



Bridges for gender equality between Latin America and the Caribbean and Germany

Criteria and priorities for a regional feminist development cooperation policy

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Introduction

Bridges for gender equality between Latin America and the Caribbean and Germany: Criteria and priorities for a regional feminist development cooperation policy presents the outcomes of the project "Success criteria for a feminist development cooperation policy specific to Latin America and the Caribbean" developed under the Strategic Alliance between the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ) and carried out by the ECLAC Division for Gender Affairs and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) between 2022 and 2024. The document covers the dialogue and multi-stakeholder exchanges conducted between the government institutions involved in international cooperation, civil society organizations, academics and the United Nations system. It also includes an analysis of the GIZ project portfolio in Latin America and the Caribbean, participation in intergovernmental forums and new cooperation projects. The aim is to present success criteria for drawing up a feminist development cooperation policy between Germany and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Latin America and the Caribbean is the only region of the world with an ambitious, in-depth and comprehensive Regional Gender Agenda, which incorporates the agreements reached by the ECLAC member States at the meetings of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean held since 1977. In 2022, at the fifteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean,¹ the States adopted the Buenos Aires Commitment, which calls for a transition to a new style of development and to a care society that prioritizes the sustainability of life and of the planet. In that context, the countries agreed to "encourage subregional, regional and multilateral cooperation programmes through

¹ See [online] <https://conferenciamujer.cepal.org/15/en>.



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North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation modalities, as well as between national machineries for the advancement of women, that promote gender equality, women's autonomy, the prevention and elimination of all forms of gender-based violence against women, including human smuggling and trafficking, particularly of women and girls, and the right to care" (ECLAC, 2023e, p. 13).

The region has a commitment, a calling and an opportunity to renew multilateralism through feminist policies for foreign relations and international development cooperation and to contribute to overcoming the structural challenges of gender inequality and sustainable development at the global, regional, national and local levels. New-generation feminist cooperation policies can foster a more productive, inclusive and sustainable future for attaining substantive equality. To achieve this, in addition to establishing principles and advancing towards institutionalization, feminist policies must be aimed at increasing and sustaining funding and cooperation with gender equality as the main objective in the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, at developing capacities, methodologies and actions, information systems and mechanisms for participation, evaluation and accountability, and at other actions (Güezmes and Romero, 2024).

The triangular cooperation established in the project "Strengthening Feminist Foreign Policy and Feminist International Cooperation through a community of practice between Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Germany and ECLAC", which was approved by the Regional Fund for Triangular Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean (BMZ/GIZ) in 2024, is the Fund's first cooperation initiative on gender equality and feminist cooperation and the first initiative of that kind in which ECLAC has participated.

I. A strategic alliance to confront the structural challenges of gender inequality

The purpose of the Strategic Alliance between ECLAC and BMZ, created in 1980, is to contribute to sustainable development by bridging social, economic and environmental gaps in development and to further regional integration in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The project "Success criteria for a feminist development cooperation policy specific to Latin America and the Caribbean", launched in 2022, is taking place in a challenging context. The region faces multiple, cascading and interconnected crises that threaten to deepen its historical structural inequalities (ECLAC, 2023b). A low-growth trend that affects fiscal space and the creation of decent employment is compounded by environmental and care crises. Structural inequalities disproportionately affect women (ECLAC, 2024j), particularly those who face multiple and interrelated forms of discrimination, such as rural, Indigenous and Afrodescendent women, women with disabilities or those in situations of human mobility. In addition, many of the region's countries face high levels of public debt, and the region is not among the priority destinations for international cooperation and other types of financing.

Latin America and the Caribbean have taken significant steps to promote constitutional, statutory, political and cultural transformations that have modified various discriminatory institutional structures. In particular, the region has consolidated formal equality by including the principle of equality and non-discrimination in its constitutional and regulatory frameworks. Progress has been made with the enactment of laws against gender violence, prohibiting child marriage, against wage discrimination and so on, and in gender-mainstreaming in the different branches of government. However, challenges remain in the implementation and funding of policies for equality, and so substantive equality remains an aspiration in the region. ECLAC therefore proposes moving towards a care society as a new paradigm for a future that guarantees the sustainability of life and the planet and that recognizes the interdependence in synergy between people, the environment and economic and social development (ECLAC, 2022b).

The region is not starting from scratch: Latin America and the Caribbean is notable as the only region to have a United Nations intergovernmental regional body for these issues since 1977: the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. Over half a century, the ECLAC member States have held 15 sessions of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean and have agreed on an ambitious, profound, comprehensive and cumulative Regional Gender Agenda, which guides the countries' public policies in pursuit of gender equality, guaranteed rights for women, adolescents and girls in all their diversity, women's autonomy and the region's sustainable development (ECLAC, 2023c). The Conference is a subsidiary body of ECLAC and, since 2020, its sessions are organized in coordination with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). It enjoys broad participation by the region's governments and by representatives of the United Nations system, various international organizations, academia and civil society organizations, particularly women's and feminist movements (ECLAC, 2024d).

Latin America and the Caribbean also has a long tradition of contributions by feminists and their organizations to multilateralism, sustainable development and peace, and this—together with the efforts of governments and multilateral organizations—has nurtured a regional and global network of human rights instruments, rules, institutions and policies dedicated to achieving gender equality and upholding women's rights. Additionally, "the countries of the region have worked actively in global and regional forums to integrate gender equality as a guiding principle and pillar into global agreements on climate change, sustainable development, migration, financing for development, human rights, peace and security, international cooperation and international trade, among other topics, which shows that no area of foreign policy is gender-neutral and that women's full and equal participation remains a work in progress everywhere" (Güezmes and Romero, 2024, p. 10).

In early March 2023, BMZ published the document *Feminist Development Policy: For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide* (BMZ, 2023a), followed by the Third Development Policy Action Plan on Gender Equality (2023–27) (BMZ, 2023d), which focuses on securing women's human rights and on "overcoming the structural and systemic causes behind the lack of equality by taking into account the intersectionality of discrimination's different characteristics so that all people can participate equally and autonomously in social, political and economic life" (BMZ, 2023a, p. 5). In its publications, BMZ emphasizes what it calls the "three Rs": rights, resources and representation (BMZ, 2023a, p. 6). With regard to budget issues, BMZ has undertaken to ensure that by 2025, fully 93% of the funds available for new projects will be allocated to those that promote gender equality. This target includes 85% of funds for projects where gender equality is a significant objective and 8% for projects where gender equality is the main objective (BMZ, 2023b). In comparison, the ministry reported that the corresponding figure in 2021 was around 64%.

