



# The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

## Synergies between gender equality and climate action

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Discussion paper – Slovenia



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# Women Must Step Out of the climate change shadow

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## 1. Introduction

Climate crisis is one of the most pressing global challenges, with far-reaching implications for human societies and the environment. Climate change transcends borders and affects people in diverse ways. The impacts of climate change are already starkly visible in the intensification of extreme weather events, disruptions to agricultural systems, loss of biodiversity, and the emergence of climate-induced migration patterns. Based on the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) most of the impacts exacerbate existing social and economic inequalities, disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities who often contribute the least to the conditions driving climate change (Chancel, 2022). Given the scale of climate risks, achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 represents an urgent priority. Addressing climate change demands global cooperation and coordinated state action, which are both in short supply. At the global level, efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions are hindered by stark power imbalances between countries in the Global North and Global South, as well as the increasing influence of corporate actors with vested interests in fossil fuels and other environmentally harmful industries. These imbalances play out in the UNFCCC intergovernmental process, which is still marked by low ambition, slow progress and bitter political conflict. This situation in UNFCCC calls for women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in the international climate process and to ensure a prominent role for women in decision-making and in climate action. Empowering women means better climate solutions (IPCC, 2023). This discussion paper aims to stimulate dialogue on the complex relationship between climate change and gender, highlighting key issues, challenges, and potential avenues for addressing this intersection.

## 2. Gendered impacts of climate change

Climate change is not gender-neutral and recognising the gender dimension of climate change is crucial for creating effective and equitable solutions. For example on average, women have smaller carbon footprints than men and more-responsible attitudes towards climate change. It is essential to explore the intersectionality of climate change and gender issues, as women often experience the impacts differently due to existing societal norms, economic structures, and access to resources. Of course, gender is just one social category. A truly intersectional approach should

consider not just gender, but also factors such as age, race, location, socioeconomic status, and more.

## **2.1 Differential Vulnerability**

Women, especially in developing countries, are often more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to socio-economic disparities, limited access to resources, and discriminatory cultural norms. Climate-related events can exacerbate existing gender inequalities, disproportionately affecting women's health, livelihoods, and overall well-being (IPCC, 2022 a). Studies have shown that gender-based violence, including physical, psychological, and reproductive violence against women, becomes more prevalent after natural disasters (Sloand et al., 2015). For example, Europe is experiencing an increase in the frequency and intensity of heatwaves. Women, particularly older women, may face heightened health risks, including heat-related illnesses, due to physiological differences and social factors such as caregiving responsibilities.

## **2.2 Economic disparities**

Many of climate change impacts can lead to economic hardships for women who are engaged in subsistence farming or small-scale enterprises. Unequal access to resources, including credit and technology, further amplifies the economic challenges faced by women in adapting to climate. The burden of reproductive and caregiving responsibilities often falls on women. Climate change-related challenges, such as increased frequency of disasters, can intensify these responsibilities, affecting women's well-being and limiting their opportunities for economic participation (IUCN, 2021). Women's contributions to community resilience, such as through informal networks and knowledge-sharing, often go unrecognized. Acknowledging and valuing these contributions is crucial for building effective climate resilience. There are also important issues regarding legal and land rights. In areas where land rights are gender-biased, climate-induced displacement can result in women losing access to their homes and land. Legal frameworks should address and rectify these inequalities to ensure the protection of women's property rights.

## **2.3 Role in climate adaptation and resilience**

Women often play a crucial role in community-based adaptation and resilience efforts. Their knowledge of local ecosystems and traditional practices contributes significantly to climate resilience. Women often bring innovative solutions to climate challenges and women often act as social glue within communities, fostering cooperation and resilience (UN CEDAW, 2018). Recognizing and valuing the roles of women in climate adaptation is vital for building effective and sustainable strategies. Leveraging this knowledge is essential for designing context-specific adaptation strategies that enhance community resilience.

## **3. Barriers to gender-inclusive climate action**

### **3.1 Limited representation**

Women are often underrepresented in decision-making processes related to climate change at local, national, and international levels (UNFCCC, 2023). UNFCCC parties should guarantee full, equal and meaningful participation of women delegates by actively building capacity, knowledge management, diplomacy and communication skills for their respective negotiation areas, particularly negotiation areas that have been historically male-dominated (WEDO, 2023). Lack of gender-sensitive policies and insufficient representation hinder the development and implementation of effective climate strategies. Also, in climate science women are underrepresented. Only 12 % the world's top climate scientists are women. Gender diversity at the managerial level also has stronger mitigating effects on climate change, especially if females are also well-represented outside the organization, e.g. in political institutions and civil society organizations. Firms with greater gender diversity reduced their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by about 5% more than firms with more male managers (Altunbas et al., 2022).

