

Holding the Line on Gender Equality: Evidence to Inform the Future of Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy

Full Report

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Acknowledgements and disclaimer

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Acronyms

CAD	Canadian dollar
CFLI	Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FIAP	Feminist International Assistance Policy
FFP	Feminist Foreign Policy
GAC	Global Affairs Canada
GOC	Government of Canada
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation, and learning
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
UN	United Nations
WHRD	Women human rights defenders
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

Report at a glance

CONTEXT OF THIS REPORT

A historic and impactful policy at a critical juncture. Since its launch in 2017, Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) has been ambitious, globally influential, and widely recognized for positioning Canada as a leader on gender equality and a feminist donor. The FIAP positioned gender equality as both a core priority of its international assistance and a cross-cutting theme. The evidence reviewed in this report points to tangible impacts across sectors and regions, alongside meaningful shifts in policy discourse, programming, and resourcing.

Growing uncertainty amid a vastly changing international security and economic landscape. While the FIAP remains the formal policy framework, changes in the policy environment, recent geopolitical developments, and mixed messaging on the FIAP are signaling a potential retreat from Canada’s long-standing commitments and a sidelining of the FIAP. Evolving priorities toward defence, trade, and economic security, alongside significant aid cuts and the absence of an explicit reaffirmation of feminist commitments, have raised questions about the policy’s future direction. These dynamics unfold amid a broader global context marked by reductions in Official Development Assistance (ODA), backlash against gender equality, and shifting approaches to feminist foreign policies.

SUCCESSSES

The FIAP has had several concrete positive impacts. The FIAP has fundamentally redefined Canada’s global footprint, establishing gender equality as a core principle of its international assistance. By mobilizing critical resources for women’s rights organizations (WROs), feminist movements, and previously underfunded areas like sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), the FIAP has catalyzed a systemic shift in the Canadian assistance ecosystem. The FIAP has drastically changed how organizations operate and has also solidified Canada’s position as a credible, high-influence leader in the global pursuit of gender equality.

Gender equality investments have the potential to deliver wide benefits that extend beyond immediate program outcomes and directly contribute to Canada’s current foreign policy priorities. While more evidence is needed to understand the FIAP’s long-term effects, the data reviewed in this report indicates that feminist approaches and investments in gender equality—especially those supporting SRHR, girls’ education, and WROs—have ripple effects across health, social and economic resilience, climate adaptation, humanitarian effectiveness, and peacebuilding and stability.

GAPS AND CHALLENGES

The FIAP has a credible record despite persistent gaps and challenges. While the policy has delivered several tangible advances in feminist programming, funding, and organizational change, these achievements continue to be shaped by persistent structural, institutional, and political constraints impacting implementation. This ambivalence does not undermine the FIAP’s value; it

reflects the inherent complexity of translating feminist ambition into practice across diverse contexts.

ANALYTICAL CONCLUSIONS FROM THE STUDY

Six analytical conclusions emerge from the desk review and survey:

1. **Clarity of purpose is uneven:** Findings indicate that the FIAP’s feminist definitions, objectives, and overall theory of change would benefit from a clearer (re)articulation and renewal to support consistent interpretation and implementation across sectors and partners, especially in light of the current environment.
2. **Policy coherence shapes impact:** Evidence shows that the FIAP’s effectiveness is closely linked to alignment with other foreign policy domains—particularly security, trade, and crisis response—where current gaps in coherence can limit overall impact.
3. **Locally led feminist approaches drive strongest results:** The most consistent positive outcomes are associated with core, flexible, and long-term support to feminist and WROs.
4. **Current measurement and learning management systems are a constraint:** The study finds that traditional MEL, reporting, and risk practices remain complex and compliance-heavy, and do not always capture qualitative and transformative change well, limiting learning and adaptive management.
5. **Financing is a structural pressure point:** Analysis highlights a persistent gap between the FIAP’s level of ambition and the predictability and level of available resources, particularly for gender-targeted (“principal”) programming.
6. **The FIAP is a strategic policy asset:** Across sources, the FIAP is assessed as a credible and operationally significant framework that has shaped partnerships, programming models, and Canada’s international leadership.

Uncertainty is already impacting the sector. Amid overall cuts in international assistance, global retrenchment on gender equality, and the government’s shifting foreign policy realities, fiscal constraints, and mixed messaging on the FIAP, practitioners participating in this study perceive a growing risk of sidelining the FIAP, underscoring the need to actively safeguard its achievements and sustain programmatic and funding commitments.

The FIAP is a reflection of Canadian values and a strategic investment for the future. Evidence reviewed in this study shows that sustained commitments and targeted adjustments around the FIAP can be aligned to meet the priorities of the current environment, including economic resilience, comprehensive security, and respect for state sovereignty and international law. Addressing gender inequalities now is also a risk-management strategy, as sustained investments can help reduce future humanitarian, security, and economic costs.

The case is for reframing and consolidation, not deprioritization. Findings and lessons learned strongly suggest that weakening or sidelining the FIAP would be more costly than maintaining it as a priority, risking fragmented approaches, weakened partnerships, and diminished international credibility at a time of global pushback against gender equality. Feminist, gender-transformative change requires sustained effort, resources, and political will, and it is essential for building resilient, safer communities worldwide.

1. Introduction: Meeting the moment, understanding the value of feminist international cooperation

The FIAP, launched in 2017, marked a bold shift in Canadian foreign policy. By embedding explicit feminist language, funding, and priorities into international assistance, the FIAP institutionalized gender equality, women’s rights and leadership, women’s economic empowerment, poverty reduction, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) as core priorities of Canada’s global engagement. It catalyzed resource mobilization for gender equality initiatives and feminist and women’s rights organizations (WROs), positioned Canada within global debates on feminist foreign policy, and helped open space for critical conversations, including the interrogation of power imbalances and colonial dynamics in international assistance.

The FIAP now faces mounting challenges at the federal level, including significant budget cuts, an upcoming foreign policy review, and a marked shift toward defence, security, and economic priorities amid a rapidly changing international security and economic landscape. Recent official messaging has increasingly emphasized broad references to “Canadian values” and “value-based pragmatism” in foreign policy, without clearly articulating how gender equality and feminist commitments, such as the FIAP, fit within this framing. This evolving narrative, combined with varying levels of emphasis in public statements, has created uncertainty among partners and practitioners about the future role of feminist and gender equality priorities in Canada’s international engagement. These domestic shifts are also unfolding amid a global setback and backlash on women’s rights and 2SLGBTQI+ rights, characterized by growing resistance to gender equality frameworks like the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, the rise of authoritarian and anti-rights movements, the rollback of feminist foreign policies in several countries, and a weakening multilateral system.¹

This report provides a sector-informed, evidence-based analysis of the FIAP’s impacts, aiming to support efforts for the ongoing integration of gender equality in Canada’s international assistance. Grounded in the current shifting priorities and uncertainty in Canada’s international assistance landscape, it provides evidence and perspectives to the Government of Canada and the community of practice working on and around the FIAP. This report is guided by the following three broad questions: **1) What are the key outcomes achieved under the FIAP? 2) Where do gaps still exist? 3) How can these outcomes and lessons learned inform Canada’s role and priorities in international development cooperation?**

The report is based primarily on a secondary data desk review and does not constitute an exhaustive evaluation of all FIAP initiatives or pillars; rather, it uses aggregated data to highlight broad trends and to provide an overview of FIAP’s outcomes, gaps, and lessons learned to date. Throughout, it weaves descriptive quantitative evidence with qualitative insights, including short case studies, stories, and quotes shared by survey participants.

The analysis draws on a mixed-methods approach. It combines a desk review of secondary sources—policy briefs, research and evaluation reports, and articles from think tanks, research

¹ Whipkey et al. (2025)

centres, CSOs, NGOs, and academia—with primary data from government open sources and OECD-DAC databases. In addition, Cooperation Canada distributed a survey to its members and received a limited but diverse set of responses, which were used to complement the desk review findings (see Annex 1 for the full methodology).

A complementary “What We Heard” summary accompanies this report, drawing on two multi-stakeholder, focus-group-style strategic roundtables with practitioners held in February 2026, which brought together participants across the country to consider implications for the FIAP going forward.

2. A brief history of the FIAP

Launched in June 2017, the FIAP marked a decisive shift in international development cooperation policy. The FIAP was welcomed with a mix of enthusiasm and caution by academics and practitioners across the sector,² but was lauded as a promising commitment. Although a turning point in Canadian foreign policy, scholars note that “Canada’s FIAP must be understood as part of a long history of Canadian leadership on gender equality and women’s empowerment, including a range of efforts to streamline gender across Global Affairs Canada programming and to integrate a Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) lens to all Canadian government actions.”³ The FIAP was launched in a context shaped by Canada’s positioning on the global stage, shifting dynamics with the United States, and increased international attention to feminist foreign policies, notably Sweden’s.⁴

The FIAP marked a deliberate and explicit shift in the orientation of Canadian international assistance by adopting a feminist approach, positioning gender equality, poverty reduction, women and girls’ rights, and access to resources and decision-making power as its core objectives. It aimed to achieve the goal that 95% of Canada’s bilateral international assistance spending would either “target” or “integrate” gender equality by 2021-2022: 15% that specifically target gender equality (compared to 2% prior to the FIAP) and 80% that integrates gender equality across international assistance efforts.⁵ Moving beyond earlier approaches, often criticized by scholars for reproducing gender essentialism,⁶ the FIAP articulates a feminist framework grounded in human rights, women’s and girls’ empowerment, and intersectionality, with the ultimate goal of poverty eradication. The policy is organized around six action areas: 1) Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, 2) Human dignity (Health and Nutrition, Education and Gender-Responsive Humanitarian Action), 3) Growth that works for everyone, 4) Environment and climate action, 5) Inclusive governance, and 6) Peace and security.⁷

² Baranyi and Saint-Louis (2025); Tiessen and Swan (2018); Brown and Swiss (2017)

³ Rao and Tiessen (2020, 352)

⁴ Parisi (2020); see also Deschamps-Laporte and Santoire (forthcoming); Beaulieu (2025); Thomson (2020); Chapnick (2019)

⁵ Global Affairs Canada (2017)

⁶ Tiessen (2019). Gender essentialism usually refers to approaches that treat women and men as biologically fixed and binary groups with inherent roles, characteristics, and needs, often reproducing harmful gender stereotypes (e.g., framing “women and children” mainly as vulnerable victims) rather than addressing the social and cultural dimensions of gender, and recognizing diverse identities, power dynamics, agency, and structural causes of gender inequalities.

⁷ Global Affairs Canada (2017)

The FIAP is a policy comprising a collection of flagship initiatives, projects, and bilateral programs, as well as a cross-cutting framework that guides all Canadian international assistance activities and spending. The FIAP establishes that all international assistance investments should contribute, directly or indirectly, to gender equality outcomes. The FIAP also signalled a commitment to more inclusive partnerships, greater accountability for gender equality outcomes, and increased support for locally-led development and humanitarian efforts. It is worth noting that the FIAP was highly consultative, following a year-long process (as part of the International Assistance Review) in 2016 that involved consultations with more than 15,000 people—including a wide range of civil society groups, WROs, and feminist advocates—in 65 countries, shaping its vision.⁸ This consultative approach recognized civil society not only as a beneficiary but also as a co-creator of the policy.