At the regional level, Mexico was the first country in the region and the Global South to adopt a feminist foreign policy, as early as 2020. Mexico's example was followed by Chile in 2022 and by Colombia in 2024.

In 2022, GIZ and the ECLAC Division for Gender Affairs developed the project "Success criteria for a feminist development cooperation policy specific to Latin America and the Caribbean" to draft recommendations and define criteria to reconfigure Germany's cooperation initiatives so as to align them with the timescales and objectives that the region has set for itself on the topics of gender equality and women's rights and autonomy through the Regional Gender Agenda (ECLAC, 2023c). To that end, the German cooperation authorities and ECLAC have organized various workshops, events and meetings, attended by government representatives from Germany and Latin American and Caribbean countries, ECLAC officials and members of civil society organizations, particularly women's and feminist organizations and think tanks.

The first strategic dialogue session took place at the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Buenos Aires in November 2022 (ECLAC, 2022a). The ECLAC Division for Gender Affairs was also represented at the German week on Latin America and the Caribbean, during which it participated

in the dialogue “Designing a feminist policy for development cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean. Expert dialogue with Minister Svenja Schulze” (ECLAC, 2023a). With the help of a German think tank, ECLAC and GIZ analysed the portfolio of German cooperation projects with gender objectives implemented in selected Latin American and Caribbean countries between 2017 and 2022, in order to present BMZ with recommendations on opportunities for improvement.

One successful milestone based on the recommendation to align Germany’s regional cooperation project portfolio with the priorities of the Regional Gender Agenda is a regional project launched in 2024 with ECLAC on the care economy, the aim of which is to advance towards the care society: a goal that the region agreed to pursue in the Buenos Aires Commitment. This is the first ECLAC-BMZ/GIZ Strategic Alliance project where gender equality is the main objective. The ECLAC Division for Gender Affairs also participated in panel 2, “Accelerating the Achievement of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Latin America and the Caribbean”, of the VII Regional Conference on Trilateral Cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean 2024: “Overcoming Obstacles, Building Bridges” (GIZ, 2024a). To summarize, all these opportunities for policy dialogue and exchanges of experiences, reflections, lessons learned and good practices served to strengthen the ECLAC-BMZ/GIZ Strategic Alliance, joint learning and the interconnection of a range of actors.

Significant progress has been made with integrating the gender perspective into international relations over the last five decades, especially since the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará, 1994), together with other treaties, conventions and agreements that provide an international legal framework for protecting, upholding and guaranteeing the human rights of women, adolescents and girls in all their diversity. Also notable were the global commitments made by the States in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015), Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security, the Pact for the Future (2024) and other essential agreements for sustainable development.

As noted above, the region has adopted its Regional Gender Agenda, which operates in synergy with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the 2030 Agenda and the international and regional human rights frameworks that set out fundamental agreements for addressing the structural causes of gender inequality, achieving a transformative recovery with gender equality oriented towards the sustainability of life and moving towards a care society (ECLAC, 2023e). The Montevideo Strategy for implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the sustainable development framework by 2030 (ECLAC, 2017) identifies four structural challenges that need to be addressed to attain gender equality: (i) socioeconomic inequality and persistent poverty, (ii) patriarchal, discriminatory and violent cultural patterns and the prevailing culture of privilege, (iii) the sexual division of labour and the unjust social organization of care, and (iv) the concentration of power and hierarchical relations in the public arena (see diagram 1).

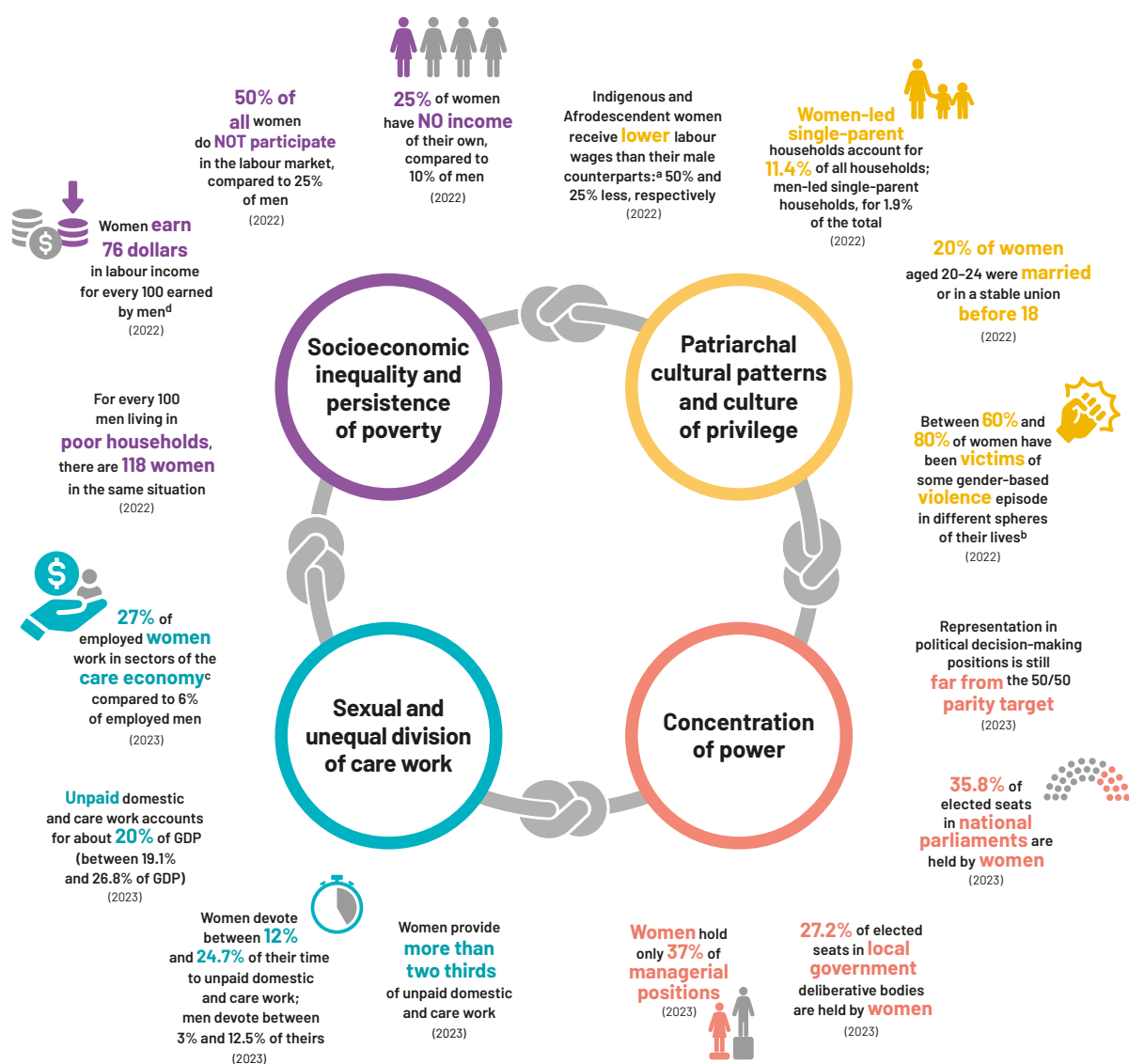
As already explained, Latin America and the Caribbean is notable as the only region where governments have agreed on a Regional Gender Agenda that acts in synergy with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the 2030 Agenda and international and regional human rights frameworks. In the Buenos Aires Commitment, ECLAC member States undertook to promote North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation for the agenda’s implementation. The commitment sets out fundamental agreements for addressing the structural causes of gender inequality, achieving a transformative recovery with gender equality oriented towards life sustainability, and moving towards a care society (ECLAC, 2023e).

