

Gender Equality in Climate Change

Climate change has sparked quite a heated debate in the past decade. Its impact is taking a heavy toll on economies and livelihoods. Climate change can be defined as *“a statistically significant variation in either the mean state of the climate or its variability, persisting for an extended period (typically decades or longer).”*¹ For instance, humans are contributing to global warming by burning fossil fuels and cutting down forests.² *“This adds enormous amounts of greenhouse gases to those naturally occurring in the atmosphere, increasing the greenhouse effect and global warming.”*³

Climate change affects women and men differently. **Economic disparities** lead to differences in the capacity to cope with, and to mitigate, climate change. Women’s salaries and assets are lower. Thus, women are disadvantaged if expensive adaptation and mitigation measures are required. In fact, men are more likely to instal equipment at home to control and reduce energy consumption, such as smart meters.⁴

The **health impacts** of climate change can differ between women and men for biological and social reasons. For example, *“the majority of European studies have shown that women are more at risk, in both relative and absolute terms, of dying in heatwaves”*.⁵ The **consumption patterns** of women and men are different, resulting in more or less energy-intense lifestyles, and in differentiated attitudes/perceptions, based on different value. For example, women make more use of public transport when compared to men. Women are more likely to buy and eat more organic food, and to consider the carbon footprint of their food purchases and adapt their shopping accordingly.⁶

¹ <https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/Gender-Equality-and-Climate-Change-Report.pdf>

² https://ec.europa.eu/clima/climate-change/causes-climate-change_en#:~:text=Humans%20are%20increasingly%20influencing%20the,greenhouse%20effect%20and%20global%20warming.

³ Ibid

⁴ Eurobarometer 513 – Climate Change – July 2021

⁵ https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/144781/9789241508186_eng.pdf

⁶ Eurobarometer 513 – Climate Change – July 2021

Moreover, men are dominant in decision-making sectors related to climate. Indeed, women remain under-represented among the highest-ranking civil servants in ministries with competences in environment, transport, and energy.⁷

According to EU policy, the best strategy to address the different impact of climate change is through gender mainstreaming. Since women and men have different needs, priorities, and possibilities of mitigating the effects of climate change, it is critical to adopt a gender equality perspective in decision-making processes at all levels. Ensuring the active participation of women in the development of funding criteria and the allocation of resources for climate change initiatives, incorporating a gender perspective into national policies/actions/plans, and ensuring that technological developments consider the priorities/needs/roles of women, as well as their knowledge/expertise, are **all examples of gender mainstreaming actions**.

According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) Gender Equality and Climate Change Report⁸, the lack of knowledge base and resistance towards the integration of a gender perspective in climate change mitigation policies are identified as obstacles to a successful integration of the gender equality agenda and the climate change agenda.

Moreover, an institutional survey carried out by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 2006 on gender mainstreaming in environmental policies, found that even if gender equality policies were in place and applied according to the environmental sector, the lack of financial resources, lack of awareness on gender and the environment, lack of understanding and clarity on the relevance of gender to environmental work, lack of institutional capacity and expertise on the subject, limited gender-related institutional structures, and limited female participation would still act as barriers.⁹

To this end, gender equality and climate change are being given increased prominence on the **national, EU, and international** agendas due to their impact and consequences on the daily lives of men and women in society. Understanding and effectively taking the gendered

⁷ https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/bpfa_k_offic_k1__wmid_env_natmin_admin/datatable

⁸ <https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/Gender-Equality-and-Climate-Change-Report.pdf>

⁹ Ibid

dimension of climate change into account is key for achieving sustainable development and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In 2021, the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference, more commonly referred to as COP26, was held at the SEC Centre in Glasgow, Scotland, between the 31st October and 12th November 2021. This Conference was an opportunity for different stakeholders to discuss climate action including the disproportionate impact of climate change on women and girls.

In addition to the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 goals, at the European level, the European Commission is committed to include a gender perspective in all its major initiatives responding to European challenges such as climate change. Since 2011, the European Parliament has also produced a number of resolutions that address climate change from a gender perspective. For instance, the European Parliament Resolution of 20 April 2012 on women and climate change addresses the connections between gender and climate change¹⁰.

In Malta, in 2010, Prof. Simone Borg was appointed Malta's Ambassador for Climate Action. She chairs the Climate Action Board, which is responsible for monitoring the implementation of climate action targets within the public sector and promoting initiatives within the private sector in Malta. Moreover, both female and male social partners work closely with the Government and Malta's Ambassador for Climate Action in stakeholder dialogue meetings to implement climate action.

It is high time to fully integrate efforts to address both gender equality and climate change. We all need to pull together to create a better environment, not just locally but also on a global level because the lack of action of one country will negatively affect the whole world. As a society, we can all step up our efforts, both collectively and individually, to tackle the climate crisis as the long-term price to our health and the environment is too high.

The importance of tackling climate change has been distinctly recognised by young people. In fact, the role of young women has been remarkable in leading the push for change. Greta Thunberg became known when she was 15 years old after challenging world leaders to take action for climate change mitigation. Her small campaign had a global effect, inspiring other

¹⁰ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-7-2012-0145_EN.html

young people worldwide to organise their protests. By December 2018, more than 20,000 students from the UK to Japan joined her campaign. In 2019, Thunberg received the first of three Nobel Peace Prize nominations for climate activism.¹¹

The contribution of both women and men of all ages in the development, implementation, and monitoring of gender-responsive policies related to climate change must also be ensured so that women and men have an active role and leadership in developing a holistic strategy with the hope of achieving the best results.

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¹¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-49918719>