

Walking the Talk

Political leadership on financing for gender equality at FFD4: a readout



At the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD4) in Sevilla, our [Walking the Talk](#) program hosted a side event attended by powerful voices from across the world. “Financing for Development and Gender Equality: A Feminist Agenda for Action for Sevilla and Beyond” welcomed ministers, civil society and feminist activists, UN entities and development partners. The following is a detailed readout of the event.

Compromiso de Sevilla and financing for gender equality

Although the outcome document ‘[Compromiso de Sevilla](#)’ did not match the level of ambition feminists advocated for, we welcome the commitment and political leadership on financing for gender equality of the governments of Norway, Iceland, Malawi, Brazil, France, Spain, and the Netherlands. Amidst a challenging global landscape marked by democratic backsliding, shrinking civic space, and a pronounced backlash against women’s rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), the speakers at this event underscored the urgent need for decisive political will, increased investment, and innovative financing mechanisms that prioritize feminist principles and the empowerment of women and girls. The discussions highlighted the critical intersections between gender equality, economic development, social justice, and multilateral cooperation, with particular emphasis on maintaining and expanding funding for vital UN agencies and grassroots women-led organizations.



From left on: Foteini Papagiotti (moderator), Deputy Director Policy and Advocacy at ICRW, Þorgerður Katrín Gunnarsdóttir, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland, Dr. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, Deputy Executive Director at UN Women, Åsmund Grøver Aukrust, Minister for International Development of Norway, Jean-Sébastien Conty, Deputy Director of Global Affairs of France

Opening remarks

The keynote speakers' initial remarks gave an overview of ongoing efforts to transform global financing and policy frameworks in pursuit of a just and equitable future for all genders.

Dr. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, Deputy Executive Director at UN Women, opened the session by reaffirming the value of member state leadership in upholding rights-based commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment. She framed the conference as a pivotal moment—not just for policy dialogue, but for affirming agency and confronting a deepening global backlash against gender equality. She emphasized that gender equality must not be relegated to footnotes or statistical indicators. "Women are not numbers—they are real lives lived every day," she said.

Þorgerður Katrín Gunnarsdóttir, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland, stated: "We are in difficult times for building resilience and a global response to gender push-back. We must adapt our approach continually. Anti-rights movements are completely unacceptable. Iceland remains a constructive partner to the women and girls' movement and continues to push the gender agenda forward. Let's fight for a better future for all girls and all women around the world."

Minister Gunnarsdóttir described Iceland's international development approach as both specific and cross-cutting, with gender equality serving as a core pillar. She highlighted Iceland's support for women's rights organizations, particularly through the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, and its commitment to increasing financial contributions to multilateral institutions supporting SRHR.

Åsmund Grøver Aukrust, the Norwegian Minister for International Development, underscored Norway's unwavering commitment to gender equality and SRHR, identifying them as core pillars of the country's international development policy. He emphasized that the fundamental right of women and girls to bodily autonomy and freedom is not negotiable: "We are facing backlash at this time, the rise of diverse anti-gender groups. It is time for the rest of us to really step up. UN agencies, civil society, Southern and European countries need to build stronger futures for women and girls."

He added that Norway had fulfilled its funding pledge of 9.6 billion Norwegian kroner for SRHR and increased its SRHR budget this year, affirming that political will must be backed by concrete investment.

The opening segment was closed by Jean-Sébastien Conty, Deputy Director of Global Affairs of France. He delivered a forward-looking intervention outlining France's strategic commitment to advancing feminist foreign policy (FFP) and feminist financing. He emphasized that fighting for gender equality must remain a central global priority. In response, France has launched a new Feminist Foreign Policy Strategy (2025–2030)



shaped by broad consultation with over 200 partners. And France will host a high-level Ministerial Conference on FFP on October 27 and 28, 2025.

Mr. Conty underscored that inclusive financing requires rethinking global partnerships and financing models. He laid out three key convictions for transforming the global financing landscape through a feminist lens: robust partnerships, change of scale and nature of finance, and the importance of accountability.

A video statement followed by Fred Simwaka, Deputy Director for Gender Affairs of Malawi. His government co-sponsored the side-event, and Mr. Simwaka emphasized that feminist movements must be placed at the center of financial decision-making processes.

Panel discussion

The panel discussion highlighted various perspectives on financing for gender equality as fundamental to development, covering approaches from government, philanthropy, and civil society organizations.



From left to right: Foteini Papagiotti (moderator), Deputy Director Policy and Advocacy at ICRW, Alessandra Nilo, External Relations Director at IPPF ACRO, Sai Jyothirmay Racherla, Deputy Executive Director at ARROW, Seema Jalan, Deputy Director for Gender Equality Program Advocacy and Communications at Gates Foundation, Gustavo Westmann, Secretary of the Presidency of Brazil

Starting the panel, Gustavo Westmann, Secretary of the Presidency of Brazil, emphasized that SRHR is becoming a taboo again in some spaces, despite the foundational progress achieved in Cairo in 1994. He described this regression as alarming and underscored Brazil's

longstanding commitment to gender equality, which it views as indispensable to sustainable development. He outlined Brazil's approach to navigating the current "chaotic" geopolitical environment: building broad, inclusive narratives that bring opposing views to the same table. Brazil has carried this strategy across platforms, including the G20, COP processes, and BRICS, with an emphasis on multilateral coordination. He shared a powerful reminder that the challenge is not a lack of resources, but political will and priority-setting. Referencing recent G7 discussions where nations pledged to increase military spending, he said: "Resources exist. It's a matter of choice. The legacy we leave to the next generation must not be one where weapons are worth more than justice and equality."