The region has made progress towards parity in the area of education: in fact, women on average have more years of schooling than men, but this is not yet reflected in their full participation in the economy, politics, science and technology, or many other fields. Women are overrepresented in poor households, often lack their own incomes, face violence in all its forms and must deal with a scarcity of opportunities. The development model that has predominated in the region is closely related to the fact that Latin America and the Caribbean

is the world's most unequal region. At the current rate of progress, it is unlikely that the structural challenges will be overcome and substantive gender equality achieved by 2030. Finally, the growth of conservative groups and their global and regional alliances, which have called into question commitments to gender equality, pose a major threat for the coming decade.

Diagram 1

Latin America and the Caribbean: selected data on the structural challenges of gender inequality



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean; CEPALSTAT [online database] <https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/index.html?lang=en>; Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG); Repository of information on time use in Latin America and the Caribbean; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean/United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (ECLAC/UN-Women), *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Regional Gender Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean: gender indicators up to 2023* (LC/TS.2024/19), Santiago, 2024.

^a In purchasing power parity (PPP) dollars.

^b According to data from those countries with prevalence studies (Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay).

^c The care economy sector comprises the health, education and domestic service (households as employers) sectors of economic activity.

^d Hourly income in PPP dollars.

The Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean is a very important tool for monitoring strategic indicators and analysing trends. Official statistical information from the region's countries (see diagram 1) has much to say about the characteristics of the structural challenges of gender inequality (ECLAC, 2024i). First, with respect to socioeconomic inequality and the persistence of poverty in a context of exclusionary growth, it must be noted that inequality of opportunities is seen at both the individual and household levels. Thus, the index of femininity in poor households shows that in 2023, for every 100 men living in poor households in the region, there were 121 women in the same situation (ECLAC, 2024j). This fact is closely related to people's ability to generate their own incomes: in 2023, 26.3% of the region's women had no individual monetary income of any kind, compared to 10.1% of men.² In turn, those results are related to labour market and employment participation rates: in 2023,³ the former was 74.2% among men and 51.8% among women, the respective employment rates⁴ were 70.2% and 47.8%, and the unemployment rates stood at 5.4% and 7.7%. This inequality also impacts the income of employed women: in 2022, for every 100 dollars that men received in labour income, women received 76.

The situation described above is closely related to the second structural challenge of gender inequality: the sexual division of labour and the unfair organization of care, which manifests itself in the observed differences in participation in domestic and unpaid care work. Women spend three times as much time as men on work of this kind, which sustains life and the economy. Unpaid domestic and care work represents between 19% and 27% of GDP in the region's countries, and 74% of it is performed by women. In 2023, 56.3% of the women outside the labour market in Latin American countries were engaged exclusively in unpaid domestic and care work, compared to 7.3% of men (ECLAC, 2024j).

Patriarchal, discriminatory and violent cultural patterns and the persistence of the culture of privilege—which constitute another of the structural challenges of gender inequality—are seen in such harmful practices as child marriage: in 2022, one in five women aged 20–24 were either married or in a stable union before turning 18. In addition, according to data from countries with violence prevalence studies, in 2022 between 60% and 80% of women reported having been victims of gender-based violence at some point in their lives and in different settings. Moreover, in 2023, at least 3,897 women were victims of femicide in 27 Latin American countries and Caribbean territories, representing at least 11 violent gender-related deaths of women every day (ECLAC, 2024k).

Finally, as regards the concentration of power and hierarchical relations in the public sphere, the region is far from parity in women's political representation. Regional data for 2023 show an average representation rate of women in elected seats in national parliaments of 36%, and one of 27% in local governments. That situation underscores the need to pursue measures to bolster women's political participation and to incorporate the gender perspective into decision-making at the local level.

With increasing leadership, the region's countries have included the Regional Gender Agenda's agreements in discussions at global and regional forums in order to incorporate gender equality as a guiding principle and axis of global agreements on climate change, sustainable development, migration, development financing, human rights, peace and security, international cooperation and international trade. This shows that there is no area of foreign or cooperation policy that is gender-neutral and that overcoming the structural challenges of gender inequality and achieving the full participation of women under conditions of equality is still a pending task for the world.

² See Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), "Population without own income, by sex, age group and area" [online] https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/databank/index.html?lang=es&indicator_id=3343&lang=en.

³ See Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), "Labour force participation rate, by sex" [online] https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/databank/index.html?lang=es&indicator_id=2470&lang=en.

⁴ See Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), "Employment rate by sex" [online] https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/databank/index.html?lang=es&indicator_id=2471&lang=en.

The sixteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean is to be held in Mexico in 2025, as part of the commemoration of 50 years since the World Conference of the International Women's Year (Mexico City, 1975) and 30 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995). It will also take place five years before the deadline for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Based on the idea of promoting the care society and gender equality, the Conference will aim to present –from the territorial level to the national, and from the regional level to the global– a proposal and resolved, decisive actions for achieving substantive equality, peace and development.

