

Mexico's Feminist Foreign Policy: A Preliminary Assessment

La política exterior feminista de México: un primer ejercicio de evaluación

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Abstract:

This article is an initial assessment of Mexico's feminist foreign policy principles and strategies, the objectives of which are to transform Mexico's multilateral leadership as well as its Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE) organisational culture through the lens of institutional feminism and the characteristics of gender mainstreaming. To accomplish this goal, documentary research was carried out and three members of the SRE were interviewed to evaluate the dimensions "Work-Family Division", "Organisational Leadership and Social Positions" and "Gender Violence".

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Resumen:

Este artículo es un primer ejercicio de evaluación de las estrategias y principios de la política exterior feminista de México, cuyo objetivo es tanto transformar el liderazgo multilateral de nuestro país, como la cultura organizacional de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (SRE), bajo la óptica del feminismo institucional y la transversalidad de la igualdad de género. Para lograr esta valoración, se llevó a cabo una investigación documental y se entrevistó a tres funcionarias de la SRE, con el objetivo de evaluar las dimensiones "División trabajo-familia", "Liderazgo organizacional y posición social de las mujeres" y "Violencia de género" de esta política.

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Key Words:

Mexico's feminist foreign policy, institutional feminism, gender mainstreaming.

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Palabras clave:

Política exterior feminista de México, feminismo institucional, transversalización de la igualdad de género.

Mexico's Feminist Foreign Policy: A Preliminary Assessment

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Introduction

“The Government of Mexico is feminist and our foreign policy will also be feminist” were the words of Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard at the U.N. General Assembly in New York in September of 2019.¹ This statement would serve as a preamble to the formal announcement of the adoption of a feminist foreign policy (FFP), which would position Mexico as the first country in Latin America to adopt such a foreign policy. This announcement took place in the framework of the 31st Meeting of Ambassadors and Consuls held in January 2020, a particularly unique year due to the health emergency and a marked increase in cases of violence against girls and women. On March 8, 2020, prior to the government's call for people to stay indoors and the transfer of non-essential face-to-face activities to homes. The march for International Women's Day had been particularly large. The feminist collectives and all the people who marched that day wielded a common slogan; a strong claim against a government led by the partisan left: “Mexico feminicida” (Mexico femicide), “Ni una más” (Not One More). Thus, with the announcement of the FFP, it seemed that Foreign Minister Ebrard was trying

¹ Martha Delgado Peralta, “Mexico's Feminist Foreign Policy and the 2030 Sustainability Agenda,” in *Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior*, no. 118, 2020, pp. 7-13, in <https://revistadigital.sre.gob.mx/images/stories/numeros/n118/delgado/pffp.pdf> (date of access: June 18, 2021).

to mark his autonomy in the face of this reality and the discourse of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, as he presented an institutional feminist and progressive stance.

In general, through the FFP, the Mexican Foreign Ministry aims to establish a “set of principles that seek, through foreign policy, to guide government actions to reduce and eliminate structural differences, gaps and gender inequalities in order to build a fairer and more prosperous society”.²

The FFP will be developed on the basis of five principles, oriented towards concrete actions at both the national and international level, in a work plan for the period 2020-2024, and having as a priority audience the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE); representatives of Mexico in the Mexican Foreign Service (SEM) and Mexican women abroad who may require the services of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.³

Taking into account the relevance of this initiative, the aim of this paper is to carry out an initial assessment of the dogmatic scope and strategies aimed at transforming the organisational culture of the SRE and Mexico's multilateral leadership, within the framework of Mexico's “feminist foreign policy”, in the light of the principles of institutional feminism and the characteristics of the gender mainstreaming strategy. To this end, desk research was carried out and three female officials from the SRE were interviewed to assess the dimensions ‘Work-family division’, ‘Organisational leadership and women's social position’ and ‘Gender violence’ of this policy.

The dogmatic scope of FFP

The FFP, proposed by the SRE, is framed within an “institutional feminism” or “state feminism” which, by situating itself within the system, allows it to adhere to its power group while responding to both international and internal actors and the demands of the feminist movement.

² SRE, “México anuncia la adopción de su política exterior feminista,” press release 15, January 9, 2020, in <https://www.gob.mx/sre/prensa/mexico-anuncia-la-adopcion-de-su-politica-exterior-feminista?state=published> (date of access: June 18, 2021).

³ *Idem.*

In this regard, Sofía Reverter-Bañón recognises the complexity of the different levels of governance (sub- and supra-state) in institutional feminism, which allow us to visualise, in a very specific way, the transversality of the gender and human rights approach in foreign policy actions and instruments.⁴

As such, gender mainstreaming⁵ is conceived as an integral strategy for the incorporation of a gender perspective in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies, programmes, administrative and financial procedures, as well as in the cultural framework of public institutions. Thus, by promoting gender mainstreaming, the aim is to transform the gendered social order in the political, social and economic spheres.