### **3.2 Access to resources**

Unequal access to resources such as land, education, and technology constrains women's ability to actively participate in climate mitigation and adaptation activities. Also limited mobility places women where they are disproportionately affected by climate change. Efforts are needed to address these structural barriers and promote gender-inclusive approaches to resource distribution. Empowering women through improved representation in governments in Europe has the potential to facilitate the way in which societies adapt to climate change.

### **3.3 Lack of gender-responsive finance mechanisms**

Climate finance mechanisms may not be designed to address the specific needs and priorities of women. Limited access to climate finance can hinder women's ability to implement climate-resilient practices and technologies. Gender-just climate finance will require active and systemic effort, with the funds supporting and institutionalizing transformational systemic change to include and engage women's organizations and groups as integral partners at all stages of project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and at all levels and types of financing (WEDO, 2019).

### **3.4 Cultural and societal norms**

Deep-seated gender norms and stereotypes can impede women's involvement in climate-related activities and limit their ability to voice concerns or contribute to decision-making processes. Promoting cultural sensitivity and challenging gender norms is essential for fostering inclusivity in climate action.

### **3.5 Lack of gender-disaggregated data**

Insufficient data that is disaggregated by gender obscures the differential impacts of climate change on women and men. Without accurate and gender-specific information, it is challenging to develop targeted and effective climate policies that address the needs of diverse communities.

## **4. Opportunities for gender-responsive climate Policies**

### **4.1 Mainstreaming gender in policies and climate diplomacy**

Governments and international organizations can integrate gender perspectives into climate policies, ensuring that they account for the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women. Lima Work Programme on Gender was adopted at COP20 in 2014, later at COP25 in 2019 was replaced by the Enhanced Lima Work Programme, with a corresponding Gender Action Plan which will have its end review at COP29 in 2024. The programme promotes gender balance to achieve gender-responsive climate policy. It should also be noted that while this is the primary tool at international level, it lacks clearly defined indicators and targets for measuring its progress. Although parties to the UNFCCC have officially recognized the importance of involving women and men equally in climate negotiations and the development and implementation of national climate policies there is still much progress to be made (Flavell, 2023).

### **4.2 Promoting Women's Leadership**

Promoting women's leadership in climate change requires concerted efforts across various levels of society. There are several strategies to foster and enhance women's leadership in climate action: empowerment through education, representation in decision-making bodies including supportive policies and legislation. Networking and mentorship programs that connect women with established leaders and experts in the field of climate change help create a supportive environment for learning, collaboration, and career advancement. Recognition of women's contributions through awards, recognition events, and media coverage inspire others and challenge gender stereotypes. Advocate for increased access to climate finance for women-led initiatives also promotes women's leadership. This includes funding for projects that empower women economically, enhance their resilience to climate impacts, and promote sustainable practices. Businesses and corporations should promote gender diversity in their climate-related initiatives and leadership position, as well. This can include implementing gender-inclusive policies and practices within corporate sustainability efforts.

### **4.3 Advocating for Feminist climate justice**

Women and girls have a right to effectively participate in and lead efforts to achieve climate justice, as equal rights holders and agents of change. To the extent that climate mitigation and adaptation measures disregard women's agency and the vital

contributions of women's collective action, these measures are unlikely to deliver just, effective or durable solutions to the climate crisis. That is why UN Women calls for a new Feminist Climate Justice Approach (Turquet et al., 2023). The feminist climate justice approach centres around four key areas:

- Recognizing women's rights, labour, and knowledge

Policy needs to prioritize the rights of women and other groups that face discrimination, because it undermines their resilience to climate impacts. Alongside scientific knowledge, decision-makers need to recognize the expertise that women, including indigenous, rural and young women have

- Redistributing economic resources

Since women are already disadvantaged in economies, in terms of wage gaps, unequal access to jobs, land, technology and education, it is essential to prioritize gender equality in just transitions. Governments need to raise resources through progressive taxation on the wealthiest people and companies to pay for social welfare programmes to support women's resilience.

