards and policies.

METHODOLOGY



The analysis consisted of several steps, namely:

- 1. Desk review** of various national and international documents, available data and reports on gender equality provided a summary of existing data and, to a degree, evaluated the enabling environment for women's inclusion in foreign policy in North Macedonia. It also examined factors such as (but not limited to) women's participation in the labour market, political participation, and education attainment, focusing on how these factors may impact gender equality in foreign policy. The objective of the desk review was to capture best practices in advancing gender equality in foreign policy: governments promulgating changes in leadership, policy, and resource allocation. The desktop analysis focused on:
 - The 3 Rs - Rights, Representation, and Resources for women and girls - and commitment to "applying a systematic gender equality perspective throughout the foreign policy agenda".¹⁹
 - Highlighting and identifying the main approaches, gaps, and good practices globally and within the foreign policy in North Macedonia (in the above-listed areas).
 - Reviewed findings in comparison to the recommendations of PACE Resolution 2351 (2020) on the gender dimension of foreign policy and proposed specific recommendations.
- 2. Mapping and stakeholder analysis** of main actors relevant to the analysis of gender and foreign policy to be included in the data collection phase.
- 3. Interviews** – To supplement the desktop review, five in-depth interviews were conducted with women actively engaged in high-level foreign policy in North Macedonia, both current and former professionals. The selection of interviewees was a collaborative process carried out in consultation with the UN Women's team. The interviews were conducted with strictest confidentiality and special attention is paid not to use any identifying data throughout the analysis. This allowed for complete openness and willingness by the interview participants to share their experiences and opinions. Despite the limited size of the sample for the Key Informant (KI) interviews, result of the study's constrained timeline and the restricted availability of high-level and executive female participants within that timeline, the interviews provided essential and valuable information for the analysis. The interviews were not intended to serve as an exhaustive qualitative data collection tool. Instead, they were designed to augment the desk review research and analysis and to validate key findings. Their primary purpose was to provide direction for future, more extensive research on gender equality in the field of foreign policy, rather than aiming to offer a comprehensive first-hand account of the experiences of all women across various foreign policy institutions and thematic areas in North Macedonia.

¹⁹ Government Office of Sweden, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2019. *Handbook: Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy*.

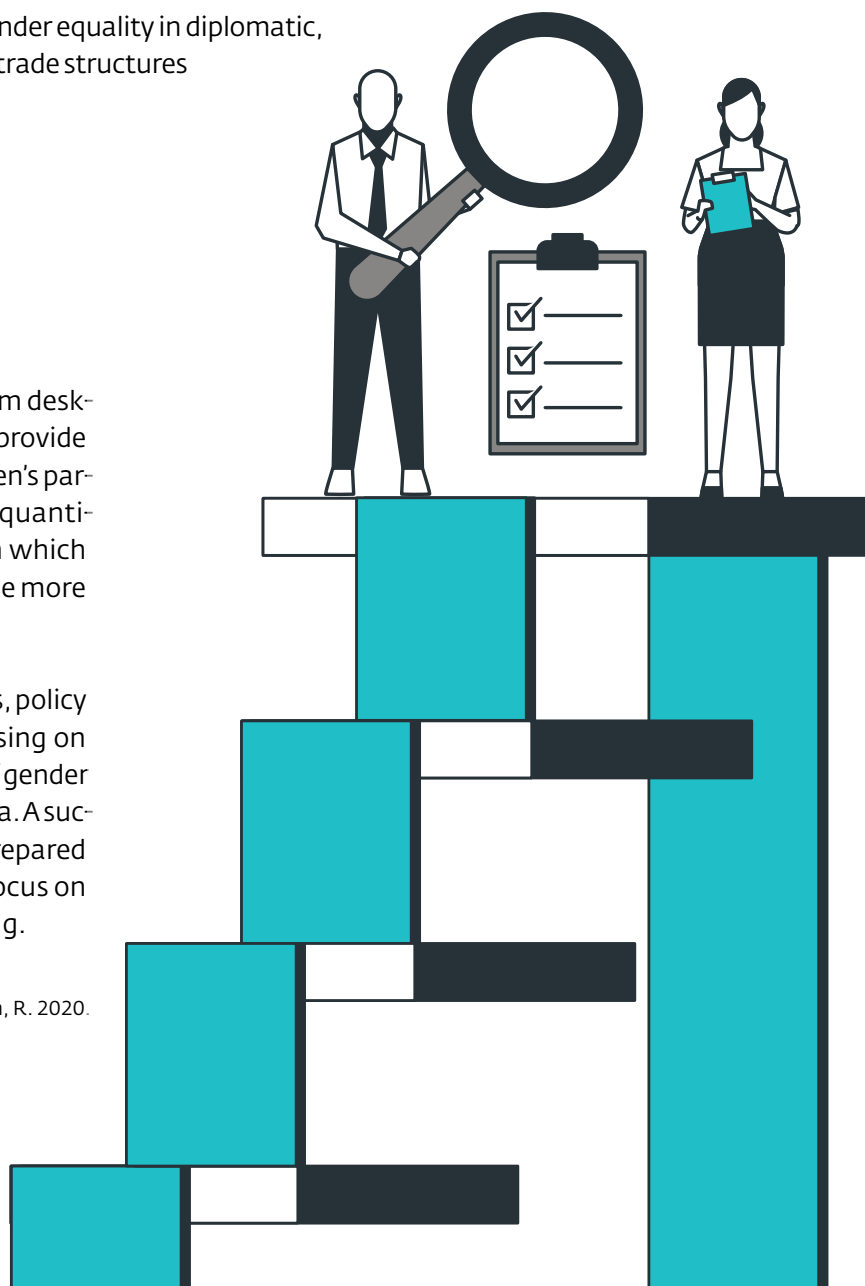
The interviews were conducted through a semi-structured questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions focused on²⁰:

- Leadership
 - Ambassadors and Envoys for Gender Equality
 - Senior Posts
 - Public Commitments
 - Policy (current and former post holders)
 - Opportunities to integrate a focus on gender equality in diplomatic, development, defence, economics, and trade structures
- Resources
 - Aid Targets
 - Gender Budgeting
 - Gender Equality Funds
 - Pooled Funds and Collective Initiatives

4. Summary of findings – Data collected from desk-top review and interviews was analysed to provide insights on the overall situation with women's participation in foreign policy and combine quantitative and qualitative data on the ways in which North Macedonia could enhance/introduce more of the (feminist) foreign policy approach.

5. Recommendations – Based on the findings, policy recommendations have been drawn focusing on systematically addressing the promotion of gender equality in foreign policy in North Macedonia. A succinct set of recommendations has been prepared for areas of improvement with a specific focus on the advancement of gender mainstreaming.

²⁰ Based on approaches identified by Bigio, J. and Vogelstein, R. 2020. Understanding Gender Equality in Foreign Policy.



INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT:
FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY (FFP)
FRAMEWORKS



3

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT: FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY (FFP) FRAMEWORKS

Feminist foreign policy (FFP) is a relatively new phenomenon born out of a growing awareness of gender in international politics. The gender focus has steadily expanded, starting with development policy, and spreading to human rights, conflict, security, and now foreign policy. Even though FFP is generally considered to have originated with Sweden's FFP in 2014, frameworks of FFP can be traced back from the three World Conferences on Women during the UN Decade for Women,²¹ the adoption of the UN General Assembly's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994), the OECD High-level Fora on Aid Effectiveness in Rome (2003), Paris (2005), Accra (2008) and Busan (2011), and finally in the adoption of the CoE Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) at the 121st session of the Committee of Ministers in Istanbul (2011).²² A growing number of nations has since been adopting feminist foreign policy (FFP), along with states like Sweden (2014), Canada (2017), France (2019), Mexico (2020), Spain (2021), Luxembourg (2021), Germany (2021) and Chile (2022). The European Union (EU) has developed a variety of initiatives, policies, and strategies within its external action that either incorporate gender perspectives or actively aim to foster gender equality including the EU's Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 (GAP III)²³ and A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025,²⁴ as part of its wider agenda on equality and democracy.

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 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 (e.g. defence, diplomacy, trade, immigration, aid (if applicable)), anchored by the exercise of those values at home, and is co-created with feminist activists, groups and movements, at home and abroad.

(Thompson et al. 2021)

²¹ Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), and Nairobi (1985).

²² Focus of feminist diplomacy priorities include strong promotion of the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention, responding to the backlash against women's rights.

²³ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2184

²⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/items/682425/en>

Almost all countries that have feminist foreign policies have a way to go to truly integrate feminist approaches across all elements of their work, including applying those approaches and principles in decision-making in their institutions and implementing a more pronounced and consistent shifting of power in their internal and external processes and relationships.²⁵

What can be noted is that most of the countries are mirroring Sweden's approach, focusing on three overarching objectives: *equal rights for women and girls, equitable representation of women in all areas of society, and equal access to resources for women and girls* (in short: *rights, representation, and resources – the 3 Rs*).²⁶ There is no blueprint for FFP, so some countries with feminist foreign policies have handbooks to specify in greater detail the goals and means of FFP, others have set up advisory bodies to guide the government in implementing FFP, and not all of them have published their plan or an articulation of the policy. While France has developed a comprehensive accountability framework with timelines, indicators, and responsible stakeholders, Spain has decided to appoint a Special Envoy on its FFP and present annual reports to its parliament, and Sweden has been publishing yearly updates ever since 2014.²⁷

The desktop analysis identified some approaches implemented by countries implementing FFP. Most of the countries have adopted a three-pronged policy for integrating gender into their foreign policies at the foreign affairs ministries levels:

1. Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming in foreign policy usually involves systematically incorporating a gender perspective into all foreign policy areas and processes. It ensures that the impact on both women and men is considered, and that gender equality is a fundamental principle in all policymaking. This usually involves the creation of gender equality units within foreign affairs ministries, mandatory gender impact assessments for all policies, and regular training on gender equality for foreign service personnel.

2. Gender Diplomacy

Gender diplomacy focuses on ensuring parity in the representation of women in diplomacy missions, as well as on using diplomatic channels to promote gender equality and women's rights in international relations. The latter includes advocating for gender-responsive policies, engaging in international negotiations, and supporting initiatives to advance women's participation in peace and security efforts.

²⁵ Thompson L., Ahmed S. and Khokhar T. 2021. Defining Feminist Foreign Policy: A 2021 Update

²⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Netherlands. 2021. Study on Feminist Foreign Policy

²⁷ https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/Brief-Feminist-foreign-policies-en_0.pdf

Countries often opt to appoint gender advisors or envoys in their diplomatic missions, develop strategies for addressing gender-based violence in conflict zones, and actively participate in international forums to advocate for gender equality.

