

# Where next for feminist foreign policy on countering anti-gender backlash?

Ayesha Khan, Emilie Tant and Ján Michalko  
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## Key messages

To counter the anti-gender movement, states with an existing or aspiring feminist foreign policy can work together to coordinate action to defend and uphold gender justice. Policy action can be taken at three levels: domestically, bilaterally and globally within multilateral spaces.

If FFP's core objective is upholding and advancing gender justice and equality, then tackling the causes and tactics of backlash must be a priority. FFP states are strategically well placed to tackle the complexity and international nature of anti-gender movements.

The five priority policy areas are: resourcing feminist movements; defending and upholding women's rights in multilateral agreements; avoiding disbursement of funds to anti-gender actors; protecting sexual and reproductive rights, and the civil and political liberties of all women and LGBTIQ+ people; countering harmful discourse and narratives in digital spaces.

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Cover photo: Anti-femicide monument in Mexico City which reads ‘in Mexico 10 women are murdered a day’, 2020. Credit: Eve Orea/Shutterstock

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## About this publication

This policy brief forms part of the ODI series: *Where next for feminist foreign policy?* and was developed from a set of closed-door roundtables with leading experts and feminist actors.

It aims to bridge technical expertise, feminist advocacy and global scholarship, and delves into emerging aspects of feminist foreign policy. This series intends to advance understanding on intersecting agendas to establish potential directions for future research and policy.

## About the authors

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# About this policy brief

This brief explores how countries with feminist foreign policy (FFP) and FFP-aspiring countries can take action together to challenge the anti-gender forces weakening gender justice, democracy, civic space, public life and global norms around equalities. Key recommendations are drawn from the existing literature, together with new insights gathered from ODI's closed-door roundtable 'How can feminist foreign policy counter the anti-rights and anti-democratic backlash?'.

It builds on the expertise of FFP scholars and diverse global feminist actors who participated in the conversation and voiced both sceptical and hopeful views about the potential of FFP (see Annex 1). It also brings forward ideas based on an ALIGN framing paper (Khan et al., 2023) and should be read alongside a FFP background note (Michalko, forthcoming) outlining some of the key tensions and proposals about FFP implementation (see also Brechenmacher, 2023).

This brief presents emerging ideas for FFP policymakers on how to urgently counter the global phenomena of anti-gender movements and anti-feminist backlash, identifying **five priority policy areas** for FFP and FFP-aspiring states.

# Introduction

**‘Feminist foreign policy states need to take up the mantle on backlash – otherwise everybody’s problem becomes nobody’s problem.’**

Sandra Pepera, Director, Gender Women & Democracy, National Democratic Institute

Backlash against progress on gender equality, LGBTQI+ diversity and feminism is now a well-recognised global phenomenon (Goetz, 2020; Datta, 2021) – and is referred to in this policy brief as an anti-gender movement. This movement manifests most clearly in the rollback of sexual and reproductive rights, the reversal of gender equality policies, the defunding of related services and the curtailing of LGBTQI+ freedoms, such as the criminalisation of homosexuality. Those who belong to socially and racially marginalised groups are particularly targeted, with anti-gender actors promoting intolerance and xenophobia in efforts to undermine inclusive societies (Butler, 2023).

Diverse actors attacking gender equality and feminist causes have coalesced into a movement, one that vilifies what it terms ‘gender ideology’ in the name of upholding patriarchal power and values (Edstrom et al., 2023). While women and LGBTQI+ people are facing an increasingly hostile environment as a result of these actions, the denial of their equal rights is tied with the broader weakening of democratic norms, such as legislation to constrain civic space. As cases of hate crimes and femicides rise in places as diverse as Turkey, Burundi and Canada, there is a wider ongoing process that is eroding citizens’ trust in democracy as states fail to uphold their side of the social contract or to provide public services (Goetz, 2023).

