From Seville to Paris: Financing Feminist Futures!

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From June 30 to July 3, 2025, the fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) will take place in Seville. This event, bringing together state actors, philanthropic organizations, and civil society from across the globe, will be decisive for the future of international solidarity. It comes at a time of unprecedented global cuts to Official Development Assistance (ODA), as well as systematic attacks on the rights of women and LGBTQIA+ people.

With only five years remaining before the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development expires, the achievement of its 17 goals—gender equality among them—is far from guaranteed[1]. The FfD4 conference marks a pivotal moment for states to reverse the trend, or at the very least, commit to strong action to close the gap separating the international community from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At stake are not only women's rights but also the other pillars of our democracies, and the very foundation of our multilateral and international cooperation systems. In this context, silence, backtracking, or reduced ambition from countries that champion feminist foreign policies are simply not an option. France, which recently released an ambitious framework for its feminist diplomacy[2], must step up and lead the defense of gender equality and women's rights in multilateral spaces against conservative attacks.

1. International Solidarity at a Tipping Point

The FfD4 conference is taking place in a global climate increasingly hostile to the financing of international solidarity, mirroring the agenda of anti-rights conservative movements. Since taking office in January 2025, Donald Trump has continuously undermined gender equality,

[1] The 2030 Agenda is the sustainable development program adopted in 2015 by all member states of the United Nations (UN), with a horizon set for 2030.

[2] *"France's international strategy for a Feminist Foreign Policy"*, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, March 2025.

and more broadly, democracy and multilateralism. In multilateral forums, the United States now speaks with a markedly conservative and reactionary voice, alongside governments like Javier Milei's Argentina, going so far as to reject the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs altogether[3].

When it comes to development financing, the dismantling of USAID—the United States Agency for International Development—and deep budget cuts are having severe consequences for women's and LGBTQIA+ rights, as well as for the global fight against HIV, climate change, higher education, and scientific research. A report published in April 2025[4] by Swedish feminist organization RFSU[5] noted that the U.S. was previously the largest donor to many UN agencies, including the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), which advances women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) worldwide. The report also highlights that over 70% of global funding for HIV/AIDS came from the U.S. Without this funding, an estimated 1,650,000 people could die from AIDS in 2025[6]. The elimination of all diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs in U.S. government agencies has also halted scientific research programs on health, climate, and gender-related issues. The loss of such research will have serious implications for the health and rights of women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and ethnic minorities.

This downward trend in development financing can also be seen, to varying degrees, across Europe. European institutions and several member states—such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Finland, Sweden, and France—have made significant cuts to their ODA budgets[7]. In February 2025, Coordination SUD[8] estimated that Dutch funding for civil society organizations working on international solidarity would drop from €1.4 billion to between €390–565 million as of 2026. Germany, meanwhile, announced a €2.1 billion cut to its ODA budget for 2025. In the UK, Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced that the ODA budget would be reduced to 0.3% of Gross National Income starting in 2027 (down from 0.5%).

These cuts must be viewed in light of the rising tide of conservatism and far-right politics across the continent. Political balances are increasingly fragile, with many governments formed by coalitions between right-wing and far-right parties. Budget austerity in Europe is now compounded by far-right attacks on women's rights and feminist organizations. While military spending and calls for EU-wide remilitarization are on the rise, development aid and international solidarity are being deprioritized.

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[3] « Les États-Unis "rejettent et dénoncent" l'Agenda 2030 et les ODD », *AEF Info*, 6 mars 2025.
[4] « From harm to hope: Advancing gender equality, SRHR and global alliances under the weight of US foreign policy », RFSU, 2025.
[5] The Riksförbundet för Sexuell Upplysning is a Swedish feminist organization advocating for access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, and is a member of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) network.
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] « The European Funding Gap : How Slashed Cooperation Budgets Can Jeopardise Global Sexuel and Reproductive Health and Rights », Countdown 2030, April 2025.
[8] « Adoption du projet loi de finances pour 2025 : qu'est-ce que cela change pour la solidarité internationale ? », Coordination SUD, February 12, 2025.

France is no exception. The 2025 budget saw a 37% reduction in ODA[9]—a proportionally larger cut than in any other area of the state budget. This decision was made with little public outcry, based on overly simplistic reasoning, and under pressure from right-wing and far-right parties. It also contradicts several of the French government's own commitments[10]. Gender equality has not been spared: the budget for the Fund to Support Feminist Organizations (FSOF) was cut, as were French contributions to UNFPA, the lead UN agency on SRHR and a cornerstone of France's own international strategy on the issue[11]. In 2021, France committed to multi-year funding for UNFPA through 2025. However, at the time of writing, the disbursement for 2025 has been outright cancelled.