3. Gender-Specific Programmes

In the context of foreign policy, gender-specific programmes refer to initiatives specifically designed to address gender disparities and promote women's rights on the international stage. These programmes are an essential tool for advancing gender equality in diplomatic relations and are usually implemented through development cooperation. Governments allocate resources to fund foreign aid programmes and international projects that aim to empower women, enhance gender equality, and address gender-based discrimination in partner countries. These programmes may include initiatives to support women's economic participation, increase women's involvement in peace and security processes, promote girls' education, and address health and reproductive rights issues. By implementing these programmes, countries contribute to global efforts to advance gender equality and women's rights through their foreign policy agendas.

Each of these components requires a high level of commitment to change and entails an integrated approach to gender equality. Governments often choose to adopt a combination of these three strategies to address gender disparities both at home and abroad. These approaches are interconnected, with gender diplomacy, for example, facilitating the promotion of gender mainstreaming and gender-specific programmes in the international arena.

In terms of development cooperation, ministries usually set explicit targets for advancing gender equality and strengthening the position of women and girls as a cross-cutting goal across all parts of their development cooperation policy²⁸:

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

It's important to note that before each FFP, a thorough examination of the country's context was conducted in each country to formulate tailored strategies aligned with the real needs of the affected populations. Every country also pinpointed distinct priorities, including aspects like gender and climate, but they all shared a common emphasis on addressing violence against women and girls, promoting participation in various spheres, safeguarding economic rights, and addressing women's roles in peace and security.

²⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Netherlands. 2021. Study on Feminist Foreign Policy

3.1. International Best Practices

Numerous countries across the globe are actively working to enhance the representation of women in foreign policy institutions and diplomatic missions. By examining the successful strategies employed by these nations, we can gather valuable insights. In this section, we offer a brief overview of some of these countries' approaches to highlight the diversity of implementation and the various areas of focus within the realm of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP). Sweden stands out as a pioneer, championing its "Feminist Foreign Policy," which places a strong emphasis on rights, representation, and the allocation of resources. Meanwhile, Canada has been implementing its "Feminist International Assistance Policy," which directs a significant portion of foreign aid toward advancing gender equality and is expanding the feminist approach to broader foreign policy domains. Luxembourg's approach spans defence, diplomacy, and development efforts, with a focus on human rights, women's representation, and the rights of LGBTQI individuals. Mexico, as the first country in the Global South to embrace a Feminist Foreign Policy, concentrates on principles like gender parity and intersectionality. Spain, on the other hand, actively promotes gender equality both at home and in its international endeavours through a comprehensive feminist foreign policy. Finally, Libya's FFP has broader regional and multilateral impacts, aiming to contribute to the stabilization of both Libya and the surrounding region.

These international best practices serve as valuable lessons for other countries seeking to elevate the role of women in the field of foreign policy and diplomacy.

Sweden: The "Original" Feminist Foreign Policy

Sweden is considered the pioneer of feminist foreign policy, with a comprehensive approach that extends to various aspects of foreign policy, including rights, representation, and resources. This approach is rooted in international agreements like the International Conference on Population and Development, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Sweden's FFP covers three main domains: foreign and national security policies, development cooperation, and trade and promotion policy. The Swedish FFP is aimed at policy coherence, connecting international and domestic actions across various government departments. It addressed gender equality in both foreign and national security policies, development cooperation, and trade policies, considering it both a priority and a tool for advancing other policy objectives. From 2019 to 2022, the policy included six objectives related to human rights, freedom from violence, conflict resolution, political participation, economic empowerment, and sexual and reproductive health and rights, with additional attention to the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls. However, there were significant gaps in the policy. It focused primarily on women and didn't fully address the rights of individuals across the SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, and sex characteristics) spectrum, except in terms of LGBTQI individuals' sexual and reproductive health and rights. Additionally, concerns have been raised about Sweden's arms trade with Saudi Arabia, a country with a poor record on human and women's rights.²⁹

Despite these challenges, Sweden remains committed to its feminist foreign policy and continues to allocate a significant portion of its overseas development assistance to gender equality. However, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for the policy's implementation could be strengthened. Overall, Sweden's FFP serves as a global benchmark and work done up to date resulted in getting very close to gender parity both in its national parliament (47 per cent), and among ambassadors (50 per cent of women ambassadors) and 22 per cent of women in the military.³⁰

²⁹ Vucetic, S. 2018, April 8. The uneasy co-existence of arms exports and feminist foreign policy. *The Conversation*.

³⁰ Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy. 2023. Women in Diplomacy Index.

However, in October 2022, under a new government leadership, Sweden's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Tobias Billström, made the announcement that Sweden would no longer uphold its ground-breaking feminist foreign policy. While it is too early to gauge the full impact of this decision, it is crucial to recognize that the consequences will hinge on the specific policies and actions the new Swedish government chooses to pursue in the future, particularly in their approach to gender equality and women's rights in foreign policy. This shift signifies a significant development in the realm of feminist foreign policy and global gender equality advocacy. It underscores the necessity for ongoing reforms and advocacy efforts to ensure that gender equality remains a central priority in foreign policy, or risk being relegated from the government's agenda.

Canada: Feminist International Assistance as a Foundation for Feminist Foreign Policy

In June 2017, Canada launched the world's first Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's leadership. FIAP focuses on a feminist approach to development assistance and aims to allocate a significant portion of foreign aid to gender equality. Canada committed to dedicating 95 per cent of its foreign assistance to gender equality as a principal or significant goal, surpassing Sweden in OECD rankings.³¹ Additionally, Canada has been at the forefront of directing resources to women's rights organizations and feminist movements.

However, unlike Sweden, Canada's FIAP does not explicitly aim to "disrupt" patriarchal power structures, but often frames gender equality in service of broader economic and security goals. The FIAP is organized thematically into six priority areas, including gender equality, human dignity, economic empowerment, climate action, inclusive governance, and women, peace, and security, with key performance indicators for monitoring and evaluation. Despite ongoing mentions of a feminist foreign policy, until recently, Canada's explicitly feminist approach was primarily focused on development assistance, with the limited articulation of broader foreign policy, although civil society organizations have played a crucial role in advocating for a fully articulated FFP, contributing to the policy's design and principles, including an intersectional approach, demilitarization, environmental protection, and accountability. Canadian officials have been working to expand feminist elements into various sectoral policies, including trade, women, peace, security and defence, and internal guidance. FIAP highlighted the importance of women's active role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and Canada made gender equality a priority on the political agenda of the G7 during its presidency in 2018. This external feminist foreign policy had a great impact on closing internal institutional gender parities, with half of the Canadian diplomats being women, including in high-ranking positions. This approach is also reflected in the allocation of resources for implementation of FFP, in particular \$1.4 bn per year allocated to promoting women's and girls' health and rights.

However, much like in Sweden, there have been some setbacks, with a white paper outlining Canada's feminist foreign policy commitment scheduled for release in 2021 being indefinitely delayed due to political factors, potentially jeopardizing the policy's future.³²

³¹ www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/Brief-Feminist-foreign-policies-en_0.pdf

³² Ministry of Foreign Affairs Netherlands. 2021. Study on Feminist Foreign Policy

Luxembourg: Rights and Representation for Women and LGBTI People Across the “3Ds”³³

The government of Luxembourg applies its feminist foreign policy across defence, diplomacy, and development efforts, and involves three thematic priorities³⁴:

1. The protection and promotion of human rights of women and girls, [including, but not limited to] human dignity, security, right to integrity, education, socioeconomic integration (property rights, microfinance), sexual and reproductive health and rights (maternal health, fight against female genital mutilation), fight against violence perpetuated against women (sexual abuse as a weapon of war, sexual exploitation)
2. The representation and participation of women, [including, but not limited to] representation of women in multilateral fora participation in civil and electoral observation missions, education, reinforcing women’s autonomy, gender equality in recruitment, and
3. The promotion of gender equality within the structures of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MFEA), [including, but not limited to, its] national action plan, recruitment policies (competency-based), work-life balance, language (use of feminine declinations when appropriate), training [and] legal framework.

The impact of Luxembourg’s FFP implementation includes its ranking as one of the top 20 donors to UN Women, support for the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, and a recruitment rate of 60 per cent female candidates to its Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs in 2020. However, with bigger gender parity gaps internally with 35 per cent of women’s representation in national parliament and just over 22 per cent of women ambassadors.³⁵

What sets this FFP approach from other countries is the co-equal emphasis of Luxembourg’s development cooperation strategy on gender equality, human rights, and environmental sustainability - a strength that could be extended across the whole of its approach to feminist foreign policy, as climate/environment is not mentioned in it.³⁶ However, the government is still lacking specific details regarding benchmarks, or nomination of responsible parties for implementation, and monitoring and evaluating the FFP progress. Recommendations for improvement thus far include providing more specifics on implementation and goals, extending the emphasis on environmental sustainability, consulting with civil society and supporting feminist and women’s rights organizations in the implementation of its FFP.

Mexico: The Global South’s First FFP

In 2020, Mexico unveiled its FFP, becoming the first country in Latin America and the Global South to incorporate gender equality principles in foreign policy. The policy focuses on five key principles:

1. Integrating a gender perspective into foreign policy,
2. Achieving gender parity within the Foreign Ministry,
3. Combating gender-based violence,
4. Recognizing women’s contributions, and
5. Adopting an intersectional feminist approach.

³³ Government of Luxembourg. 2018. Accord de coalition 2018-2023

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ <https://lines.gendip.gu.se/>

³⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Netherlands. 2021. Study on Feminist Foreign Policy

While the FFP demonstrates Mexico's commitment to gender equality on the global stage, there are still concerns about gender-related issues within the country, such as violence against women. Critics argue that the FFP should lead to stronger women's rights advocacy at home. Recent developments, including decriminalizing abortion and achieving gender parity in leadership, are seen as positive steps and are the FFP's specific goals for 2020-2024, allowing for accountability and monitoring.

Spain: Promoting Gender Equality within FFP

In 2021, Spain adopted a comprehensive FFP, committing to promoting gender equality in both its national and international actions. Although worded slightly differently, much like the other countries, the Spanish FFP is guided by five fundamental principles:

1. **Structural Reform:** Transforming the working practices and institutional culture within its foreign service. A gender perspective is systematically integrated into every aspect of foreign policy, to achieve coherence across all areas of external action.
2. **Strong Leadership:** Leadership within the foreign service will play a crucial role in developing the framework for FFP and ensuring its incorporation into management and budget processes.
3. **Coordination Mechanisms:** Spain's FFP emphasizes the importance of setting up coordination mechanisms that facilitate ownership and implementation of FFP among various stakeholders. This includes cooperation with the MoFA, the Ministry of Equality, and the EU.
4. **Participation and Alliance Building:** Aims to unite state efforts for gender equality by collaborating with civil society and other relevant stakeholders.
5. **Intersectionality and Diversity:** Spain's FFP adopts an intersectional approach, considering not only gender but also factors like ethnicity, sexual orientation, economic status, religious beliefs, disability, and place of origin.