II. Conclusions and recommendations for cooperation between Germany and Latin America and the Caribbean within the framework of the Regional Gender Agenda

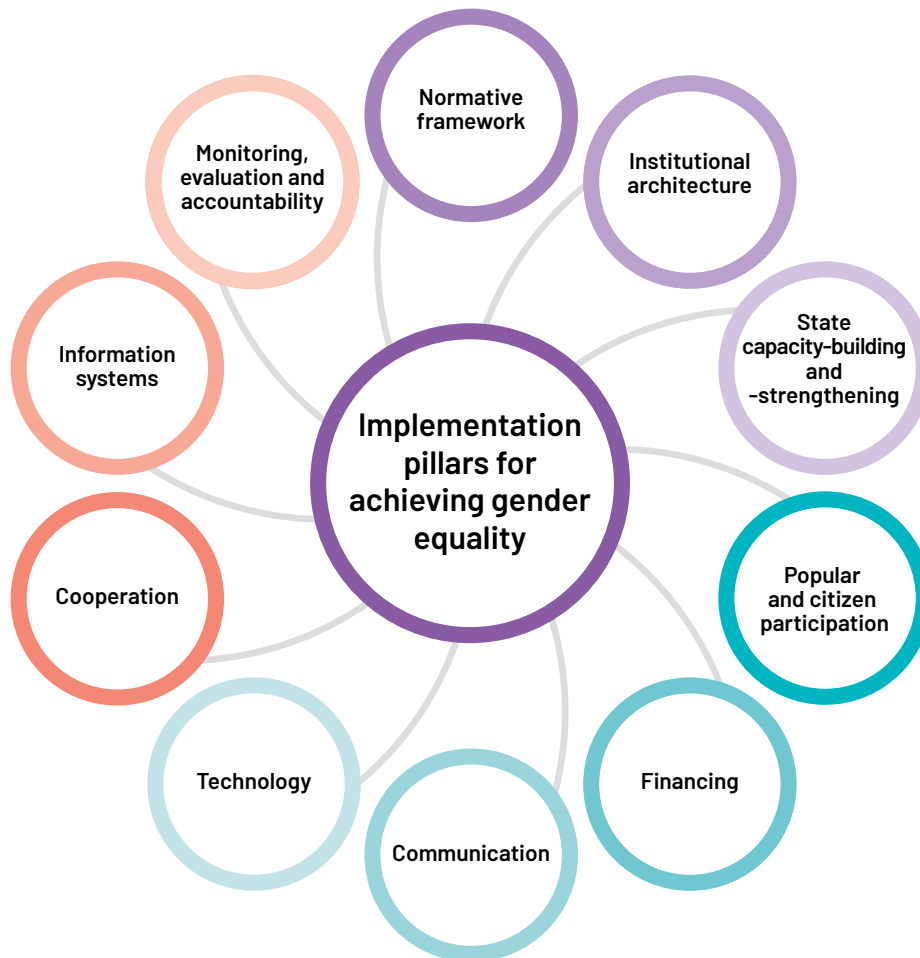
In its *Feminist Development Policy: For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide*, BMZ (2023a) defines four action areas to overcome discriminatory power structures and sets the following specific objectives for each of them: (i) enforcing the rights of women and marginalized groups, guaranteeing their access to resources and promoting their representation (action area 1), (ii) enshrining the feminist approach across its project portfolio (action area 2), (iii) strengthening feminist development policy in international partnerships (action area 3), and (iv) continuing to develop its own structures and ways of working in line with a feminist development policy based on reflection (action area 4). The BMZ further elaborates on these action areas in its Third Development Policy Action Plan on Gender Equality (2023–27) (BMZ, 2023c), which describes measures linked to the commitments adopted in the Regional Gender Agenda.

The existence of regional instruments such as the Montevideo Strategy, which is aimed at assisting States in their pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Regional Gender Agenda, represents an operational leap forward and provides a valuable guide for countries that, like Germany, seek to accelerate progress towards gender equality through international policies and to prioritize the implementation and strengthening of sectoral and cross-cutting public policies aimed at guaranteeing substantive gender equality and the autonomy and human rights of women in all their diversity. Accordingly, addressing gender equality from the perspective of women's autonomy in its three dimensions (physical, economic and decision-making), in conjunction with overcoming the structural challenges of inequality described above, represents a qualitative leap for the Regional Gender Agenda, which seeks to transform the systems and mechanisms that perpetuate gender inequality in the region.

The Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030 was approved by the ECLAC member States and sets out 74 measures across 10 implementation pillars: (1) normative framework, (2) institutional architecture, (3) popular and citizen participation, (4) State capacity-building and -strengthening, (5) financing, (6) communication, (7) technology, (8) cooperation, (9) information systems, and (10) monitoring, evaluation and accountability (see diagram 2).

This chapter presents a series of recommendations for German cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean in line with the 10 implementation pillars of the Montevideo Strategy, together with the Santiago Commitment and Buenos Aires Commitment, as part of the Regional Gender Agenda agreed on at the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean.

- **Diagram 2**
Implementation pillars of the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030* (LC/CRM.13/5), Santiago, 2017.

A. Normative framework

The adoption of a gender approach by the ministries responsible for foreign and development policy in Germany (the Federal Foreign Office and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)) represents a major turning point that is fully aligned with pillar 1 (normative framework) of the Montevideo Strategy. In that context, the challenge is to further the institutionalization of this approach, thereby ensuring that the feminist perspective becomes a State policy.

The adoption of national laws intended to strengthen the objectives and instruments of foreign and international development cooperation policies is an option for achieving tangible and sustainable changes, together with the adoption, ratification and full respect for the international and regional normative framework governing gender equality and the human rights of women and girls. This commitment implies implementing international conventions, agreements and consensuses at all levels and branches of government and systematically reporting on their enforcement, in order to contribute to progress towards substantive equality. Beyond those commitments, which are binding on all United Nations Member States, countries that advocate for feminist foreign policies and feminist international development cooperation policies demonstrate their potential and

commitment by continuing to establish agreements, consensuses and mechanisms to accelerate gender equality and uphold the rights of all women and girls. These actions are carried out at multilateral, regional and bilateral forums.