By adopting this approach, the FFP aims to force structural changes within the SRE, focusing on the search for organisational, institutional, administrative and normative improvements to eliminate inequality gaps.⁶

However, it is important to analyse who forms part of the team behind the FFP and how solid its proposal is, as well as the possibilities of implementing it. As the current Spanish foreign minister says, “the implementation of a feminist foreign policy without a feminist organisation is very complex, or at least without feminist leadership in key positions”.⁷

To answer these questions, a valuable exercise would be to analyse the feminist vein in the Foreign Ministry’s own history, as suggested by Tatiana Telles Calderón, as it seeks to recognise the work and initiatives

⁴ Sonia Reverter-Bañón, “Los retos del feminismo institucional”, in *Daimon. Revista Internacional de Filosofía*, supplement 4, 2011, pp. 223-229.

⁵ For the purposes of this study, the concepts of *gender mainstreaming* and *gender equality mainstreaming* will be used interchangeably.

⁶ Broadly speaking, these measures are: 1) Adoption of the Mexican Standard NMX-R-025-SC-FI-2015, on Labour Equality and Non-Discrimination. 2) Training in gender perspective at the Matías Romero Institute (IMR). 3) Protocol for the prevention, attention and sanctioning of sexual harassment and abuse. 4) Endorse the commitment of all areas of the Secretariat to the United Nations #HeforShe programme. 5) Development of violence-free perimeters and work quadrants in the vicinity of the Foreign Ministry. 6) Parity in all SRE and SEM staff. 7) “Breaking the glass ceiling” medals. 8) Visibility of female SRE staff.

⁷ María Castro Serantes, “España anuncia que su política exterior será feminista”, in Centro Mexicano de Relaciones Internacionales (CEMERI), April 21, 2021, in <https://cemerri.org/art/espana-anuncia-politica-exterior-feminista/> (date of access: June 19, 2021).

prior to the announcement of the FFP.⁸ First, it should be understood that the appellation “feminist”, in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s opinion, is given to any man or woman who says: “Yes, there is a problem with gender as it is today and we must fix it. We must do better”.⁹

More and more feminist women are participating in the different areas of public administration, making inroads and winning spaces for the transformation of policies and the very structure of the state. Although the transformations have been very slow, the feminist movement is also advancing within state structures to conquer spaces and discourses. In this respect, Joni Lovenduski argues that the descriptive representation of women—that is, the representation that implies the presence of women in institutions—implies greater substantive representation, which translates into a greater articulation of ideas of equality and women’s interests in political agendas and decision-making spaces.¹⁰

However, it should be borne in mind that the pure representation of women in positions of power does not necessarily imply a feminist view of the issues to be addressed; there must be female officials committed to advancing the gender agenda within institutional spaces.

Focusing on the specific case of the SRE, 2015 was an emblematic year with regards to gender, as the Protocol for consular attention to unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents was published, the creation of the Equality Policy Unit (UPIG) in the Ministry was decided upon, and the first Ventanillas Integrales de Atención a la Mujer (VAIM) (Integrated Women’s Helpdesks) were established, becoming the first consular tool with a gender

⁸ Tatiana Telles Calderón, “¿Una política exterior feminista mexicana?”, in *Foreign Affairs Latinoamérica*, March 2020, in <https://revistafal.com/una-politica-exterior-feminista-mexicana/> (date of access: May 28, 2021).

⁹ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “We should all be feminists,” in TED Talks, December 2012, in https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_we_should_all_be_feminists? (date of access: July 12, 2021)

¹⁰ S. Reverter Bañón, “Feminismo Institucional: ¿Feminismo Líquido?”, in Laura Branciforte y Rocío Orsi Portalo (eds.), *Ritmos Contemporáneos. Género, política y sociedad en los siglos XIX y XX*, Madrid, Dykinson, p. 223

focus.¹¹ All these initiatives are now covered by the FFP. It is important to note that these initiatives would not have been possible without the impetus of some of the SRE's female officials, who have sought to raise awareness and set the tone on gender equality and women's empowerment.

In Julieta Lemaitre Ripoll's view, as they move forward, feminists are placing flags for gender equality on enemy territory. Lemaitre Ripoll argues that there is an ambivalence amongst subaltern groups that make use of the law, oscillating between a hopeful vision and a pessimistic one focused on highlighting its limitations. She visualises the use of law as fetishism; a symbol that mobilises people beyond their logical and rational capacity. Law mobilises emotions, and the author's argument is that clinging to it, despite systemic violence, is a way of conquering a space of subjectivity, where this phenomenon appears as wrong, reprehensible and punishable. Thus, the author highlights the power of discourse and the importance of naming things as a tool for ordering meaning.¹²

Lemaitre Ripoll's argument is not inconsequential if one takes into account that the state is also a web of cultural expressions that are disseminated and promoted in society and, in turn, engulfs and appropriates other cultural forms from society itself.