Principles are applied across various priority areas, including climate change, bilateral relations and foreign policy development with the following aims:

- **Mainstreaming Gender:** Integrating gender into all foreign policy instruments and actions, with a focus on strategic areas like climate change and bilateral relations.
- **Regional Initiatives:** Strengthen ties with alliances, partners, and civil society through initiatives like the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and Development and promoting women's leadership and political participation in peace and security efforts.
- **Advocating in the EU:** Advocating for gender equality within the European Union by supporting gender equality instruments, women's human rights, and the implementation of the EU's Action Plan on Gender Equality.
- **Multilateral Diplomacy:** Seeking to deepen its commitments to gender equality by supporting international initiatives, collaborating with organizations like the UN and Council of Europe, and promoting women's leadership in international agencies.

The Spanish FFP also mandates structural changes within the Foreign Service to align internal practices with principles of equity and equal opportunity which includes embedding a gender perspective in initiatives and action plans. Overall, what sets apart this FFP is accountability, a key component of Spain's FFP, with annual public reporting on implementation progress, discussions with stakeholders and civil society and the creation of a high-level Advisory Group to shape future priorities. The policy also commits

to improving data collection and monitoring. This approach of integrating gender equality into foreign policy, one that focuses on aligning internal practices as well as external interventions, seems to be quite successful as it resulted in an increase of women's participation across the board: 44 per cent women's representation in national parliament, 36.5 per cent of women in the Foreign Affairs Committee (chaired by women since 2019 as well), and 32 per cent of women ambassadors (increase from 13.4 per cent in 2019).

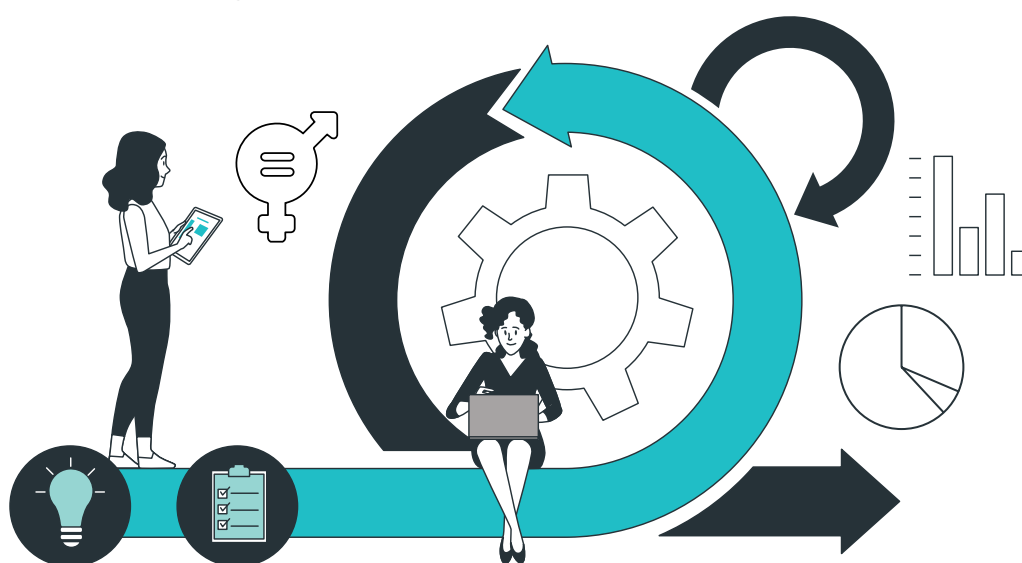
Libya: Example of FFP efforts in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

At the 2021 Generation Equality Forum in Paris, Libya committed to adopting a FFP, the first one in MENA, and this marked a significant development, given Libya's unique context characterized by security challenges, economic issues, and ongoing conflicts. Libya's FFP would focus on addressing the root causes of conflict in the country, aligning with the women, peace, and security agenda.

Although the specifics of Libya's FFP are yet to be public, it was emphasized that Libya's FFP will strive to understand the perspectives of marginalized actors in Libyan foreign policy design and relevant decision-making, to improve the standards of living for those communities, and uphold human and digital security, and dignity.³⁷ Libya's FFP has aspirations to have broader regional and multilateral impacts, contributing to the stabilization of both Libya and the surrounding region. Once in force, it will be interesting to closely watch to see how Libya's FFP evolves and what potential implications it has for the country and the broader MENA region.

What is common for all the countries that have developed FFPs is that they already had a national action plan on women, peace, and security, however, depending solely on that framework is discouraged, especially within the current global political climate. FFP should not focus only on addressing women's needs during conflict, but on preventing conflict itself. FFP therefore should enable effective conflict prevention through disarmament, women's meaningful participation, and providing effective conditions for women's empowerment.

For the analysis, when we evaluate what the Government of North Macedonia is doing in this area, we are using the term "gender mainstreaming" instead of "Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP)." We do this for practical, cultural, and political reasons. However, we note that the goal remains the same: to promote gender equality and reduce gender disparities.



³⁷ Ragrag, N. 2022. What Does a Feminist Foreign Policy Mean for Libya?

GENDER EQUALITY IN NORTH MACEDONIA



4

GENDER EQUALITY IN NORTH MACEDONIA

Research on the topic of women in foreign policy suggests that societal, individual, policy and organizational factors impact women's progress, including in foreign policy, and in that regard the following overview also takes a closer look at available data related to women's position in economy, education, and decision-making in North Macedonia.

The national data indicates that the labour market inactivity rate of women significantly surpasses the inactivity rate of men. In 2021, the activity rate of women was 44.9 per cent compared to that of men at 67.2 per cent, while the employment rate of women was 38.3 per cent compared to that of men at 56.2 per cent.³⁸ Of the inactive population, 59.3 per cent are women inactive due to care obligations, compared to 2.3 per cent of men.³⁹ Women continue to be the largest proportion of unpaid family workers, particularly in rural areas, where an estimated 15.5 per cent of employed women are in this category, while 17.7 per cent of employed men are in the category own-account workers.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the National Time-Use Survey⁴¹ suggests that the division of domestic responsibilities continues to fall on women, regardless of whether they are employed, unemployed or inactive in the labour market. According to the survey, women who work spend 14 per cent more time on domestic responsibilities compared to employed men who participate with only 5 per cent in domestic activities.

Whilst women have a higher educational attainment, they do not meaningfully engage in the labour market due to domestic or childcare responsibilities. In the 2022 academic year, for the overall number of graduates (undergraduate studies), 57 per cent were women, while in the 2021/2022 cycle, of the 3,397 enrolled in the second cycle of studies (masters), 67 per cent were women.⁴² Yet, in 2022, from a total of 656,416 inactive citizens in the four categories: pupils/students, housewives, retired, and other categories, 60 per cent were women.⁴³

When it comes to the political and decision-making participation of women, the figure is strikingly small and the inclusion of women in public life does not significantly affect policies which promote gender equality. This is also reflected in the political participation of women, which remains partial. During the period 2020–2024, out of a total of 21 ministries, only 4 were headed by women.⁴⁴ After the 2021 local elections, women lead only 2 out of 81 municipalities in the country, while out of 301 candidates for

³⁸ State Statistical Office. 2023. Women and Men in North Macedonia

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ State Statistical Office. Time Use Survey 2014/2015.

⁴² State Statistical Office. 2023. Women and Men in North Macedonia.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ <https://vlada.mk/node/18031?ln=en-gb>

mayors, only 25 were women.⁴⁵ The number of women members of parliament has increased to 42 per cent in 2023,⁴⁶ as a result of the introduction of the quota in the Electoral Code which stipulates that in the proposed list of candidates, each gender will be represented by at least 40 per cent - for every three places, at least one place for will be reserved to the less represented gender and additionally at least one place for every ten places. However, this has not been transcribed on gender-sensitive policy making.

The Commission for Equal Opportunities of Women and Men within the Parliament⁴⁷ in its mandate can: consider the proposals for laws and other regulations adopted by the Parliament in the fields of labour, social policy, education and health, family and child care, as well as other proposals for laws and other regulations from the aspect of the inclusion of the gender concept in them; can initiate adoption and amendment of laws and other regulations in the field of equal opportunities for women and men and can monitor the system of measures to eliminate the unequal treatment of women and men through submitted reports from the Sector for Equal Opportunities within the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The Commission has not proposed policies which could promote women's participation in decision-making or significantly improve the status of women in the public/political and diplomatic domain as per the publicly available information on the work of the Commission. In 2023, the Commission held two sessions,⁴⁸ and overall, there is no record of the Commission submitting any draft proposals and amendments that relate to gender-sensitive policymaking.

4.1. Frameworks for Gender Equality in North Macedonia

North Macedonia is committed to promoting gender equality and has signed several international treaties supporting this cause, including significant agreements like CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration, and the Istanbul Convention. Additionally, North Macedonia is dedicated to achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and has prioritized EU membership since gaining independence. Successfully achieving global commitments and the EU agenda entails cross-institutional coordination and cooperation, and allocation of human, technical and financial resources which it seems that the current gender institutional mechanism is lacking. EU Gender Action Plan III and Country Level Implementation Plan highlight areas of interest, such as policy dialogue, feminist diplomacy, and participation in decision-making at local and central levels. There is still a considerable gap between North Macedonia's commitment and

⁴⁵ State Electoral Commission, 2021. Candidates list. Available at: <https://www.sec.mk/izbori-2021/#tab-id-12>

⁴⁶ [https://www.sobranie.mk/pratenici-vo-parlament.nspix%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20.nspix](https://www.sobranie.mk/pratenici-vo-parlament.nspix%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20.nspix)

⁴⁷ Parliamentary Commission on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men (2023). Available at <https://sobranie.mk/detali-na-komisija.nspix?param=e325eceb-296e-444a-abde-5f20371919c5>

⁴⁸ Ibid.

achievements, as these are not fully encompassed in the Strategy for Gender Equality and National Action Plan for implementation of the Strategy for Gender Equality, National Action Plan for the implementation of the UN Resolution 1325 “Women, Peace and Security” 2020-2025, and other institutional strategies, such as the annual plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Desk review indicates that within North Macedonia’s foreign policy, women are notably absent from negotiations, strategic decision making, and ambassadorial positions. Whilst North Macedonia is not alone in that it does not have a Feminist Foreign Policy, as do other EU member countries, what is important to note is that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not have a comprehensive overall strategy for its foreign policies, but is rather guided by several national strategies like National strategy for cooperation with diaspora, National development strategies and similar documents, which have addressed some gender issues, but without full gender mainstreaming. Whilst the MoFA has its own institutional annual action plans, the one reviewed (MoFAAP 2023) has no objectives nor targets specifically relating to gender equality, or objectives specifically on gender issues within their interventions in the field of foreign policy.