2.1 The FIAP flagship initiatives

The FIAP is usually recognized as having flagship or “signature” initiatives. First, **the Women’s Voice and Leadership (WVL) program is widely recognized as one of the FIAP’s most emblematic initiatives.** Launched in 2017, WVL was designed to address longstanding gaps in international assistance by providing predictable, long-term, and flexible funding to WROs and feminist movements, including in fragile or conflict-affected contexts. Unlike traditional project-based funding modalities, WVL emphasizes core and direct funding, organizational capacity-building support, leadership development, policy influence, advocacy, and coalition/movement-building, without imposing thematic priorities on WROs.⁹ Through partnerships with local, national, and international organizations and donors, WVL sought to rebalance power in aid relationships by recognizing WROs as essential agents of change rather than as service-delivery mechanisms. The investment for the first round of the WVL program was \$150 million¹⁰ over five years, and in 2023, the Government of Canada announced a further \$195 million over five years, and 43.4 million annually thereafter, for the renewal and expansion of the program, notably increased support for WROs, 2SLGBTQI+ groups, and women human rights defenders.¹¹

As part of the FIAP’s commitment to innovation in financing for gender equality, **another FIAP flagship initiative is the Partnership for Gender Equality.** In 2018, Global Affairs Canada launched an open call for proposals to create a new financing mechanism for feminist movements and WROs. The MATCH International Women’s Fund, together with partners including World University Service of Canada, Toronto Foundation, and the African Women's Development Fund, won this proposal and went on to establish what is now the Equality Fund. In 2019, Canada committed an initial investment of \$300 million, over 15 years, to launch the Equality Fund, an innovative finance mechanism that combines grant-making, investment, and philanthropy to support diverse feminist movements and WROs globally. The Fund was designed to respond to the chronic underfunding and financial precarity faced by WROs and to build sustainable, long-term resources for their work.¹² It also forms part of Canada’s broader strategy to diversify

⁸ Global Affairs Canada (2017)

⁹ Global Affairs Canada (2022c)

¹⁰ Unless stated otherwise, all amounts are in Canadian Dollars (CAD).

¹¹ Global Affairs Canada (2025c; 2025a)

¹² Global Affairs Canada (2024b)

financing modalities in its international assistance portfolio and to position the country as a global leader in testing new ways of resourcing feminist action.

Another key initiative under the FIAP is Canada’s 10-Year Commitment to Global Health and Rights (10YC). Building on the Muskoka Initiative on maternal, newborn and child health, it involves an expansion and increase of Canadian global health investments to reach an average of \$1.4 billion annually, starting in 2023, with \$700 million specifically dedicated to comprehensive SRHR, notably the \$650 million from 2017-2018 to 2020-2021 for the Her Voice, Her Choice Partnership.¹³ Finally, although the Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) is not usually identified as a flagship initiative of the FIAP, it has been aligned with the FIAP’s six core pillars, along with other policies such as the National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS),¹⁴ and the LGBTQ2I International Assistance Program.¹⁵ Other connected initiatives include the Charlevoix Declaration on Quality Education for Girls, Adolescent Girls, and Women in Developing Countries, and the Partnership for Climate Action (doubling climate finance to 5.3 billion over five years, with a focus on adaptation and biodiversity). Other financial commitments include directing 50% of GAC’s bilateral aid to sub-Saharan Africa; dedicating 100 million over five years to Canadian CSOs; and investing 100 million over five years to address inequalities in unpaid and paid care work in low- and middle-income countries.¹⁶

Although the FIAP positioned Canada as a global pioneer in feminist international assistance, its impact and credibility have been shaped not only by its policy commitments but also by the sustained engagement of Canadian civil society organizations and their partners. These actors advocated for feminist approaches before the FIAP’s formal adoption, supported the development and implementation of gender-transformative programming, and informed the FIAP’s design, learning, implementation, and adaptation across diverse and complex settings.

3. Nearly a decade of impact: what are the FIAP’s key outcomes?

Building on the previous section, which presented the FIAP’s stated commitments and targets, this section presents the study’s findings: quantitative and qualitative evidence on the FIAP’s outcomes, drawing on synthesized primary and secondary data and survey participants’ experiences. The findings illustrate both measurable results and more nuanced forms of change that are not fully captured by numbers alone.

¹³ Global Affairs Canada (2022a; 2023a)

¹⁴ Global Affairs Canada (2024c)

¹⁵ Global Affairs Canada (2019)

¹⁶ OECD (2025b, 17)

3.1 FIAP outcomes in numbers: quantitative trends

Section main findings:

- Canada's ODA as a share of its gross national income remains above the OECD-DAC average but below the UN global target. After rising post-FIAP launch, this share has begun to decline since 2023.
- International assistance with gender equality 'principal' and 'significant' objectives has increased since the launch of the FIAP, but funding where gender equality is the 'principal' objective remains limited. Since the 2020-2021 period, both have decreased.
- Latest OECD data shows that Canada is among the top DAC members in supporting WROs and ending violence against women and girls.
- Evidence from the desk review and the survey indicates that flagship FIAP initiatives, such as the WVL Program, the Equality Fund, and the 10-Year Global Health Commitment, demonstrate large-scale reach and measurable impact.
- Numbers show scale, not necessarily the depth of change. Financial volumes and beneficiary counts demonstrate reach and prioritization, but by themselves can hardly measure transformative impact, power shifts, or long-term outcomes. This highlights the crucial need to complement quantitative trends with qualitative evidence.

In 2024, Canada provided USD 7.42 billion of official development assistance (ODA), representing 0.34% of its gross national income (GNI). This percentage is slightly above the average of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members (0.33%), but still below the UN 0.7% target. Canadian ODA, as a share of GNI, increased after the FIAP launch in 2017 but has begun to decline since 2023.¹⁷ While targeted funding for gender equality increased overall, driven partly by major investments in the WVL program and a one-time contribution to the Equality Fund, recent decreases reflect shifting allocations, including large flows directed to Ukraine.¹⁸

Since the launch of the FIAP, evaluations and audits indicate that GAC has fulfilled 1 of 3 FIAP financial commitments: it exceeded its 80% gender-integrated spending goal, reaching 90% in 2018-2019, but did not fully achieve the 15% for gender-targeted projects and 50% for Sub-Saharan Africa, missing by 1%. Nevertheless, GAC increased spending on gender-targeted projects from 2% in 2016-2017 to 14% in 2019-2020, and funding for Sub-Saharan Africa from 35% in 2016-2017 to 49% in 2017-2018, marking notable achievements.¹⁹

The following Figure 1 explores trends in Canadian bilateral allocable ODA spending (volumes and shares, in constant terms) by gender equality policy marker, based on the OECD-DAC creditor

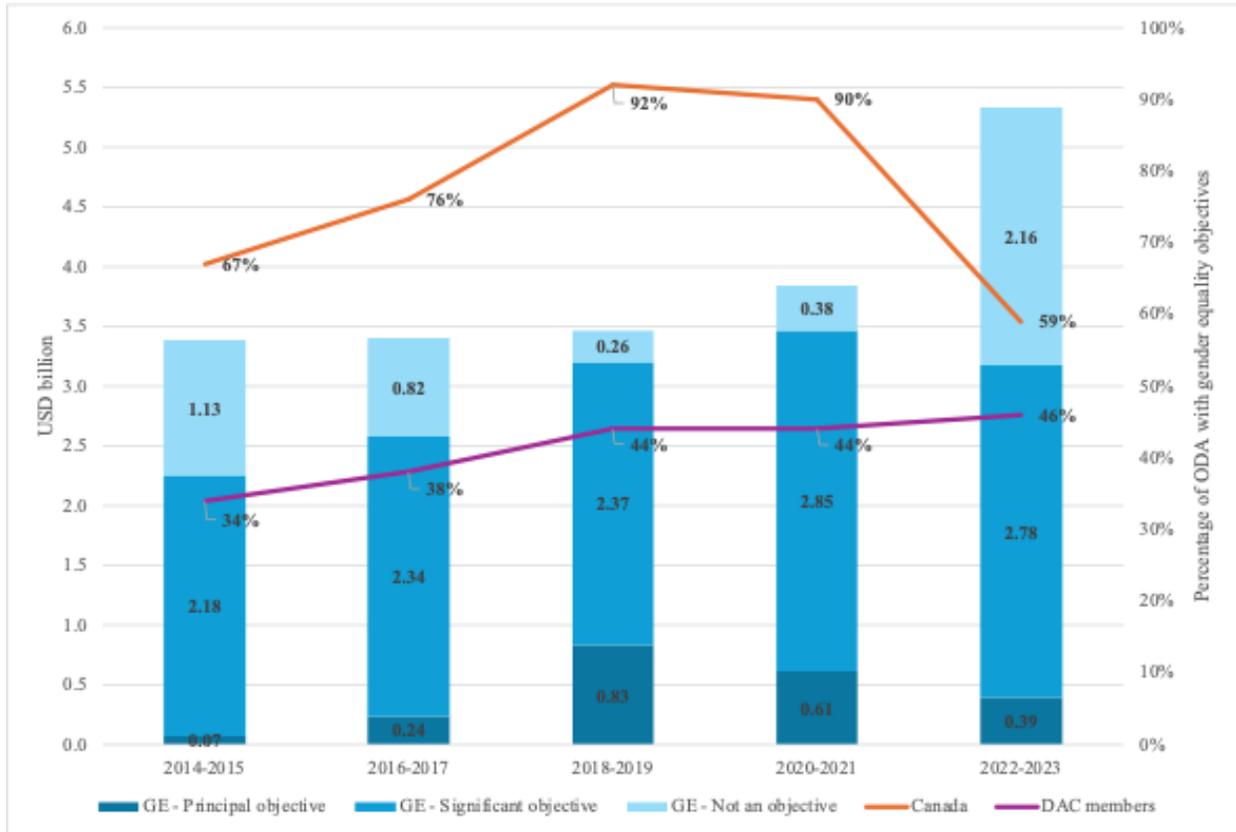
¹⁷ OECD (2025a)

¹⁸ Woroniuk (2025); Donor Tracker (2023)

¹⁹ Office of the Auditor General of Canada (2023, 10)

reporting system.²⁰ Table 1, on the other hand, demonstrates the amount of international assistance and ODA spending by each FIAP action area, based on the latest six annual Reports to the Parliament on Canada’s International Assistance.²¹

Figure 1: Volumes and shares of Canadian ODA with GE objectives (2014-2023)



Source: OECD (n.d.)

Figure 1 shows that overall Canadian screened bilateral allocable ODA (blue bars) with ‘principal’ and ‘significant’ gender equality policy markers increased over time since the FIAP launch. However, the ‘principal’ marker (dark blue) remains limited, and both ‘principal’ and ‘significant’ have declined since the 2020-2021 period, after a peak. ODA without any gender equality objectives decreased overall over time but rose again in 2022-2023, reflecting the sharp increase in total ODA volume to Ukraine. The orange line shows that the proportion of bilateral allocable ODA screened for gender equality objectives has grown significantly since the FIAP launch in 2017, reaching a peak of 92% and 90% in the 2018-2019

²⁰ It is important to mention that GAC and OECD-DAC use gender equality policy marker differently. While GAC talks about gender “integrated” and “targeted,” the OECD talks about gender as a “significant” versus “principal” objective, creating inconsistencies across tracking systems and results. Another discrepancy between both reporting systems is that Canada reports its international assistance spending according to the fiscal year, from April 1 to March 31, whereas OECD-DAC reports according to calendar years (Dicks and Woroniuk 2023, 37).