To resist the anti-gender movement, the international political community needs to take coordinated action to defend and uphold gender justice. Feminist foreign policy (FFP), with its focus on addressing structural forces of oppression and power inequalities (Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, 2021), can offer an alternative approach to engaging in international relations – one that has the potential to craft solutions that will save lives, reduce violence and push the global community to revitalise its commitment to democratic governance and human rights for all. To do this it must take a transformative approach that avoids superficial acts of nation-branding or ‘pinkwashing’ (Sowa, 2023), referring to the political strategy of co-opting supposed commitments to minority rights to mask continuing forms of structural discrimination or other harms.

## Context

Tackling anti-gender backlash through FFP requires first understanding the drivers fuelling the movement and its impact on democracy (Khan et al., 2023). Despite their different religious and political affiliations, a set of diverse actors and their organisations have been attacking the gender justice agenda in local, domestic, international and digital spaces for decades. They spend vast sums of money – \$3.7 billion globally between 2013 and 2017 (Global Philanthropy Project, 2020) – and are very well coordinated. So much so, that they are now termed by some an ‘anti-rights movement’ (CIVICUS, 2019; Shameem, 2021).

This diverse movement represents a determined coalition of stakeholders, including the Vatican, select governments and faith-based NGOs, and wealthy individuals. They work through transnational networks and funding flows to influence laws and policies at the multilateral level and across all continents (McEwen, 2020; Datta, 2021; Shameem, 2021). They build their own media outlets and educational platforms (such as PragerU), fund litigation, lobby for policy influence and even support individuals to reach positions of political power to influence governmental decision-making.

The movement’s advocates are working hard to retain and expand the social, economic and political power they wield, while curbing that of the most oppressed. They weaponize traditional binary gender roles and norms to garner public support, resist change and maintain their position (Chenoweth and Marks, 2022; Khan et al., 2023). This works to the detriment of democracy and against efforts to reduce inequality, achieve social justice, and restore the well-being of our planet (IPCC, 2022; Edstrom et al., 2023).

The transnational nature of the ‘anti-gender ideology’ is a reminder that patriarchal biases are embedded into our social, economic and global political systems, reproducing a status quo that normalises women’s subordination, heteronormativity and rigid notions of masculinity. Feminists’ hard-won, fragile gains and rights to protect people from gender-based violence are targeted and challenged by anti-gender movements for violating ‘culture’ and ‘religion’ as interpreted by them (Sanders, 2018; Washington et al., 2021).

The growth of anti-gender movements has reinforced and aligned with another global trend – democratic recession (Mueller, 2023) or backsliding. Some authoritarian governments instrumentalise anti-gender policies to increase the legitimacy and stability of their governments (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 2022). For example, the Turkish government backtracked on its commitment to gender equality with increasingly patriarchal and conservative religious policies as it grew more authoritarian (Arat, 2021). The growing persecution of minority groups, including LGBTQI+ communities, has been noted as evidence of democratic backsliding through the erosion of minority rights (Flores et al., 2022).

In response to critiques of such erosion of rights and freedoms, the Indian government defends its Hindutva policies in anti-colonial terms. This use of religion and culture appeals ‘to disenfranchised or alienated groups in times of economic precarity and social change, calling for a restoration of patriarchal norms as a way to improve their lives’ – which serves as a distraction from electoral autocracy and de-democratisation (Goetz, 2023).

FFPs could strategically tackle the complexity and international nature of anti-gender movements, and in so doing reaffirm their commitment to human rights and democracy – of which gender-equality is a crucial feature (Lombardo, 2023). If FFP’s core objective is upholding and advancing gender justice and equality, then tackling the causes and tactics of backlash must be a priority. From their unique positions of power and influence on the global stage, FFP states have the potential to work together to create a more effective barrier against cross-border forces that are currently fuelling a regression on women’s and LGBTQI+ rights around the world.

Policy action can be taken at three levels: domestically, bilaterally and globally within regional or multilateral spaces. Based on the views of leading scholars and activists in the field, and ODI’s own research, this policy brief suggests areas of action that governments with existing and aspirational FFPs should consider to counter democratic recession and anti-feminist backlash.