Within North Macedonia, there exists a robust legislative framework aimed at advancing gender equality. The national legislative framework lays out the structure for institutionalizing the gender machinery at both national and local levels, with the primary objective of advancing gender equality and integrating gender mainstreaming into institutions. Indeed, North Macedonia boasts a comprehensive legislative framework that encompasses various laws, including the Law on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men,⁴⁹ the Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence Against Women and Family Violence,⁵⁰ and the Budget Law, which incorporates the concept of gender-responsive budgeting along with gender indicators at both central and local levels. Gender equality efforts in foreign policy in North Macedonia focus on recognizing and involving women in diplomacy and foreign policy, especially when it comes to gender-related issues, through policies related to Women, Peace, and Security (WPS).

The Law on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men serves as the foundational pillar for systematically embedding the principle of gender equality into various aspects of society, thereby advancing gender equality. Under this law, the National Strategy for Gender Equality and the National Action Plan for its Implementation were established. The primary goal of this law is to establish equal opportunities for women and men across the political, economic, social, educational, cultural, health, civil, and other spheres of society. However, upon closer examination, it becomes evident that the law lacks specific provisions aimed at promoting or supporting women in foreign policy. Its focus primarily involves the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is responsible for monitoring and implementing international agreements related to equal opportunities and the advancement of women’s status.

Regarding gender mainstreaming in foreign policy or introduction of FFP, the Strategy for Gender Equality 2022-2027 does not explicitly reference it but recognizes the importance of women’s equal participation in defence, security, and international relations, including peace missions, as part of the country’s NATO membership. To that end, the National Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for Gender Equality 2022-2024 outlines the general objective of enhancing the position of women across all spheres of public and private life, emphasizing equal participation in decision-making, known as the “50-50 commitment”. It also includes specific objectives, such as increasing women’s involvement in defence, particularly in decision-making roles, and fostering gender-sensitive personnel in defence,

⁴⁹ Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia” no. 6/2012, 166/2014.

⁵⁰ Official Gazette of North Macedonia no. 24 from 29.1.2021.

foreign policy, and internal affairs, with a focus on promoting gender equality to achieve and maintain positive peace (WPS). However, the plan lacks clear and quantifiable indicators to measure results and activities, making it challenging to assess progress. For example, there is no clear measurement for “Increasing the number of women employed in defence and placed in decision-making positions.” The plan includes activities related to gender equality training, but without baseline research to find out the existing gaps and inequalities, these activities may not lead to substantial, lasting outcomes that boost the number of women in diplomatic, negotiation, and defence missions. The 2022-2024 Government work programme⁵¹ acknowledges the significance of gender equality and equal access to resources, opportunities, and protection across all aspects of life, but does not specifically address the promotion of women in foreign policy. An analysis of the Ministry of Foreign Policy’s 2023 action plan reveals that North Macedonia has not adopted a FFP, as there is very limited inclusion of gender equality objectives, outcomes, targets, and indicators.⁵²

Available data, which will be analysed in greater detail in section 4.2, points to some key gender inequality issues. Namely, noting that while within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there’s a significant presence of women diplomats in supervisory positions within the country, there appears to be a disparity between women in managerial roles domestically and those progressing to ambassadorial positions abroad. In the parliamentary setting, there is a notable gender distribution in various committees. Specifically, men hold the positions of president and deputy president in the Committee for Foreign Affairs, the Committee overseeing the work of the National Security Agency and the Intelligence Agency, and the Committee for Defence and Security. Furthermore, the Committee for Financing and Budgeting is headed by a male MP. Conversely, the Committee for Equal Opportunities is unique in that both the president and deputy president are women. Among its 21 members and deputy members, only two are men. Similarly, in the Committee for Education, both the president and deputy president positions are held by women, and out of its 30 members, only 9 are men. It’s worth noting that a male MP serves as the president of the Committee on Labour and Social Policy, where, out of 26 members, only 8 are men. Overall, the data highlights gender imbalances in political and diplomatic roles, suggesting that women are more prominent in committees overseeing topics traditionally associated with female-centric sectors, such as women’s rights, education, and social policy.

In conclusion, despite significant progress in establishing supportive frameworks for women in civil service and politics to participate in foreign policy structures since gaining independence, these positive trends may now face potential setbacks due to evolving social and cultural dynamics within North Macedonia, as well as on a regional and global scale. A concerning pattern of eroding women’s rights, marked by the emergence of anti-feminist rhetoric and policies, could jeopardize the commitment to gender equality in the country and introduce new obstacles that threaten to undermine the achievements and advancements in women’s rights. This is exemplified by the case of a draft Law on Gender Equality, which despite involving diverse stakeholder groups in 18 public discussions, has encountered resistance from anti-gender movements and religious organizations, leading to protests, and ultimately stalling its adoption.

North Macedonia maintains a strong commitment to advancing gender equality through international agreements and robust legislative measures. However, the path to fostering women’s involvement in foreign policy is not free from challenges, and recent developments within the country, coupled with the global shift towards populist political views, have given rise to concerns about potential obstacles in this pursuit.

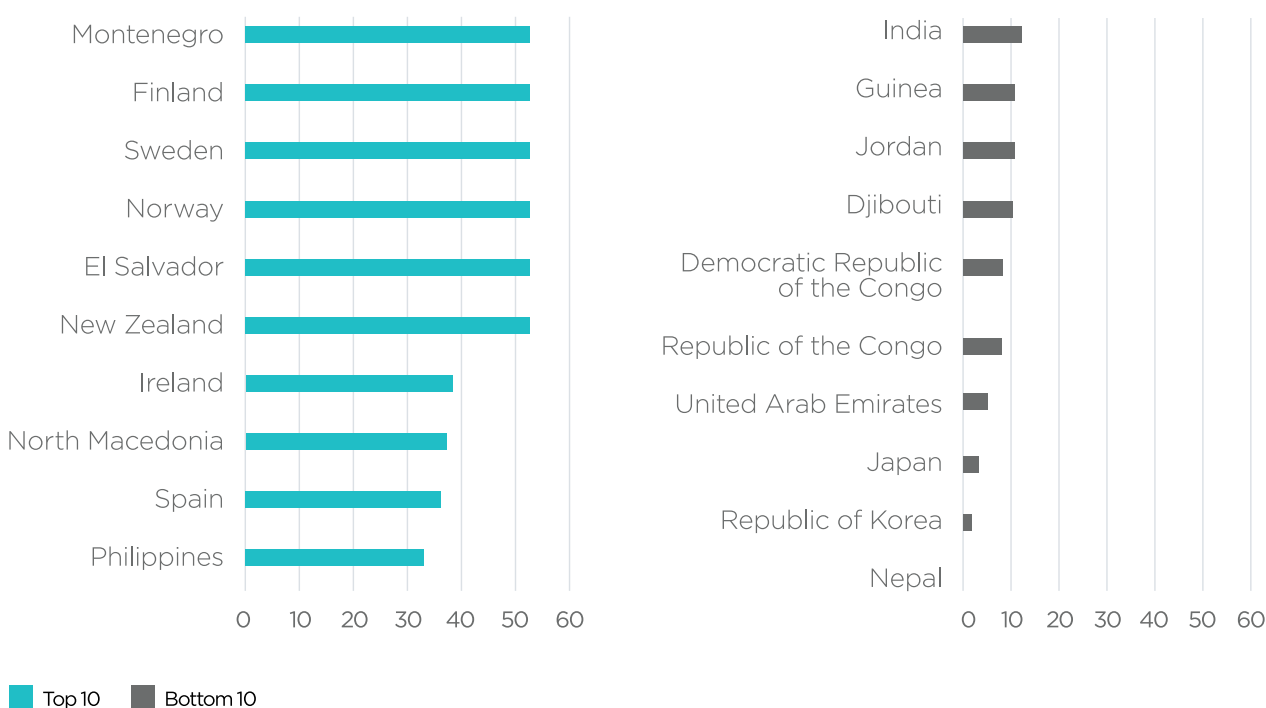
⁵¹ https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/programa/2022-2024/programa_na_vladata_2022-2024.pdf

⁵² Annual work plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2023).

4.2. Gender Parity in Foreign Policy Structures in North Macedonia

In the realm of government leadership, since the reshuffling of the Government in 2022, there are 21 individuals holding key ministerial positions, but the distribution of power reveals an uneven gender representation. Out of these 21 ministers, only four are women, pointing to a significant gender disparity.⁵³ As mentioned above, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a crucial department in international relations, is led by Bujar Osmani, with Fatmire Isaki as Deputy Minister. Since the independence, only one woman headed this ministry (Ilinka Mitreva, 13.05.2001 – 30.11.2001 and again from 01.11.2002 – 26.08.2006).⁵⁴ Diving further into the ministry's structure, two women head departments among the 12 Directorates,⁵⁵ showcasing a somewhat limited trend towards gender diversity at top-level positions. Also, within this landscape, the Secretariat for European Affairs plays a critical role in coordinating North Macedonia's EU accession process. Heading this institution is Bojan Marichikj, who also serves as the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs. Notably, State Secretary of the Secretariat is Drita Abdiu-Halili (position previously held by Kalinka Gaber), demonstrating the presence of female leadership in these influential roles. In North Macedonia's Foreign Affairs Committee within the Parliament, 46 per cent of the 26 members are women. However, both the president and chair of the Committee are men.

