

Gaps between Discourse and Practice in the Feminist Foreign Policy of Mexico: The Case of Central American Migrant Women in Tapachula

Brechas entre el discurso y la práctica en la política exterior feminista de México: el caso de las mujeres migrantes centroamericanas en Tapachula

Tzinti Ramírez Reyes

The School of Government and Public Transformation, Tec de Monterrey
tzinti.r@tec.mx

Eduardo González Velázquez

The School of Government and Social Sciences, Tec de Monterrey
egonzalez@tec.mx

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Abstract:

In 2019 Mexico became the first country in Latin America and only the fifth in the world to adopt a feminist foreign policy. The purpose of this article is to examine the emerging conceptualisation of what would constitute a feminist foreign policy and to contrast its key elements with the migratory reality experienced by Central American women and on the southern border of the country. Suggestions are outlined for the creation of a feminist foreign policy that humanises the migratory journey, while emphasising the notion that a policy of this nature would necessarily include questioning the global systems that generate states of vulnerability and precariousness for millions of people.

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Resumen:

En 2019 México se convirtió en el primer país de América Latina y el quinto del mundo en adoptar una política exterior feminista. El propósito de este artículo es examinar la conceptualización emergente del deber ser de una política exterior feminista y contrastar sus elementos clave con la realidad migratoria que viven las mujeres centroamericanas en la frontera sur del país. Se esbozan sugerencias para materializar una política exterior feminista que humanice el trayecto migratorio y se enfatiza que una política de esta naturaleza incluiría necesariamente el cuestionamiento de los sistemas globales que generan estados de vulnerabilidad y precarización para millones de personas.

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Key Words:

Migration, women, refugee, asylum, foreign policy, feminist.

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Palabras clave:

Migración, mujeres, refugiado, asilo, política exterior, feminismo.

Gaps between Discourse and Practice in the Feminist Foreign Policy of Mexico: The Case of Central American Migrant Women in Tapachula¹

*Tzinti Ramírez Reyes
and Eduardo González Velázquez*

We believe foreign policy has the potential to be a mechanism for equality, justice, solidarity, and peace.

CENTRE FOR FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY (CFFP)

In 2016, the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP), an academic and investigative organisation, was established for the promotion of the study and scrutiny of self-proclaimed feminist approaches to foreign policy, which have been gaining international resonance since the announcement, in October 2014, by then Swedish foreign minister Margot Wallström of her desire to design a *feministisk utrikespolitik* (FUP).² The aim of the CFFP is, according to its own website, to contribute to making foreign policies “more feminist, more transparent and more intersectional”.³ But what in essence is a feminist foreign policy and how could it become more feminist, transparent and intersectional?

Following the announcement, the Swedish foreign policy handbook was published in 2018, which defined feminist foreign policy as “a working

¹ The authors of this article thank Georgina Chávez Reyes and Jimena Parra Gutiérrez for transcribing the interviews and researching the information. They also thank the staff of the agencies and shelters who gave the interviews.

² Rebecca Oas. “What Is Feminist Foreign Policy?”, in *Definitions.*, no. 14, June 15, 2020, pp. 1-2, in <https://c-fam.org/wp-content/uploads/What-is-feminist-foreign-policy.pdf> (date of access: August 10, 2021).

³ CFFP, “Become a Member”, in <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org> (date of access: July 20, 2021).

method and perspective” based on “three R’s” (rights, representation and resources):⁴ the rights of women and girls, the allocation of resources and the promotion of representation as guiding principles for a foreign policy that must be anchored to a fourth R, which is the reality in which women and girls actually live.⁵ Since then, Canada (2017), the United Kingdom (2018), France, Luxembourg and Mexico (2019) have declared their intention to implement gender-sensitive international assistance policies or, more ambitiously, feminist foreign policies.

Mexico thus became the first country in Latin America and the fifth in the world to announce the adoption of a feminist foreign policy. The purpose of this article is to examine the emerging conceptualisation of what a feminist foreign policy should be and to compare its key elements with the migratory reality currently experienced by Central American women and girls on Mexico’s southern border, specifically in the area of Tapachula, Chiapas.