These budget cuts contradict the commitments made by France in the 2021 Development Programming Law for Solidarity and the Fight Against Global Inequalities (LOP-DSLIM)[12], which stipulated that 20% of France's annual bilateral programmable ODA should have gender equality as its primary objective by 2025. According to OECD data, this figure was below 6% in 2022–2023[13]. The cuts also partly contradict the intentions set out in France's newly released feminist foreign policy strategy, published in March 2025[14] (see below).

At the national level, feminist organizations are also suffering. For example, Planned Parenthood France (Planning familial) has experienced significant cuts to its subsidies: in the Drôme department alone, seven out of twelve sexual health centers were shut down in 2025 by the local council, and the association's funding was slashed by 20%[15]. These cuts threaten women's rights and health, even as SRHR is supposedly one of the key priorities of France's feminist diplomacy.

2. In the Face of Backlash, a Moment of Truth for Feminist Foreign Policies

All around the world, feminist movements are on the front lines countering the backlash organized by anti-rights groups, driving the societal changes needed to achieve gender equality and end gender-based and sexual violence. A few examples: in Chile, feminist activists played a major role in the 2019 October uprising that sparked the push for a new Constitution. In 2020, feminist mobilizations for abortion rights in Poland opened the door to wider demands around

[9] Explanation of the calculation: The ODA budget is artificially inflated by €738 million that was previously allocated to a fund outside the state budget and that already contributed to international solidarity. Since this does not represent new funding, Coordination SUD does not include it in the cut calculation. As a result, the ODA budget for 2025 is €3.6 billion compared to €5.8 billion in 2024, representing a decrease of over €2.1 billion—equivalent to a –37% change. See: https://www.coordinationsud.org/actualite/adoption-du-projet-loi-de-finances-pour-2025-quest-ce-que-cela-change-pour-la-solidarite-internationale/

[10] The law of August 4, 2021 commits France to continue a positive trajectory for ODA, aiming to allocate 0.7% of its gross national income by 2025.

[11] *"France's international strategy for a Feminist Foreign Policy",* Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, March 2025.

[12] Loi n ° 2021-1031 de programmation relative au développement solidaire et à la lutte contre les inégalités mondiales, Légifrance, 4 août 2021.

[13] « À quelle hauteur la France financera-t-elle l'égalité des genres en 2026 ? », Focus 2030, June 23, 2021.

[14] *"France's international strategy for a Feminist Foreign Policy",* Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, March 2025.

[15] « Baisse de subventions du Planning familial », tribune du Planning Familial, *Le Monde*, June 16, 2025.

LGBTQIA+ rights, the rule of law, and judicial independence[16]. In 2022, protests led by women in support of Mahsa Amini in Iran sparked one of the largest waves of dissent in the history of the Islamic Republic.

Despite their vital role in defending human rights and democracy, feminist movements remain severely underfunded. Even within funding streams earmarked for gender equality, the share that actually reaches feminist organizations is minimal. Feminist organization AWID estimates that only 0.4% of aid allocated to gender equality ends up in the hands of feminist groups[17].

It is essential for public authorities to support these feminist organizations and activists—politically and financially, both nationally and internationally. This is one of the core aims of feminist foreign policies (FFPs), a concept that emerged in 2014 under the leadership of former Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallström. Sweden's approach was based on the "three Rs"[18]: rights, by centering a human rights-based approach; representation, by ensuring women are fairly represented in decision-making; and resources, by allocating meaningful funding to feminist organizations.

France followed Sweden's lead in 2019, expressing its intention to adopt a feminist foreign policy. In 2025, it officially launched its first international strategy for feminist diplomacy. In it, France commits to making the rights of women and girls and gender equality "a priority in every area of its European and international action, including peace and security, climate and environment, development, democratic governance, human rights, humanitarian action, economic, financial and trade issues, digital technologies, culture, education, health and food security. All diplomatic action—bilateral, multilateral, and consular—is included."[19] Today, around fifteen governments have adopted or are in the process of adopting a feminist foreign policy, including Mexico, Chile, Canada, Spain, Luxembourg, Scotland, and Mongolia … Some countries are moving in the opposite direction. Sweden, once a pioneer in the field, abandoned its feminist foreign policy as soon as a right-wing coalition supported by the far right came to power.