FIGURE 1. Percentage of women ambassadors in 2021 (top 10 and bottom 10 countries*)



*Amongst countries which responded

Source: <https://shsecurity.info>

⁵³ Government of North Macedonia 2022-2024. Available at <https://vlada.mk/sostav-na-vladata>

⁵⁴ <https://www.mfa.gov.mk/en/page/21/about-the-ministry>

⁵⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Last updated in May 2023. List of leading diplomats in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Directorate for NATO and Political-Security Affairs Director for NATO and Political-Security Affairs Katerina Stavreska and Directorate for bilateral relations with the countries of South-Eastern Europe and regional initiatives Director for bilateral relations with the countries of South-Eastern Europe and regional initiatives Jadranka Chaushevska Dimov. Available at <https://www.mfa.gov.mk/mk/document/1829/spisok-na-rakovodni-diplomati-vo-mnr>

Within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there are 88 diplomats holding supervisory positions within the country. Among this group, around 40 per cent are women,⁵⁶ marking a noteworthy representation within the internal structures even when compared globally (Figure 1). However, although data show that there is a significant number of female diplomats in different departments, only around 34 per cent⁵⁷ are present as ambassadors in North Macedonia's 56 diplomatic representations in 33 countries worldwide,⁵⁸ turning our gaze to diplomatic missions in European countries alone,⁵⁹ 37 diplomatic missions in total, we discover that nine of these missions are headed by women.⁶⁰

Though the considerably high percentage of women might be deceiving, further analysis is needed to see the impact of different postings in terms of political significance, as well as personal and professional development for women and for men. Certain pivotal positions in the government remain under men's leadership. These include the OSCE Chairpersonship, the post of North Macedonia's Ambassador to the UN, the NATO Permanent Representative, and the position of North Macedonia's Ambassador to the USA, which is particularly significant due to the country's strategic partnership with the United States. On a brighter note, women diplomats are currently at the helm of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of North Macedonia to the United Nations Office in Geneva⁶¹ and the Permanent Representation to the Council of Europe.⁶²

In the realm of defence, two female representatives from the Ministry of Defence are actively serving in NATO in Brussels, while another representative holds a position at the OSCE Permanent Mission in Vienna.⁶³ However, the number of women from the Ministry of Defence participating in international military missions abroad remains notably low, with only 2.8 per cent taking part in such missions in 2022.⁶⁴ In the same year, women constituted 10.6 per cent of the army's composition, with varying percentages in different roles, including officers (18.1 per cent), non-commissioned officers (11.7 per cent), professional soldiers (5.9 per cent), and civilians (10.2 per cent).⁶⁵

Desk review of available data relating to Foreign Policy, representations of women in Defence missions abroad, Parliamentary committees, heads of Directorates within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Heads of International bodies and past and current practices suggest that although there is significant progress made in the past years women continue to lag behind men with representation and inclusion specifically at the top and executive functions across the board.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ UN Women. 2023. Country Gender Equality Profile of North Macedonia, Skopje, North Macedonia.

⁵⁸ <https://embassies.net/north-macedonia-embassy#:~:text=North%20Macedonia%20has%20a%20total,39%20countries%20around%20the%20world>.

⁵⁹ North Macedonia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Available at <https://www.mfa.gov.mk/mk/page/37/europe/ambasadi>

⁶⁰ <https://embassies.net/north-macedonia-embassy-#:~:text=North%20Macedonia%20has%20a%20total,39%20countries%20around%20the%20world>.

⁶¹ Permanent Mission of the Republic of North Macedonia to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva. Available at <https://www.ungeneva.org/en/blue-book/missions/member-states/north-macedonia>

⁶² <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/north-macedonia>

⁶³ Annual report on the degree of realization of annual operational plans in 2022 for the implementation of the second National Action Plan of the Republic of North Macedonia for the implementation of the United Nations Resolution 1325 "Women, peace and security" 2020-2025-strategic framework. Available at <https://mod.gov.mk/storage/2023/05/Vtor-godisen-izvestaj-NAP-za-stepen-za-realizacija-na-godisni-opertativni-planovi-vo-2022-20.04.2023.pdf>

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ OSCE chairpersonship: <https://www.osce.org/chairpersonship>

4.3. Women's Participation in North Macedonia's Foreign Policy

Available data concerning North Macedonia's Foreign Policy paints a picture where gender inequality persists, particularly when it comes to the representation and involvement of women. The statistics reveal a significant gender gap that extends across various facets of foreign affairs, including leadership positions, defence missions abroad, parliamentary committees, and roles within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Despite some positive developments linked to North Macedonia's accession to NATO and its pursuit of EU candidacy, the participation of women in foreign policy remains notably limited. This disparity is compounded by the absence of a robust framework for gender mainstreaming within the nation's foreign policy agenda. Institutional mechanisms aimed at supporting gender equality and the advancement of women within the realm of North Macedonia's Foreign Policy are conspicuously lacking. While the National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2022-2024 does allocate a modest budget for gender equality training, it falls short of implementing substantial measures that could bring about a meaningful transformation in gender equality within the foreign policy arena.

The current landscape underscores the necessity for further research to gain a deeper understanding of the specific challenges that hinder women's progress and participation in foreign policy processes. Such insights are pivotal in addressing the root causes of gender disparities in this domain. To rectify the current imbalance, it is imperative to integrate gender mainstreaming comprehensively throughout all aspects of diplomacy, including cultural, political, and economic dimensions. In the absence of a dedicated Feminist Foreign Policy, the introduction of a more focused Strategy and Action Plan, where gender equality and gender issues are both visible and budgeted for, is warranted.

Nevertheless, amid these challenges, there are signs of positive action. In 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under the leadership of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Fatmire Isaki, and with the support of UN Women, initiated annual conferences to commemorate the International Day of Women in Diplomacy. These gatherings serve as a platform for prominent domestic and foreign speakers to share their personal journeys and experiences in foreign policy and diplomacy. The overarching goal of these conferences is to enhance awareness surrounding women's experiences and their contributions to the field. Furthermore, in 2023, under the auspices of OSCE Chairpersonship and guided by Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bujar Osmani, a high-level Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Conference took place in Tetovo. The event drew participation from OSCE leaders, ambassadors, officials from OSCE participating States, as well as representatives from the private sector, academia, civil society, and other international organizations. The conference addressed specific challenges, such as the role of women in peace and security, their engagement in peacebuilding and conflict management, and the promotion of women's leadership across all sectors of political and public life. These initiatives represent positive steps towards rectifying gender imbalances within North Macedonia's Foreign Policy. These types of initiatives also underscore the importance of collective action and positive initiatives. By portraying the efforts of women leaders and the steps taken to address gender inequality, this narrative can serve as a motivational tool for aspiring women who wish to join the field of foreign policy. Furthermore, the latest conference is also important in terms of countering anti-gender and gender equality sentiments, pointing out the need for gender mainstreaming and highlighting the benefits of diverse perspectives in foreign policy, underscoring the value that women can bring to the field.

The landscape of government leadership in North Macedonia reveals both progress and areas that require continued attention in terms of gender diversity and representation. While there are commendable instances of women in key diplomatic positions, including heading important missions and departments, there remains a noticeable gender disparity in top-level leadership roles. As noted above, men hold pivotal positions such as the OSCE Chairpersonship, North Macedonia's Ambassador to the UN, NATO Permanent Representative, and North Macedonia's Ambassador to the USA. On the positive side, women are making significant contributions in various diplomatic positions, including leading missions to international organizations, and serving in influential roles within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

North Macedonia is an example in the region as a signatory to a number of internal and external agreements that oversaw full diplomatic commitments involving both the international community and diplomatic corps. In this regard, the Ministry of Defence, for two consecutive mandates is led by a woman, can be noted as a positive example. These achievements reflect a growing trend toward gender diversity and empowerment within the country's diplomatic landscape, however, even in the field of defence, there is room for improvement in terms of women's participation in international military missions. While the representation of women in the army has been gradually increasing, from 8.4 per cent in 2014 to 10.6 per cent in 2022,⁶⁶ their presence in certain roles remains limited.

Moving forward, it is crucial to continue promoting gender equality and ensuring that women have equal opportunities to excel in leadership roles across all sectors, including diplomacy and defence. The draft Law on Foreign Affairs underscores the importance of upholding principles of equitable representation and gender equality when appointing leaders of diplomatic and consular missions, as a commitment to fostering diversity and inclusion within North Macedonia's diplomatic corps. By doing so, North Macedonia can further enhance its reputation as a nation committed to diversity, inclusion, and equal representation in national and international affairs. However, there is no single body (Parliamentary Committee or such) that could exercise a veto against diplomatic list nominations based on gender inequality.

4.4. Conclusions

In summary, while North Macedonia has a robust national framework for promoting gender equality, implementation is hindered by insufficient financial and human resources, a lack of clear goals and strategies within ministries, and a shortage of expertise and well-trained gender equality coordinators within institutions. While the Law on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men serves as a foundation, a comprehensive Law on Gender Equality is needed to set a clearer framework on advancing gender equality. The National Strategy for Gender Equality and the National Action Plan have limitations, including the absence of clear baseline data and statistical indicators to measure their success and the requirement to regularly produce data on the issue that could be incorporated in the regular publications by the State Statistical Office. Additionally, they lack specific goals and objectives related to women in foreign policy. Cross-institutional coordination for implementing these frameworks is weak, with a focus on conferences, initiatives, training, and analysis rather than affirmative measures, socioeconomic support, and gender mainstreaming. Political and institutional commitment, allocation of resources, and engagement of experts and NGOs are crucial to fully uphold the principle of gender equality and ensure its transformative impact.

⁶⁶ https://shecurity.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/SHEcurity_2022_dataset_final.pdf

EMPOWERING WOMEN
IN DIPLOMACY:
A JOURNEY OF CHALLENGES AND
TRIUMPHS IN NORTH MACEDONIA



5

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY: A JOURNEY OF CHALLENGES AND TRIUMPHS IN NORTH MACEDONIA

Diplomacy has long been perceived as a male-dominated field, but North Macedonia is making significant strides in breaking these barriers by empowering women to take on prominent roles in its foreign service. The interviews conducted with Key Informants (KIs), who held influential executive positions within the foreign service, revealed fascinating insights into their unique journeys to leadership roles. This section offers a first-hand insight into KI's views and their perceptions of gender equality, discrimination, and work-life balance in their profession.

"Most of the top female diplomats started their professional career as political figures." - KI interview

One striking revelation from the interviews is the intersection of political careers with diplomatic roles. The majority of the KIs began their professional journeys as political figures before transitioning into diplomatic positions. This illustrates the influential role of political power and connections in shaping women's career trajectories in diplomacy. Rather than being promoted within the institutional structure of foreign ministry, most of the women holding these prominent roles were either political nominations or entered foreign service through their political engagement. This suggests that women who venture into politics can leverage their political roles to contribute significantly to foreign policy and diplomacy later.