To this end, it must be recognised that, since the 1980s, Mexico has established itself as a country of migrants through five different channels: Mexicans who migrate to the United States, U.S. nationals who settle in the country, Central Americans who cross the Republic to reach the United States, Mexican nationals who move from one state to another in search of work, and return migrants. It is worth noting that these five flows have changed over time and space.

Over the last 20 years, Central American migrants have changed their mobility patterns, originally being a population whose migration was based around transit to the United States, now they have begun to stay in Mexico. Despite this, the Mexican state continues to insist that Central American migration is transitory migration, which is used to justify the absence of public policies for those who decide to stay in the country. This situation must change.

⁴ Lyric Thompson & Rachel Clement, *Defining Feminist Foreign Policy*, Washington, D. C., International Center for Research on Women, 2019, p. 2, in https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/ICRW_DefiningFeministForeignPolicy_Brief_Revised_v5_WebReady.pdf (date of access: August 10, 2021).

⁵ R. Oas, *op. cit.*, pp.1-2.

It becomes imperative that, as a reflection of a feminist Mexican foreign policy, migration is rethought from a policy of containment, to instead promote policies of humanisation of migration outside of the traditional militarised security approach. The discussion in this article is structured around the emerging notion of feminist foreign policy and the way in which it could address the topic of migration. In order to achieve this, the conceptual discussion is compared with the testimonies of Central American migrant women and the statements and actions of civil society actors, international organisations and federal governmental bodies operating in Tapachula, which were collected through fieldwork during May of 2021. Finally, it outlines general suggestions that would aid in the creation of a feminist foreign policy with a positive impact on the migratory reality of women and girls in Mexico. To achieve this, the article questions whether the principles of the feminist foreign policy (FFP), announced in 2020, have managed to permeate the reality of the governmental and civil scaffolding that “responds” to migratory flows in Mexican territory.

The key questions are whether, on the ground, the FFP has achieved complementarity and interrelatedness of global and national actions in cooperation and assistance with the human rights centred approach that this policy proposes; likewise, the authors of this article question whether the FFP has been able to promote full respect for and the exercise of human rights in Mexico, and whether the government has prioritised the implementation of assistance and protection policies for groups in situations of extreme vulnerability, such as migrant women and girls.

Likewise, the question is raised of whether there is indeed a Mexican feminist foreign policy that has managed to promote multilateralism in order to find solutions to common problems of states, such as migration. The answers, rather than absolute points of view, are posed as necessary nuances between reality and discourse.

Feminist foreign policy: towards a set of basic premises

In the traditional view of international relations, foreign policy is conceived of as the structural organisation of a government and its foreign affairs, on the one hand, and the structuring of the dynamics of relations

between states, on the other.⁶ In contrast, and although the concept of feminist foreign policy does not enjoy full consensus among the academic community, civil society and the political class, one would think that, from a feminist underpinned perspective, foreign policy should be set up as a “political framework centred around the wellbeing of marginalised people and invokes processes of self-reflection regarding foreign policy’s hierarchical global systems”.⁷ To achieve this, a feminist foreign policy would involve questioning the global systems (political, economic, commercial) that generate states of vulnerability and precariousness for millions of people. Street violence or violence resulting from organised crime, conflicts, displacement, unsafe migration, are some of the phenomena that a feminist foreign policy should seek to understand by questioning the structures and forces that generate them, as well as seeking not only to address but also to transform, from approaches far removed from traditional national security and much closer to human and citizen security approaches informed from a human rights perspective and an intersectional gender approach.

As Victoria Scheyer and Marina Kumkova point out, the basic premise of a feminist foreign policy is that “gender is an integral, not an accidental, feature of the global structure of diplomatic, military and economic relations”⁸ and that, as such, a feminist foreign policy should not only focus on making women’s situation, needs and rights visible, and be concerned with their degree of representation and participation,⁹ but also encourage the disruption of established concepts such as *sovereignty*, *security*, *state*, *militarism*, *nationalism*, among others.