For feminist foreign policies to be embodied and effective, they must be backed by significant funding. The framework laid out by France's *International Strategy for a Feminist Diplomacy* is solid and ambitious. But to implement it, France must resume a positive trajectory in development financing and support feminist organizations, which play a key role in advancing gender equality—and, more broadly, democracy.

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[16] Report *"Women's rights: fighting the backlash. What role for France? Recommendations for French Foreign Policy"*, Equipop et Fondation Jean Jaurès, 2023

[17] AWID, « 2021 Brief : Where is the money for feminist organizing ? », May 24, 2021.

[18] ICRW, « Defining feminist foreign policy ».

[19] *"France's international strategy for a Feminist Foreign Policy",* Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, March 2025.

3. Raising French and international ambitions

In this critical context, the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4), to be held in Seville from June 30 to July 3, 2025, represents a crucial milestone. This conference will take place ten years after the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA)[20] and marks the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action[21]. The FfD4 is a decisive opportunity to build a global financial architecture that supports feminist actors and movements. The recent publication of France's strategy for a feminist diplomacy aims to raise the country's ambition on gender equality. It is also essential for France to push the international community to do the same.

The FfD4 preparatory process has made it clear: issues related to international solidarity, gender equality, human rights, and the fight against inequalities are geopolitical fault lines. No multilateral space is currently immune to backlash—whether it's the withdrawal of the United States from the FfD4 process or the proactive efforts of conservative states to undermine international agreements, as seen at the UN Commission on the Status of Women or the World Health Assembly.

In the face of these attacks, bold and international mobilization is essential. States committed to gender equality must publicly affirm their positions, use all their diplomatic influence, and refuse to compromise on gender equality. It is also time for states that have remained silent on these issues to take a clear stance.

The Seville conference is even more pivotal as it precedes several major international deadlines that will determine the level of state ambition regarding global health, gender equality, and feminist policies in the coming years. In September 2025, the UN will hold its 80th General Assembly. October will mark the 25th anniversary of the "Women, Peace and Security" resolution[22], an opportunity to renew momentum and enhance visibility for this agenda both internationally and nationally. At the end of October, France will host the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Feminist Foreign Policies, following Germany, the Netherlands, and Mexico. Previous conferences leaned more toward information-sharing and lacked sufficient action. In 2025, it is time to strengthen state alliances to push back against international backlash.

The final quarter of 2025 will also see the replenishment conference for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. This will be a crucial event, especially as the United States accounted for over 70% of international HIV/AIDS funding[23], epidemic resurgence

[20] This action program within United Nations member states, approved in 2015, mobilizes the necessary funds for the 17 Sustainable Development Goals for the 2015–2030 period.
[21] The Fourth World Conference on Women was held from September 4 to 15, 1995, in Beijing and resulted in this Declaration and Program that establish 12 areas of action.
[22] Adopted in 2000, this resolution aims to increase women's participation in conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding.
[23] « L'ONUSIDA alerte sur l'impact du gel de l'aide américaine sur la prévention du VIH dans le monde », ONU Info, February 7, 2025.

threats are stronger than ever[24], and women's rights and health—already underfunded—are in further retreat, particularly due to pressures from the Trump administration.

France will also assume the G7 presidency starting in 2026, just as the United States takes over the G20 presidency, one year before assuming the G7 presidency again. The 2019 negotiations were already tense; those of 2026 are likely to be even more unpredictable. Gender-related issues are almost certain to be among the most diplomatically contentious.

4. No retreat—and rebuilding a financial architecture for gender equality

In this context, UN member states and all stakeholders involved in the Seville conference must adopt two firm positions: not to retreat on gender equality, and to rebuild a financial architecture conducive to achieving gender equality within a reasonable timeframe.

First, not retreating means that **states which traditionally support gender equality must stand firm, use their full diplomatic leverage, and refuse to treat gender equality as a bargaining chip in negotiations.** States that have not been active in recent years must now recognize the urgency of the moment and commit publicly. Silence and inaction are no longer options. As for states actively undermining gender equality, feminist civil society organizations are calling on them to cease all forms of action—formal or informal, explicit or covert—and to respect the principles outlined in the preamble of the United Nations Charter.