For their part, Philip Corrigan and Sayer Derek have contributed a view that reveals the state as the forger of a moral and cultural ethos:

Moral regulation is coextensive with state formation, and state forms are always animated and legitimated by a particular moral ethos. Centrally, state agencies attempt to give unitary and unifying expression to what are in reality multifaceted and differential historical experiences of groups within society, denying their particularity.¹³

¹¹ Guadalupe Gómez Maganda, Guadalupe & Alicia Kerber Palma, "Atención con perspectiva de género para las comunidades mexicanas en el exterior", in *Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior*, no. 107, May-August 2016, pp. 191-193.

¹² Julieta Lemaitre Ripoll, *El derecho como conjuro: Fetichismo legal, violencia y movimientos sociales*, Bogotá, Siglo del Hombre Editores/Universidad de los Andes, 2009, pp. 28-36.

¹³ Philip Corrigan & Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English state formation as cultural revolution*, New York, Basil Blackwell, 1985, p. 4, cited in María L. Lagos & Pamela Calla (comps.), *Antropología*

With these two arguments in mind, the SRE, with the publication of the FFP, is reading and interpreting different problems and proposals emanating from feminisms and reorganising, both internally and externally, diverse actions that fall within its remit.

Likewise, the FFP does not reflect a common or shared position of all state agencies, nor of the current government; it reveals the particular position of the Foreign Ministry. On this basis, William Rosebery's work should be taken up again, as it has important contributions that reveal that hegemony is a discursive framework in dispute between various dominant and subaltern actors.¹⁴ Thus, with the publication of the FFP, it would seem that Foreign Minister Ebrard marked his autonomy from the discourse of President López Obrador, which has been described as conservative, insensitive and lacking understanding of the demands of the feminist movement. On the other hand, Ebrard, who appears to be a presidential candidate for the upcoming elections, has a progressive, forward-looking feminist discourse.

The FFP through the lens of gender mainstreaming

In order to determine the implications of adopting a feminist foreign policy and to assess the degree of coherence of the strategies designed with respect to said implications, we will first start from the fact that the FFP presents an approach framed within institutional feminism. This initiative is a clear example of the institutionalisation of the gender agenda and the advance of the so-called *femocracy* within the Mexican government's public bodies.

As the principles and demands of the feminist movement are incorporated into the public sphere, plans, programmes and projects that call themselves *feminist* intrinsically take on an institutional character, as they

del Estado. Dominación y prácticas contestatarias en América Latina, La Paz, Informe Nacional sobre Desarrollo Humano-PNUD (Cuaderno del Futuro, 23), 2007, p. 46.

¹⁴ William Rosebery, "Hegemonía y el lenguaje de la controversia," in M. L. Lagos & P. Calla (comps.), *op. cit.*, p. 123.

are absorbed into the government's agenda.¹⁵ Since the First World Conference of the Year of Women (1975) and the signing of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, governmental political action has incorporated among its objectives the "equal social, political, legal and economic rights of women in relation to men".¹⁶

It is worth making this clarification, because this objective is not homogeneous within the ranks of the feminist movement, but the diversity of currents that nourish it maintains different goals and objectives.¹⁷ In this regard, one issue that stands out from the dogmatic mandate of the FFP is its contribution to generating the notion of intersectionality, which makes the different forms of oppression visible. This implies that measures put in place to mitigate and eradicate gaps and inequalities in the institutional culture of the SRE should focus on prioritising the interests and needs of those who have been historically excluded. If this intention is genuine, the strategies to be applied require recognition of the privileges held by certain groups within the institution, and should therefore aim to distribute economic, symbolic and power resources equitably in order to ensure coherence between discourse and praxis. This is where the question arises as to whether the actions to be implemented are sufficiently disruptive to achieve this goal.

In relation to the institutional position of the FFP, it should be noted that gender equality is the culmination point to which the feminism adopted by governmental and intergovernmental bodies aspires to, and the main

¹⁵ Virginia Guzmán & Claudia Bonan Janotti, "La institucionalización del tema de la equidad de género y la modernización del estado en América Latina," in M. Judith Astelarra Bonomi (coord.), *Pacto entre géneros y políticas públicas. Género y cuestión social*, Madrid, Instituto de la Mujer-Ministerio de Trabajo e Inmigración, 2008, pp. 64-72.

¹⁶ UN Women, "Women of the World, Unite!," in <https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/timeline/womenunite/en/index.html#/> (date of access: July 12, 2021).

¹⁷ The feminist movement is, in the words of Sonia E. Álvarez "a broad, heterogeneous, polycentric, multifaceted and polyphonic field or political domain, as Vicki Guzmán has called it, which extends beyond the movement's own organisations or groups, *strictu sensu*". S. E. Álvarez, "Feminismos latinoamericanos," in *Estudios Feministas*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1998, p. 265.

theoretical and methodological tool they have developed to achieve this goal is gender mainstreaming.¹⁸

According to Evangelina García Prince, this mechanism has a systemic, strategic and participatory nature, as it proposes, as the ultimate goal, a structural change that allows for the elimination of gender gaps and inequalities.¹⁹

Although the principle of equality is not explicitly alluded to, the FFP's mandate states that the measures seek to maintain a systemic nature, aiming to destabilise and eliminate gaps and inequalities rooted in the gender order. This indicates that at least the mission and objective of this policy are in line with the ultimate goal of a gender mainstreaming strategy.

