



# Lessons from Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy and its Implementation in Latin America and the Caribbean

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The election of a [new Canadian federal government](#) in April 2025, in a context of increasing tensions with the United States and other large powers, has sparked debates about the value and the future of the [Feminist International Assistance Policy \(FIAP\)](#), which Canada adopted in 2017. At the time, the FIAP was presented as a strategic approach to making gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls THE cross-cutting priority of Canadian cooperation – in key areas like human dignity; inclusive and sustainable growth; governance, peace and security. Though no explicit links were made to Thinking and Working Politically (TWP), FIAP principles like understanding gendered power relations and adapting programmes accordingly certainly converged with TWP thinking.

### Summary of Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP)

FIAP centres on the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as essential levers for poverty reduction, peace building, and other indicators of development as espoused in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through FIAP, Canada aims to ensure that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are the focus of, or integrated into, the programming of at least 95 percent of its bilateral international development assistance.

Today's debates are informed by [Auditor General Karen Hogan's report to Parliament](#) in 2023, which concluded that "Global Affairs Canada [GAC] was unable to show how the approximately \$3.5 billion in bilateral development assistance it provides each year ... improved outcomes for women and girls". Though the report identified "weaknesses in the department's information management practices", which "resulted in incomplete or missing project files", as the main problem, it underscored how GAC was unable to document how Canada contributed to long-term gender equality (GE) in developing country contexts.

Our research analysing the impact of Canada's FIAP from 2014 to 2024 in Latin America and Caribbean speaks to these issues. We focused on three case studies – Colombia, Haiti and Jamaica – where Canada has major assistance programmes. Colombia is a middle-income country implementing a [peace accord with GE components](#). Haiti is a low-income country struggling to [re-establish security and legitimate governance](#). Jamaica and the broader Caribbean Community (CARICOM) are mostly middle-income countries with liberal democratic institutions but also [high levels of violence, including](#)

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<sup>1</sup> For the authors' biographies and info on the April 30, 2025 panel where we presented our results, see <https://www.cips-cepi.ca/event/what-can-we-learn-from-how-canadas-fiap-is-landing-in-latin-america-and-the-caribbean/>. Thanks to Denise Beaulieu, Rebecca Tiessen, Lilly Nicholls, and Beth Woroniuk, for their feedback.

[gender-based violence \(GBV\)](#). From fiscal year 2014-2015 until 2023-2024, Colombia received an average of \$55 million per year; Haiti received an average of \$109 million of aid per year; and CARICOM (including Jamaica but not Haiti) received an average of \$53 million. Our research focused on Canada's assistance at the intersection of GE, peace, justice and security, leaving other areas of GE programming (like education, health and poverty reduction) to other studies.

Overall, our research suggests that, during the period of study (2014-2024), FIAP led to major increases in Canadian funding focused on or incorporating significant components of GE. In all three countries, partners in both government and civil society believed that FIAP helped to advance GE efforts.

- In Colombia, partners noted that FIAP distinguished Canada from other international partners and opened the door towards supporting a variety of feminist voices on the ground – including Indigenous, Afro-Colombian and LGBTQ activists.
- In Haiti, partners including organisations of women with disabilities argued that the FIAP should continue as a strategic lever to promote GE and generational change. However, many of the people we spoke with also emphasised that Canada's experience pointed to important lessons that could improve the quality of its assistance, including for example incorporating local organisations of women with disabilities more systematically in its engagement.
- In Jamaica and across the CARICOM region, partners indicated that FIAP ensured that gender equality was always considered in sectors where Canada was active. Still, some Jamaican partners urged Canada to be more sensitive to voices rooted in more traditional feminist perspectives, suggesting that, when feminist approaches reflect the realities in the region where colonial histories, social class, and religious values influence how gender is experienced, they create more opportunities for national ownership and lasting change.

Indeed, an appreciation of these realities may bring to the fore prevailing local concerns, such as those affecting poorer boys and men, who are often overrepresented as victims and perpetrators of violence, including intentional homicides. Moreover, while FIAP acknowledges the importance of transforming social norms and power relations, in practice these complex undertakings are often sidelined in favour of more easily achievable project deliverables such as ensuring large numbers of women participants in training programmes.