²¹ Under the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act, Global Affairs Canada reports to the Parliament of Canada its annual international assistance activities, including on each action area of the FIAP.

and 2020-2021 periods, always well above the DAC average (purple line), though less markedly since 2022-2023. Worth mentioning (not pictured in Figure 1) is that in the 2022-2023 period, Canada was the fourth-largest ODA donor to WROs and the third-largest ODA donor to end violence against women and girls.²² However, the proportion of bilateral ODA channelled to and through NGOs/CSOs decreased significantly after a peak (27.6%) in 2019-2020 (due to the large one-off investment into the Equality Fund), and fell to 15% in 2023.²³

Given that GAC and OECD-DAC use different reporting systems, these numbers differ from Canada’s reported figures. Comparatively, in the annual reports to Parliament for 2018-2019 and 2019-2020, Canada reports that 95% and 97% of its bilateral international assistance targeted or integrated gender equality²⁴, whereas Figure 1 above reports 92% and 90%. In other words, the gaps between these figures are mainly due to how data are counted and coded in each system, not because Canada reported or spent fundamentally different amounts.

In the DevData dashboard, from 2017-2018 to 2023-2024, Canada spent 41.7 billion on international assistance, marked with a gender equality objective, of which 39.5 billion was counted as ODA.²⁵

Table 1: Amount of CAD (rounded) invested in the FIAP action area (2018-2024)

FIAP action area	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Action 1 (Gender equality & empowerment)	90.3M (98% ODA)	241M (99% ODA)	377M (99% ODA)	200M (99% ODA)	241M (99% ODA)	261M (95% ODA)
Action 2 (Health & nutrition)	1.17B (~100% ODA)	1.06B (~100% ODA)	2.23B (99% ODA)	1.824B ²⁶ (~100% ODA)	2.26B (99% ODA)	1.4B (~100% ODA)
Action 2 (Education)	433.5M (~100% ODA)	450.5M (~100% ODA)	452M (~100% ODA)	402M (~100% ODA)	678M (81% ODA)	493M (~100% ODA)

²² OECD (n.d.)

²³ OECD (2025b)

²⁴ Global Affairs Canada (2020b; 2021b)

²⁵ Global Affairs Canada (n.d.)

²⁶ In 2021-2022, unlike previous years, this category was reported as ‘Global health, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and nutrition’.

Action 2 (Gender-responsive humanitarian action)	909.7M (~100% ODA)	872.3M (~100% ODA)	1.16B (~100% ODA)	1.045B (~100% ODA)	1.27B (98% ODA)	800M (~100% ODA)
Action 3 (Growth that works for everyone)	983.3M (~100% ODA)	822.8M (99% ODA)	877M (99% ODA)	1.043B (~100% ODA)	1.36B (94% ODA)	952M (87% ODA)
Action 4 (Environment & climate action)	630.4M (~100% ODA)	714.3M (~100% ODA)	1.08B (~100% ODA)	1.058B (97% ODA)	1.24B (99% ODA)	1.34B (65% ODA)
Action 5 (Inclusive governance)	442.6M (99% ODA)	389.7M (99% ODA)	446M (99% ODA)	438M (97% ODA)	485M (92% ODA)	481M (83% ODA)
Action 6 (Peace and security)	314.1M (51% ODA)	304M (60% ODA)	257M (65% ODA)	302M (63% ODA)	307M (71% ODA)	306M (68% ODA)

Source: Global Affairs Canada 2020b; 2021b; 2021c; 2023c; 2024c; 2025b

Table 1 highlights the volume of Canadian international assistance by FIAP area, including the total amount and the portion considered ODA, according to the latest six reports to Parliament on international assistance. It reveals that “Global health and nutrition”, “Environment and climate action” (from 2020-2021), and “Gender-responsive humanitarian action” (from 2020-2023) received the most funding. On the other hand, “Education”, “Inclusive governance”, and “Peace and security” appear to receive less. However, it is important to look beyond these numbers and also pay attention to the gender equality policy markers. According to the Equality Fund’s *Follow the Money* report²⁷, while gender equality ‘significant’ marker constitutes a high percentage of each action area, the gender equality ‘principal’ marker remains limited across all core areas (except for “Gender equality and empowerment”), and some areas with significant investments, like “Global health and nutrition”, still have a high percentage of gender equality ‘none.’

Estimating the total number of participants and beneficiaries, directly and indirectly reached by the FIAP’s highly decentralized initiatives and projects is methodologically challenging. Still, selected data from FIAP’s flagship initiatives provide useful insights. The Formative Evaluation of the WVL shows that it has encompassed 30 projects in 28 countries and three sub-regions, totalling nearly CAD \$293 as of July 2025, including the first round and the current renewed initiative.²⁸ In five years of existence, the Equality Fund moved \$100 million to 1,800 WROs and grantee partners in 100 countries.²⁹

²⁷ Dicks and Woroniuk (2023, 32)

²⁸ Global Affairs Canada (2025c; 2022c)

²⁹ Tomlin (2025)

In global health, the latest annual report of the 10-Year Commitment to Global Health and Rights (10YC) found that, for fiscal year 2022–2023, Canada reached several significant milestones, surpassing its annual \$1.4 billion target one year ahead of schedule. Investments supported 391 global health initiatives implemented through 355 partners, with a sustained focus on sub-Saharan Africa, which received 55% of bilateral health assistance and accounted for seven of the top ten recipient countries. Gender equality remained central to implementation, with over 97% of bilateral development investments under the 10YC either integrating or targeting gender equality outcomes, including 26% that explicitly targeted women’s and girls’ empowerment. Health investments (excluding COVID-19, nutrition, and SRHR) rose to \$724 million, alongside \$120 million for nutrition and \$574 million for comprehensive SRHR programming. Reportedly, these investments enabled 54 projects to reach 18.2 million people, 15 million of whom were women and girls, across 42 countries, while strengthening health systems through training for 150,000 service providers and support for 8,353 health facilities in 39 countries.³⁰ The CFLI supported 716 projects across 124 countries under each FIAP action area.³¹

The Reports to Parliament on international assistance provide compelling evidence of FIAP’s outcomes in numbers, reach, and scale. Across regions and sectors, selected FIAP-funded initiatives demonstrate how Canada’s FIAP translated policy commitments into measurable change. For example, the latest report³² shows that in 2023–2024, nearly all of Canada’s bilateral international development assistance either targeted or integrated gender equality. Canada also supported over 3,000 WROs worldwide, including through the WVL program and the Equality Fund. In education, Canada’s support to the Global Partnership for Education reached 120 million students, trained 481,000 teachers, and renovated or built 6,700 classrooms. In global health, Canada supported approximately 120 polio immunization campaigns across 30 countries. In nutrition, a Canadian-funded initiative across 15 African countries provided vitamin A to 33.8 million children, trained 42,000 women’s groups, 28,000 health workers in gender equity, and reached 1.9 million women and 1.2 million men. The following small case studies³³ under the FIAP umbrella and its intersecting pillars, shared by survey participants, present a compelling snapshot of the FIAP’s initiatives and key numbers:

Plan International Canada’s Strengthening Health Outcomes for Women and Children (SHOW) project (2016–2020) demonstrates how gender-transformative health programming can deliver tangible results. Implemented in Nigeria, Haiti, Bangladesh, Ghana, and Senegal, SHOW reached 1.4 million women of reproductive age, including adolescent girls, and nearly 720,000 children, while engaging over one million men and boys. The initiative contributed to clear improvements in service uptake, including an 18% increase in adequate antenatal care, a 20% rise in skilled birth attendance, and a 15% increase in postnatal care within 48 hours of delivery, while

³⁰ Global Affairs Canada (2024a)

³¹ Global Affairs Canada (2024d; 2023b)

³² Global Affairs Canada (2025b)

³³ The case studies highlighted in this section represent a small snapshot of the hundreds of programs implemented under the FIAP over time. Given the scale, diversity, and geographic breadth of FIAP-funded initiatives, it is not methodologically feasible to exhaustively document the outcomes of every intervention within a single report. These examples are therefore not intended to be anecdotal illustrations or selective success stories. Rather, they are drawn from internal data shared by implementing organizations through the survey process and were selected because they reflected recurring patterns of results observed across multiple contexts. As such, they are illustrative of broader trends and outcomes generated under the FIAP, capturing only a fraction of its overall impact.

also supporting 867 communities during COVID-19 through the provision of essential health supplies. These results were achieved through a three-pronged gender-transformative approach that focuses on building the agency and decision-making power of women and girls, engaging men to improve maternal, newborn, and child health (MNCH)/SRHR outcomes, and providing gender-responsive MNCH/SRHR services.³⁴

Over six years, **KAIROS’ Women of Courage: Women, Peace and Security program** in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and Palestine demonstrates how sustained feminist partnerships can translate into concrete protection, participation, and advocacy outcomes. Working across 40 communities and municipalities and 39 national and regional networks, partners directly supported over 32,800 participants, more than 26,000 of whom were women, and encouraged 1,518 male allies to be advocates for women’s roles in peace and security. The program provided psychosocial, medical, and legal support to thousands of survivors of gender-based violence, strengthened gender and human rights awareness through large-scale training, and mobilized partners to engage in over 300 advocacy campaigns for legal reforms and policy implementation.³⁵

Based on a forthcoming analysis³⁶ of **ten years of feminist programming at Oxfam Canada (2015–2025)**, to be publicly launched in February 2026, evidence from FIAP initiatives such as WVL programs, Sexual Health and Empowerment (SHE), Her Future Her Choice, and Creating Spaces to Take Action on Violence Against Women and Girls illustrates how FIAP principles have delivered concrete results across diverse contexts. These programs prioritized the leadership of grassroots WROs in advocacy, service delivery, and governance, with 82% of them adopting new gender-sensitive institutional policies and practices. Investments expanded access to SRHR for 482,812 women and girls and increased the provision of gender-responsive health services from 41% to 93%. They also strengthened feminist movement-building and women’s leadership, exemplified by more than 2,000 women securing roles in local decision-making structures in Nepal. Across 14 countries, FIAP initiatives implemented by Oxfam Canada contributed to a 26% relative increase in positive attitudes toward women’s and girls’ rights. Additional impacts included support for 70 women- and youth-led climate adaptation initiatives in Guatemala, a near doubling of women’s leadership in humanitarian action, and advocacy influencing 245 gender-justice-related laws and policy developments, notably reforms criminalizing child, early, and forced marriage in Indonesia and the Philippines.

The Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie and CECI’s project – Girls’ Education for a Better Future in the African Great Lakes Region (ÉDUFAM) – in Burundi, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo demonstrates the concrete results that a gender-transformative approach to education can achieve. By developing a unique implementation model, based, among other things, on a “social contract” engaging community leaders to “seal a pact” ensuring girls’ right to education and removing barriers to their schooling, the project has enabled thousands of girls and adolescents, including refugees and displaced persons, to return to school, stay in school, or enroll in vocational training. In three communities, 96 community relays (*relais communautaires*)

³⁴ Plan International Canada (2022); (n.d)

³⁵ KAIROS (2024)

³⁶ Shared in the survey.

provided individualized follow-ups co-developed with refugee and displaced girls; 25,000 girls, adolescents, and women were reached; 2,800 girls and adolescents who are out of school or have dropped out, among the most vulnerable, have been supported to re-enter or start school since the project began; 3,500 girls and adolescents with learning difficulties and at risk of dropping out have been supported to stay in school, notably through academic support; and 24 primary and secondary schools have been transformed into gender-sensitive schools.³⁷

While the quantitative evidence presented in this section provides important insights into the scale, reach, and financial prioritization of gender equality under the FIAP, it does not, on its own, capture the nature or depth of change on the ground. Measures of how many women reached or how much was spent remain surface-level, and deeper considerations are needed to ensure a gender-transformative approach that challenges and changes the very institutions and structures that keep global inequalities in place.³⁸ Aggregate funding figures and policy markers offer limited visibility into how resources translate into shifts in power, agency, institutional practices, or lived experiences for women and girls across diverse contexts. Nor do they fully reflect variations in implementation quality, local ownership, or sustainability over time. This is not specific to the FIAP but reflects the challenges of translating feminist ambitions into practice and measuring their impact in any context. For these reasons, quantitative data must be carefully interpreted alongside qualitative evidence to better understand how and to what extent the FIAP contributed to meaningful and transformative change, as reviewed in the next section.

3.2 FIAP outcomes beyond the numbers: Qualitative evidence

Section main findings:

- The FIAP made gender equality both a core organizing principle and a cross-cutting theme in Canadian international assistance, grounded in a feminist and intersectional approach to gender analysis across government and partner organizations. It also directed attention and crucial resources toward previously underfunded areas like SRHR, women’s transformative leadership, ending violence against women and girls, and feminist and WROs.
- Beyond the commonly referenced themes above, other FIAP-aligned programming and investments, such as education, women’s economic empowerment, environment and climate action, and peace and security, have demonstrated promising results. Although more data are needed to assess the long-term impacts of these investments, broader literature indicates that gender equality investments can deliver ripple effects beyond immediate program outcomes and directly support Canada’s current foreign policy priorities.
- Flagship initiatives like the WVL Program and the Equality Fund provided flexible, core funding that strengthened thousands of WROs, women human rights defenders, feminist groups and

³⁷ Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie and CECI (2025). Document shared with the author.

³⁸ Tiessen (2019)

movements, expanding their capacity, advocacy, and services, and improving access to decision-makers, including in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

- Evidence from the desk review and survey participants indicates that the FIAP fundamentally shifted how the Canadian international assistance ecosystem thinks and works. It contributed to increased gender expertise, the introduction of feminist MEL approaches, stronger gender analysis in program design, and more equal partnership models, influencing how organizations plan, deliver, and evaluate their work.
- The FIAP positioned Canada as a recognized and credible global leader in gender equality and a feminist donor in international assistance, with symbolic, normative, and practical influence.

3.2.1 Gender equality as a central principle

First, by explicitly recognizing gender equality as the “starting point and foundation for building a more peaceful, inclusive and prosperous world”³⁹, **the FIAP elevated gender equality from a cross-cutting consideration to a central organizing principle of Canada’s international assistance.** In doing so, it reframed development and humanitarian action as inherently political, grounded in power relations, rights, and structural inequalities. This shift helped legitimize feminist analysis within government institutions and among implementing partners, while also directing increased attention and resources toward issues that had historically been marginalized, underfunded, or treated as peripheral. Emily Wiseman (CARE Canada), noted in the survey that over the course of the last several years with the FIAP:

“Canada has been a consistent, bold voice on gender equality and flatter power dynamics in the aid sector, amidst other countries that have gone in the opposite direction. It's been refreshing and reassuring. It has also served as an important form of leverage to hold the line on gender equality in a moment where we face increasing global pressures to abandon commitments. The FIAP and its commitments and requirements for funding have acted as a lever upon which CARE Canada has drawn upon to maintain and continue to advance the fight for gender equality. It has been instrumental in a time of such regression and backlash.”

This explicit policy recognition has been particularly significant in contexts where SRHR remains politically contested and sensitive, providing both normative support and dedicated financial commitments in this area. Reflecting on the FIAP’s outcomes after five years of existence, Julie Delahanty (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights) notes that:

“The FIAP’s focus on women’s rights has successfully shifted the thinking, framing, and discourse within government and among government officials on the fundamental importance and impact of investing in gender equality and women’s rights [...] the FIAP specifically names SRHR, including access to safe abortion, and recognizes SRHR as an official part of government policy in international assistance, with significant funding having been dedicated to it as well as other standalone gender equality and women’s rights issues.”⁴⁰

³⁹ OECD (2025b, 41)

⁴⁰ Woroniuk (2022a)

Similarly, Lauren Ravon (Oxfam Canada) emphasizes that:

“The greatest impact of the FIAP has been to open up space for conversations about patriarchy and inequality in the context of humanitarian aid and international development. The FIAP enabled new programming to emerge that deliberately addresses the systemic inequalities that keep women and gender-diverse people trapped in poverty, while opening up new funding channels for advocacy work. The FIAP provided the framework for a much-needed ramp-up of investments in gender justice programming, including in chronically underfunded areas such as women’s transformative leadership, LGBTQI+ rights, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. The FIAP also acknowledged the catalytic role that women’s rights organizations and feminist movements play in advancing gender equality and led to much-needed resourcing of their work.”⁴¹

The evidence suggests that the FIAP’s has held symbolic, normative, and practical significance, including by moving resources to structurally underfunded areas and actors. While financial and programmatic commitments to SRHR and the empowerment of women and girls are often cited as major contributions of the FIAP in the literature and in the survey, other pillars of the FIAP warrant attention. Although an exhaustive review of FIAP’s impacts across all pillars is not possible in this report, some results are important to reflect on, considering their cross-cutting nature.

Evidence from the broader literature indicates that education is a catalyst for realizing women and girls’ rights. Supporting girls’ access to safe, quality, and gender-sensitive education and related health and protection services helps delay early marriage and prevent school dropout, strengthens labour market participation, and contributes to more inclusive and sustainable growth.⁴² In the ‘Education’ pillar, examples from Canada’s work in Colombia illustrate that even in fragile contexts, FIAP-related projects improved learning conditions, protected at-risk youth from recruitment into armed and criminal groups, and expanded access for marginalized communities.⁴³

In the ‘Growth that works for everyone’ pillar, FIAP-supported women’s economic empowerment initiatives demonstrate that gender equality and inclusive economic and trade policies are mutually reinforcing. The *Making Trade Work for Women in Eastern Africa* project and other projects in Egypt and Senegal show that when women traders, farmers, and entrepreneurs receive targeted support, results include higher mobility and income, more resilient economies, and greater inclusion of women from marginalized groups.⁴⁴

In the ‘Environment and climate action’ pillar, evidence from FIAP-supported programming indicates that when gender-transformative approaches are integrated into climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and resilience-building efforts, they contribute not only to improved gender outcomes but also to stronger community coping capacity and, over time, possibly reduced humanitarian needs. Canadian-supported initiatives such as *Land4Life*, *Canada Climate Change Program*, *Energy Access Relief Fund*, and *SeedChange* in several African, Asian, and Latin American countries have helped embed gender considerations in local climate governance, expand

⁴¹ Woroniuk (2022a)

⁴² UN Women (n.d.)

⁴³ Global Affairs Canada (2025b; 2018)

⁴⁴ Global Affairs Canada (2025b; 2024d)

women's access to renewable energy and climate-smart livelihoods and agriculture, and strengthen food and seed security through women-led and youth-led cooperatives, for example.⁴⁵

On the 'Peace and security' pillar, research and program evaluations show that supporting women's participation in justice, security, and peace processes improves responsiveness to victims of sexual and gender-based violence, strengthens accountability, and helps address key conflict drivers.⁴⁶ A study looking at the FIAP in Haiti through various projects in the judiciary and security sectors confirms the relevance of projects targeting gender equality that benefit women, girls, and marginalized people, including women with disabilities and LGBTQI+ individuals. Moreover, their analysis found that replacing strategic projects like WVL to fund security efforts did not necessarily enhance safety for vulnerable populations.⁴⁷ Canadian-supported initiatives like the *Elsie Initiative* have also improved the effectiveness and inclusiveness of peacekeeping operations by removing barriers to women's participation and strengthening gender-responsive standards in missions.⁴⁸

3.2.2 Flexible and sustained core funding for feminist movements and WROs

Second, **the FIAP mobilizes crucial resources for feminist movements, WROs, and grassroots actors such as WHRDs** who have long been underfunded despite being the most effective drivers of social change and often the best positioned to deliver services to marginalized communities.

For example, the formative evaluation of the WVL program concluded that it was highly relevant to the needs of local WROs across various contexts, addressed important funding and capacity gaps, and provided sufficient flexibility for WRO partners to focus on what mattered most to them and their communities, including during the COVID-19 pandemic response. It also found that the majority of evaluated WVL projects contributed positively to strengthening organizational capacities. Across most countries, WVL funding enabled WROs to pursue context-specific priorities through a combination of multi-year and flexible funding modalities. While outcomes varied widely across organizations and thematic areas, WVL support allowed WROs to deliver services, advance advocacy, and sustain operations, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when flexible funds were used to provide essential relief, raise health awareness, and advocate for gender-responsive responses. Participants emphasized that this support enabled organizations to continue their work and remain responsive to community needs, highlighting WROs' adaptability as first responders. Within relatively short timeframes, WVL contributed to increased reach and effectiveness, with approximately one third of projects reporting expanded programming and notable advocacy gains in countries such as Bangladesh, Guatemala, and Peru. In several contexts, including Bangladesh, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Senegal, WVL also strengthened WROs' engagement with public institutions, expanding access to decision-makers, particularly for grassroots organizations previously excluded from policy spaces.⁴⁹ This mutual

⁴⁵ Global Affairs Canada (2025b; 2024d; 2023e)

⁴⁶ Global Affairs Canada (2018). See also UN Women (n.d.)

⁴⁷ Baranyi and Saint-Louis 2(026)

⁴⁸ Global Affairs Canada (2025b)

⁴⁹ Global Affairs Canada (2022c)

learning shifted Canada’s role from donor to partner, positively challenging unequal and colonial dynamics in development partnerships.⁵⁰

Similarly, the formative evaluation of the Partnership for Gender Equality reported that WROs and feminist organizations felt that the flexible, stable core funding from the Equality Fund effectively addressed key organizational needs and strengthened capacity. This enabled grantees to dedicate more effort to creating positive impact within their communities, emphasizing trust-based partnerships and respect for local agency and perspectives, and intentionally shifting power to women’s rights and feminist organizations in the Global South and East.⁵¹ Canada’s leadership makes it a leading DAC donor for WROs.⁵² During a high-level event of the Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network in 2020, Canada announced a new investment of nearly 15 million for women peacebuilders and the creation of an annual WPS awards program.⁵³

Recent empirical evidence shows that the FIAP has been and remains a powerful tool for WROs on the ground. A newly published study examining the outcomes of three of the FIAP’s initiatives in Haiti states that the FIAP, through a project led by Avocats Sans Frontières Canada and local partners, provided essential guidance, resources, and legitimacy to their work. It supported and enabled the integration of an intersectional understanding of gender equality and Haitian partners’ agency, and it formed strategic alliances with the feminist movement from the outset, despite a difficult security environment. In a WVL program led by the Centre d’études et de coopération internationale (CECI), the capacities of 35 Haitian WROs were reinforced, enabling them to reach 4000 women victims of gender-based violence with essential medical and psychological support.⁵⁴ The WVL programs in Mali, Senegal, and Haiti, implemented by CECI, further showed that, beyond organizational strengthening of WROs, the WVL projects brought together organizations that did not previously collaborate and gave them the opportunity to engage in joint advocacy.⁵⁵

In an event on Canada’s FIAP after eight years in September 2025, participants and panelists raised that the “by leveraging FIAP funding, CSOs were able to strengthen their watchdog roles, and hold the government to account for its commitments to gender equality and feminist practice,” all of which are “important strategies needed for countering the rise of anti-gender and anti-rights movements worldwide.”⁵⁶ Core, flexible, predictable, and long-term funding are essential for enabling WROs and feminist organizations to conduct their work on the ground, notably through advocacy and participation in peace and security decision-making. This, in turn, can have long-term consequences on a country’s stability. Avocats sans Frontières Canada shared compelling evidence from their work in the survey undertaken for this report:

⁵⁰ Demeke and Imbleau (2025)

⁵¹ Global Affairs Canada (2024b)

⁵² OECD (2025b)

⁵³ Global Affairs Canada (2020a)

⁵⁴ Baranyi and Saint-Louis (2025); Baranyi et al. (2025)

⁵⁵ CECI (2022)

⁵⁶ Demeke and Imbleau (2025, 2)

“Women’s empowerment through law is a powerful driver of a country’s development. Thus, women’s participation in peace processes has increased the chances of long-term stability⁵⁷. We have supported women in Colombia and Mali in rebuilding peace and compiling historical memory to prevent conflicts from recurring. We have seen how these women have become agents of change in their communities; they have professionalized, become leaders, directly contributed to the local economy of their households and villages, been able to join health mutuals, send their daughters to school, and more.”