It is important to emphasise that actions aimed solely at making women visible in international relations, seeking gender parity, and the incorporation

⁶ Victoria Scheyer & Marina Kumkova, “Feminist Foreign Policy: A Fine Line between “Adding Women” and Pursuing a Feminist Agenda”, in *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 2, Spring-Summer, 2019, p. 59.

⁷ CFFP, “Feminist Foreign Policy”, in <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/feminist-foreign-policy> (date of access: August 10, 2021).

⁸ V. Scheyer & M. Kumkova, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

of women in international assistance or development cooperation efforts, would not be sufficient enough to be able to speak of a comprehensive feminist foreign policy. According to Cynthia Enloe, such policies seek rather to “embed women within a patriarchal system and do not challenge the underlying gender norms that fuel violence and conflict”,¹⁰ and thus constitute an insufficient vision.

However, it is important to mention that the emergence of this push towards feminist foreign policies has its roots in the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in 1994, in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, and in U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)¹¹ of October 31, 2000, which raises urgent and specific needs of women and girls during repatriation, reintegration, reconstruction and resettlement processes. This implies that a feminist foreign policy would be related not only to the questioning of existing structures and practices that undermine, discriminate and violate women, but should also be articulated on the basis of pressing and concrete needs, seeking, on the one hand, to incorporate women and girls into more efficient protection mechanisms and, on the other, to focus on the advancement of their rights, development and well-being.

A feminist foreign policy should also seek to be a framework for political action that, through an international dimension, pushes for the advancement of gender mainstreaming in domestic politics and the generation of gender-sensitive policy within a nation. International commitments on gender equality should, from this perspective, have an impact on national laws and lead to the recognition of the need to not only integrate nationals, but also women and vulnerable groups who are not citizens of the country.

The recognition of the responsibility towards non-citizens that a feminist foreign policy can have is undoubtedly a contentious point, but it is nevertheless progressing favourably. For example, 24 out of the 34 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 60. V. Scheyer & M. Kumskova cite the book by C. Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, Berkley, University of California Press, 2014.

¹¹ Karin Aggestam, Annika Bergman Rosamond & Annica Kronsell, “Theorising Feminist Foreign Policy”, in *International Relations*, vol. 33, no. 1, March 2019, p. 23, in <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117818811892> (date of access: August 10, 2021).

now consider the gender dimension valid for examining and accepting asylum claims based on discrimination or violence.¹² Among these countries, Mexico has recognised, since 2011, in the Law on Refugees, Complementary Protection and Political Asylum, gender-related persecution or violence as grounds for seeking asylum in the country.¹³ It is therefore possible and necessary to consider the dimension of protection for women in migratory processes as an integral part of a feminist foreign policy that seeks to approach an intersectional understanding of the power relations immersed in migration processes.

Mexico's feminist foreign policy: principles and characteristics

The commitment, which in the framework of the 31st Meeting of Ambassadors and Consuls, outlined for Mexico when presenting the adoption of a feminist foreign policy originally announced at the 74th U.N. General Assembly in September 2019 was: "The Mexican FFP will seek to make the human rights approach, gender perspective and intersectionality transversal, in all areas; to make visible the contribution of women to foreign policy and global actions, and to maintain coherence and congruence in focusing both externally and within the SRE."¹⁴

¹² M. Christine Alwan & S. Laurel Wendon. "What Is Feminist Policy? An Exploratory Evaluation of Foreign Policy in OECD Countries", in European Consortium for Political Research, June 2017, p. 27, in ecpreu.org/Events/Event/PaperDetails/34331 (date of access: August 10, 2021).

¹³ This law states that refugee status shall be granted to any foreigner who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, gender, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; and who, owing to circumstances which have arisen in his country of origin [...] has a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, gender, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. Law on Refugees, Complementary Protection and Political Asylum (last amendment published on November 11, 2020), art. 13, subparas. I & III, in *Diario Oficial de la Federación*, January 27, 2011.

¹⁴ 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> (date of access: August 10, 2021).