In the current context of cascading crises, the cooperation between ECLAC and BMZ/GIZ plays a fundamental role in defining priorities, allocating resources and directing transformations, in keeping with the principles of horizontal exchanges and collective learning. Ensuring that the feminist perspective permeates all the institutional structures of German cooperation and that it cuts across all cooperation undertakings as one of its main objectives, in line with pillar 1 of the Montevideo Strategy, poses an additional challenge.

B. Institutional architecture

The consolidation of a foreign and development cooperation policy as a fundamental pillar of structural transformation for achieving gender equality and ensuring women's rights requires its institutionalization as a State policy. In addition to the normative framework, contributions to the institutional architecture can be made by a framework document or strategy that clarifies the essence of feminist foreign policy and feminist development cooperation and sets out political and technical goals and guidelines to facilitate the achievement of the established objectives in all areas of government. Not only does this process create synergy among internal efforts, it also provides a measurable standard for civil society—especially women's and feminist organizations—to evaluate progress and participate in accountability processes. Germany, like other countries that have moved in this direction, has adopted its *Feminist Development Policy: For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide* (BMZ, 2023a) and its Third Development Policy Action Plan on Gender Equality (2023–27) (BMZ, 2023d). This approach, which is aligned with the principles of pillar 2 of the Montevideo Strategy, seeks to establish solid institutional, administrative and legal anchors to ensure the durability of the political mandate.

In that context, establishing a solid institutional architecture for feminist cooperation is essential. Progress with identifying priorities and setting a road map on the feminist perspective in cooperation and in all areas of development is a necessary objective. The training of technical and political officers to build narratives, proposals and tools to consolidate the feminist perspective is a crucial step. In line with pillar 2 of the Montevideo Strategy, these actions seek to reach all institutional structures and make the feminist perspective a cross-cutting and priority objective in the development and implementation of feminist foreign and development cooperation policy.

C. Popular and citizen participation

Civil society's effective participation in the design and execution of feminist policies is an essential element in ensuring their success and legitimacy. The implementation of open consultations that encourage greater transparency and participation, the inclusion of valuable knowledge and experiences from women in the Global South and the promotion of inclusive dialogues with various sectors of civil society—and with women's and feminist organizations in particular—not only enrich the process, but also consolidate the foundations of those policies. Although this represents an additional challenge since the region is not a priority in bilateral international cooperation, it does offer the opportunity to innovate through triangular, South-South and circular cooperation models with processes in which an active civil society participates.

Civil society has played a leading role in the region, especially women's and feminist organizations and groups of human rights defenders in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Montevideo Strategy recognizes citizen participation, particularly by women's and feminist organizations and movements, as a key pillar for the implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda, policy follow-up and strengthening democracy. The Buenos Aires Commitment calls for the promotion of exchanges and alliances among those organizations and between them and States to ensure progress towards the objectives set out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Regional Gender Agenda, fostering conditions for the participation by such organizations, addressing cultural and linguistic barriers, and identifying and securing funding sources (ECLAC, 2023e).

At the same time, it should be noted that the region recognizes the vital importance of including women's and feminist organizations and extending determined support to them. Thus, one pioneering initiative that arose from the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean is the Regional Fund in Support of Women's and Feminist Organizations and Movements (ECLAC/UN-Women, 2022). This fund has a Board of Directors made up of representatives of governments, women's and feminist organizations, networks, movements and ECLAC, together with a secretariat comprising representatives of governments and women's and feminist organizations and the UN-Women Regional Office as the administrating entity.

This participatory approach, as part of the *Feminist Development Policy: For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide* (BMZ, 2023a), is in alignment with pillar 3, "popular and citizen participation", of the Montevideo Strategy, which underscores the importance of the active and diverse participation of women at all levels of decision-making, thus contributing to the construction of policies and actions that more effectively reflect the needs and aspirations of the region's women.

D. State capacity-building and -strengthening

Building and strengthening capacities is essential in guaranteeing the effective implementation of a feminist foreign and development cooperation policy, in line with pillar 4 (State capacity-building and -strengthening) of the Montevideo Strategy. The development of action plans, budgeting tools, implementation guidelines and other documents that define precise responsibilities and specific standards for each area involved is essential to achieve consistent and efficient implementation.

The *Feminist Development Policy: For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide* (BMZ, 2023a) recognizes the importance of BMZ setting an institutional example and of its staff receiving continuous training in key aspects of the policy. Training and continuing education could contribute to the development of a civil service with a feminist perspective. Providing the necessary training, skill development processes and evaluations to all the staff of the ministries and agencies responsible for foreign and cooperation policy for feminist development is crucial in mainstreaming gender issues in their day-to-day work. Several countries, including Germany, have therefore paid keen attention to this issue and recognized that international feminist policies must transform all departments of the affected ministries and agencies as well as their multilateral, bilateral and regional spheres of action. Given the wide range of issues addressed by feminist cooperation policies, the transfer of knowledge and experiences between countries –especially to adapt successful approaches to different contexts– is an invaluable resource. Exchanges of experiences and technical assistance, both nationally and internationally, have the potential to improve the capacity of the actors involved in policy development and implementation to achieve tangible results.

E. Financing

The allocation of specific resources for the advancement of gender equality is a key issue for the successful implementation of a feminist foreign and development cooperation policy; resources for the transformations required must therefore be mobilized and made available. German cooperation is committed to stepping up its bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation with its partners in the region through various cooperation mechanisms. As noted above, BMZ has undertaken to ensure that by 2025, fully 93% of the funds available for new projects will be allocated to those that promote gender equality (BMZ, 2023b).

Given the limited fiscal space in the region, the use of innovative financing mechanisms can help to secure adequate and sustainable resources for the long-term implementation of a feminist foreign and development cooperation policy. Strengthening and progressively increasing the volume of resources dedicated to North-South, South-South and triangular international cooperation is also crucial for implementing feminist foreign policies and programmes centred on women's rights and autonomy and adapted to local contexts (Güezmes and Romero, 2024).

F. Project portfolio and management

The objectives of the BMZ *Feminist Development Policy: For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide* (2023a) include anchoring the feminist approach in projects and promoting gender equality in a targeted way (action area 2). This requires structural changes, but also the adoption of an innovative approach to tools for facilitating the mainstreaming of the gender perspective in all phases of the project cycle: diagnosis, formulation, implementation and evaluation. Similarly, it is necessary to increase the number of specific projects for gender equality and to mainstream the gender perspective across the project portfolio (including environmental projects) and in addressing strategic issues (such as care, for example). All this must be done using a multi-stakeholder and multi-level approach from the local to the national, regional and global levels.