Building on the previous point about the interconnected nature of FIAP pillars and the ripple effects of investments in this area, this quote from a participant shows how funding and support for local WROs on the ground have far-reaching impacts beyond short-term programmatic results.

3.2.3 Transforming programming, partnerships, and institutional practice

Third, at the programmatic and organizational levels, **the FIAP fundamentally changed the Canadian international assistance ecosystem and contributed to more effective and inclusive programming** by embedding feminist analysis into project design and MEL and encouraging more equal partnerships in international development assistance. Despite several sector-informed critiques of the FIAP (see Section 4), the FIAP opened space for conversations about colonial histories and power asymmetries embedded in the international aid system, the need for locally-led, context-specific, feminist approaches, and the limitations within Canada’s own bureaucratic systems that impede real transformation, such as a top-down, complex and opaque compliance and regulatory requirements (see following section). The introduction of the FIAP in 2017 required a thorough reconsideration of programming priorities, approaches, and activities, with this adjustment occasionally presenting challenges on the ground for partners and staff.⁵⁸

A study investigating civil society’s experiences with the FIAP found that it served as an “enabler” for organizations to work on gender equality and led to varying degrees of related organizational and programmatic change. The FIAP has directly influenced how organizations design, implement, monitor, and evaluate their work, leading to changes in internal policies and human capacity to better address gender inequalities. Additionally, FIAP has informed strategic adjustments in gender equality programming for CSOs, particularly in enhancing gender analysis and programme development.⁵⁹

Evidence also indicates significant institutional and cultural changes within GAC, prompted by the FIAP. These include a marked rise in hiring gender equality specialists and the implementation of feminist MEL frameworks. Organizations that previously did not identify as feminist increasingly incorporated gender perspectives into their programming and partnerships. Beyond restoring funding to women’s rights groups and other sectors that have been comparatively under-prioritized in earlier policy frameworks, such as SRHR, the FIAP helped institutionalize feminist analysis within bureaucratic routines, despite existing critiques. At GAC, this led to expanded internal gender expertise, greater incorporation of gender-transformative approaches into funding

⁵⁷ This is coherent with academic literature on the subject, showing that peace processes that have women signatories have higher implementation rates and are more durable (Krause et al. 2018).

⁵⁸ Global Affairs Canada (2023a; 2021a; 2018)

⁵⁹ Rao and Delorme (2024); Rao (2020)

and accountability practices, and higher completion in GBA+ training across government departments.⁶⁰

These organizational changes affected programming. The formative evaluation of the WVL program found that an overarching program approach successfully realized WVL’s feminist vision and ensured cohesion in a highly decentralized initiative. WVL’s program included a common feature set and an overarching architecture managed by geographic programs. This approach maintained cohesion across projects despite decentralization and led to a unique toolbox of operational and technical guidance for grantees and partners, as well as to a feminist MEL strategy and workplan (the first GAC program to adopt a feminist approach to MEL).⁶¹ Reflections shared by participating organizations in the survey corroborate these evaluations:

“One of the most significant impacts of the FIAP was through the first and renewed phases of the WVL Program. This program has had a significant ripple effect on how we work globally as a confederation and has inspired programming across multiple countries. The WVL program has provided impetus for CARE Canada and our confederation to rethink some of our systems, policies, and processes related to partnerships. We have not changed everything, but it has provided an important nudge that we have leveraged to improve our sub-granting practices. The amplifying effect of WVL has been considerable and has not been commensurate at all with the size of these projects. Importantly, we’ve also been able to leverage the funding that GAC has provided to crowd in additional and private funding for feminist partnerships and support WROs. The multiplier effect of this type of funding cannot be understated and is crucial at this time.” (CARE Canada)

“WUSC has a strong and consistent track record of integrating gender equality across its programming. The launch of the FIAP further sharpened this focus, prompting the design of an increasing number of initiatives in which gender equality is not only mainstreamed but also positioned as the principal objective and outcome, rather than a secondary result. Over time, our teams’ increased capacity in this area made integrating gender considerations an integral and automatic part of the process. GE Coding, which assessed projects, also strengthened the design of gender equality outcomes from the outset of new projects. The FIAP indirectly influenced our decision to establish a robust Anti-Discrimination, Diversity, and Inclusion process within the organization, helping us expand our thinking to include more intersectional factors, organizational commitments, and actions related to equity and inclusion within our strategy, leadership, staff members, culture, and programming.” (World University Services of Canada)

“The FIAP has strengthened gender equality outcomes by mainstreaming feminist approaches in policy dialogue, evidence generation, and advocacy spaces. The policy’s emphasis on feminist leadership, intersectionality, and power analysis has influenced how Oxfam and partners design, implement, and evaluate programs. In particular, FIAP has created opportunities for cross-sector collaboration and learning among women’s rights organizations, INGOs, and Global Affairs Canada. These collaborations have helped shift organizational culture and practice toward more inclusive, rights-based, and transformative models of partnership.” (Oxfam Canada)

⁶⁰ Demeke and Imbleau (2025, 3)

⁶¹ Global Affairs Canada (2023c; 2022c)

3.2.4 Canada's global leadership on gender equality and feminist foreign policy

Fourth, **the FIAP strengthens Canada's leadership, credibility, and influence on the global stage.** At a time when the rise of feminist foreign policy was popular, following Sweden's adoption in 2016, the FIAP positioned Canada as a leading voice on feminist foreign policy and feminist international assistance. The explicit use of the term 'feminist' in Canadian international engagement carried both symbolic and practical significance. It not only normalized the term but also gave Canada tangible global leadership in progressive norms and values,⁶² increased expectations, feminist scrutiny, and opportunities for accountability, collaborative work across sectors, and dialogues.⁶³ The FIAP helped shape global debates on inclusive peace processes, feminist economic policy, SRHR, women human rights defenders, and education, among other issues. This leadership had potential ripple effects, though it is difficult to establish a causal link between Canadian leadership and other governments encouraged to adopt feminist foreign policies.

Scholars have noted that “a feminist approach to diplomacy also begins with listening to people on the margins of society. In this area, Canada has been at the forefront of promoting the rights of women and girls, as well as gender equality in conflict-affected countries and beyond.” For them, “this is a field where the Canadian government has taken an activist stance. It has championed the cause of women's rights and spoken out to defend women in danger in their home countries, sometimes at the expense of its diplomatic relations.”⁶⁴

Today, Canada is widely acknowledged as a champion of gender equality and plays a leading role in global initiatives, including serving as chair of the DAC Network on Gender Equality until 2024. Canada's leadership in gender equality continues to play an important role in an evolving global context marked by various backlashes against women's rights. In this environment, Canada has maintained engagement with a range of international partners and initiatives to advance gender equality.⁶⁵ For example, Canada (and the Equality Fund) played a leadership role in creating the Alliance for Feminist Movements in September 2022, a partnership aimed at increasing support for WROs and feminist movements worldwide. As co-chair, Canada helped establish partnerships with over 375 members from civil society, philanthropy, governments, and allies.⁶⁶ During its G7 Presidency in 2018, Canada led on the Charlevoix Declaration on Quality Education for Girls, Adolescent Girls, and Women in Developing Countries, which pledged a \$400 million investment to advancing women's and girls' education in fragile, conflict, and crisis contexts as well as the Whistler Declaration on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action. Canada also established the G7's Gender Equality Advisory Council, a format that has carried on since.

At a time when many states are retreating from multilateralism and commitments to gender equality, including the former FFP countries such as Sweden, Germany, Luxembourg, Argentina,

⁶² Demeke and Imbleau (2025); Daigle (2024); Morton et al. (2020); Parisi (2020); Tiessen (2019)

⁶³ Demeke and Imbleau (2025); Tomlin (2023); Woroniuk (2022b; 2022a); Rao and Tiessen (2020); Global Affairs Canada (n.d.)

⁶⁴ Bouka et al. (2021, 3)

⁶⁵ OECD (2025b, 41)

⁶⁶ Global Affairs Canada (2024d)

and the Netherlands,⁶⁷ evidence in this report points to the value for Canada to continue to uphold these commitments and to build on the progress made and invested in by Canada to date. With rising authoritarianism, rollback on women’s rights, shrinking civic space, and weakened multilateral institutions, evidence demonstrates that gender equality is a stabilizing force. The evidence presented in this section shows that in this context, the FIAP is one of the few foreign policy tools capable of supporting the resilience of a vibrant civil society in fragile and conflict-affected contexts—which is vital for democracy and stability—mobilizing resources and serving as a counterbalance to global retrenchment on women’s rights. Sidelining or weakening FIAP now would remove a critical tool for Canada to navigate these global challenges.

The qualitative evidence reviewed in this section offers valuable insights into how the FIAP has influenced practices, partnerships, and narratives within Canada’s international assistance ecosystem, complementing the quantitative data reviewed in the previous section. Stakeholder accounts and documentary analysis reveal a range of positive changes, including increased funding for feminist actors, changes in programming and organizational culture, and greater policy influence. However, given the FIAP’s bold and ambitious nature, numerous systemic barriers and critiques of the FIAP remain pertinent, and they are examined in the following section.

4. FIAP’s challenges and its lessons learned

Section main findings:

- Analysts, scholars, and practitioners have noted that the FIAP’s transformative potential has sometimes been hindered by policy incoherence, siloed implementation, and conceptual ambiguity. Tensions with other foreign policy domains and unclear conceptual definitions of feminism and intersectionality at times limited consistency and credibility.
- Evidence from the study consistently shows that top-down, bureaucratic, and opaque ways of funding, along with high administrative reporting burdens and low risk tolerance, negatively impacted the accessibility and reach of smaller and more informal WROs.
- Evidence reviewed suggests that the FIAP’s ambitious feminist goals were not always matched by sufficient funding, yet significant outcomes were still achieved despite challenges.
- Despite limitations, the FIAP has a strong, credible record with the potential to yield long-term impacts. It delivered meaningful results on the ground and built a strong global reputation.