The same description can be found in the Foreign Affairs Sectoral Programme 2020-2024, published on July 2, 2020 in the *Diario Oficial de la Federación*. The FFP is thus defined by the SRE itself as 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 more just and prosperous society”.¹⁵

In letter, the FFP includes a human rights approach and a desire to mainstream human rights, while orienting its actions along four axes: openness to international scrutiny through international and Inter-American systems; attracting the highest standards in this area to achieve full respect for and the exercise of human rights in Mexico; giving priority to groups in situations of vulnerability or to those historically discriminated against; and effective multilateralism to find solutions to common problems faced by states. All of these axes are applicable to the analysis of Mexico’s actions in the face of the reality of Central American migrant women and children.

Furthermore, the FFP takes shape on the basis of five principles: a foreign policy with a gender perspective and an external gender plus agenda, a parity-based SRE, a SRE free of violence and safe for all, the visibility of the SRE’s female capital, and the SRE establishing itself as an intersectional feminist body.

It is precisely in the fifth principle that the complementarity and interrelatedness of global and national actions in cooperation and assistance with a human rights and equality approach is proposed, and emphasis is placed on the fact that international human rights instruments are not only obligatory “but also guiding”.¹⁶

As a whole, the axes and principles that have been defined for the FFP allow us to evaluate it not only on the basis of its actions and positions in terms of the visibility of women, the promotion of parity and the strength of its voice in international forums, but also to examine the extent to which

¹⁵ *Idem*.

¹⁶ Subsecretaría para Asuntos Multilaterales y Derechos Humanos-SRE, *La Política Exterior Feminista del Gobierno de México*, Mexico, SRE, 2020, [p. 16], in https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/576095/Presentación_PEF_baja.pdf (date of access: August 10, 2021).

these declarations have permeated the reality of the Mexican state's actions in terms of the protection of human rights, gender and migration in general, and assistance and asylum policies in particular.

Central American migration through Mexico: characteristics and seasonality

Migration from Central America to Mexico and the United States has had a long and deep history of over a century and a half. Its first stage runs from the second half of the 19th century to the 1970s. In those years, the temporary ebb and flow of indigenous people and peasants along the country's southern border was directed towards the plantations in Chiapas. The second stage runs from the end of the 1970s to the end of the 1980s and takes place in a context of profound economic crisis, intense guerrilla activity, authoritarian governments, and *coups d'état*, which provoked radical changes in the nature of migration, namely: new motives, increased flows of migrants, diversity in temporality, redefinition of routes, destinations and expulsion zones, the creation of refuge zones in Mexico, the United States and Canada, and the expansion of legal requirements for entering Mexico, which led to the criminalisation of migrants as they were considered "illegal". The third stage began in the late 1980s, after the end of the armed conflicts and the return of a certain degree of political stability. Migrant individuals and families ceased to be refugees and became economic migrants. The fourth phase began in 2000, the main feature of which was the upsurge in violence against Central American migrants as they crossed the Mexican border.¹⁷

Today, the thousands of migrants who enter Mexico through hundreds of hidden passages on the southern border are fleeing street violence, natural disasters and the starving economy to arrive at the ambiguity of "what's next". Already on Mexican territory, renegotiation is taking place with the National

¹⁷ Eduardo González Velázquez, *Frontera vertical. México frente a los migrantes centroamericanos*, Guadalajara, Centro Universitario UTEG, 2011, pp. 18-27.

Guard, state and municipal police, the National Institute for Migration (INM), the Mexican Commission for Refugee Aid (Comar), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), shelters and soup kitchens, and the various civil society organisations that help to humanise, as far as possible, the migration process.

In any case, migrants' access to Mexico and asylum applications continue to increase. According to data from the Migration Policy Unit of the Ministry of the Interior (Segob), in 2020, 87 260 migrants entered irregularly and presented themselves to the migration authority; in contrast, during the first quarter of 2021, following the closure of the border in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were 36 148 migrants. From that year's total number of migrants, 34 983 (96.77%) came from Central America; Honduras was the country with the largest population at 19 679, followed by Guatemala with 12 083, El Salvador with 2534 migrants, Nicaragua with 671, Cuba with 296, the United States with 169, Colombia with 120, Ecuador with 66, Venezuela with 46, Belize with 10 and Costa Rica with 6. Of the total, 3983 (11%) were minors. It is estimated that in 2021 more than 90 000 people could apply for asylum in Mexico, the highest number in the past decade.¹⁸