The analyses of the project portfolio jointly carried out by GIZ and the ECLAC Division for Gender Affairs were initially conducted on the GIZ portfolio in Colombia and Peru. They were subsequently extended to bilateral projects with the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Paraguay, and to regional projects with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), ECLAC, the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) and the Central American Integration System (SICA). Notable results of the studies in relation to the agreements that make up the Regional Gender Agenda include the following:

1. Strategic contents and the analytical framework for gender in projects

The projects analysed reported progress with identifying gender inequalities, especially in the preparation phase, and they use analytical frameworks consistent with international standards. The existence of internal gender strategies, such as the one adopted by GIZ, has been an important success factor, as they considerably influence the content and implementation of development cooperation through projects and programmes. It is also useful to be able to draw on global concepts and guidelines that show how to incorporate the gender perspective into the priority sectors of German development cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean. In the formulation stage, however, there is a need for improved coordination with the Regional Gender Agenda in the region's different priority areas pursued by BMZ. At the same time, further development of the intersectionality approach and gender mainstreaming in environmental projects is needed.

2. Project formulation and management

One positive aspect seen in the projects undertaken is the adoption of forms, instructions and guidelines. In most of the projects, the diagnostic phase is the most complete as regards the incorporation of the gender approach. Here, several factors facilitate its inclusion: staff with expertise in the field, instruments for gender analysis, focal points trained in gender analysis in each country, information available for conducting disaggregated analyses, and a practice of differentiated situation analysis systematically included by GIZ as a requirement in recent years. In the implementation phase, however, the gender approach has not been so systematically incorporated. The reasons for this include the limited availability of documentation and the lack of specific monitoring and evaluation tools with a gender perspective.

According to the Regional Gender Agenda, the availability of disaggregated data and gender and intersectional analyses are key to the effective development of gender policies and strategies and to the formulation of strategies to address inequalities. To that end, the availability of national statistical information and data must be improved across the region, as must its accessibility. The incorporation of existing data sources, such as the ECLAC Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, could be useful in the strategies. Sex-disaggregated data collection and gender analysis requires further integration into all different development cooperation project models.

Finally, regarding project analysis, emphasis is placed on the importance of financing and the need to strengthen funding to overcome gender inequalities. There is therefore a need for adequate funding to comply with the gender priorities established in the projects, and also to guarantee greater funding for projects with the main objective of promoting gender equality and to explore strategies such as gender-focused budgeting and gender markers to improve project effectiveness.

3. Leadership, management and institutional experience

All the actors interviewed acknowledged the ongoing progress achieved with incorporating gender issues and the gender approach into BMZ projects in the region. This process has evolved from simply setting general guidelines in the initial stages to the concrete tools currently available and the explicit requirement in force to include a gender perspective in all phases of cooperation projects. The interviewees indicated the need to strengthen training on the gender approach for all professionals —not only the focal points— in order to facilitate the understanding of how those tools are used and the development of impactful gender indicators that are comparable in quality and usefulness with indicators from other sectors and in line with the agreements adopted in the Regional Gender Agenda.

The leadership role of decision-makers and their continuous support are fundamental pillars for the successful implementation of the gender perspective in projects and programmes. Progress has been made in this area in response to the new priorities and relevance of the gender agenda and the feminist perspective in cooperation. Their permanent involvement in the development of that perspective should be guaranteed. The formal establishment of focal points for gender in the countries is crucial for gender mainstreaming at all project stages. In order for focal points' contributions to have an impact on the decision-making process, their responsibilities must be adequately defined and they must be equipped with the necessary level of seniority and influence to be able to carry them out.

As for the staff involved in project management, greater awareness and support for the gender equality agenda were observed; accordingly, the willingness of staff to work on this agenda at all levels can be further strengthened through continuous training, extending capacity-building to implementing organizations and establishing continuous learning structures. However, the shift in perspective from gender as a cross-cutting issue to gender equality as a main objective of development has not yet been fully realized. That transition could be reinforced through technical and awareness-raising support. Another option, as proposed by the Regional Gender Agenda, is to include affirmative actions that promote decent work and the full, meaningful and equal participation of women in leadership positions: for example, in strategic sectors of the economy or in environmental projects.

G. Partnerships for cooperation

A feminist development policy requires alliances to promote systematic and structural changes, and to deal with possible instances of backsliding with women's rights and gender equality. One of the objectives of the *BMZ Feminist Development Policy: For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide* (2023a) is to further develop international partnerships (action area 3), in the recognition that international and multilateral cooperation supports and leverages more gender equality (BMZ, 2023a). Thus, pillar 8 of the Montevideo Strategy (cooperation: towards democratic multilateral governance), sets out a series of measures to advance international cooperation and partnerships for Latin America and the Caribbean in order to support efforts to achieve gender equality and guarantee women's rights. Likewise, the Buenos Aires Commitment also calls for North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation in various areas. Triangular cooperation is another multilateral mechanism that contributes to strengthening feminist policy. Thus, "BMZ makes increasing use of triangular cooperation in order to build horizontal partnerships. In the context of triangular cooperation, the feminist development policy approach will be incorporated into a practical structure for shared learning and shared responsibility" (BMZ, 2023a, p. 33).

Pursuing this agenda requires stepping up and planning triangular cooperation and German non-State cooperation, interconnecting specialists and experiences and fostering exchanges and learning acquired in overcoming certain development problems associated with the reproduction and maintenance of gender inequalities in the region. According to pillar 8 of the Montevideo Strategy: "feminist foreign and cooperation policies in Latin America and the Caribbean have the potential to catalyse cooperation strategies between countries with similar gender equality challenges and shared goals to secure women's human rights and autonomy" (Güezmes and Romero, 2024, p. 78). Forging alliances in the framework of feminist foreign policy offers an opportunity for mutual learning and for strengthening the way in which it is addressed at the global level. An example of this is the project "Strengthening Feminist Foreign Policy and Feminist International Cooperation through a community of practice between Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Germany and ECLAC" (see chapter III).

It is important for Latin America and the Caribbean to step up bilateral technical cooperation at local levels of action, through whichever cities, mayors' offices and municipalities that can share substantive experiences with respect to gender equality in their territories (BMZ, 2023c, p. 20) and the exchange of good practices and experiences. It is also important to promote regional dialogue on gender equality among specialists in different areas in which several countries are making major investments through bilateral cooperation or in response to transnational phenomena (ECLAC, 2019, pp. 33–35). Such actions should be broadened and deepened within the framework of the current agreements with multilateral regional organizations.