Personal motivations have undoubtedly emerged as a powerful catalyst driving women's pursuit of careers in diplomacy. The interviews conducted with women diplomats from various backgrounds have shed light on the multifaceted reasons behind their career choices. The following emerged as the key factors that underscore the significance of personal drive and gender awareness in breaking barriers in traditionally male-dominated fields of diplomacy:

- **Gender issues and social engagement:** All of the women diplomats interviewed demonstrated a deep awareness of gender issues within their families and societies. They recognized the disparities, discrimination, and challenges faced by women in various aspects of life, including in the professional sphere. This awareness acted as a motivating factor, compelling them to strive for change from within the system.
- **Mentorship and family support:** Encouragement from mentors or family members played a pivotal role in shaping the career choices of a few of our KIs. These mentors, often senior diplomats themselves, or influential figures in national policy or international relations, provided guidance, advice, and a sense of possibility. Family support, especially from parents who recognized their daughters' potential and encouraged them to break barriers, was a common thread. Such mentorship and familial backing instilled confidence and determination, making the pursuit of both politics and diplomacy a feasible and desirable option.

- **Personal ambition and aspiration:** Beyond external factors, personal ambition and aspiration played a crucial role in women's pursuit of diplomacy. The interviewees possessed a genuine passion for international affairs, diplomacy, and the complexities of global politics. This intrinsic motivation propelled them forward, enabling them to navigate the challenges of a career traditionally dominated by men.

5.1. Cultural and Organizational Gender Equality Challenges for Women in Diplomacy

Despite the distinct cultural and organizational nuances that shape the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) in North Macedonia, it is evident that this institution shares strikingly similar gender equality challenges with such ministries and entities worldwide. These challenges, often deeply embedded within the diplomatic profession, transcend geographical borders, and reveal shared struggles experienced by women diplomats. Two of these particularly resilient and pervasive issues are the challenges faced by diplomats' families and the persistent gender biases inherent in diplomatic assignments and hidden power structures.

One notable issue that transcends international boundaries is the **complex set of challenges foreign service pose for diplomats' families**. The nomadic nature of diplomatic careers, requiring frequent relocations and international postings, often places significant strains on family life. Spouses, who may also be highly educated and professionally accomplished individuals, often find themselves grappling with career interruptions, the necessity to adapt to new environments, and limited opportunities for their own professional growth. These challenges can create a disincentive for individuals, particularly women, to pursue diplomatic careers, as the demands on family life can be substantial. North Macedonia's MoFA, like its counterparts worldwide, faces the task of addressing these challenges to attract and retain diverse talent in the diplomatic corps.

Another universal issue within diplomacy globally that is visible in the foreign policy structures of North Macedonia as well is the **persistent gender biases that manifest in the assignment of professional roles and the existence of unconscious bias in the creation of power structures**. Diplomatic assignments are often influenced by traditional gender roles and stereotypes (as noted in the interviews with KIs), resulting in women diplomats being relegated to certain types of roles, such as those related to social or cultural affairs while being underrepresented in high-stakes, negotiation, policymaking positions. Gender plays a decisive role in geographic placement as well, and not all ambassadorships are of equal weight. Some appointments, generally those for states at the centre of military and economic power, are considered to have much more weight than others (being appointed ambassador to Washington DC, Moscow, or Beijing is clearly not equivalent in significance to being posted in Podgorica or Athens).

Indeed, the interviews pointed out that women tended to cluster in ambassadorships of lesser status while remaining underrepresented in the ambassador positions of power and clout.

These biases not only limit women's career progression but also contribute to the perpetuation of gender disparities in diplomatic outcomes. Hidden power structures, often rooted in historical male dominance, continue to further exacerbate these biases, making it challenging for women to break through glass ceilings and have their voices heard in decision-making processes.

Balancing domestic responsibilities with professional aspirations emerged as a recurrent and poignant theme in these interviews. All of the key informants (KIs) spoke openly and candidly about the intricate challenges they face when trying to juggle their family duties with their career ambitions. These conversations provided a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between societal expectations, traditional gender roles, and the deeply personal pursuit of individual career goals. The interviews revealed that, in many cases, women diplomats are still navigating a landscape where traditional gender roles and societal expectations persist. The expectation that women primarily bear the burden of domestic responsibilities can create a formidable barrier to career advancement. Moreover, these expectations often extend to perceptions of what it means to be a "good" mother or wife, sometimes casting those who prioritize their careers in a different light. On the other hand, men who opt to support their partners' careers by taking on more significant domestic responsibilities can encounter challenges to their self-perceived masculinity. Societal stereotypes and expectations about men as providers or leaders can lead to concerns about appearing "wimpy" or not fulfilling traditional roles. These deeply ingrained gender norms can place significant emotional and psychological stress on both men and women who aspire to excel in their diplomatic careers while maintaining a fulfilling family life. Although there is a clear agreement that societal views of gender roles have become more fluid, recent populism has threatened gender equality progress, and the interviews underscored the need for a broader societal shift in recognizing and valuing the contributions of both men and women in balancing professional and domestic responsibilities. They also highlighted the importance of institutional policies and support mechanisms within diplomatic services to facilitate a more equitable distribution of family duties, ultimately enabling diplomats of all genders to pursue their career aspirations without unnecessary hindrances.

"Accompanying their wives on a 4-year posting can be challenging for men, not due to any of their own beliefs, but more due to the potential impact on their own career advancement but also considering the perception it may create (long term) of them appearing less assertive... less manly." - KI interview

"The idea of domestic responsibilities being evenly distributed in our society is not fully accepted. Too often this has a huge role in the career development of women, mostly secondary to that of career development of their husbands." - KI interview

In conclusion, the discussions surrounding the challenge of balancing domestic responsibilities with professional ambitions shed light on the intricate web of societal expectations, gender roles, and individual career aspirations that diplomats, particularly women, navigate in their pursuit of success in the field. These interviews emphasize the urgency of fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment, both within diplomatic services and society at large, to empower individuals to excel in their careers while enjoying meaningful family lives without being encumbered by outdated gender norms.

5.2. Exclusion, Discrimination and Organizational Biases

The key informants (KIs) went beyond acknowledging the absence of direct gender bias within their personal experiences to emphasize the critical importance of creating and implementing policies and initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and diversity within the foreign service. They recognized that while their own careers might have been relatively free from overt discrimination, the need to proactively address systemic issues and promote greater inclusivity within diplomatic institutions remained pressing.

One of the key takeaways from the interviews was the awareness that unconscious bias, even if not overtly expressed, could still exert a subtle yet profound influence on decision-making processes. The KIs understood that biases, whether conscious or not, could shape perceptions of suitability, competence, and leadership potential, potentially hindering the advancement of women diplomats. As such, they emphasized the necessity of measures to mitigate these biases and ensure that opportunities and promotions are based on merit rather than unconscious prejudices.

However, not all KIs agreed about the MoFA and the foreign diplomatic core being void of discrimination. Few of the interviewees reflected on how their experiences changed over the past ten years in relation to seeing and being aware of discrimination and gender inequality. A decade ago, they would have not felt discriminated against and would not have likely expressed this sentiment. However, over the course of years, they became more knowledgeable and understanding of the actuality of Feminist Foreign Policy, particularly through the perspective of work done in other countries like Sweden and Canada. They have learned more about the systems governments put in place to ensure gender equality in “hard” sectors like trade, capital investment, energy etc., which may have led them to notice and understand discrimination more clearly within the policy context in North Macedonia. The concept of FFP in North Macedonia is still viewed as representing a noble idea, aiming to ensure that diverse population is adequately represented in various categories of activities. Currently, while gender representation and the integration of gender considerations are increasingly discussed in policy circles, the practical execution of gender-sensitive initiatives remains irregular and inadequately funded. This is particularly true in the context of North Macedonia’s foreign policy priorities. The significance of having diverse representation is underscored, and the introduction of quotas is recommended as a means to accelerate progress within the North Macedonia’s context.

While quotas are viewed as a potential solution, there is recognition that they alone may not be adequate. It’s understood that merely implementing quotas does not guarantee the creation of gender-sensitive workplaces. In fact, it could potentially have adverse effects by placing women in roles that negatively affect their work-life balance. In line with these views, the KIs advocated for family-friendly frameworks within diplomatic institutions. They recognized that gender equality and inclusivity should extend beyond just benefiting women or mothers. Instead, creating work environments that are accommodating to family needs, without regard to gender, can be crucial in enabling diplomats to fulfil the demanding responsibilities of their roles. By promoting family-friendly policies and initiatives, diplomatic services can help individuals, regardless of their gender, better balance their domestic responsibilities with their professional aspirations. This approach not only acknowledges the diverse roles and responsibilities of diplomats but also contributes to a more equitable workplace culture where all employees feel supported in their career journeys. Looking forward, the interviewees also touched upon potential policy initiatives to further empower women in diplomacy. Suggestions ranged from introducing positive discrimination or affirmative action measures, introducing quotas for nomination to key positions, and participation in key negotiations, to creating opportunities for women to participate more actively in foreign policy discussions.

Furthermore, during interviews, the issue of a lack of institutional memory within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) was brought to the forefront. It is proposed that North Macedonia's authorities and leaders should make more effective use of individuals who possess the expertise to enhance existing capacities and initiatives, without regard to their political or party affiliations. The overarching theme of the discussions revolved around the importance of acknowledging and addressing hidden forms of discrimination within the MoFA itself. It also emphasized the need to explore avenues for involving individuals from various political backgrounds in collaborative efforts to advance gender equality. In this context, it is crucial to employ a range of tools and strategies tailored specifically to the North Macedonia's MoFA's unique circumstances and requirements. Additionally, it was noted that while there have been numerous events focused on Women/Gender Equality in Diplomacy by the MoFA, the targeting of the right participants was not always given the highest priority. The recommendation is to organize well-conceived events with specific goals and targeted participation, as this approach is likely to yield more favourable outcomes.

5.3. Gender Mainstreaming in Foreign Policy

During these interviews, a central theme emerged that carried profound implications for contemporary diplomacy: the imperative of gender mainstreaming in foreign policy. The key informants (KIs), representing a diverse range of experiences and insights, consistently emphasized the pressing need to introduce gender perspectives into all foreign policy decisions and actions. They all stated that gender mainstreaming entails recognising that gender dynamics wield far-reaching influence over international relations, security, development, and human rights. Several of the KIs underscored the significance of gender mainstreaming in foreign policy to ensure that women can contribute to foreign policy through new fresh insights and innovative solutions to diplomatic decision-making. KIs believed that gender mainstreaming would contribute to greater diversity and inclusivity in the realm of diplomacy and legitimize effectiveness of diplomatic undertakings by addressing the unique needs and concerns of all segments of society.

"Gender mainstreaming means recognizing that gender dynamics affect global issues like international relations, security, development, and human rights. Right now, that is not the case in Macedonian foreign policy. The focus is rather narrow." - KI interview

Recent global developments have significantly reshaped contemporary foreign policy in a transformative manner. The KIs exhibited a comprehensive understanding of these developments, including the discussions within the UN Security Council concerning FFP. This underscored the principal importance of integrating gender perspective into modern diplomacy. They stressed that gender mainstreaming was not a superficial nod to political correctness, but a profound paradigm shift in how foreign policy was conceptualized and operationalized.