Now, it is important to bear in mind that an adequate gender mainstreaming strategy is constructed as a process; that is, it is a set of interrelated, coordinated and organised activities that interact successively to generate results that contribute to achieving the purpose of the process.²⁰ It cannot be denied that, since the publication of the Programme for Equality between Women and Men 2009-2012 (Proigualdad-SRE), the gender agenda has been institutionalised within the SRE. The programme was initiated as a platform for the elaboration of a diagnosis that would allow for the implementation of a gender mainstreaming strategy in this entity.

Yaiza Ariana Rodríguez Gutiérrez argues that this strategy included the following aspects: "A gender analysis of the work climate, the reconciliation of work, personal and family life, discrimination and violence, training and education on gender issues, equality policies and regulatory factors that hinder gender equality".²¹

¹⁸ S. Reverter Banon, "Los retos del feminismo...", p. 224.

¹⁹ Evangelina García Prince, *Políticas de Igualdad, Equidad y Gender Mainstreaming, ¿de qué estamos hablando?*, San José, PNUD, 2008, p. 59.

²⁰ Carmen de la Cruz, "La planificación de género en las políticas públicas," in Marta Aparicio García, Begoña Leyra Fatou y Rosario Ortega Serrano (eds.), *Cuadernos de género: políticas y acciones de género. Materiales de formación*, Spain, Madrid, Instituto Complutense de Estudios Internacionales-Universidad Complutense, 2009, p. 63.

²¹ Yaiza Ariana Rodríguez Gutiérrez, *Las redes de políticas públicas en el proceso de institucionalización e implementación de la agenda de género de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (2012-2017)* [Masters thesis], Mexico, FLACSO, 2018, p. 45.

Other precedents that should not be overlooked have to do with the establishment of the institutional gender structure, *i.e.* the creation of the Gender Equality Policy Area in 2016, a body through which the head of the SRE conducts gender equality policy. This progress was made in the six-year presidential term of Enrique Peña Nieto, whose administration was pioneering in making it clear in the National Development Plan 2013–2018 that the gender perspective would be a cross-cutting theme in all the programmes of the federal public administration’s agencies and entities.²²

Thus, although this background could mean that the FFP is not an isolated event, the fact is that the absence of gender mainstreaming within the priorities of the current administration indicates the opposite. In the National Development Plan 2019–2024, substantive equality between women and men is only mentioned tangentially and not as one of the priorities of this six-year term; indicating that the FFP lacks programmatic support, which casts doubt on the effectiveness and sustainability of the measures to be implemented.²³

It is important to bear this in mind, because publishing a policy of this magnitude, without gender equality having been declared a priority of the current administration—and without the continuation of previous efforts to implement an adequate mainstreaming strategy having been declared—suggests that the achievement of this objective within the SRE is a secondary issue and that the protagonist of this effort is rather the application of the gender approach itself, as a political strategy to appear interested in the materialisation of this agenda within the government.

On the other hand, it is worth asking whether the FFP has the capacity to consolidate itself as a trans-sexennial initiative; gender mainstreaming measures need to enter the state agenda in order to carry out structural transformations that contribute to guaranteeing not only equal treatment between men and women, but also equality of results between the sexes. The information available so far indicates that a legal and organisational

²² Inmujeres, “La perspectiva de género, eje transversal del PND: Inmujeres”, press release 15, March 20, 2013, in <https://www.gob.mx/inmujeres/prensa/la-perspectiva-de-genero-eje-transversal-del-pnd-inmujeres> (date of access: June 20, 2021).

²³ Gobierno de México, *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo (2019–2024)*, in <https://framework-gb.cdn.gob.mx/landing/documentos/PND.pdf> (date of access: June 20, 2021).

reform will be carried out to “build parity in the SRE with structural adjustments and positive actions”.²⁴ However, it is not unfounded to be suspicious as to whether these reforms will transcend the six-year presidential term, considering that there has been no talk of a reform to article 89 of the Constitution that would include the FFP as a new pillar of Mexico’s foreign policy. Furthermore, it should be considered that in the Sectoral Programme for Foreign Affairs 2020-2024 this initiative is not mentioned as one of the priority objectives for this period; indeed, this document only mentions the scope of the FFP and states that it will be promoted “in line with Mexico’s foreign policy”, which conveys the message that it is a tangential action.²⁵

In order to corroborate this analysis, a deepening of our knowledge of the measures that the FFP has established to fulfil its objective is needed; most of these have been aimed at achieving the transformation of the institutional culture within the SRE, which is why we compiled the opinions of three female officials who work within the Foreign Ministry on the pillars “Foreign policy with a gender perspective and feminist foreign plus agenda”, “A parity SRE” and “A violence-free SRE”.²⁶ Their impact will be assessed in light of the components “Family-work division”, “Organisational leadership and women’s social position” and “Gender-based violence”.