The FIAP’s limitations and challenges have been widely examined in both academic and practitioner circles. Despite the numerous successes and positive impacts of the FIAP reviewed in the previous sections, the FIAP also has several gaps and limitations worth reflecting on to learn from and to inform future lessons. Many scholars,⁶⁸ practitioners, and civil society groups have

⁶⁷ Whipkey et al. (2025)

⁶⁸ Much of the existing critical literature has emerged from academia and has provided important conceptual and discursive insights into the policy’s framing and ambition. At the same time, many of these early analyses are primarily

criticized the Government of Canada for not always, or not sufficiently, “walking the talk” on its feminist commitments and values in practice.

A critique that is often raised by scholars and practitioners is that **the FIAP’s credibility and transformative potential are hindered by policy incoherence and siloed implementation**. The literature on the subject has demonstrated several policy inconsistencies between the FIAP and other foreign policy domains, such as defence and security, and trade. Many scholars argue that pursuing a FIAP (or a feminist foreign policy) while simultaneously selling weapons to countries with poor human rights records, like Israel and Saudi Arabia, is incompatible with feminist values and can undermine the overall goals and potential of the FIAP.⁶⁹ Others have noted that the FIAP conflicts with Canada’s mining practices and has been criticized for not sufficiently addressing the negative impacts of extractive economies on women’s human rights, as well as the environmental and humanitarian consequences of Canadian resource extraction corporations in countries where Canada provides assistance under the FIAP.⁷⁰ Finally, some have pointed out the disconnect between FIAP’s initiatives in Gaza and the West Bank and the broader context of Israeli occupation and the genocide of Palestinians. They also criticize Canada’s uncritical support for Israel and its silence on the numerous violations of human rights and international law in Gaza, actions that fundamentally contradict the FIAP’s feminist values.⁷¹

Further on policy coherence, Canadian feminist civil society, academics, and practitioners across the country have criticized the never-released white paper on feminist foreign policy, despite Canada’s claims to have one.⁷² One of the main arguments for this release is that a feminist foreign policy would enhance coherence across foreign policy areas and decrease siloed programming and implementation that lead to duplication or incoherence. On that topic, a survey member notes:

“The siloed nature of funding for development work versus humanitarian work at Global Affairs Canada creates barriers in pursuing triple nexus programming that would enhance and sustain gender equality outcomes across FIAP action areas, including Women, Peace and Security [...] Canada has done a good job supporting women and gender equality, but there’s still work to do, especially considering the new stated ODA direction focused on the trade-development nexus. Small local women’s groups need easier access to funding and more say in decisions. Canada should make sure that the new emphasis on trade diversification does not allow Canada to backslide on gender equality progress. Especially given that many of the sectors occupying government’s attention due to tariff action are male-dominated. The next policy review should focus on fair partnerships, long-term support, and real changes in power, not just short projects. Many partners still face short-term funding cycles and administrative burdens that limit flexibility and sustainability.” (Oxfam Canada)

grounded in textual and theoretical approaches, with limited attention to empirical evidence on how the FIAP is experienced and implemented in practice. This report therefore places greater emphasis on sector-informed critiques rooted in applied experience and empirical data, drawing on sources such as practitioner reflections, key informant insights, and evidence generated through implementation, evaluation, and field-based learning.

⁶⁹ Potvin and Lefurgey (2025); Vucetic (2017); Santoire (2021); Swan (2021); The Feminist Foreign Policy Working Group (2020)

⁷⁰ Plouffe 2025; Bouka et al. (2021); Seck and Simons (2018)

⁷¹ Swan (2021). See also Potvin and Lefurgey (2025)

⁷² Leclerc (2025)

Another survey participant has mentioned that:

“International assistance must be aligned with Canada's foreign policy, as several of its foreign policy positions directly undermine Canada's international assistance efforts, including in relation to gender equality. Specifically in the areas of trade, international financial architecture, bilateral relations, and global governance. For example, Canada's positions on the IMF, World Bank, and the Global Tax Treaty directly undermine low-income countries' ability to develop and prioritize their own social protection systems, including universal health coverage, which has a disproportionate impact on women.” (Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights)

As suggested by the organization above, the siloed nature of funding for the FIAP may have impeded a holistic approach, such as the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) or trade-development nexus approaches. Beyond the foreign policy realm, scholars have noted a lack of recognition of the interconnection between foreign and domestic policies. For example, between domestic migration policies and the welcoming of WHRDs from conflict-affected contexts⁷³, or again, the inconsistency in describing itself as a feminist country, while at the same time not implementing the recommendations put forward in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.⁷⁴

→ **Lesson learned:** Addressing these inconsistencies does not require abandoning feminist ambitions, but rather strengthening governance, safeguards, funding, and accountability across foreign policy domains. Evidence indicates that a clearer whole-of-government frameworks could help ensure that trade, investments, climate, and security engagements do not undermine FIAP objectives, while also enabling feminist principles to inform responsible private-sector engagement, risk management, and long-term stability. In this sense, policy coherence should be understood not only as a normative requirement but as a practical tool for protecting public investments and reducing downstream humanitarian and security risks.

A second commonly raised critique is that **the FIAP does not clearly articulate what it means by “feminism” or consistently define key gender equality concepts.** In practice, this can lead to uneven interpretations and superficial use of terms such as intersectionality, and occasional confusion around gender-related language and approaches. Some analysts also note that the policy tends to emphasize market-based and neoliberal approaches of feminism and may place less emphasis on addressing deeper structural drivers of conflict and poverty.

Scholars have criticized the lack of a more substantial feminist definition—specifically, how the government understands what feminism is and what makes the FIAP feminist—as impeding its transformative potential, leading to different definitions and interpretations of key terms. For example, some researchers⁷⁵ have discussed the conflation of terms ‘gender’ and ‘women’ or ‘gender equality’ with ‘women’s empowerment’ within the FIAP. Others have argued that the FIAP has a “flat” understanding of intersectionality, viewing it as an “additive model” of identities, rather than as the intersection of structures of oppression, and therefore denatured of its radical origins⁷⁶. In the same line, others argue that the FIAP produces a binary understanding of gender

⁷³ Petrozziello and Hennebry (2025)

⁷⁴ Midzain-Gobin and Dunton (2021)

⁷⁵ Cadesky (2020)

⁷⁶ Mason (2019)

and that there is insufficient importance put on intersecting identities like 2SLGBTQIA+ and women living with disability⁷⁷, which has consequences in reaching and including diverse beneficiaries in the FIAP, programming, monitoring, and evaluation, a conclusion that is also corroborated by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada's latest audit report.⁷⁸

A lack of definition of feminism, defined by and with partners, can limit its potential. Multiple empirical studies on the landing of the FIAP in different contexts reveal that there is an insufficient examination of how feminism is understood and sometimes rejected in some contexts, often perceived as a Western construct or imposition from abroad that does not align well with local priorities.⁷⁹ The results of a study⁸⁰ demonstrate that the FIAP's objectives were disconnected from the realities of the communities where they conducted the research (Saloum Islands, Senegal), and did not resonate with women's ambitions in this context, nor did they sufficiently consider the need for community men's involvement. The study concludes that the FIAP is based on a Western view of gender relations, ignoring the postcolonial historical, cultural, social, and economic contexts in which these relations occur.

Although the Government of Canada explicitly states that the FIAP "is feminist because it addresses the root causes of poverty through an intersectional, human rights-based and feminist lens",⁸¹ some disagree, arguing that the FIAP rather adopts an instrumentalist approach to women's rights, by emphasizing economic growth as a capitalist argument for women's rights. To balance this critique, however, it is important to recognize that evidence from partners shows that feminist economic programming has led to crucial results in agency, decision-making power, poverty reduction, and economic innovation outcomes.

Still, many scholars have argued that the FIAP endorses rather than challenges the neoliberal international order, creating a feminist tension⁸² and a mainstream neoliberal version of feminism⁸³ that does not sufficiently address the structural causes of inequalities, like poverty, and Canada's role in maintaining them. This is particularly the case in the 'Growth that works for everyone' action area (linking gender equality with economic growth – or "smart economics") and in relying on market mechanisms⁸⁴ to achieve gender equality. A survey participant mentions that:

"Gender inequalities, and poverty in general, are caused and sustained by systems that benefit from them. As long as these systems are not challenged, it will be difficult to overcome the various barriers faced by women and other vulnerable groups. The objectives [of the FIAP] are indeed

⁷⁷ Morton et al. (2020); Aylward and Brown (2020); Mason (2019); Rao and Delorme (2024)

⁷⁸ Office of the Auditor General of Canada (2023)

⁷⁹ Bouka et al. (2021); Rao and Tiessen (2020)

⁸⁰ Fall and Koziej Lévesque (2022). See also Rao and Delorme (2023, 10).

⁸¹ Global Affairs Canada (2023e)

⁸² Bouka et al. (2021)

⁸³ Parisi (2020); Morton et al. (2020)

⁸⁴ Some practitioners and scholars have criticized the Equality Fund initiative based on the argument that it is using "dirty" money from the stock market to "do good." Gender-lens investing, for some feminists, is incompatible with transformative feminist change. For them, the Canadian government's promotion of innovative financing mechanisms as a means to achieve gender equality goals represents a form of "gender washing" that contributes to the financialization of development (Spronk and St-Pierre-Gaudreault 2025; for more context on those discussions, see Amin and Yahaya 2023; Miller and Staszewska 2020).

feminist, but without questioning the systems of oppression, the feminist approach remains incomplete.” Société de coopération pour le développement international (SOCODEVI)

→ **Lesson learned:** This critique points to a practical area for renewal. Evidence indicates that clarifying core concepts and operational definitions around feminism, gender equality, and intersectionality could strengthen policy coherence and credibility, improve implementation consistency, and make results easier to measure and communicate to the Canadian public. For a government operating under fiscal and geopolitical constraints, greater conceptual precision could support clearer guidance, more efficient programming, and stronger accountability for outcomes. In this sense, addressing conceptual gaps is less about redefining the policy’s ambition than about making its tools more usable, defensible, and aligned with evolving foreign policy priorities.

In practice, another recurring critique emerging from the analysis is that **the FIAP’s top-down, bureaucratic, and opaque funding methods, along with its high administrative and reporting demands, hinder partnerships and restrict its transformative potential.** Grassroots partners and practitioners have noted that GAC’s institutional reporting requirements are burdensome and fall on the shoulders of already marginalized, under-resourced, and overworked WROs. They also observe that there is often a poor fit between results-based management reporting requirements and a feminist MEL approach⁸⁵, as social changes are not easily measured through traditional reporting,⁸⁶ especially in conflict-affected contexts and countries facing complex, unpredictable, multidimensional “polycrises” like Mali.⁸⁷ These reflections were also supported by a recent audit that found that most of GAC’s indicators were not effectively tracking and measuring project outputs and outcomes, and that there were significant issues in GAC’s information management practices, making it difficult to demonstrate the outcomes of the FIAP for women and girls.⁸⁸

As discussed in Section 3.2, while the FIAP initiated several organizational changes and pushed organizations to better integrate gender equality measures in their structure, a study⁸⁹ found that limited staffing, gender expertise, and dedicated financial resources also placed additional strain on those organizations, often concentrating the burden of gender analysis on a small number of staff without adequate support. At the same time, the study highlights persistent systemic barriers within GAC’s funding and accountability mechanisms, which respondents described as exclusionary, opaque, and bureaucratic. These practices continue to reproduce unequal power relations between Northern and Southern institutions and risk undermining trust-based partnerships central to feminist approaches.