Second, all parties must work together to bridge the massive funding gap that continues to trap women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people in situations of vulnerability. In 2023, UN Women estimated that, at the current pace, it would take nearly 300 years to achieve gender equality[25]. All stakeholders—states, multilateral organizations and banks, private foundations—must contribute to this effort immediately. In line with the *Common Set of Demands*[26] consolidated in early 2025 by various feminist organizations and funds, it is crucial **to integrate a gender lens into all dimensions of development financing, particularly through gender-responsive budgeting.** Within five years, **at least 20% of allocable bilateral aid worldwide must be dedicated to initiatives with gender equality as a primary objective, with 10% going directly to women's rights organizations, networks, and feminist funds in all their diversity.**

Multilateral organizations—including international financial institutions and UN entities—must set ambitious targets and report on progress made toward financing gender equality, especially in relation to funding with gender equality as its principal goal. This must also apply to funding allocated to feminist organizations, networks, and women's rights funds.

Private and philanthropic foundations must work alongside other donors to meet the target of $1.5 billion in annual investments in feminist organizations, networks, and

[24] Frédérique Prabonnaud, « Retrait du PEPFAR : jusqu'à 56 000 décès supplémentaires en Afrique de l'Ouest », Sidaction, April 21, 2025.
[25] « Près de 300 ans avant d'atteindre l'égalité de genre : ONU Femmes France appelle à revoir nos priorités ! », ONU Femmes France, March 16, 2023.
[26] « Common ask framework », Walking the Talk, 2025.

women's rights funds, as recommended by *Shake the Table* and the *Bridgespan Group*[27]. In a context of shrinking public budgets, these foundations are more critical than ever and must step up to support feminist movements by listening to their needs and priorities.

Governments implementing official development assistance policies must increase funding to feminist organizations or, at a minimum, raise the proportion of current funding that goes to such organizations. They must also improve the quality of their funding mechanisms—by making them more flexible, multi-year, and accessible via unearmarked or thematic calls for proposals—and ensure the protection and well-being of activists.

States that have adopted feminist foreign policies, such as France, have a particular responsibility. France must increase funding for feminist organizations, both nationally and through its international solidarity policy. To fulfill its commitments and raise international ambition, France should bolster its support to feminist associations both domestically and globally.

In the first case, it is about putting an end to budget cuts in the nonprofit sector within France. Feminist networks such as Le Planning Familial and the National Federation of Information Centers on Women's and Family Rights (FNCIDFF) must be unwaveringly supported. Internationally, this means safeguarding and expanding the *Support Fund for Feminist Organizations (FSOF)*, launched in 2021 and managed by the French Development Agency (AFD). This fund has so far reached over 1,400 formal and informal organizations in 75 countries[28]. However, it has recently faced budget cuts amid the global decline in official development assistance. French civil society organizations are advocating to restore it to its original level in the medium term. Alongside international partners and French public institutions, they are also working to make its operations more just and effective, focusing on key issues such as flexibility, localization, and decolonial approaches.

The FSOF is just one example. Mechanisms dedicated to feminist organizations must be scaled up and replicated. The European Union, in particular, could draw inspiration from it. As discussions continue around the next multiannual financial framework and the renewal of the *Gender Action Plan*, the EU could play a key role at the global level—especially since Europe remains one of the world's leading contributors to development aid.

These demands are supported by over 250 feminist organizations in more than 60 countries, through a letter addressed to the entities involved in the Seville conference[29]. It is now up to all other stakeholders—UN member states, multilateral banks, UN agencies, private and philanthropic foundations—to listen, and to act quickly and boldly against the attacks on gender equality. The "Seville Compromise"[30] which is expected to be officially adopted during

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[27] *Ibid.*

[28] Agence française de développement, Support Fund for Feminist Organizations. Activity Report 2020-2023, November 2024.

[29] Equipop, « Lettre ouverte : un plaidoyer international pour financer les mouvements féministes », May 6, 2025.

[30] « Outcome document of the Fourth international Conference on Financing for Development », June 2025.

the FfD4 conference, asserts the imperative of achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, recognizes the economic value of unpaid care work, highlights the need to eliminate gender-based violence, and commits to gender-responsive solutions. However, it lacks ambition on key issues such as debt, taxation, universal access to healthcare—including sexual and reproductive health and rights—and climate action. It is therefore essential to go further. The "Financing for Feminist Futures" conference, organized in October 2025 in Madrid by the civil society consortium "Walking the Talk," will be an opportunity to strengthen the follow-up and accountability mechanisms of FfD4 and, more broadly, the financing of feminist movements and gender equality.

Translation: Equipop.