# 1 Resource feminist movements working at the frontlines of democracy and defending collective rights

Women's movements have historically fought on the frontlines to defend human rights, topple military dictatorships, and demand democratic reforms across all continents and diverse geographies (Chenoweth and Marks, 2022; Jaquette, 2001; Khan, 2018). Currently they are resisting gender persecution in Afghanistan under the Taliban and in Iran's theocracy, while also confronting the rise of authoritarian and majoritarian politics in Turkey, Russia and India.

Feminist movements have succeeded in pushing back against misogynistic populism, such as in Brazil under President Jair Bolsonaro, and in Chile, where they won historic democratic reforms, proving that they are a powerful constituency for democracy (Carranca, 2018; Bakker, 2019). Feminist civil society activism holds governments accountable to deliver social services (while often plugging gaps in provision) and helps maintain public trust in the state, when ongoing distrust fuels anti-democratic populism. However, without coordinated diplomatic support and increased funding, feminist activists cannot be expected to stem the tide of retrogressive change that threatens democracy and gender justice.

## Box 1 Leading from the South

Leading from the South (LFS) is a feminist Global South-led consortium conceptualised and managed by four leading women's funds including the African Women's Development Fund, Women's Fund Asia, Fondo de Mujeres del Sur and International Indigenous Women's Forum. Its mission is to strengthen feminist activism, advocacy and lobbying efforts of women-, girls- and trans-led organisations, focusing on movements and networks at the regional, national and grassroots levels in the Global South.

Financed by the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs, LFS received initial funding of €42 million in 2017 over four years. This was scaled up in 2020 with €80 million in funding over five years, with additional support from Fondation Chanel. It is an innovative example of meaningful FFP government partnerships to resource feminist movements that are leading change and transforming societies for the full achievement of their human rights.

Source: Leading from the South, 2023.

In terms of bilateral support, feminist movements receive reportedly less than 1% of official development assistance (ODA) (Dolker, 2021) and LGBTQI+ movements receive only 0.04% of ODA (Global Philanthropy Project, 2020). To be effective, progressive activists, feminists, and human rights and climate defenders need resources (see Box 1), political backing and the freedom to work in open civic spaces. Their success and involvement in dialogical processes will lend credence to the ‘feminist’ in FFP.

**Policy recommendations governments with FFP should consider:**

- **Resource gender justice movements** as natural allies of FFP states through new modalities with predictable, long-term, flexible and core funds, and strengthen mechanisms for cross-border collaboration. States can set a goal of earmarking 20% of ODA for initiatives that have gender justice as its principal objective (MamaCash, 2022).
- **Support feminists to enter states’ domestic and multilateral gender negotiations** to achieve human rights and dignity for all.
- **Fund feminist leadership** initiatives that enhance the political participation of women.
- **Work closely with civil society in partner countries** to better understand how to support their work for gender justice and facilitate South–South networking and learning.
- **Finance the wider feminist funding ecosystem** with support to women’s funds that are best placed to resource the movements as directly as possible.
- **Diplomatically engage with partner governments to protect civic space** for autonomous feminist mobilisation, especially for non-ODA donor FFP states.

## 2 Defend and uphold the universality of human and women's rights in frameworks and conventions agreed in multilateral spaces

**'FFP countries will also have to invest in defending women's rights just as heavily as current foreign policy invests in trade negotiations.'**

Dr Anne-Marie Goetz, Clinical Professor, Centre of Global Affairs, New York University

While multilateral forums have provided spaces for collective action and accountability on gender equality, FFP takes place in the global arena where state sovereignty operates as one of the strongest protected norms. This allows nation-states to erect a wall behind which gender-related discriminations is permitted, in the name of national sovereignty, culture or religious tradition. With a growing number of committed states hostile to women's rights, harmful practices are sometimes defended as cultural preferences, in the name of 'preserving the nation' (see Box 2).

### Box 2 FFP's role in challenging gender persecution in Afghanistan and Iran

Gender persecution is a recognised crime against humanity. However, many countries still engage in state-led policies to persecute women on the basis of their gender. In Iran, it is mandatory for women to wear the veil, and failure to obey is now punishable by up to 10 years in prison. Although many states do not have diplomatic relations with Iran due to their disagreements with its political and religious policies, FFP countries should work with Iranian women's organisations and expand beyond nuclear weapons-focused security concerns to address other concerns as articulated by Iranian women and other oppressed constituencies.