Multiple evaluations highlight that the implementation of the WVL program was inherently complex, reflecting both the ambition and novelty of its feminist design. The program’s broad scope, large number of stakeholders, and evolving policy environment made coordination across GAC divisions time- and resource-intensive.⁹⁰ This complexity was compounded by internal challenges, including confusion among staff and partners about gender equality coding, and

⁸⁵ Global Affairs Canada (2023c)

⁸⁶ Baranyi and Saint-Louis (2025); Bouka et al. (2021)

⁸⁷ Goyet (2025)

⁸⁸ Office of the Auditor General of Canada (2023)

⁸⁹ Rao and Delorme (2024, 9)

⁹⁰ Global Affairs Canada (2022c, 20)

administrative demands that proved burdensome for grantees.⁹¹ On the other hand, as raised by participating organizations in the survey, gender equality coding has also functioned as a “disciplining” mechanism for program design, implementation, and MEL, particularly in health, SRHR, education, and women’s economic empowerment programming, driving improved alignment with gender equality results.

The 2022 Formative Evaluation further underscored that WVL was particularly challenging for GAC’s Gender Equality Division, which assumed an expanded role without commensurate adjustments to structures, resources, or capacities. At launch, departmental systems were not fully “fit for purpose” for feminist programming or direct support to local WROs. Corporate requirements related to contracting, due diligence, reporting, and partner selection posed significant barriers—especially for new and local partners—and did not consistently reflect feminist principles of inclusivity, transparency, or capacity strengthening.⁹²

A recurring constraint across WVL and other FIAP-related initiatives was GAC’s low risk appetite. Evaluations found that risk management approaches did not evolve sufficiently to support direct or indirect funding for local and smaller WROs, leading to conservative partner selection and additional reporting burdens for lower-capacity organizations. In some cases, risk and audit requirements were transferred to implementing partners, incentivizing the selection of larger, more established organizations perceived as “safer” choices. Similar dynamics were raised in the Equality Fund/Partnership for Gender Equality formative evaluation, reinforcing overall concerns about unequal access to funding.⁹³

Despite FIAP’s commitment to leaving no one behind, evidence indicates that certain groups are left behind and not reached by FIAP initiatives, including women with disabilities, 2SLGBTQI+ communities, displaced and migrant women, and small, informal, or unregistered WROs, notably for safety reasons, like sex workers or women living with HIV.⁹⁴ Challenges related to transparency, communication, and consistency in application and selection processes further limited accessibility, with civil society actors reporting unclear guidance and high unpaid costs associated with proposal development.⁹⁵ At the same time, evaluations acknowledge that WVL’s inclusive and participatory feminist approach is inherently demanding, requiring sustained time and resources from all actors—an investment that, while challenging, reflects Canada’s willingness to pursue transformative change.⁹⁶

→ Lesson learned: This challenge should be understood less as a flaw of the FIAP itself and more as a systems-design lesson. Evidence from partners suggests that simplifying funding, reporting, and due diligence processes, particularly for smaller WROs, would significantly improve delivery efficiency, partnership quality, and results sustainability. Streamlined and more proportionate administrative requirements, while still maintaining commitments to quality, can reduce transaction costs for both government and partners and enable high-impact local actors to deliver

⁹¹ Global Affairs Canada (2024b; 2021a); Novović (2020)

⁹² Global Affairs Canada (2022c, 5)

⁹³ Global Affairs Canada (2024b; 2022c; 2023b)

⁹⁴ Baranyi and Saint-Louis (2025); Petrozziello and Hennebry (2025); Parent Long and Dureid (2025); Brayton et al. (2023); Global Affairs Canada (2022c)

⁹⁵ Women’s Rights Policy Group and Canadian Council for International Co-operation (2020)

⁹⁶ Global Affairs Canada (2022c; 2022b; 2021a; 2018)

more effectively. In a constrained fiscal environment, adapting funding and reporting mechanisms is therefore not about lowering standards, but about improving performance, accountability, and value for money while preserving the FIAP's most proven effective locally-led components.

Finally, analysts have noted that **the FIAP's ambitious goals were not always met with sufficient financial resources**. From the outset of the FIAP, practitioners and scholars have raised concerns about the gap between the highly ambitious goals of the FIAP's initiatives and an insufficient budget.⁹⁷ As shown in Section 3.1, despite large investments since the launch of the FIAP, both in overall ODA and ODA with gender equality objectives, Canada's ODA still does not meet the UN recommendation target of 0.7% of GNI. While there have been increases in gender 'significant' bilateral allocable aid across all programming areas, evidence indicates that improvements are needed to increase gender 'principal' initiatives in certain areas, notably humanitarian action, climate, and peace and security funding.⁹⁸ Insufficient resources have consequences, evidence shows. For example, the formative evaluation noted that some challenges limited the capacity of WVL projects to deliver large-scale, transformational gender equality results. In large countries like Ukraine, WROs said that grants were too small to achieve broad outreach or impact. The short duration of most grants, under two years, also hindered the achievement, consolidation, and maintenance of results, raising sustainability concerns.⁹⁹

→ **Lesson learned:** A lesson learned from the FIAP is that highly ambitious policy objectives are most effective when matched with clear, predictable, and appropriately scoped resources. Several analysts noted that funding did not always fully align with the policy's feminist ambitions, which at times limited the depth and sustainability of results. In the current fiscal context, this does not necessarily imply expanding budgets; rather, it involves sharpening priorities, protecting the most effective and evidence-based funding streams, and ensuring greater predictability for partners. Aligning objectives, instruments, and resources strengthens policy credibility, improves value for money, and helps ensure that commitments translate into measurable outcomes.

Despite the policy incoherence, bureaucratic constraints, and conceptual gaps critiques laid out in this section, which should not be mistaken for evidence of sector underperformance, many of the documented outcomes of the FIAP were achieved despite these limitations through adaptive, high-risk implementation by CSOs and local partners. The evidence presented in this section suggests **the importance of engaging critically with the FIAP's gaps, not as grounds for sidelining the policy, but as essential pathways to strengthen and safeguard its future**.

5. Analytical conclusions from the study and ways forward

The FIAP—its flagship initiatives, large-scale investments, and various programs— is ambitious, laudable, and historic. **The evidence gathered and reviewed through this research demonstrates tangible positive impacts of the FIAP worldwide and highlights Canada's global leadership in gender equality.**

⁹⁷ Brown and Swiss (2017)

⁹⁸ Dicks and Woroniuk (2023)

⁹⁹ Global Affairs Canada (2022c)

This analytical study takes place during a time of significant uncertainty. The 2025 federal budget proposes substantial cuts to international assistance and global health programs, signaling a potential retreat from Canada’s long-standing commitments and a sidelining of the FIAP. The government’s shift toward security and economic issues such as defence, trade, geopolitical competition, and economic security—driven by a rapidly changing international landscape—raises concerns about conflicting with its feminist commitments. Six forward-looking analytical conclusions emerge from the study.

First, the evidence reviewed in this study indicates that **the FIAP’s feminist foundations—including definitions, objectives, and theory of change—would benefit from clearer (re)articulation and a reaffirmation**, grounded in human rights, intersectionality, and power analysis. A more precise operational definition of “feminism” would support more consistent interpretation and implementation across sectors and departments. Survey participants have noted that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls should remain the core objective of Canada’s international assistance, especially in a global context marked by militarization, shrinking civic space, democratic backsliding, anti-gender movements, and setbacks on hard-won gender equality gains. Findings from the review and the survey highlight the importance of reaffirming and updating the FIAP’s core principles through inclusive consultations and a comprehensive review of its first eight years. In a markedly different political landscape from its launch and under fiscal constraints, clearer language and strategic framing—while maintaining the policy’s core feminist principles—could also improve usability, coherence, and policy defensibility amid changing government priorities.¹⁰⁰

Second, **policy coherence is a central constraint on the FIAP’s overall impact**. While the policy has significantly shaped international assistance programming, the evidence shows that misalignment with other foreign policy domains—including security, trade, diplomacy, and crisis response—has at times weakened credibility, consistency, and results. The FIAP has often operated within development silos rather than as a fully integrated whole-of-government framework. Findings from the review and survey point to the importance of stronger cross-government coordination and clearer accountability structures to ensure that gender equality commitments are applied more consistently across Canada’s broader international engagement.

Third, the evidence reviewed in this report highlights the importance of **maintaining support for feminist, WROs, and locally led approaches**. Programs such as WVL have demonstrated the value of core, flexible, long-term funding for WROs and feminist movements. Trust-based partnerships and local decision-making are critical to realizing the FIAP’s stated commitment to locally led development. Best practices shown in the desk review and noted by survey participants include “hosting” arrangements and partnerships between established national WROs and smaller, informal or unregistered local organizations. There is a strong push to more deliberately shift power, resources, and capacity to local actors, including through partnerships with networks representing structurally excluded groups and through targeted calls or quotas. Respondents also emphasized the need for Canada to uphold its commitments on rapid, flexible, and crisis-responsive funding windows, especially in high-risk contexts, as well as a centralized platform to support implementing partners throughout the full program cycle, from application to reporting,

¹⁰⁰ Demeke and Imbleau (2025); Whipkey et al. (2025)

paired with meaningful feedback mechanisms.¹⁰¹ These recommendations are especially crucial, given the recent massive aid cuts seen globally in 2025 and prior to that, which are pushing many WROs to a “breaking point worldwide”, according to a groundbreaking UN Women report.¹⁰² Several studies have shown that funding WROs, 2SLGBTQIA+ organizations, and youth-led movements yields significant benefits across peacebuilding, democratic resilience, climate action, security, and crisis response.¹⁰³

Fourth, evidence across sectors and participant organizations has shown that **the FIAP would benefit from continued improvements in results measurement, learning, and management.** The desk review and survey participants have consistently called for improved, streamlined results measurement, MEL, and reporting systems, including clearer indicators and a rethink of what constitutes “success” in feminist programming. Greater transparency, consistency, and reliability in gender policy markers would benefit from refinement, alongside corporate systems and bureaucratic requirements better adapted to feminist, locally led programming, including partner feedback mechanisms to inform programming. Low institutional risk tolerance was identified as a major barrier to sustainable partnerships with feminist and WROs, reinforcing the need to simplify funding and reporting requirements and to encourage non-traditional, narrative, and qualitative approaches to performance and impact reporting.¹⁰⁴

Fifth, **financing remains a structural pressure point for the FIAP.** The evidence shows that while Canada made significant gender equality investments under the policy, funding has not always matched the scale or duration of its feminist ambitions, which have limited the depth and sustainability of results in some contexts. At the same time, innovative financing models—such as the Equality Fund—demonstrate that gender equality objectives can be advanced through diverse instruments when paired with strong transparency, accountability, and accessibility safeguards.