Since the beginning of Andrés Manuel López Obrador's government, actions have been put in place to address the migration phenomenon in a different way than under previous administrations. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, adopted in December 2018 in Marrakech, Morocco, was signed. The Southern Border Programme, which militarised migration policy, was cancelled. The Comprehensive Development Plan was designed to shore up the economies of the Northern Triangle countries (Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala), and to help create sources of employment that allow citizens to stay in their homelands without the need to flee. At the beginning of the administration, efforts were also made to allow migrants to cross the country to the United States, including by offering them employment in southern Mexico. This triggered a diplomatic crisis in which Donald Trump threatened to impose a 5% tariff

¹⁸ Editorial, "Aumentó 16.9% tránsito irregular de migrantes por el país: SG", *La Jornada*, May 11, 2021, in <https://www.jornada.com.mx/notas/2021/05/11/politica/aumento-16-9-transito-irregular-de-migrantes-por-el-pais-sg/> (date of access: August 10, 2021).

on all products imported from Mexico if migration was not halted, which implied a change in Mexico's migration policy and a return to schemes similar to those used by previous governments.

From discourse to the field: migrant women in Tapachula, policies, programmes and actions for protection

Four out of every ten migrants entering Mexico are women, 55% of whom are between 25 and 39 years old. The vast majority come with their children, 80% of whom are aged between 0-12 years old.¹⁹ These women experience forced migration, fleeing a context of great structural vulnerability based on poverty, hunger, lack of opportunities, unemployment, limited education, and street and domestic violence. The stories escalate. Lilian comments: "My husband mistreated me, when I came in 2019 he threatened to kill me, that wherever I went he would look for me. I never heard from him again".²⁰ Another voice echoes in the rooms of the El Buen Pastor shelter: "Since I was 8 years old my stepfather abused me, when I was 12 I got pregnant by my 16-year-old brother and had my baby".²¹

Once in Chiapas, violence against women does not diminish, on the contrary, it increases and diversifies. They have limited access to legal documents authorising their stay in the country, due to the cost or requirements requested; they have difficulties in accessing public and private rights and services, such as access to justice, education, work and health, and it is difficult for them to even rent a room or find employment; they also

¹⁹ According to data from the Survey of Applicants for Refugee Status Recognition and Refugees (ESCR). See Rafael Alonso Hernández López & Rodolfo Cruz Piñeiro (coords.), *Perfiles, dinámicas y perspectivas en torno a la situación de las personas refugiadas en México*, Tijuana, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2020, pp. 5-6, en <https://www.colef.mx/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/ACNU-RInforme2021.pdf> (date of access: August 10, 2021).

²⁰ Lilian, interview with Tzinti Ramírez Reyes & E. González Velázquez, Tapachula, Chiapas, May 25, 2021.

²¹ Yolanda, interview with T. Ramírez Reyes & E. González Velázquez. Tapachula, Chiapas, May 25, 2021.

face constant obstacles to access social programmes or to register the birth of Mexican children even after obtaining authorised legal stay in Mexico, not to mention the danger that human trafficking and sexual exploitation networks represent for them.²²

The story of Stephanie from Choloma, a municipality in the Department of Cortés, Honduras, is a mirror reflecting hundreds of similar endeavours. She arrived in Mexico using the rafts that crowd the waters of the Suchiate River day and night, charging 25 pesos per person. She came with her brother-in-law and does not remember where she lost him, “maybe they caught him and deported him”, she says. She lost everything in her village, first because of the hurricanes,²³ then because of the gangs’ extortion of her husband, who had a mechanic’s workshop. They had to flee. Then “the pandemic finished us off”. Then came the family separation due to the “*llenas*” (floods) and she never saw her husband again. Once in Chiapas, she processed her application through Comar and obtained a favourable resolution, “so the next step is to go north [...], I would like to get to California where I have family. I had thought about going through Ciudad Juárez, but they say that the borders are closed”.²⁴

For Olga Sánchez Martínez, director of the El Buen Pastor shelter, the situation of migrant women is at its most vulnerable. Not only because of the context from which they are escaping, but also because of the violence they are subjected to in various parts of Chiapas. While recounting the difficulties faced by the migrant population and in particular by women, Olga Sánchez highlights the existence of:

²² Eugenia Judith Erazo Caravantes (coord.), *Mujeres y migración: vivencias desde Mesoamérica*, Guatemala, Equipos Comunitarios y Acción Psicosocial/Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Matías de Córdova/Voces Mesoamericanas, Acción de Pueblos Migrantes, 2019, p. 68.