In Afghanistan, the persecution of women extends to banning them from work, education and public life. However, there are growing calls to recognise the Taliban regime and engage with it despite these measures. FFP states can exercise a unified voice at the multilateral level to advance the discourse around how diplomacy can build global consensus against gender persecution and show solidarity with women living in these countries.

For example, FFP governments could engage with the debate over the recognition of 'gender apartheid' as a crime against humanity, and thereby contribute to making gender persecution visible. This can demonstrate thought leadership and be used to mobilise international action for gender justice.

Source: Adebahr and Mittelhammer, 2020; Zelin, 2022; OHCHR, 2023; Parent, 2023.

Turkey, after sponsoring the 2011 Istanbul Convention to stop violence against women and domestic violence, became the first country to withdraw. This occurred alongside growing electoral authoritarianism and rising levels of gender-based violence and anti-feminist backlash and was framed within a politicised new discourse of preserving Turkish culture and religion (Acar and Altunok, 2013; Altan-Olcay and Oder, 2021; Arat, 2021).

To date, FFP countries have not built a front against backlash, despite ongoing politicisation of UN documents for ideological and religious aims, where ‘norm-spoiling’<sup>1</sup> (Sanders, 2018) takes away decades of international consensus on women’s human rights (Goetz, 2023).

FFP states – from the Global North and South – can lead the way by investing in gender negotiations at the multilateral level, and by refusing to sideline women’s rights through prioritising diplomacy that advocates upholding these conventions. FFP coordination, especially if working through existing coalitions like the FFP+ Group at the UN and spearheaded by Global South countries with feminist-informed foreign policy, could avoid neo-colonial imposition and be an effective counterweight to the highly organised and well-resourced anti-gender rights presence determined to ‘norm-spoil’ in multilateral spaces (Shameem, 2017).

**‘Why are we allowing these organisations to be accredited when they are working against human rights, against UN principles? That is bewildering to me.’**

Omair Paul, Senior Global Advocacy Officer, ILGA (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association) Asia

For example, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was ratified by 179 countries and was crafted with support of feminist movements around the world. This and other landmark conventions and frameworks were historic gains for gender justice. Working together with bureaucrats and civil society organisations, governments developed domestic plans of action to ensure their implementation. These efforts demonstrate the interconnectedness between global and domestic policy agendas.

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1 As defined by Sanders (2018) the term ‘norm-spoiling’ describes the process through which conservative states and non-state actors wage concerted campaigns at the United Nations to directly challenge existing norms (such as those relating to women’s reproductive freedom, social, economic and political equality) within international agreements.

**Policy recommendations governments with FFP should consider:**

- **Resource and appoint key positions or ambassadors** to advance FFP and implement a gender-justice focused agenda, such as gender equality or women's rights ambassadors in Australia, Canada, France, Mexico, Netherlands and Sweden.
- **Fund initiatives that facilitate feminist civil society and women human rights defenders' access** to key multilateral spaces, including as members of government delegations, to foster pathways to policy influence.
- **Challenge corruption of UN accreditation system and civil society organisation appointments** where anti-rights actors infiltrate spaces dedicated to advancing women's rights.
- **Collectively push back on norm-spoiling** and take an active stance against rights-eroding language by equipping diplomats and multilateral policymakers with strong gender negotiation mandates and skills.
- **Create and strengthen existing coalitions with other FFP-friendly countries in partnership with feminist civil society** to intervene with high quality feminist representatives in multilateral forums, including the UN General Assembly, the African Union, the European Union (EU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), UN Women, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), and COP.
- **Global South FFP states can lead South-South consensus building** and coordination.
- **Host, support and finance regional and global conventions and ministerial-level engagements**, such as the FFP+ Group at the UN, the Generation Equality Forum (UN Women, 2023), the Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy conference, the African CSW, and other gender justice forums with participation of feminist movements and other civil society actors, such as Women's Major Group, Women's Major Rights Caucus, and others.
- **Urgently call for gender-rotation at the helm of the UN General Assembly** to combat growing hostility to gender equality and justice (GWL Voices, 2023).
- **Use diplomatic leverage to pursue political dialogue with states hostile to women's rights**, ensuring women's participation and accountability for women's rights violations in the UN Human Rights Council.