Sixth, in a context of global democratic backsliding, shrinking civic space, and growing pushback against gender equality and feminist foreign policy, evidence indicates that **the FIAP represents a strategically significant and credible policy asset rather than a peripheral one.** Across the survey inputs, participants consistently view the preservation of FIAP gains as both urgent and pragmatic: the policy has functioned as a stabilizing framework for advancing gender equality, SRHR, women’s rights, and inclusive peace and development, even where implementation has been imperfect. Its added value is greatest where political commitment, coherent cross-government alignment, and predictable resourcing are present. The findings also show that Canada’s international credibility and leadership in gender equality, WPS, and feminist approaches now depend on whether these commitments are upheld in practice and communicated effectively. A key point is that the durability of the FIAP—and the safeguarding of its most effective elements—are increasingly seen by practitioners as a “test” of Canadian leadership amid a global retreat from rights and multilateralism. Indeed, maintaining Canada’s leadership in feminist approaches, within multilateral fora and through partnerships with civil society, will be essential to sustaining momentum and countering global retrenchment on gender equality. This includes maintaining

¹⁰¹ Global Affairs Canada (2023c); Women’s Rights Policy Group and Canadian Council for International Co-operation (2020)

¹⁰² UN Women (2025)

¹⁰³ Women’s Rights Policy Group (2025)

¹⁰⁴ Global Affairs Canada (2023c)

gender equality departmental targets, renewing and safeguarding existing financial and programmatic investments, strengthening accountability and public reporting, and continuing active leadership in multilateral feminist spaces such as the FFP+ Group, the Women Foreign Ministers' Network, and the G7 and G20.¹⁰⁵ The 2025 OECD Peer review also suggested the importance of clearer public communication of FIAP results to Canadian audiences, noting that a compelling narrative of the FIAP's impacts could help defend development budgets in an increasingly constrained geopolitical environment.¹⁰⁶

Overall, the evidence reviewed in this report indicates a credible record of the FIAP's outcomes. The FIAP has generated numerous tangible shifts in resourcing, programming, and policy discussions, despite limitations in implementation. As feedback from survey participants and the formative evaluation of several FIAP initiatives show, feminist programming and MEL, for example, are inherently more time-consuming and difficult; transformative change, including within institutions, takes time. The challenges and lessons learned presented in Section 4 should not be interpreted as a reason to sideline the FIAP.

Taken together, the lessons learned suggest that the focus should be on preserving what already works from the FIAP through consolidation, reframing, and strategic reinforcement. With targeted adjustments and sustained political commitment, the FIAP is well-positioned to continue shaping Canada's international assistance in a way that is principled, effective, and adaptable to a rapidly changing global environment. Evidence from the desk review and survey participants shows that gender equality is a structural determinant shaping outcomes across economic resilience, peace, security and stability, climate adaptation, and humanitarian effectiveness. Given that the FIAP's initial purpose was to build a "more peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous world," it aligns with current foreign policy and fiscal priorities. For example:

- Through different mechanisms, both WVL and the Equality Fund help strengthen locally led WROs and feminist organizations that deliver frontline services, prevent instability, and build community resilience in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, directly supporting goals related to **conflict prevention, social cohesion, and overall democratic and economic stability.**
- The 10-YC on Global Health delivers measurable outcomes in maternal health, SRHR, and nutrition, again areas that the empirical literature shows are strongly linked to **labour market participation, poverty reduction, and long-term economic resilience.**
- Other FIAP-related initiatives, such as the WPS National Action Plan, directly contribute to advancing **inclusive governance, stability, peace, and long-term conflict prevention.**
- FIAP-aligned investments in education show that gender-responsive schooling and education-to-work pathways are not only rights-based interventions but also **strategic investments in long-term stability and economic resilience.**
- FIAP-related investments linked to women's economic empowerment, financial access, literacy, and decision-making and skills development are consistent with the literature showing that such investments strengthen women's participation in the labour market, increase the formalization of work, and expand access to decent work and financial products and

¹⁰⁵ OECD (2025b); Whipkey et al. (2025)

¹⁰⁶ OECD (2025b, 9)

services.¹⁰⁷ These approaches align with Canada’s **current trade and economic resilience objectives**.

- Evidence from the literature shows that climate shocks interact with existing gender inequalities in ways that heighten risks for women, girls, and marginalized communities. Programs integrating gender-transformative approaches into climate governance, clean energy, and climate-smart agriculture can improve coping capacity and reduce long-term vulnerability.¹⁰⁸ Framed this way, FIAP’s climate investments support today’s priorities in **climate resilience, the energy transition, and risk reduction**.
- Data shows that conflicts exacerbate gender inequalities, poverty, instability, and climate insecurity; on the other hand, investments in gender equality have positive spillover effects on stability, peace, and economic growth. Decades of empirical evidence have shown that women’s meaningful participation in decision-making linked to peace and security, including peace processes, is linked to improved institutional trust and more durable peace outcomes.¹⁰⁹ FIAP-related investments, in particular those that reinforce the implementation of the WPS agenda, are directly aligned with broader goals of **stability, conflict prevention, and credible multilateral engagement**.

Together, these initiatives are not peripheral social programs but **strategic investments in human capital, institutional resilience, and inclusive growth**. They offer tested delivery platforms, trusted partnerships, and global credibility that Canada can continue to build on, articulated around today’s priorities on security, prosperity, and effective and principled international assistance. As noted by the Women’s Rights Policy Group,¹¹⁰ Canada’s longstanding leadership in feminist international assistance is consistent with its current priorities of advancing economic and trade resilience, democratic values, international development effectiveness, and global stability.

The desk review findings and survey participants’ insights point to a broader need to reframe FIAP and gender equality not as a niche or stand-alone priority, but **as a strategic pillar that supports the delivery of Canada’s evolving foreign policy and fiscal priorities and reflects Canadian values**. As some survey participants noted, the FIAP’s relevance will be judged by its ability to help Canada respond to future risks. From this perspective, sustaining and strengthening the FIAP can be about both maintaining long-standing feminist principles *and* exercising strategic foresight. In the context of “polycrisis”—geopolitical instability, climate shocks, protracted conflicts, setbacks in human rights, and declining democracy—addressing gender inequalities is also a risk-management strategy: sustained investments now can help reduce future humanitarian, security, and economic costs.

In summary, evidence in **this report demonstrates that deprioritizing the FIAP could carry higher strategic and operational costs than maintaining it as a core framework of Canada’s international assistance**. As noted by the Women’s Rights Policy Group¹¹¹ “without the FIAP and its safeguards, aid risks becoming more instrumentalist and less aligned with poverty reduction, global stability and human rights.” The analysis indicates that reducing the FIAP’s role could lead

¹⁰⁷ UN Women (n.d.)

¹⁰⁸ UN Women (n.d.)

¹⁰⁹ UN Women (n.d.)

¹¹⁰ Women’s Rights Policy Group (2025)

¹¹¹ Women’s Rights Policy Group (2025)

to a more fragmented policy approach, undermining hard-won partnerships and investments, and reducing international credibility where Canada has built recognized leadership at a time when gender equality faces increasing global backlash. Rebuilding comparable frameworks, partnerships, and policy leadership later would likely require significantly more time and resources than sustaining and adapting the ones already in place for eight years.

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Annex 1: Methodology of the report

This report draws on a mixed methodology. First, a desk review of secondary data (academic articles and evaluation reports produced by think tanks, research centres, partner organizations, civil society networks, and NGOs) and primary data (Government open-source and OECD-DAC data). A combination of four search databases (Google, Google Scholar, Government of Canada Open Portal, and the FFP Collaborative’s repository) was used to map and identify relevant documents, using a variety of keywords to locate sources. Second, Cooperation Canada has distributed a survey to its organizational members, and 14 answers¹¹² have been received. Their answers were helpful for data mapping and analysis (allowing the identification of internal sources from their own organizations or their partners and their reflections on the FIAP).

The sources were divided into four broad categories for analysis: 1) policy, 2) government, 3) academia, and 4) results of the Cooperation Canada members’ survey. The policy category includes documentation – such as reports, evaluations, policy briefs, blogs, and stories/case studies – produced by civil society, NGOs, think tanks, implementing partners, FIAP beneficiaries, and international and intergovernmental organizations such as the OECD-DAC. While this is a broad category, it was hard to separate them, as they often interacted with one another through implementation or learning partnerships (E.g., the Feminist Foreign Policy Working Group, the Women’s Rights Policy Group, etc.). The government category includes documentation produced by the Government, the Office of the General Auditor of Canada, and other federal agencies, such as Global Affairs Canada, through formative evaluation reports, audits, annual reports to Parliament on international assistance, web pages, and open-source datasets. Academia includes peer-reviewed scientific articles and book chapters that specifically focus on the FIAP (theses or academic sources that propose only theoretical and discursive arguments/reflections, without empirical material, were not included in this sample).

Recognizing the breadth of material related to Canada’s FIAP, this evaluation did not aim to compile an exhaustive sample of all references to the policy. As a highly decentralized initiative, the amount of online and offline material (which is not always publicly accessible), along with inconsistent use¹¹³ of the “FIAP” label across reports and partner documentation, renders such

¹¹² From the following organizations: Acted Canada, CARE Canada, Plan International Canada, Fós Feminista Canada, Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights, Equality Fund, World University Service of Canada, Humanity & Inclusion Canada, Oxfam Canada, Save the Children Canada, the Humanitarian Policy Group (ODI Global), Inter Pares, KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, SOCODEVI, and Avocats sans Frontières Canada. Québec organizations were directly contacted by the author to ensure a francophone representation in the study: Fondation Paul-Gérin Lajoie and CECI shared internal documentation with the author.

¹¹³ For example, members of Cooperation Canada shared some programme evaluation reports with us through the survey, but they are not always *explicitly* labeled as part of the FIAP, making it hard to locate them in the public domain. While there is abundant data on FIAP, there is even more voluminous information available on feminist foreign policy (FFP) – which is sometimes used interchangeably with FIAP in the Canadian context – but the study targeted the search more specifically on the FIAP as much as possible. For a deeper narrative analysis on the interlinkages and overlapping of FFP, FIAP, and WPS, see: (Deschamps-Laporte and Santoire, forthcoming 2026).

exhaustivity neither feasible nor methodologically meaningful. Instead, the study used a rigorous triangulated research approach, combining structured database searches, mapping of grey and academic literature, and targeted document reviews in both English and French (although there was more available in English). It excluded news articles, press releases, op-eds, and commentaries. Through this approach, the selection of sources prioritised relevance (that is, at least a significant part of the source discusses the FIAP), empirical evidence, and a clear link to the FIAP's initiatives and/or funding, thereby strengthening the reliability of the findings. The document review also incorporated an iterative snowballing approach, cross-checking references and citation trails across identified sources to ensure that major and frequently cited materials were captured.

Although 100+ documents and web pages were skimmed and consulted to assess relevance, in total, a sample of **N=86** sources was selected, thematically coded, and analyzed in NVivo¹¹⁴: n=14 from the members' survey, n=18 from academia, n=23 from the Government, and n=31 from the policy sector.

¹¹⁴ NVivo is a qualitative data analysis software.

Annex 2: Survey questions

The following are the survey questions managed by the Women's Rights Policy Group de Cooperation Canada from October to December 2025 (in English and French).

1. Name of your organization (facultative)
2. Has your organization conducted any internal or external reviews, assessments, or evaluations of how FIAP has influenced your programming, partnerships, or results?
3. Has your organization participated in, commissioned, or contributed to any sector-wide studies or collective analyses on FIAP's impact? Are there particular publications or resources you would recommend we review?
4. From your organization's perspective, what aspects of FIAP have most strengthened gender equality outcomes?
5. Where do you see gaps, challenges, or lessons learned that Canada should consider in shaping the future of its international assistance policy?
6. Do you have case studies, data, or examples of practice that illustrate FIAP's impact (positive or negative)?