The interviewees acknowledged their own awareness of the conditions for gender mainstreaming, both in terms of reforms needed within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and across the broader spectrum of policy in North Macedonia. However, they also highlighted that the necessity of restructuring both the institutional framework and policy environment to accommodate these transformations was not universally understood or accepted within the current system and relevant organizations.

Throughout the interviews, there was a resounding call for women to take on leadership positions in the technical sectors of North Macedonia. This call underscores the belief that women should not be limited to peripheral roles but should actively engage in essential technical areas such as trade policy, economic affairs, political negotiations, and discussions related to conflict resolution.

Finally, a few KIs also pointed out that gender equality and equity did not hold a prominent position on North Macedonia's policy agenda. While they regarded these issues as critically important, they noted that they seemed to be competing with other pressing matters such as economic reforms, social development, and security issues. One KI pointed out that "*gender issues are not as important as economic issues*," while another KI recognized the high threshold and the time it takes to achieve gender equality, stating that "*too high of a threshold - process [achieving gender equality] takes time*."

5.4. Conclusions

For many of our KIs, the journey into the foreign policy arena was guided by a combination of factors:

- a. Influence:** The captivating realm of politics, with its capacity to shape national and international priorities, exerted a compelling pull for many of them. The quest for political participation and consequently political influence served as a springboard to their prestigious roles in the field of foreign service.
- b. Awareness:** A deepened consciousness of gender inequalities and the significance of women in diplomacy motivated many of them to pursue leadership positions. They all acknowledged the transformative power of women's perspectives in shaping both internal and foreign policy and international affairs from their own personal experiences and from practices they observed in other countries.
- c. Culture and family:** The cultural context, including societal norms and expectations, played a significant role in shaping the career paths of our KIs. In some instances, cultural expectations aligned with their aspirations, while in others, these women broke through cultural barriers to achieve their goals. Family support and encouragement played a pivotal role in enabling them to pursue careers in diplomacy. The unwavering belief and backing from their families gave them the confidence to forge ahead. For some, the pursuit of leadership roles required sacrifices, including forgoing the opportunity to start a family. They acknowledged the formidable challenge of achieving a balanced work-life equation in the absence of family understanding, broader community support, and institutional frameworks that consider these concerns.
- d. Organizational Exclusion:** Many of the interviewed women faced discrimination and exclusion in their political work, but not directly in their roles at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) or in their diplomatic responsibilities. They explained that within their organizations, there was a subtle bias influenced by traditional gender roles in Macedonian society, making it harder for women to be accepted in foreign policy-related areas. These challenges made their career journeys more complex, but they persisted with determination.

Throughout the interviews, the KIs engaged in candid discussions about the complexities of their careers, and a consensus emerged on several interconnected issues. They highlighted the pivotal role of family support, recognizing it as an essential element, alongside the understanding that quotas alone are insufficient for achieving meaningful progress in gender equality. This underscored the need for broader societal backing to drive substantial change. In their discussions, the KIs touched upon the multifaceted nature of women's experiences in negotiations, where they excelled in advocating for others but encountered challenges when advocating for themselves, a phenomenon intricately tied to gender biases and stereotypes. Their call for bolder steps in foreign policy echoed the urgency to move beyond soft initiatives and embrace meaningful leadership and issue-based diplomacy.

Gender mainstreaming emerged as a unifying theme that permeated the discussions, underscoring its essential role in the pursuit of gender equality within the realm of diplomacy. Importantly, it was recognized that gender mainstreaming transcends the boundaries of traditional diplomatic areas, extending its relevance into previously uncharted territories. They noted that the concept of gender mainstreaming goes beyond merely acknowledging the presence of women in diplomatic roles and it involves integrating gender perspectives and considerations into the very fabric of policymaking, decision-making, and implementation processes. This approach seeks to ensure that the unique needs, experiences, and contributions of both women and men are considered across all policy domains, not limited to the conventional areas of diplomacy. The understanding was that gender mainstreaming should not be compartmentalized but rather infused into the core of diplomatic endeavours. This would mean addressing gender disparities and promoting gender equality in areas that may not traditionally be associated with gender issues, such as trade policy, economic negotiations, and conflict resolution discussions. By doing so, it was believed that a more comprehensive and effective approach to advancing gender equality within diplomacy could be achieved, reflecting the diverse and interconnected challenges and opportunities women face in various diplomatic contexts. Linguistic sensitivity and the use of gender-responsive language were recognized as crucial tools for promoting gender equality. Greater introduction of gender-sensitive and gender-responsive language, the KIs stated, would prevent reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes or roles. It would ensure that the general public and public service colleagues do not assume that certain qualities or professions are inherently linked to a specific gender. For example, instead of saying "chairman," one would use "chairperson," etc. The KIs also acknowledged the need for applying international standards observed in foreign policies globally, including UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Furthermore, they advocated for gender-focused policy training across the thematic areas, however not generic training but rather technical training which would enable staff to understand how to implement these standards practically in their everyday work, through programme planning, budgeting, and monitoring of their own and their department's activities.

Positive discrimination or affirmative action was discussed to level the playing field for women in diplomacy, addressing concerns related to their career-life balance. The underrepresentation of women in specific sectors was discussed in tandem with the necessity for targeted efforts to rectify this imbalance. Education and awareness were seen as pivotal in challenging traditional gender roles and advancing gender equality, with social sector initiatives like violence prevention and gender awareness programmes integral to the broader agenda. These interconnected issues formed a holistic perspective on the challenges and opportunities in promoting gender equality in diplomacy.

RECOMMENDATIONS



6

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a unanimous agreement among the interviewees, supported by the desktop analysis, that gender mainstreaming in foreign policy in North Macedonia currently lacks uniformity. To promote gender mainstreaming approaches that could eventually lead to the institutionalization of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) in the future, the Government of North Macedonia must make gender an integral part of foreign affairs institutional structure, processes, and programmes. This entails ensuring that gender considerations guide decision-making across all aspects of international engagement, including diplomacy, trade, security, and international cooperation. In parallel, it is crucial to secure leadership commitment for systematically integrating gender mainstreaming into foreign policy. To facilitate this, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) should develop a gender equality strategy as part of its mission strategy and draft a comprehensive handbook to provide clear guidance to all MoFA departments and units on how to incorporate gender perspectives into their daily operations, policies, action plans, and monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) processes. This holistic approach is essential for the effective implementation of Feminist Foreign Policy and the advancement of gender equality in foreign affairs.

6.1. Long-term Recommendations

Below are some more specific long-term recommendations that aim to create a lasting framework for the consistent implementation of feminist foreign policy, fostering gender equality and women's empowerment in the realm of international affairs.

HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL COMMITMENT

The key to making progress in the promotion of gender mainstreaming or implementation of FFP is buy-in from political parties and the leadership in power. High-level political commitment is crucial for integrating gender into foreign policy and developing Feminist Foreign Policies (FFPs). For it to be adopted as an overarching pledge in addressing foreign policy issues, leaders within the MoFA, relevant line ministries, and the Prime Minister must all champion these efforts.

Action Point: Identify and engage gender champions among senior civil servants who can promote gender mainstreaming in foreign policy. The utilization of women diplomats and foreign policy public servants who are not in the current MoFA structures is equally important to ensure institutional memory and commence discussion with them on areas of foreign policy that are affecting the lives of people adversely and on interventions that might have had positive impacts in the past.

LEGAL, POLICY, AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

1. Strengthening gender legislation: Support comprehensive gender equality laws with specific provisions focusing on advancing women's rights and gender equality in foreign policy and diplomacy.
2. Advocate for the integration of Feminist Foreign Policy principles within institutional frameworks of the MoFA. This integration should be coordinated by gender experts to systematically mainstream gender into all foreign policy areas.

3. **Affirmative actions, quota and parental leave provisions:** Promote affirmative action and introduce quotas to address gender disparities in ambassadorial, consular, and directorate positions. Advocate for changes in labour laws to encourage shared parental leave to challenge traditional gender norms, or some stimulative measures for professional engagement for spouses with different working modalities, use of hybrid working modalities, provision of childcare services and measures for improving work-life balance.

INSTITUTIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATION AND COMMITMENTS

Implementing gender-mainstreamed foreign policy (as is certainly the case of implementing feminist foreign policy) requires personal motivation and commitment from individuals within foreign policy institutions. The following are some recommendations which could help foster personal and institutional motivation for the implementation of gender-responsive foreign policy in North Macedonia:

1. **Awareness and Education:** Encourage diplomats, policymakers, and foreign affairs professionals to undergo training and awareness programmes that highlight the principles and goals of feminist foreign policy. These capacity and capability skills trainings should encompass subjects like gender equality, and intersectionality, and focus on building a technical understanding of the importance of building gender-sensitive foreign policy specifically in areas like trade, investment, etc. (traditionally viewed as not being gender/equality relevant).
2. **Leadership Support:** Foster a supportive environment within foreign policy institutions where leadership actively endorses and champions feminist foreign policy. Senior officials (both women and men) should lead by example, demonstrating their commitment to gender equality in international affairs.
3. **Gender mainstreaming strategy for MoFA:** To implement FFP across all policy areas, MoFA staff should gain deeper insights into gender-related efforts in various sectors. Policy coherence, coordination, and Gender Impact Assessments (GIAs) should be prioritized. Rather than creating a gender mainstreaming strategy (or even an FFP action plan) for MoFA immediately, it would be good to phase the publication of those based on GIAs results and aim to create specific strategies developed collaboratively with relevant ministries, therefore linking internal policymaking with external/foreign policy priorities. Where necessary, seek the inclusion of gender experts/consultants and local and international women's organizations to assist with this process.
4. **Inclusive Dialogue:** MoFA should aim to create spaces for open and inclusive dialogues for their current employees drawing on experience from people who worked on the same issues in previous administrations (or have since moved on) and encourage discussions on gender-related issues, allowing employees to share their perspectives and experiences and ensure strong institutional memory. These conversations can help individuals understand the relevance of feminist foreign policy in various contexts and the continuity of work between different administrations so that work done, and lessons learned are not lost.
5. **Gender-Sensitive Recruitment:** Advocate for recruitment processes in MoFA, for diplomatic and foreign affairs positions, to prioritize diversity and inclusion. Actively seek to hire individuals who are committed to feminist principles and have a track record of supporting gender equality.