Seema Jalan, Deputy Director for Gender Equality Program Advocacy and Communications at Gates Foundation, emphasized that while philanthropy plays a critical role in advancing gender equality, it is not the responsibility of philanthropies to fill the funding gaps left by governments, as philanthropies are not elected bodies. Instead, the Gates Foundation focuses on investing in bold, innovative ideas—especially in areas that governments or the private sector may overlook or avoid—and reducing risks to help pave the way for broader government and private sector investment. She highlighted their work on building evidence and clearing pathways to scale programs that support gender equality, particularly focusing on all genders with special attention to women and gender non-conforming individuals. She also stressed that accountability must remain at the center of these efforts to ensure that investments truly improve women's lives.

Sai Jyothirmai Racherla, Deputy Executive Director of ARROW, emphasized that feminist financing must directly address justice and gender equality and focus on eradicating poverty in all its forms, ensuring dignity without distinction of race, sex, language, religion, political opinion, disability, or gender. Central to feminist financing is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the right to development, which must be fulfilled in ways that meet the needs of people while harmonizing with the environment. This includes both current and future generations and demands the redistribution of wealth and resources within and across countries.

Alessandra Nilo, External Relations Director of IPPF ACRO, noted that the current well-coordinated and well-funded assault on democracy, gender equality, science, and climate action is also focusing particularly on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). This backlash denies bodily autonomy as a fundamental right inseparable from development. She argued that without sexual and reproductive rights, women cannot fully participate economically, and without gender equality, the SDGs remain out of reach. Investing directly in gender equality is not only a rights issue but yields the highest economic return, potentially boosting GDP by 20%. Ms. Nilo called for a radical rethink of resource distribution — it's not a lack of financial resources globally, but the choices on how they are allocated. Instead of investing in wars and military spending, governments should exceed their Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitments and ensure sustained



funding for gender equality and SRHR, which is fundamental for poverty alleviation and sustainable institutions. She referenced decades of feminist advocacy pushing for structural shifts in financing, stronger multilateral systems for accountability, and an end to harmful fiscal practices like tax evasion and regressive taxation in order to free up budget for rights-based investments.

Audience contribution

After the panel, there was an intervention from the floor by the government of the Netherlands. Steven Collet, Deputy Director General International Cooperation, addressed concerns about the Netherlands' commitment to gender equality, affirming that the Dutch government remains fully committed to standing shoulder to shoulder with global partners on this issue. He emphasized that this commitment is a matter of political will and staying power, both internationally and domestically. He acknowledged recent budget cuts affecting gender equality but highlighted that the Netherlands continues to mainstream gender equality across all programming, including areas such as gender-based violence (GBV), women's entrepreneurship, and Women, Peace, and Security (WPS).



From left on: Foteini Papagiotti (moderator), Deputy Director Policy and Advocacy at ICRW, Ana M. Alonso Giganto, Ambassador-at-large for Feminist Foreign Policy of Spain, Bruna Martinez, Manager of Walking the Talk at Hivos.

Closing remarks

The side event concluded with closing remarks by Ana M. Alonso Giganto, Ambassador-at-large for Feminist Foreign Policy of Spain and Bruna Martinez, Manager of Walking the Talk at Hivos.

Ms. Alonso reflected on the important issues raised during the panel, emphasizing the real and life-threatening impact that funding and defunding—particularly Official Development Assistance (ODA)—has on women's and girls' access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. She reaffirmed Spain's full commitment to continued ODA funding for UNFPA and UN Women as key mechanisms to ensure these resources reach those in need. Ms. Alonso highlighted the staggering gender financing gap in ODA—estimated at \$420 billion annually—and cautioned that ongoing global cuts to ODA threaten the sustainability of this system.

Ms. Martinez emphasized the urgent need for greater cohesion and solidarity in the efforts to advance gender equality, particularly in collaboration with governments. She highlighted the importance of identifying and supporting the champions who continue to demonstrate political will in this space. It is inspiring, she noted, to witness governments stepping up to "walk the talk" by aligning resources with commitments to gender equality. Ms. Martinez underscored the necessity of building trust and strong partnerships across governments, UN agencies, civil society organizations, the private sector, and philanthropy. She reinforced the view that investing in women's rights organizations and gender equality is not merely a moral imperative but a critical investment in sustainable development. She concluded her remarks by emphasizing the importance of continued engagement and connecting FFD4 commitments to other global agendas and processes. She pointed to the [Financing for Feminist Futures Conference](#), organized by Walking the Talk, as an opportunity to maintain momentum and strategize for a fairer international financial system and increased funding for gender equality and women's rights organizations. The conference will take place from October 8-10 in Madrid.

12 Calls to Action for Resourcing Gender Equality

The [12 Calls to Action](#) is a bold initiative to mobilize more and better funding for feminist movements and women's rights organizations, especially in the Majority world. This collective approach aims to build momentum to fund strong, independent feminist movements that strengthen democracies, advance peace, address climate change, and drive economic, political, and social equality. By consolidating these demands into one document and narrowing them down to 12 calls to action, we aim to draw the attention of political decision-makers and advance funding for gender equality ahead of the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development and other key international processes.



Thank you co-organizers

We thank our co-organizers International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), Countdown 2030 Europe, Generation Equality Action Coalition on Feminist Movements and Leadership FML, and Generation Equality Action Coalition on Bodily Autonomy and SRHR for cooperating in this event. And a special thanks to the support received from the governments of Malawi, Norway, and Iceland as co-sponsors of this event. We also thank our other co-sponsors Fos Feminista, Crea, UN Women, ARROW and Care International.