### 3 Avoid funding actors that undermine gender equality and justice

FFP countries can cooperate to track the transnational networks and funding flows that seek to negatively impact both national, and international, gender justice work and rights-based norms. Anti-gender actors operate through transnational and intergovernmental NGOs based in the US, EU, Russia and Saudi Arabia. They include CitizenGO, Family Watch International, World Congress of Families, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, and the Alliance Defending Freedom (which, for example, is a US-based conservative Christian legal advocacy group working to expand Christian values within public schools and in government, outlaw abortion, and curtail the rights of LGBTQI+ people). Between 2008 and 2017, the aggregate revenue of such US anti-gender movements was \$6.2 billion – in that same period, 11 US organisations funnelled at least \$1 billion into countries worldwide (Global Philanthropy Project, 2020).

ODA also reaches anti-gender actors. Government funders of women’s rights projects have disbursed funds to religious organisations with anti-LGBTQI+ values, such as the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (Provost and Sekyamah, 2023). Given the currently low level of ODA reaching feminist organisations, bilateral donors must be extremely careful with disbursement of funds for women’s and gender equality. They need to be sure resources reach partner organisations upholding rights of all genders and sexualities – understanding that not all gender initiatives are feminist. This is why working with local feminist partners with knowledge of their communities is so vital.

Governments can act within their territories and cooperate multilaterally to stop providing funds that enable anti-rights movements abroad. This has been called for by LGBTQI+ activists in Uganda who understand how nation states are subject to such transborder forces (Namubiru, 2023), and have tracked funding from right-wing and fundamentalist groups in the US to Ugandan anti-rights campaigns (Soita Wepukhulu, 2023).

#### **Policy recommendations governments with FFP should consider:**

- **Improve ODA due diligence and vetting processes** on disbursement of funds to organisations working on gender (Provost and Sekyamah, 2023).
- **Finance and conduct research** to map anti-rights funding flows and sources (i.e. Datta, 2021).
- **Create pressure for transparency mechanisms** to track cross-border financial transactions by known anti-gender actors and organisations.
- **Tackle secretive use of tax havens** by anti-rights actors and organisations, to disrupt the structural drivers of backlash (Goetz, 2023).
- **Highlight and support the work of religious groups advancing gender equality norms**, such as Catholics for Choice and Muslims for Progressive Values in the US.
- **Support initiatives in partner countries that enhance democratic states’ accountability to citizens** by improving public services and livelihood opportunities.
- **Advocate for debt restructuring** to support provision of public services, which can strengthen the social contract and people’s democratic rights and well-being. This can dilute the distrust and dissatisfaction with democracy that contributes to the appeal of anti-gender movements.

## 4 Protect sexual and reproductive rights, and uphold the civil and political liberties of all women and LGBTQI+ people both at home and abroad

The international global consensus on gender equality and women's rights that was achieved during the 1990s through landmark UN conventions and platforms of action is being steadily lost – due to the influence of states resisting the language of human rights and gender justice (Goetz, 2019). Anti-gender organisations are working through the UN with states that support their views, such as the Vatican, Iran and Saudi Arabia, and historically the US, to achieve the removal of sexual and reproductive rights language from international agreements (Washington et al., 2021). This jeopardises women's access to reproductive health and abortion care, having repercussions on their economic and political autonomy.

Anti-gender movements have created compelling and effective narratives to win public and political support for their agenda. They evoke new types of rights to subtly undermine and challenge mainstream human rights discourse (Lewin, 2021). They argue for 'natural rights, family rights and the right to life of the unborn' (Sanders, 2018), and use a language of 'parental rights' to justify the removal of comprehensive sexuality education from school curricula (Venegas, 2022).