In line with the commitments assumed in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Regional Gender Agenda, the region's governments have machineries for the advancement of women, the purpose of which is to direct and coordinate gender equality policies and ensure that gender equality mainstreaming processes permeate the entire structure of the State. Several countries have also established gender equality mechanisms in sectoral ministries, such those responsible for the economy, the environment, infrastructure and foreign affairs, thereby reinforcing the institutional framework for gender mainstreaming within the State. Progress has also been made with the creation of intersectoral coordination mechanisms for gender policies and women's rights at the national and subnational levels. Proactively involving machineries for the advancement of women in development cooperation ensures that processes are aligned with international and national standards and practices for the inclusion of a gender approach. Hence, projects should collaborate more regularly with those machineries for the advancement of women and also facilitate linkages with subsidiary bodies such as the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean and the priorities of the Regional Gender Agenda. At the same time, the effective participation of civil society organizations in conducting analyses and as active programme and project subjects is key in guaranteeing that the priorities established in projects correspond to the strategic interests of women and to the advancement of their agendas in coordination with the government agencies that act as German cooperation's counterparts.

H. Information systems

Mainstreaming the gender and intersectional perspective in the production of statistics is essential to generate data that reveal the persistence and magnitude of societal inequalities, in line with pillar 9 of the Montevideo Strategy on information systems. It is also crucial for "transforming data into information, information into knowledge and knowledge into political decisions" (ECLAC, 2017, p. 32). Official statistics are therefore vitally indispensable as a source of information for the design and implementation of policies and programmes that help achieve gender equality and women's autonomy (ECLAC, 2024e).

According to its *Feminist Development Policy: For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide*, BMZ (2023a) aims to improve its empirical base and use it systematically for the design and implementation of related policies. Similarly, the actions set out in its Third Development Policy Action Plan on Gender Equality (2023–27) (BMZ, 2023d) seek to strengthen the collection and use of gender data that disaggregate the reality of the lives of women and marginalized groups according to various criteria, such as intersectionality and gender-specific issues.

The Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (SCA-ECLAC) has made progress with several initiatives. One example is the design of instruments such as the *Guidelines for mainstreaming the gender perspective in statistical production* (ECLAC, 2024e). In the Buenos Aires Commitment, adopted at the fifteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2022, the region's countries agreed to "promote gender mainstreaming in national statistical systems through coordinated work between bodies that produce and use information and guaranteeing the allocation of a sufficient budget and the periodicity of measurements and the dissemination of information" and to "promote the adoption of a gender, intersectional and intercultural perspective in the production and use of statistical information". These guidelines, which provide assistance for incorporating the gender perspective into the eight phases of the statistical process, are aimed primarily at the agencies of national statistical systems. Thus, the forging of strategic alliances in the region to strengthen statistical systems with a gender perspective is an important issue, one that entails providing the necessary resources and technical capacity and promoting increased exchanges of experiences, in light of the varying levels of institutional capacities found in the region's countries.

I. Monitoring, evaluation and accountability

Like any other public policy, a feminist development cooperation policy requires a robust monitoring and evaluation system that allows for accountability regarding its impact and results. The *Feminist Development Policy: For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide* (BMZ, 2023a) covers the development of evaluation mechanisms and tools to measure the impact of policy implementation in the medium and long terms, including participatory mechanisms with civil society and partnerships with specialized institutions. Monitoring the impact of policy measures is interconnected with the Third Development Policy Action Plan on Gender Equality (2023–27) (BMZ, 2023d).

The 10th pillar of the Montevideo Strategy, “monitoring, evaluation and accountability: guaranteeing rights and transparency”, considers that monitoring and evaluating the Strategy’s implementation and accountability are part of the cycle of planning and implementing gender equality and women’s rights policies, and says that they enable the analysis of obstacles and progress in the fulfilment of the commitments assumed by the States. At the same time, it calls for coordination between different accountability instruments.

Given the challenges that exist in assessing the real impact and transformative changes of feminist foreign and development cooperation policies, joining efforts and developing partnerships between BMZ and ECLAC—as well as with the region’s countries—is essential for the development of innovative monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess both the real impact and also areas for improvement in the implementation of existing policies and instruments with feminist monitoring and evaluation methods. Since BMZ plans to evaluate the implementation of its policy and the successes it has achieved in 2025 (BMZ, 2023a), adopting a particular focus on assessing the policy’s implementation in Latin America and the Caribbean based on the Regional Gender Agenda is recommended, which would broaden the scope of the study and help identify areas in which further collaboration is needed.

In the short term, a simple and updated follow-up system should be developed in the region to monitor progress in gender mainstreaming in cooperation projects, as regards both the achievement of results and goals and the volume of gender-related investments in Latin America and the Caribbean.

III. Bridges to the future: the project “Strengthening Feminist Foreign Policy and Feminist International Cooperation through a community of practice between Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Germany and ECLAC

The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have recognized the need for greater speed in achieving gender equality through a renewed international cooperation agreement that includes innovative mechanisms and strengthened synergies and partnerships with the broadest spectrum of actors, in which no one is left behind (ECLAC, 2023d) and in which all people and all countries participate in pursuit of the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda and the objectives of the Regional Gender Agenda. As noted in this document, the international context demands adopting urgent action and raising the ambition and scale of joint efforts at the regional and international levels.