The family-work division

This component aims to deepen the knowledge of the measures undertaken to mitigate the impact of structural gender gaps preventing the consolidation of women’s professional careers within the SRE, as well as to

²⁴ Subsecretaría para Asuntos Multilaterales y Derechos Humanos-SRE, *La Política Exterior Feminista del Gobierno de México*, Mexico, SRE, 2020, p. [10], in https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/576095/Presentación_PEF_baja.pdf (date of access: July 12, 2021).

²⁵ SRE, “Programa sectorial derivado del Plan Nacional de Desarrollo (2019-2024)”, *Diario Oficial de la Federación*, July 2, 2020, in https://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5596023&fecha=02/07/2020 (date of access: June 20, 2021).

²⁶ In order to maintain the confidentiality of the participants, it will only be mentioned that they collaborate in some general directorates of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as in the consular representations of the SRE.

carry out an initial evaluation exercise on their effectiveness in achieving this goal.²⁷

The responses revealed that the main achievements precede the publication of the feminist foreign policy; these are related to the promotion of responsible parenthood, as they involve the implementation of paternity leave, adoption leave and the possibility for fathers working within the SRE to send their children to the Ministry's day care centre. In the words of one interviewee: "Maternity and paternity leave precedes the publication of the feminist foreign policy. In general terms, I believe that there has not been a substantial change between the process of requesting leave and the feminist foreign policy".

While it is still too early to assess the implementation of the strategies to be applied, it is important to note that the measures currently in place are presented as part of an innovative plan; therefore, it is necessary to be vigilant in order to identify whether transformations to the current measures will be proposed.

Organisational leadership and women's status in society

The purpose of this component is to gain a deeper understanding of the actions taken to promote the organisational growth and leadership of women within the Ministry, as well as to assess, initially, their effectiveness in achieving this goal.²⁸

²⁷ Actions within the objective "Breaking the glass ceiling," which include "maternity and paternity leave; care system; inclusion, mobility and promotion; awarding of the Breaking the glass ceiling medal", as well as the actions framed within the goal "Equal level of responsibility, equal level of remuneration." The interviewees were asked whether they were aware of the origin and the way in which the strategies to reconcile the work-family sphere as part of the FFP emerged; whether they had noticed any changes in the granting of maternity and paternity leave following the publication of the policy; and whether they were aware of the strategies that had been implemented to provide benefits to lighten the care burden of female civil servants.

²⁸ Under the pillar "A parity SRE," it has been announced that at least 20 "Breaking the glass ceiling" medals will be awarded between now and 2024; parity measures within the Mexican Foreign Service (SEM), and the official communiqué vaguely mentions actions to address the phenomenon of the pay gap within the Ministry. In turn, the pillar "Visible equality" includes parity actions within panels, events, meetings and integration of delegations, etc., as well as measures to make women's work within the SRE more visible. Participants were asked if they were aware

It was found that the diagnoses carried out since the publication of the Programme for Equality between Women and Men 2009-2012 (Proigualdad-SRE) have revealed a gap in the occupation of high-ranking positions within the Ministry and, according to the testimonies, the specific initiative to promote an increase of women in decision-making positions was only announced in 2019; that is to say, this is not solely the result of the publication of the FFP. In the opinion of one participant: “Some affirmative actions have been implemented, such as promoting more women in SEM, encouraging more women to be in charge of offices or representations. However, leadership is still primarily male”.

It also highlights the fact that female officials are not aware of the “Breaking the Glass Ceiling” medal programme, indicating that adequate dissemination programme of FFP actions has not yet been implemented.

In general, the testimonies made it possible to identify that the main initiatives that have been implemented for the addressing of gender inequality in the occupation of high-ranking positions are related to the appointment of women to head diplomatic representations, with an emphasis on inclusive language and on making their contributions visible. However, it is not yet clear how these actions will be put into force.

On the other hand, participants were also asked whether they perceived the existence of a pay gap within the Foreign Ministry. Most respondents agreed that, strictly speaking, there is no tacit discrimination in pay based on gender; however, it should be borne in mind that “non-discrimination” implies not only prohibition, but also guaranteeing respect for established rights, without making a distinction of any kind.²⁹ In response to this, most of the participants said that there is a perceived disparity in appointments

of when and how these actions came about and if they were aware of strategies to contribute to breaking the “glass ceiling” within their area. They were also asked whether they had been informed about the requirements to obtain the “Breaking the glass ceiling” medal and whether they considered that a pay gap existed in the SRE, as well as the actions taken to combat this phenomenon.

²⁹ Imer B. Flores, “Igualdad, no discriminación (y políticas públicas); a propósito de la constitucionalidad o no del artículo 68 de la Ley General de Población”, in Carlos de la Torre Martínez (coord.), *El derecho a la no discriminación*, Mexico, Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas-UNAM, 2006, pp. 263-264.

to the highest paid positions, which does not necessarily respond to gender, but rather to political favouritism.