What stands out from our research are innovations and outcomes on the ground, which were often anchored in TWP principles and practice and help to highlight the value and possibilities of applying a TWP approach through a feminist lens. Among other things:

- In Colombia, we observed how a project led by [The HALO Trust](#) ensured that women were recruited for all roles – from deminers to logistics officers – thereby enabling them to play a vital role in the removal of landmines from several conflict zones. Our findings also showed how a project led by [Lawyers Without Borders Canada](#) improved access to justice for women and girls, placing their voices at the centre of transitional justice processes following the 2016 Peace Accords.
- In Haiti, [Voices and Leadership of Women](#), led by the Canadian NGO *Centre d'études et de coopération internationale* (CECI), worked with 36 Haitian women's organisations, including an

organisation of women with disabilities, to provide medical and psychological support to four thousand women victims of GBV. This programme is a good example of how a donor with solid partners can strategically support and strengthen the voices of women as agents of change in their society. Meanwhile, working in partnership with the Haitian National Police, a project led by the Canadian consultancy firm [Cowater International](#) significantly increased the recruitment of women into the Police and revitalised efforts to strengthen its women's affairs machinery. This innovative project was based on a smart analysis of obstacles to the recruitment of young female officers into the Police.

- In Jamaica and the wider CARICOM region, through the [Judicial Reform and Institutional Strengthening \(JURIST\) Project](#), FIAP helped to establish more victim-friendly and gender-sensitive court environments. It also supported the training of judicial officers and overall strengthening of case management systems to enhance judicial accountability. Similarly, the [Improved Access to Justice in the Caribbean \(IMPACT Justice\) Project](#) supported legislative drafting, legal aid reforms, and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, among others, helping to reduce court backlogs. Together, these projects improved access to justice for women, children, and vulnerable groups by strengthening technical, policy, and judicial systems across the region.

Nonetheless, our research highlights that the challenges of contributing long-term, transformative impact is real, a point that the Auditor General also emphasised. Partners in Colombia and Haiti stressed that shifting attitudes and collective behaviour towards greater GE for all requires generations and the favourable alignment of many factors. Demanding GAC reporting procedures, combined with lack of long-term engagement, don't help. Canadian policies can sometimes pull in different directions – for example promoting Canadian mining practices that undermine Indigenous communities in Colombia; or supporting Haitian governments that do not prioritise GE or inclusive governance. This kind of incoherence can blunt the promising outcomes of GE projects. As a Colombian activist put it: “Having a feminist policy is better than not having one, but governments should be careful not to use it as window-dressing to look good in the public eye”.

The future of Canada's FIAP hangs in the balance. Within a context of growing geopolitical tensions and shifting Canadian interests and priorities both at home and abroad, the newly elected federal government has taken a different approach, placing greater emphasis on issues like the economy and national defense. While it is unclear whether Canada will reduce its international assistance, several G7 countries have already [substantially reduced aid budgets](#), and countries like [Sweden have reversed their feminist foreign policy since 2022](#), suggesting eroding global commitments towards international development and feminist principles. Moreover, questions about effectiveness raised in the Auditor General's 2023 report to the Canadian Parliament remain relevant.

Yet, with other major international actors such as the US retreating from this space (for example, in April 2025 the Trump Administration [ended its support for the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda](#)), there are opportunities for Canada to reinforce its global influence in advancing GE. GAC should refine key programming tools developed in partnership with others – from gender equality spending targets to feminist evaluation tools. Ottawa should update FIAP to reflect lessons that have emerged since 2017. Linking a feminist lens to TWP principles and approaches may help Canada collaborate with like-

mindful donors, including Southern governments like Mexico, to renew commitments to feminist values and policy coherence in ways that are suited to today's global environment and challenges.

In this pivotal moment, Canada faces a choice: retreat from its feminist commitments or embrace them with greater clarity, coherence, and long-term investment. The evidence suggests that a revitalised FIAP, grounded in local realities and TWP principles, offers a strategic path forward for meaningful global engagement and gender equality.

## About the Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice

The Thinking and working Politically Community of Practice (TWP CoP) is a global network of practitioners, researchers and policymakers in development and global affairs committed to promoting more effective policy and practice. The TWP CoP works to foster more politically aware approaches to understand how change happens and why, translate findings and implications emerging from political economy analysis into operationally relevant guidance, encourage more flexible and adaptable ways of working, and provide evidence-based insights that can stimulate innovation, sharing and learning in international development and global affairs.

The TWP CoP is funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and hosted by the International Development Department at University of Birmingham.

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