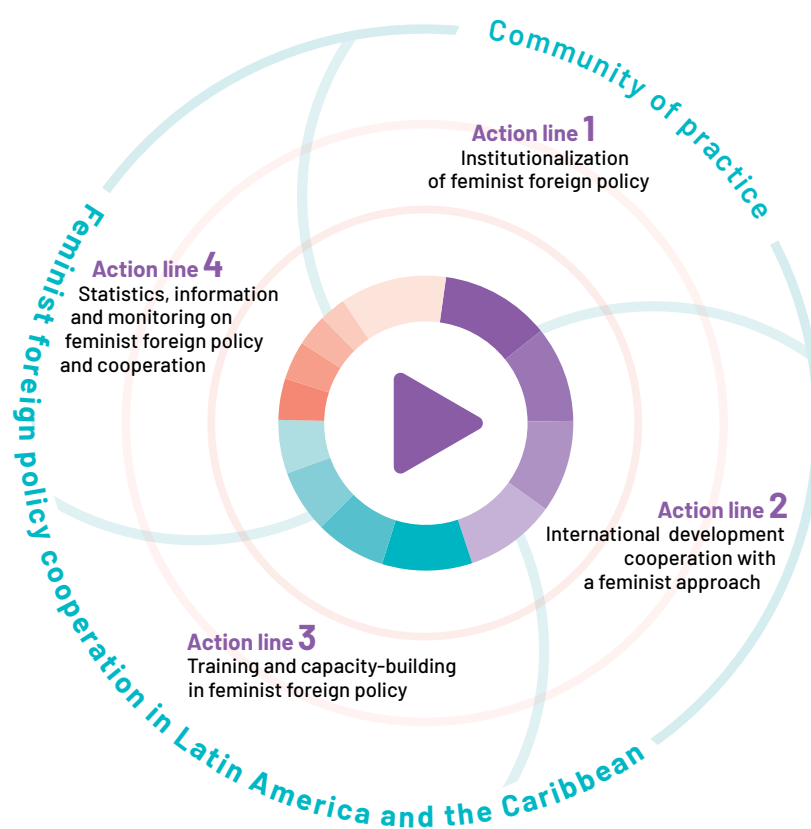
Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Germany and ECLAC have launched a promising initiative in this regard. In 2023, they jointly embarked on the design of a triangular cooperation project that was submitted to the BMZ/GIZ Regional Fund for Triangular Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean under its 25th call for proposals.

By establishing a community of practice, Chile, Colombia and Mexico—the three countries in the region that currently have a feminist foreign policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Chile, 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia, 2024b; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, 2020)—joined forces with Germany (BMZ) and ECLAC in this project. This is the first cooperation initiative on gender equality and feminist cooperation of the BMZ/GIZ Regional Fund for Triangular Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean and the first of this kind in which ECLAC participates.

In order to achieve that goal, the project is structured around four key areas of work (see diagram 3). The first action line aims at strengthening and institutionalizing feminist foreign policy in the foreign ministries of Chile, Colombia and Mexico (as regards the political, regulatory and operational frameworks), under the leadership of Chile. In this way, the project's goal is to ensure that the feminist foreign policies are sustainable policies. The second line of action involves strengthening international cooperation for development with a feminist approach within foreign ministries and international cooperation agencies (as appropriate), and identifying guidelines, directives, practices and methodologies in a community of practice hosted by ECLAC. In addition, in order to contribute to the effective development of this policy in the public sector, enabling it to permeate the different levels of the partner countries' foreign ministries and cooperation agencies, it involves a third line of action, led by Colombia: strengthening training and capacity-building, such as the ownership, when appropriate, of feminist foreign policy by officials of foreign affairs ministries and international development cooperation agencies. Finally, a fourth action line, led by Mexico, focuses on the production of information and data collection on the partner countries' progress with strengthening their feminist foreign policies and international development cooperation policies; it also addresses the collection of statistics on persistent gaps and progress in the proportion of women in diplomatic careers, in international negotiations and in the leadership of key issues in international development cooperation in the partner countries. This line of action will help increase the collection of data on women's participation in the diplomatic sphere and international negotiations, which in turn will allow the monitoring and evaluation of progress in these areas, as well as accountability to civil society.

▪ **Diagram 3**

Action lines of the project "Strengthening Feminist Foreign Policy and Feminist International Cooperation through a community of practice between Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Germany and ECLAC", 2023



Source: Prepared by the author.

The project has thus enabled alliances to be forged between the partner countries at different levels. May 2024 saw the official launch of the project “Strengthening Feminist Foreign Policy and Feminist International Cooperation through a community of practice between Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Germany and ECLAC” (ECLAC, 2024b) at the VII Regional Conference on Trilateral Cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean held in Salvador, Brazil (GIZ, 2024b). This event allowed for exchanges of best practices and lessons learned in triangular cooperation projects in areas such as climate action, gender equality and social inclusion. It also marked the formal beginning of the creation of a community of practice.

The interconnection of joint efforts was also seen in the partner countries’ participation at the III Ministerial Conference on Feminist Foreign Policies (Government of Mexico, 2024) held in Mexico City in early July 2024. Led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico and jointly organized by the National Women’s Institute of Mexico (INMUJERES)⁵ and UN-Women, the Conference brought together representatives of more than 40 States, 13 international organizations and more than 100 civil society organizations and was the first conference on feminist foreign policy in the Global South. The resulting ministerial declaration (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, 2024a), supported by 20 countries, emphasized the commitment to feminist foreign policies and international cooperation for development with a gender perspective (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, 2024b). The partner countries and ECLAC contributed to the panel session “Feminist foreign policies and development cooperation with a gender perspective from Latin America and the Caribbean: the care society for a better world”.

Finally, another important milestone was the first meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on South-South Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in June 2024. In that context, a report was given on the project “Strengthening Feminist Foreign Policy and Feminist International Cooperation through a community of practice between Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Germany and ECLAC”, and reference was made to the progress achieved in gender mainstreaming in statistical production under the aegis of the Statistical Conference of the Americas and to the decision to mainstream the gender perspective in the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement). In line with that progress and the dialogue held during the meeting, the delegates approved an agreement containing six points. On one of those points, ECLAC was asked to prepare “a plan of action for mainstreaming a gender perspective in international development cooperation policies and programmes, as a methodological and conceptual tool to guide the appropriate incorporation and implementation of the gender perspective in the various modalities of cooperation between member States, and to present this document at the second session of the Regional Conference on South-South Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean” (ECLAC, 2024f, p. 1). In line with that mandate, the Office of the Executive Secretary of ECLAC asked the member States for inputs and to respond to a questionnaire to assess the current status of tools and promising practices in each country.

Looking ahead to future challenges, the project also aims to contribute to two key events scheduled for 2025. First, the second session of the Regional Conference on South-South Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean to be held at ECLAC Headquarters in Santiago and, second, the sixteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean to be held in Mexico. Both events represent crucial opportunities for continuing the implementation of feminist foreign policies and the strengthening of feminist international cooperation, consolidating the progress achieved to date and deepening the partner countries’ commitment to gender equality in the region. In a constantly changing global context, this initiative provides an example of innovation and shared leadership for sustainable development and gender equality in the field of foreign policy and international cooperation.

⁵ In 2025, INMUJERES officially became the Ministry for Women of Mexico.

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