²³ Hurricanes *Eta* and *Iota* made landfall in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua in November 2020, leaving 9.9 million people affected, thousands of whom have had to flee their countries because of the devastation. Pan American Health Organization, “Response to Hurricanes Eta and Iota–November 2020”, in <https://www.paho.org/en/response-hurricanes-eta-iota> (date of access: August 10, 2021).

²⁴ Stephanie, interview with Tzinti Ramírez Reyes & Eduardo González Velázquez, Tapachula, Chiapas, May 25, 2021.

A programme of [the Ministry] of Social Development that pays migrants to work. We have 62 workers here in the shelter, who do the cleaning, and they are paid by the [federal] government. We try to get more women in, because they are the ones who buy milk, buy nappies. Those who are accepted into the programme are here sweeping, mopping, cleaning the toilets; this programme has helped them.²⁵

It refers to the Programme for People in Social Emergency (PES) of the Ministry of Social Development. This is a programme that, as Martín—the PES work training coordinator in Tapachula—tells us, helps migrants who are stationed in the area. There are several modules, one in Suchiate, three in Tapachula and one in Mapastepec. While the asylum application process with Comar is being concluded, those who enter the programme receive assistance and carry out communal work activities for three months. Most of them go to the United States and use the project as a way to earn money to continue their journey.

As part of the PES, the Ministry of Social Development provides workshops, training in trades or professions, and employs migrants in the parks and gardens of the municipalities in which it operates, cleaning government buildings, COVID-19 brigades (which were activated during the pandemic) or, for example, caring for 40 million trees and plants in the nursery (the largest in Latin America) of the *Sembrando Vida* programme, an international cooperation programme with Central America announced and carried out by López Obrador's government.²⁶

The PES has been able to place 1000 people in formal employment—including in companies such as Biopapel—with a salary of around 2400 pesos a fortnight.²⁷ These salaries have allowed the local population's perception of migrants to change, as they obtain a minimum level

²⁵ Olga Sánchez, interview with T. Ramírez Reyes & E. González Velázquez. Tapachula, Chiapas, May 25, 2021

²⁶ Martín Eduardo Aguilar Reyna & Angélica Isabel Ruelas Villalobos, interview with T. Ramírez Reyes & E. González Velázquez. Tapachula, May 27, 2021.

²⁷ *Idem.*

of purchasing power and have become potential clients for the purchase of food, consumption of services and even leave an economic benefit to the locality by renting houses or rooms in the city centre. The PES is, although flawed, a dignifying process for migrants who manage to join the programme.

Women can access the PES, although intuitively the programme coordinators seek to help them as a priority group by trying to channel them to civil society organisations that provide psychological care or organise other activities for those who have children, but there is no programme axis with sufficient specificity to get more women to participate in it. The Chiapaneca Foundation for Migrant Women (CHIMUMI) is an organisation that works in conjunction with PES, through a friendship agreement between the programme coordinators and the organisation's founder, Fabiola Díaz. In these times of pandemic, it provides 13 self-employment workshops and manages to assist a little over 10 women per month.²⁸ In general, as Stephanie, from Honduras, comments, it is difficult for a woman who arrives "alone" with her children to leave them in a shelter or in a rented room to go to work or receive training under the conditions required by the programme. Complementary actions to facilitate the participation of more women in programmes such as these are imperative.