In sum, the decisions that have been taken to promote and make visible women's leadership within the Ministry—and to dismantle the gender gap in the occupation of high-ranking positions—are not the result of the publication of the FFP, but rather a continuation of the efforts of previous administrations under the name of 'feminist foreign policy'. While the continuity of efforts is an integral part of any gender mainstreaming strategy, progressiveness is also important and, at least in the design phase of this public policy, no different measures are identified that would contribute to consolidating the achievements of previous administrations.

Gender-based violence

The final component seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of the actions to prevent and sanction gender-based violence within the SRE, as well as to assess whether they provide for the effective prevention and sanctioning of this problem within the Foreign Ministry.³⁰

Mainly, the testimonies show that the actions date back to 2013, when the Sectoral Programme for Foreign Affairs was published, which includes the Cross-cutting Strategy II; this contains 10 strategies and 19 specific actions to transform the organisational culture of the Foreign Ministry and to prevent and sanction gender-based violence. In the words of one of the participants:

There are no efficient and reliable institutional mechanisms for the prevention, reporting and comprehensive attention to cases of gen-

³⁰ The female officials were asked if they knew when and how the measures taken in terms of prevention and attention to gender-based violence within the Foreign Ministry came about; how common they considered the phenomenon of sexual, moral and labour harassment (mobbing) within their area and if they had been victims of any of these types of violence. They were also asked how common such cases are in the context of the delegations representing Mexico abroad and whether they had experienced this type of harassment. Similarly, they were asked about the measures, mechanisms and instances that the FFP proposes to implement to prevent these situations within their area and whether these strategies inspire confidence in them to denounce sexual and workplace harassment. Finally, they were asked about the installation of safe and violence-free quadrants and perimeters within the SRE and whether they considered that these spaces increase the sense of security of the women who work there.

der-based violence. In the last decade, efforts have been made to provide more information; prevention campaigns have been launched and reporting mechanisms such as the Ethics Committee have been set up, but the results are not consistent and fear of reporting prevails.

This is worrying considering that the interviews indicated that gender-based violence and harassment at work are common phenomena within the Foreign Ministry and that the absence of effective mechanisms to sanction these behaviours prevents a decrease in their incidence:

Unfortunately, it is common, especially because such behaviour is rarely sanctioned and not all staff have been trained on harassment issues. It must be acknowledged that for several years there has been a greater effort to disseminate codes of conduct and training on gender issues, but since they are not mandatory for all staff at all levels, at the end of the day few are interested.

In the case of workplace harassment in the delegations representing Mexico abroad, it was identified that the context of remoteness and lack of supervision magnifies the prevalence of these behaviours. In addition to the human rights of women, these actions also have serious repercussions on their work performance, as they encourage women to leave their posts, request transfers and increase the incidence of stress and anxiety.³¹ The experience of one of the participants is a case in point: “Yes, I have been the victim of a wide range of behaviour ranging from micro-violence normalised by institutional practices and culture, to situations of outright workplace harassment, which have led me to seek changes of position in the SRE or assignments abroad”.

To address these measures, participants responded that, in the context of the FFP, awareness-raising workshops are offered, but it was also mentioned that these initiatives correspond to the efforts of previous

³¹ Lidia Heller, “Desde lo organizacional”, in *Voces de mujeres. Actividad laboral y vida cotidiana*, Barcelona, Sirpus (Techo de Cristal), 2008, pp. 108-109.

administrations. The design of informative campaigns, the appointment of gender focal points and the creation of an Ethics Committee were also mentioned. The Ethics Committee follows up on gender cases and issues recommendations to the different areas to prevent the emergence of new situations; however, these observations are not of a binding nature.

Most of the interviewees mentioned that the filing of administrative reports to denounce these cases is confidential, but, as in any case of investigation, the persons denounced know that there is an ongoing procedure, so there is fear that the information will not be treated with confidentiality. This lowers levels of trust in these mechanisms, thus failing to offer incentive to report cases of harassment and gender-based violence.

Finally, the divergences in responses regarding the existence of safe and violence-free quadrants and perimeters within the SRE reflect the lack of knowledge about the implications of these actions. One official responded that these are “policies taken to give a sense of security”; another mentioned that they are mechanisms for reporting and analysing situations of violence in the Foreign Ministry. Reference was also made to the concept of a “safe zone” in all SRE facilities, but it was clarified that this term applies mainly to the attention given to the LGBTI+ community, as part of consular support.

In general, the responses indicate that the FFP has not yet implemented actions other than the existing mechanisms, and these show significant areas of opportunity, which seriously affect the performance of women within the Foreign Ministry, as they encourage them to leave their jobs, as well as to request transfers to escape situations of harassment. Likewise, there is a lack of awareness of certain actions within the framework of the FFP, which highlights the need to implement effective dissemination mechanisms to raise awareness of the implications of these strategies.