By speaking of 'LGBT+ ideology', anti-rights populists delegitimise non-heteronormative identities as a threat to national identity and stoke hatred against marginalised groups, destabilising democracy and progress towards gender-inclusive societies. The success of these narratives worldwide can arguably be traced to funding, with the anti-gender movement receiving triple the amount of philanthropic funding of LGBTQI+ movements (\$3.7 billion compared to \$1.2 billion in 2013–2017) (GPP, 2020).

These narratives are reactionary, anti-LGBTQI+ and anti-women and girls, working to polarise public opinion and political discourse. The centrality of state entities to the protection and upholding of human rights cannot be understated, especially in a context of rising authoritarianism and far-right parties in states normally considered democracies (see also Bergman Rosamond and Davitti, 2022).

**Policy recommendations governments with FFP should consider:**

- **Commit to funding expanded sexual and reproductive health services** for all and channel resources to locally led service providers. Navigate unpredictable changes in donor funding by pooling resources and plugging funding gaps.
- **As member-states, reject appointments of anti-gender actors and organisations** in gender policy spaces such as CSW.
- **Pursue multilateral instruments that encourage domestic changes** towards guarantees to reproductive rights.
- **Prioritise funding to grassroots movements and engage with local advocacy groups** leading activism on reproductive and LGBTQI+ rights (Stephenson et al., 2022).
- **Facilitate spaces for trans-border coordination and international dialogue** on LGBTQI+ rights outside of national settings where civic space is shrinking.
- **Appoint special diplomatic positions to advocate against gender persecution and for LGBTQI+ rights** in global forums and negotiation spaces, and who can support the work of the UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (Cooper-Cunningham et al., 2023).
- **Establish safe routes of passage for refugees** escaping gender persecution.
- **Support research to develop new narratives** that counter anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric and reclaim any historical or pre-colonial norms that support sexual and gender pluralism.



## 5 Counter harmful discourse, narratives and conspiracy theories, especially in digital spaces

Digital spaces amplify reactionary voices, toxic masculinity, and regressive gender norms. Even as they served to elevate the voices of women during the #MeToo and #MareaVerde movements, among others, unregulated social media platforms are now a site of vicious backlash. Reactionary actors use social media to cultivate and inflame anti-feminist support, and use platforms to coordinate gendered mis/disinformation campaigns – often taking an extreme toll on women in politics (#ShePersisted and Fundación Multitudes, 2023). Furthermore, the conspiracy theory that ‘gender ideology’ is being used to destroy the traditional family and a ‘natural’ way of life is widely propagated online (Marchlewska and Cichoka, 2020). There are also growing concerns about links between gender-based violence online, such as in ‘incel’ forums, and men’s violence offline (Bates, 2020; Srinivasan, 2021).

### **Box 3 Global initiatives to prevent online anti-gender backlash and democratic backsliding**

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) presents a threat to democracy because it harms and silences the diverse voices of women. Tech companies have so far failed to protect women, especially those publicly visible and subject to multiple intersecting discriminations. The transnational and global nature of these companies underpins the problem of tackling online violence, including the spread of gendered disinformation and abusive campaigns, leading several governments to launch a Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse.

Established in 2021, this Global Partnership (which is part of the Tech for Democracy Alliance) was supported by several FFP governments such as Chile and Canada, together with Sweden and the US. They have supported research into the impact of TFGBV against women in public life, such as journalists, human rights defenders and women in politics. The coalition also issued a statement in support of women in Iran following the death of Mahsa ‘Jina’ Amini, calling for states to work with digital platform companies to create a safe online space, where women and girls are protected from state-sponsored violence that seeks to prevent them from their activism.

Source: di Meco, 2023; Social Development Direct, 2023; US Department of State, 2022.

To contend with backlash, FFP countries must address the major policy gap in this area, which is undermining democracy and political and social cohesion. Anti-feminist and anti-LGBTQI+ narratives should be tackled at the international level, as anti-rights movements operate across borders, working to re-entrench patriarchal gender norms and mobilise ideological resistance to women's and LGBTQI+ peoples' hard-won gains (Khan et al., 2023).