On the other hand, there is Comar. In its attention centre in Tapachula, one of the main entrances reads "to avoid overcrowding, only one person per family will be attended to". Comar reviews asylum applications from Central American, Caribbean, South American and even African migrants arriving, in this case, to Chiapas. In 2021, it does so with a budget decrease of 14.34% compared to the previous year. In Mexico, the main reasons that lead foreigners to request asylum are: generalised violence (55%), internal conflict (11%), mass violence (10%) and domestic violence (10%).²⁹

Comar's work in the Tapachula-Palenque central corridor is essential, because in addition to being the body in charge of recognising refugee status, by granting a refugee application number it "unlocks" the possibility

²⁸ Fabiola Díaz, interview with T. Ramírez Reyes & E. González Velázquez. Tapachula, Chiapas, May 28, 2021.

²⁹ R. A. Hernández López & R. Cruz Piñero (coords.), *op. cit.*, p. 5.

of registering for other programmes, for example, the above mentioned PES. On her experience, Lilian comments:

I am 23 years old, from San Pedro Sula, Honduras. My oldest son is seven and my daughter is five, and I am six months pregnant. I was in Chiapas in May, June and July of 2019 [when she was deported] and I re-entered again on April 14 [2021]. I went to Comar, they haven't given me a resolution of anything because I didn't appear in the system, they told me to do the paperwork again, so I did the paperwork again and they just recently gave me the CUR (proof of registration). I want to do the paperwork with immigration to stay in Mexico, I don't want to go to the United States, I want to stay working here, and put my children in school. I don't know how to get the papers. The CUR contains photos of my children and myself. They gave me an appointment for a month from now.³⁰

For migrant women in Tapachula, time goes by, all they can do is wait for the next appointment while they access, if they are lucky, non-specific support and non-specialised attention from governmental and civil society actors.

Final reflections

Although, from the moment migrants enter the country they can receive support from a vast network, it can be observed that the support provided lacks specificity and gender focus, forcing women and their dependents, as well as people from the LGBTQ+ community, to seek involvement in existing schemes, which lack the sufficient features to facilitate participation in them.

The implementation of the axes and principles proposed for the FFP, and above all the incorporation of the basic premises of a feminist foreign

³⁰ Lilian, interview with T. Ramírez Reyes & E. González Velázquez. Tapachula, Chiapas, May 25, 2021.

policy, according to the emerging conceptualisation, would entail mainstreaming the gender perspective with attention to the migratory phenomenon, while criticising the political and economic systems that infringe on the rights of migrant women.

In keeping with the nature of this work, we list some recommendations for the immediate short term to improve the attention given to migrant women on the ground (a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for speaking of a true feminist foreign policy):

- Strengthen the normative, programmatic and strategic axes to address the humanitarian crisis that Central America is experiencing from an integral vision, with a differential approach, a human rights approach and an emphasis on the gender dimension.
- Reducing the length of the refugee application procedure and fast-tracking asylum applications for women in situations of vulnerability.
- Set up single points specialising in care for women and their dependents, providing protection services and legal, psychological, health, educational, employment and immigration status counselling.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of the mechanisms, policies, programmes and projects for assistance, protection, counselling and integration provided by federal and local governments through a gender-based approach, and make specific and relevant modifications to facilitate women's access to existing structures.
- Generate projects that incorporate an intersectional vision and integrate the specificities necessary to attend to migrant women in their diverse realities and contexts.
- Coordinate federal and local governmental bodies, particularly those charged with the protection of human rights and the provision of basic social rights—education, health, etc.—with the intention of mainstreaming a gender perspective in the treatment of migrant women.

Mexico's southern border corridor has become the end of the migratory dream of thousands of Central American women. The verification on the ground that women are violated in different spaces—governmental or otherwise—suggests that, when referring to the construction of a new way of conducting Mexico's foreign policy, the needs and varied

realities of migrant women who enter Mexican territory must not be left aside. The impetus for questioning the cultural and structural violence immersed in the migration phenomenon must be deepened, and efforts must be made to ensure that the FFP achieves the complementarity and interrelatedness of global and national actions, as well as the prioritisation of the most vulnerable human groups, which has been proposed so far in the realm of discourse. Only in this way could the FFP effectively become a political mechanism for equality, justice and peace.