The scope of the FFP abroad

An important component of the FFP is the work carried out by the Mexican consular network in the United States, where concrete actions have been implemented in consular activity and liaison from a gender perspective. It is important to mention that some of these initiatives were

designed and implemented in the years prior to the announcement of the FFP and are now framed within it.

An example of these actions is the Ventanillas Integrales de Atención a la Mujer (VAIM) (Integrated Women's Helpdesks), an institutional mechanism that provides comprehensive specialised attention to women and the LGBTI+ community.³² Its objective is to promote gender mainstreaming in all consular services. "More than a physical space, the VAIM is a public policy designed with a gender approach," says Alicia Kerber Palma.³³

VAIM also provides important information on "associations, groups and institutions that can guide women on issues such as legal advice, English language education and other trades".³⁴ This type of action strengthens collaboration networks and strategic alliances between civil society and consulates, in addition to "contributing to the integration of Mexican communities in the United States", as Alexandra Délano asserts.³⁵

The Mentor Migrant Women Programme (MMM) is another example of the materialisation of the FFP at the Consulate General of Mexico in Houston. It seeks to promote the development of young migrant women through the guidance provided by recognised professionals in different areas.³⁶ This type of programme stands out for its "multiplier" effect, as it has been

³² Consulate General of Mexico in Houston, "Ventanilla de Atención Integral a la Mujer", October 17, 2019, in <https://consulmex.sre.gob.mx/houston/index.php/proteccion/vaim> (date of access: June 20, 2021).

³³ Alicia Kerber Palma (guest), "Día de la Mujer con la cónsul general Alicia Kerber", in *Ciudad H* [podcast], Houston, March 8, 2021, in <https://open.spotify.com/episode/43cCx6Z-D6bacGeV0gEN5eb?fbclid=IwAR08c6lN7ICz2s2mtFoscNrgnmQMAfjP4yf5IFRGuHX0Obzs-3ladxvSU8uE> (date of access: July 12, 2021).

³⁴ Consulate General of Mexico in Houston, *op. cit.*

³⁵ Alexandra Délano Alonso, "¿Un puente hacia la integración? Las políticas mexicanas de vinculación con la diáspora", in *Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior*, no.107, May-August 2016, p. 70.

³⁶ Consulate General of Mexico in Houston, "Convocatoria 2021 Mujeres Migrantes Mentoradas (MMM)", in <https://consulmex.sre.gob.mx/houston/index.php/consulado/mmm2021hou> (date of access: June 18, 2021).

shown that, “by empowering women, not only they benefit, but also their families, communities and future generations”.³⁷

Another relevant initiative is the implementation of the protocol package: Protocol for consular care for victims of gender-based violence, which was developed jointly by UN Women and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2017. This initiative provides consular staff with tools to assist migrant women and girls who are victims of gender-based violence; it seeks to avoid revictimisation and provide gender-sensitive assistance.³⁸

Another fundamental axis of the FFP is “Foreign policy with a gender perspective and the feminist foreign plus agenda”, which emphasises Mexico’s leadership in the international arena. In this regard, it is important to review the opinion of Alicia Bárcena:

A feminist foreign policy not only means that States guarantee women’s rights both inside and outside their territories’ borders. It also implies that States promote multilateralism with the aim of addressing in a coordinated way the structural constraints of gender inequality, a key aspect for achieving a transformative recovery with equality in the region.³⁹

Throughout its history, Mexico has contributed significantly to the international human rights regime. Multilateral forums and mechanisms have provided the ideal setting for projecting progressive leadership, raising the visibility of the gender equality agenda and fostering networks of collaboration and coordination with countries that share common positions.

³⁷ United Nations Population Fund, “Gender Equality”, in <https://www.unfpa.org/gender-equality?page=0%2C0%2C2> (date of access: June 18, 2021).

³⁸ SRE, “Protocolo de atención consular para personas víctimas de violencia basada en el género”, January 25, 2018, in <https://www.gob.mx/sre/documentos/protocolo-de-atencion-consular-para-personas-victimas-de-violencia-basada-en-el-genero> (date of access: July 12, 2021).

³⁹ ECLAC, “A Feminist Foreign Policy is Needed to Achieve a Transformative Recovery with Equality in the Region: Alicia Bárcena”, June 14, 2021, in <https://www.cepal.org/en/news/feminist-foreign-policy-needed-achieve-transformative-recovery-equality-region-alicia-barcena> (date of access: June 18, 2021).