**Policy recommendations governments with FFP should consider:**

- **Raise digital policy up the global agenda to tackle online misogyny**, as through the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse (see Box 3), and the UK Online Harms Bill.
- **Create global standards on countering backlash online**, including cross-border frameworks that reduce cyber-harassment and protect women in public/political life.
- **Design digital and algorithmic regulatory measures** to counter anti-rights content, incitement to hatred and violence, and misogynistic radicalisation online.
- **Establish coalitions and cross-sectoral mechanisms** to share best international practices for online safety policy, including standards for taking down harmful content.
- **Invest in formulating alternative online narratives and strategies to counter anti-gender myths**, working with local rights campaigners to generate locally relevant and contextually specific approaches and language.
- **Invest in digital literacy education, training and programming** to build citizens' skills to identify disinformation, protect against radicalisation and lead safe lives online.

## Conclusion

FFP states can wield their political influence and collective diplomatic weight to counter an increasingly hostile global policy environment by developing cohesive strategies and alliances to counter anti-gender movements in international spaces. States must provide a coordinated response to protect and sustain the hard-won gains that built the global human rights framework for gender justice. Feminists and other social movement activists cannot achieve this on their own – they need FFP states to advocate and support their work on behalf of all marginalised groups at every level, domestic and international, and to hold anti-rights actors to account wherever they operate.

To be sure, some states adopting FFP must demonstrate awareness and humility regarding their own colonial legacies, and continued role in pursuing imperialist, racist and neo-liberal policies. Doing so will enhance their diplomatic effectiveness and ability to engage in meaningful dialogue on gender justice with countries in the Global South. For effective collaboration, Global North FFP countries must better coordinate when working with countries in the Global South – especially as the coalition of FFP states grows and attention will be on their credibility of living up to the feminist values they claim to embrace both at home and abroad.

When paired with the delivery of social services, and accountable democratic governance, these policy options to counter backlash resonate with FFP's aim of gender justice. While there is valid scepticism from feminist civil society in the Global South and North on the intentions and coherence of nation states declaring a feminist foreign policy, FFP governments can work as beacons in the world of international relations if they prove themselves consistent. This means living up to authentic feminist principles, pragmatically exercising diplomacy to address structural inequalities, and pursuing a world order based on democracy and social justice goals.

## Annex 1 Partial list of participants

The table below lists those participants who attended the ODI roundtable ‘How can feminist foreign policy counter the anti-rights and anti-democratic backlash?’ (31 May 2023) and agreed to include their names in this ODI policy brief. Please note: while the brief draws on the expertise and insights of the roundtable participants, they do not bear any responsibility for its content.

Name	Role and organisation
<b>Josephine Ahikire</b>	Associate Professor, School of Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University
<b>Annika Bergman-Rosamond</b>	Senior Lecturer, University of Edinburgh
<b>Saskia Brechenmacher</b>	Fellow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
<b>Damjan Denkovski</b>	Deputy Executive Director, Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy
<b>Beatriz Galli</b>	Senior Policy and Advocacy Consultant, Ipas
<b>Anne-Marie Goetz</b>	Professor, Center for Global Affairs, New York University
<b>Cheryl Hendricks</b>	Executive Director and Professor, Institute for Justice & Reconciliations
<b>Paulina Ibarra</b>	Executive Director, Fundación Multitudes
<b>Aditi Mukund</b>	Programme Associate, Kubernein Institute
<b>Nkatha Murungi</b>	Assistant Director and Professor, Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria
<b>Sohela Nazneen</b>	Research Fellow, Institute of Development Studies
<b>Omair Paul</b>	Senior Global Advocacy Officer, International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) Asia
<b>Sandra Pepera</b>	Director, Gender Women & Democracy, National Democratic Institute (NDI)
<b>Nela Porobić</b>	Researcher and Coordinator, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom
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<b>Naureen Shamim</b>	Founder and Executive Director, Noor
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