6. **Regular Gender Training:** Institute mandatory, ongoing gender training for all employees, including diplomats. This training should cover traditional gender equality topics such as gender mainstreaming, and gender-based violence prevention, but also specific gender equality issues, e.g., in anti-corruption and transparency, arms control and non-proliferation, climate and environment, combating drugs and crime, countering terrorism, cyber issues, as well as economic and trade policy areas.
7. **Performance Evaluation:** Include gender-sensitive performance evaluation with indicators for the performance of diplomats and foreign policy professionals. Recognize and reward individuals who actively promote and implement feminist foreign policy principles.

6.2. Short-term Recommendations

Following are short-term recommendations that could foster and create an enabling environment that would attract more active participation of diverse actors within the MoFA and outside, interested and committed to supporting the implementation of feminist foreign policy, fostering gender equality and women's empowerment in the realm of international affairs.

INSTITUTIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATION AND COMMITMENTS

1. **Networking Opportunities:** Support and facilitate opportunities for diplomats and foreign policy experts to network with their international counterparts who are also committed to feminist foreign policy.
 - **Mentorship and Peer Support:** Establish mentoring programmes within foreign policy institutions, where experienced diplomats can guide and support newcomers in understanding and implementing feminist foreign policy.
 - **International Commitment:** Encourage diplomats to actively engage in international forums and organizations dedicated to gender equality and women's rights.
2. **Public Recognition:** Showcase the achievements of diplomats and foreign affairs professionals who have made significant contributions to feminist foreign policy. Utilize digital media, events such as, e.g., TEDx talks, LinkedIn and other platforms to promote digital advocacy for gender-relevant foreign policy issues.
3. **Encourage Innovation:** Foster an environment that encourages innovative approaches to addressing gender-related challenges in foreign policy. Encourage and reward diplomats proposing and implementing creative solutions.
4. **Ensure parity in international representation, negotiations, and trade missions:** Actively promote, target and measure the participation of women in peace operations, negotiations, and crisis management, and develop national action plans and budgets for the implementation of these gender equality targets.
5. **Utilize ongoing chairpersonship roles:** Prioritise gender equality and women's rights during leadership tenures in prominent international organizations like the United Nations Security Council, Council of Europe, and Council of the European Union.
 - **Diversity in Event Panels:** Make diversity a key component of event planning. Incorporate diversity objectives into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Action Plan targets to ensure that panels at events reflect a broad spectrum of voices and perspectives.

LEGAL, POLICY, AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

- 1. Amend and adjust the National Action Plan for Implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy:** Include activities relating to women in foreign policy and well-defined indicators to measure the success of foreseen activities. Allocate technical, human, and financial resources for successfully coordinating the process of implementation of the NAP in the area of foreign policy.
- 2. Build specific, technical expertise for FFP in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA):** Enhance the integration of gender perspective within ministries by considering the allocation of gender experts as Coordinators for Equal Opportunities. This approach involves earmarking dedicated funds by ministries to create specialized Coordinator positions held by gender experts. This contrasts with the current practice of adding coordinator roles to existing positions, offering a more targeted and effective means of advancing gender equality within Ministries.
- 3. Provide technical capacity development to the Parliamentary Commission on Equal Opportunities and Foreign Affairs Commission:** Ensure effective and regular capacity development on the topic of gender mainstreaming in foreign policy with the commissions. Lobby proactively for introducing legislation, initiatives and topics promoting women's rights and gender equality in foreign policy. Include gender mainstreaming in foreign policy as subject for reporting within the reports of the Commission. Provide training on gender equality, diversity, and inclusion and on combating sexism in public administration.

COMMUNICATION, DIGITALIZATION, AND SOCIAL MEDIA:

- 1. Tackle Gender-Based Political Violence:** Implement systematic and institutional strategies to combat gender-based attacks on women in public discourse, including politicians, ministers, and ambassadors. These efforts should encompass legislation, social media monitoring, and cross-institutional collaboration.
- 2. Countering Misinformation/Disinformation:** Develop coordinated responses to fake news and disinformation campaigns, especially those targeting policies related to gender equality and women's rights. Foster collaboration among governments, ministries, parliamentarians, NGOs, and international organizations.
- 3. Promote cooperation between MoFA and civil society organizations** promoting and protecting equality and women's rights related to foreign policy (migration, trade, environment).

DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND DEVELOPING KNOWLEDGE BASE FOR GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN FOREIGN POLICY

- 1. In-depth Understanding:** To implement FFP across all policy areas, the ministry should gain deeper insights into gender-related efforts in various sectors. Policy coherence, coordination, and implementation of Gender Impact Assessments (GIAs) of foreign policy priorities and strategies should be prioritized.
- 2. Data Collection and Research:** Invest in collecting gender-disaggregated data and conducting related research in challenging areas of foreign policy to inform evidence-based policymaking.
 - Allocating budgetary resources for gender-relevant foreign policy analysis: Investment in the collection of gender-disaggregated data and related research is needed to start integrating gender issues across the MoFA thematic areas.

6.3. Specific Programmatic Recommendations for UN Women Interventions

- 1. Capacity Building Workshops:** Collaborate with local women's organizations, international and national experts in the field, and government agencies to organize capacity-building workshops and training sessions for diplomats and policymakers. These workshops should focus on gender mainstreaming in foreign policy, feminist diplomacy, equality issues in trade and climate issues and gender-sensitive conflict resolution.
- 2. Mentoring Programmes:** Establish mentoring programmes that pair experienced women diplomats with emerging female diplomats. These programmes should provide guidance, support, and networking opportunities, helping women advance in the field of foreign policy.
- 3. Gender Impact Assessment Tools:** Develop and introduce gender impact assessment tools specifically tailored for the foreign policy context. These tools should help policymakers analyse the gender implications of their decisions and policies.
- 4. Research and Data Collection:** Fund research projects that focus on gender-related issues in foreign policy, including women's participation in peace negotiations, gender-based violence in conflict zones, and the impact of international trade agreements on women. Encourage the collection of gender-disaggregated data in various foreign policy sectors.
 - a. Policy Analysis and Recommendations:** Conduct policy analyses and provide evidence-based recommendations to the Government of North Macedonia on how to integrate feminist principles into its foreign policy agenda. Highlight the potential positive impacts on peace and security, trade, and international relations and propose gender-responsive interventions in identified foreign policy areas.
- 5. Advocacy and Awareness Campaigns:** Support awareness campaigns to promote the benefits of feminist foreign policy. These campaigns should target policymakers, civil society, and the public to build support for gender-sensitive foreign policy approaches.
- 6. Partnerships with Civil Society:** Forge partnerships with local women's organizations and civil society organisations to ensure their active participation in shaping foreign policy decisions. Support and promote their engagement in relevant international forums and negotiations.
- 7. Promote Inclusive Diplomacy:** Advocate for the inclusion of women and marginalised groups in diplomatic missions, peace negotiations, and international delegations. Work with the Government of North Macedonia to establish policies and practices that ensure diverse representation.
- 8. Legislative Support:** Provide technical assistance to draft or amend legislation related to gender equality and women's rights in foreign policy. Ensure that laws are aligned with international foreign policy standards, conventions and women's rights frameworks.
- 9. Monitoring and Evaluation:** Support the government and MoFA in developing a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the progress of feminist foreign policy/gender mainstreaming implementation. Support regular reviews and provide recommendations on adjusting interventions based on the outcomes achieved.
- 10. Engage in Regional and International Initiatives:** Support and fund collaboration with regional and international organizations, forums, and supra-national bodies to share best practices, resources, and experiences related to feminist foreign policy. North Macedonia can benefit from lessons learned in other countries with similar initiatives.
- 11. Media Engagement:** Partner with media outlets to raise awareness of gender issues in foreign policy. Encourage balanced and informed reporting on topics related to women's rights, gender equality, and feminist diplomacy. Promote the utilization of new media and digital platforms to stimulate discussion on feminist foreign policy and gender equality in foreign policy among the younger generation. Consider alternative communication strategies to engage with marginalized, underrepresented, and vulnerable groups whose voices and concerns are rarely noted in foreign policy discussions (ensuring the protection and inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as refugees, internally displaced persons, and LGBTQI individuals, is central to feminist foreign policy).

FINAL SUMMARY



The Government of North Macedonia overall has made considerable advancements in the work on mainstreaming gender and integrating gender equality issues in many sectors. This is visible in the improved ranking on the Gender Equality Index score. North Macedonia's score for 2022 is 64.5 points out of a maximum of 100 and shows an increase of 2.5 points compared to the previous measurement in 2019.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that social progress is not always a linear trajectory and that gender issues can encounter hindrances, such as regressive policies or unfavourable contextual factors, both domestically and globally.

Our research findings indicate that gender mainstreaming in North Macedonia's foreign policy currently lacks consistent implementation. To facilitate the comprehensive integration of gender equality into foreign policy or potentially institutionalize a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) in the future, it is essential for the government to fully embed gender considerations within foreign affairs institutions. This should encompass gender-sensitive decision-making across all aspects of international engagement, including diplomacy, trade, security, and international cooperation. Furthermore, findings indicate that establishing a high-level political commitment is a key precondition for systematic gender mainstreaming in foreign policy. To this end, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) should develop a gender equality strategy as an integral part of its overall strategy and formulate a comprehensive handbook that offers clear directives to all MoFA departments and units, ensuring uniform incorporation of gender perspectives into their daily operations, policies, action plans, and monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) processes. This dual approach serves the purpose of pinpointing specific areas requiring the enhancement of gender equality policies, as well as providing a comprehensive evaluation of their practical implementation.

With this in mind, the report has put forth a series of both long-term and short-term recommendations aimed at assisting the Government of North Macedonia and UN Women, as a strategic partner in the field of gender equality, in charting the course for sustained implementation of FFA. These recommendations pertain to empowering women in international affairs and establishing enduring frameworks for this policy approach. They encompass high-level political commitment, the development of legal, policy, and institutional frameworks, supporting and highlighting the motivation and dedication of individuals championing gender equality at both institutional and individual levels, introducing gender-sensitive communication strategies and social media strategies, as well as strategies for data collection and research to build a comprehensive knowledge base for gender mainstreaming in foreign policy. Collectively, these recommendations work towards advancing an inclusive, gender-sensitive, and fair foreign policy that values and empowers all individuals, regardless of their gender identity.

This analysis is intended to serve as a starting point for a more comprehensive work on gender mainstreaming in foreign policy in North Macedonia and provide a basis to build further collaborative work between UN Women, as the leading UN entity for work on women's empowerment and gender equality, and the Government of North Macedonia and, more specifically, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of North Macedonia.

⁶⁷ Bashevka, M. 2023. Gender Equality Index for North Macedonia 2022.

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UN Women North Macedonia
Blvd. VMRO 7/10, Skopje, North Macedonia
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