- Representation of women's voices

Women human rights defenders and feminist groups are pushing for gender equality to be integrated into environmental policymaking at all levels. But they are often excluded from power. Women's representation in parliaments is associated with stronger environmental policies, but globally, women only hold around one quarter of seats. Despite the fact that women are been at the forefront of environmental activism for decades, women make up only 15 % of environment ministers at the national level. Women's participation in national delegations to the UN COP climate conferences rose from 30 to 35 per cent from 2012 to 2022, but the proportion of delegations headed by women declined from 21 to 20 % over the same period

- Repairing inequalities and historical injustices

Financial commitments to fight climate change must focus on the people and countries most at risk. Wealthy countries must meet their commitments to finance climate programmes and ensure that funds go to the most vulnerable countries and grassroots women's organisations. Only 3 per cent of climate development aid prioritizes gender equality. Polluting corporations need to be taxed and regulated to prevent future harm to the climate.

## 5. Background and related policy context in Slovenia

Slovenia is a global leader in recognizing the right to a healthy environment, but faces challenges in protecting this right. Much more urgent action on climate change is needed, as Slovenia is not addressing this crisis with sufficient urgency. In Slovenia, we still find many reflections of patriarchal culture.

The gender pay gap in Slovenia is about 8 %, but more worrying is the gender pension gap, which was 23.4% in 2019. The main problem remains underrepresentation of women in political and economic decision-making positions, such as parliament (27% of seats held by women in 2021), government (25 % of ministers were women in 2020), and business (18 % of board members of the largest listed companies were women in 2019). Women in Slovenia have valuable knowledge, skills, and experiences that can contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation, such as in the areas of renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable agriculture, and biodiversity conservation. Slovenia lags behind in the representation of women in STEM professions, as shown by Eurostat data, according to which we ranked below the European average (41 %) in 2020 with a 37 % share of female scientists and engineers. Serious problem is that women are underrepresented in decision-making processes and leadership positions related to climate change, such as in the energy sector, where only 17 % of employees are women. This limits their ability to influence and benefit from climate policies and actions that affect their lives. Promotion of women's leadership in climate change actions is completely absent in Slovenia.

Many women who deal with the issue of climate change are also subject to covert underestimation or even denial of climate change. They are exposed to communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity. Women experience microinsults at a significantly higher rate than men involved in climate change action. Microaggressions may have a large and lasting impact on women.

In societies that are rather conservative about gender equality, and Slovenia undoubtedly is, legislation is always one of the most effective mechanisms for establishing behavioural changes. Legislation is key at those moments when the wider society and the decisive political actors, in our case parties, do not yet recognize the importance of the equal presence of both genders in decision-making positions, so certain measures and requirements must be legally defined and thus accelerate changes. One of the biggest problems is party prejudice. The very narrow informal groups at the top of the parties, which are predominantly composed of men, decide on the ranking in electable places on the lists or in electable districts. This means that the guiding principles in this are neither the equality of the right of women and men to be elected nor meritocracy.

On the other hand, women in Slovenia are extremely active in various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that deal with climate change issues. NGOs sector and volunteering really aims to promote gender equality and women's empowerment as a cross-cutting theme. The main challenge that women face in environmental NGOs are the limited resources and funding opportunities for environmental NGOs, especially for those led by women. The restrictive measures introduced by the government in 2020, which reduced the access and participation of environmental NGOs in the environmental permitting procedures are also problematic.

The good news is that the main climate negotiator in Slovenia is a woman, which is certainly progress after thirty years of male dominance. For example, at COP27 only 20 % of heads of delegation were women. However, it does not yet show an increase



in the importance of mitigating climate change in the wider public. Decision-makers still come from the government sector, which does not want significant changes in the energy and transport sectors in light of climate change. Energy and transport policies are still firmly in the hands of men.

Slovenia can now boast of having a female president for the first time in the country's history, who has given greater weight to climate change during her tenure. For this purpose, she also has a female advisor. It is still too early to predict what effect this will have on mitigating and adapting to climate change in Slovenia, as changes do not happen overnight.

## 6. Conclusions

The female population is one of the lungs of society – and society must breathe with both lungs. Climate action requires 100 percent of the population. Women have the knowledge and understanding of what is needed to adapt to changing environmental conditions and to come up with practical solutions. But they are still a largely untapped resource. Women are more exposed to the effects of climate change and at the same time less represented in climate negotiations and national environmental ministries. We need women, in all their diversity, involved at all levels – from climate negotiations to boardrooms to universities, forests and fields, especially in sectors and regions hit hard by the ravages of climate change. By adopting gender-responsive policies and strategies, the burden of climate change is shared equitably and that the unique perspectives and contributions of women are valued in the global effort to combat climate change.

## 7. Literature

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