In this regard, Delgado argues that “multilateralism is the best way to address the structural and systemic obstacles to the full enjoyment of human rights and development of women and girls, in all their diversity”.⁴⁰ Thus, the Foreign Ministry has made various efforts to position Mexico as a relevant actor in what Roberto de León Huerta calls “an international system for the promotion of gender equality and the advancement of women”.⁴¹

An example of these actions was The Generation Equality Forum 2021, held in March 2021 in Mexico City. This was a global meeting focused on promoting dialogue among diverse actors promoting gender equality.⁴² Mexico, as in previous conferences, sought to be an outstanding participant, demonstrating its inclination towards multi-stakeholder multilateralism, emphasising “the attitude of openness and willingness to participate by non-state actors”.⁴³

Another example of Mexican leadership is the Care Work Alliance jointly established by the Mexican National Institute for Women (Inmujeres) and UN Women. This is a relevant effort, as it seeks to address the burden of care that hinders women’s economic opportunities.⁴⁴

The Group of Friends for Gender Equality was also established to coordinate efforts and synergies in multilateral fora for gender equality as well as to

⁴⁰ SRE, “Grupo de Amigos y Amigas por la Igualdad de Género”, press release no. 160, in <https://www.gob.mx/sre/prensa/grupo-de-amigos-y-amigas-por-la-igualdad-de-genero?idiom=es> (date of access: June 18, 2021).

⁴¹ Roberto de León Huerta, “Contribuciones de México a la agenda multilateral de igualdad de género”, in Guadalupe González, Olga Pellicer & Natalia Saltalamacchia (eds.), *México y el multilateralismo del siglo XXI. Reflexiones a los 70 años de la ONU*, Mexico, Siglo XXI/Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México/Senado de la República, 2015, p. 307.

⁴² The Generation Equality Forum, in <https://forum.generationequality.org> (date of access: June 18, 2021).

⁴³ G. González, O. Pellicer & N. Saltalamacchia, “Introducción. Rasgos y contribuciones de la política multilateral de México en el siglo XXI”, in G. González, O. Pellicer & N. Saltalamacchia (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁴⁴ Inmujeres, “Inmujeres y ONU Mujeres convocan a una Alianza por un Sistema de Cuidados en el marco del Foro Generación Igualdad 2021”, press release, March 31, 2021, in <https://www.gob.mx/inmujeres/prensa/inmujeres-y-onu-mujeres-convocan-a-una-alianza-por-un-sistema-de-cuidados-en-el-marco-del-foro-generacion-igualdad-2021?idiom=es> (date of access: June 18, 2021).

promote the human rights of women and girls through the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and other international commitments.⁴⁵

These initiatives give Mexico not only visibility, but also a certain agenda-setting power and the possibility of building coalitions on the multilateral stage.⁴⁶ According to our interviewees, there is consensus that Mexico has been a committed actor in the human rights agenda—specifically for vulnerable groups—and that this has been the case for many years. There is also recognition of the progressive changes within the Foreign Ministry, for example, inclusive language and the creation of specific gender areas. In this sense, the FFP does not represent a break with the past or a completely new project, but rather the possibility of institutionalising and highlighting those actions that have been taking place to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Final considerations

This first monitoring exercise of the FFP showed that the strategies aimed at transforming the organisational culture within the SRE reflect the continuity of the efforts of previous administrations; the promotion of these initiatives would not have been possible without the support of various female officials, who have sought to raise awareness and set the tone on gender equality and women’s empowerment. However, vigilance must be exercised over decisions which will be taken in the near future to ensure that existing initiatives are progressive in nature, as the FFP has set the goal of contributing to reducing and eliminating structural differences, gaps and gender inequalities, both within the Foreign Ministry and in the international sphere.

Therefore, the following specific actions are recommended to ensure the successful consolidation of the FFP within the Ministry:

⁴⁵ Inmujeres, “México y 20 países unen esfuerzos por las mujeres y las niñas al establecer el Grupo de amigos y amigas para la igualdad de género”, March 31, 2021, in <https://www.gob.mx/inmujeres/articulos/mexico-y-20-paises-unen-esfuerzos-por-las-mujeres-y-las-ninas-al-establecer-el-grupo-de-amigos-y-amigas-para-la-igualdad-de-genero?idiom=es> (date of access: June 19, 2021).

⁴⁶ G. González, O. Pellicer & N. Saltamacchia, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

- Strengthen dissemination measures on strategies to promote gender equality in the organisational culture of the SRE.
- Ensure that training processes on gender equality mainstreaming are given continuity and that the application of the knowledge learned is promoted through work incentives.
- Accelerate the processes of institutionalising the FFP at the policy level to ensure its continuity.

In the multilateral sphere, Mexico has been characterised for leading processes to build the international institutional architecture, as it has done in terms of disarmament, human rights, environmental protection, etc. With the FFP, the Mexican state has taken on the responsibility of leading the integration of gender equality into the multilateral agenda in Latin America as an actor with global responsibility. However, congruence with this role can only come from the domestic sphere; the discourse abroad must correspond to the reality of Mexico and the imperative need to address the serious violent human rights crisis it is experiencing.

In this way, feminist foreign policy is an opportunity for the Foreign Ministry to open dialogue with diverse groups in society, such as feminist collectives, the LGBTQ+ community, academia and others, with the aim of promoting a more democratic diplomacy and a transversal foreign policy that provides spaces and strategies for participation in its design and implementation, while guaranteeing the representation of the aforementioned groups. This is the perfect pretext to open up the once “high politics” to the dynamics of multicultural construction and contribute to its insertion into the 21st century.