

CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

this is our feminists demand

Lead

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Structural barriers and negative trends

Today, millions of women, indigenous communities, children, and low-income families across the UNECE region and around the world are already affected by the climate crisis. Biodiversity and the state of many ecosystems around the world are fully at risk with around 1 million animal and plant species threatened with extinction, many within the next decades. Our governments' actions have massive detrimental effects on people, especially marginalized groups who are at the frontlines of climate change globally.

From a climate perspective, the UNECE region is extremely diverse. In Central Asia, mountain snow caps are melting, leaving rural agricultural communities vulnerable to landslides and increased income insecurity. In the Balkan and Black Sea region, floods have demolished homes and led to disability and death, particularly of women and the elderly who have not been able to evacuate in a timely fashion.

Patriarchal social and governance structures form deep structural barriers that make it more difficult for women to take action. In particular, women from rural communities have little or no decision-making power. For example, in Central Asia, many men in the rural communities have migrated to work abroad, but the women who stay behind are often not able to make decisions on the use of the land, as the legal decision-making power is only given to their husbands.

Existing discriminatory patterns towards women reduces access to resources, to social protection and to finances, and reduces their public participation, especially for women from ethnic minorities, migrant women, and non-gender conforming people.

It is very problematic when women have no say in decisions on e.g. infrastructure projects such as construction of hydropower plants and/or coal fired power plants, and when their concerns are not taken into consideration. Such infrastructure investments are taking place in the Central Asian, Western Balkans and Black Sea regions. Women from these regions feel disempowered by decisions that impact their lives, but that have been taken without public consultation nor been assessed from a gender-impact perspective.

Climate change is directly linked to our extractive economic model, our throw-away society, our fossil fuel consumption. Not only fossil fuels for airplanes and computers, but an increasing part of global petroleum is used for derivatives such as plastics and chemicals, which we use as plastic bags, straws, cups, and then throw away.

Waste mountains burning and incinerators are emitting not only green-house gasses, but also highly dangerous toxics that accumulate in our food and our bodies, and are linked to breast cancer, reproductive diseases, diabetes, etc.

The most marginalized groups in society are also often most exposed, living in the most polluted areas. Women suffering from, for example reproductive damage due to chemical exposure are often subject to social exclusion. The increasing number of health effects on women, such as breast cancer, reproductive diseases, diabetes, allergies, etc. is linked, among other causes to exposure to chemicals in products.

A Canadian study showed that women working in the plastics industry have a 5 times higher risk of developing breast cancer in their lifetime. In some countries, women make up 85 per cent or more of the workforce applying pesticides on commercial farms and plantations, and are therefore highly exposed to pesticides that are harmful to their health.

Women's exposure to toxic chemicals can cause long-term and irreversible health damage, and also negatively impact their economic and social situation. The high health-care costs for example for cancer treatment, increase the marginalization of women impacted

In Central Asia and other Eastern European countries, most women in rural areas lack bank accounts and do not have insurance thus they are at risk of sliding more deeply into poverty with every drought or flood. A majority of the lowest income households are single women-lead. When they are forced to migrate for economic reasons, they are at risk of exploitation by criminal groups, including human trafficking including for sexual exploitation. They also can find themselves be pushed into the most dangerous and polluted jobs, for example, as waste scavengers living on-top and next to waste dumps that continuously emit carcinogenic pollutants.

In North America and the EU region, damage from environmental pollution and climate change hits low-income groups the hardest, and the majority of low-income households are headed by women.

Indigenous women in North America are most vulnerable as they rely on living off the land and need access to strong sustainable forests. This makes them most vulnerable to food

insecurity when their traditional lands are degraded. Moreover, we cannot look at the violence against Indigenous Women without looking at the connection to violence against Mother Earth.

On-going research in Europe's large cities, such as Barcelona, is showing that over 65% of households that can no longer afford to pay their heating bills, and then have their energy cut off, are single-women and women-lead households. Therefore environmental inequalities and climate-related injustices are exacerbated by gender-based discrimination and discriminatory social and economic structures. At the same time women's ecological and carbon footprint is lower than that of men. Studies indicate that "in the Western world, women use 22% less energy on average than men" (fewer automobile trips, less consumption of meat, more attention to energy efficiency...) (1) and that at the same time, they are underrepresented in environmental governance and participation. Moreover, the creation of new 'green' jobs are filled in majority to men, as women are underrepresented in technical sectors in the EU. In Western European countries the workforce and management of fossil fuel and extractive sectors are largely dominated by men. (2)



Progress on implementing the Beijing Platform for Action

Environmental and climate policies have mostly been gender-blind. It is at international levels that efforts have been made the last few years to address the full participation of women in environmental decision making, to set targets for gender equality in policy bodies, and to ensure gender-equal planning and budgeting.

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has a gender action plan (GAP) that was launched two years ago and that sets targets for participation of women in climate policy decision-making as well as allocations of funds and means for climate action.

A number of countries have taken measures to institutionalize gender equality in their environmental ministries and agencies by setting targets or allocating budgets to gender equality research. In the Eastern European, Balkan and Central Asian region, several countries want to integrate research funding for gender impact in their climate-funding applications, as this has become a requirement from the Green Climate Fund. For example, Serbia has produced a training manual on integrating gender issues and effects into national climate policies and funding plans. However, when it comes to budget allocations, gender equality measures are too often seen as 'add-ons', especially at the national level, and are not yet seen as priority issues calling for intervention. Too often, the need for eradicating pervasive gender discrimination is addressed with reluctance.

In addition, the negative impact of the UNECE region on women's rights in the rest of the world is certainly the greatest problem of all. The USA in particular is a culprit, having put on hold its commitments under the Paris Agreement, and being the second largest emitters of GreenHouse Gases (GHG) after China. According to the Union of Concerned Scientists data from October 2019, The UK and Germany are also amongst the largest global emitters of GHGs. (3)

But almost all UNECE countries are not on track to reduce their GHG emissions, and therefore they are collectively responsible for creating one of the main causes of climate-related loss of livelihoods and related conflicts in countries of the Global South. Much more needs to be done by UNECE countries to start to address their devastating historical responsibility for contributing to climate disruption and global warming. The actions needed are not limited to the energy, construction and transportation sectors, but also would need to include a moratorium on new mines as well as ending imports of products based on deforestation, e.g. soy, palm-oil and overall a reduction of meat.

There is insufficient investment in real solutions, such as 'gender-just climate solutions (4). Such best practices have shown the great potential of women lead climate actions: for example sub-soil water storage and production of renewable energy, by enterprises and cooperatives with women in leadership.

Unfortunately, instead of investments in gender-just climate solutions, the region continues to invest in fossil fuels and derivative products such as plastics and petro-chemical products, and in 'false solutions' e.g. investments in nuclear energy – the most inefficient and expensive and non-renewable (not to mention dangerous) energy source – as well as gas-fracking and non-sustainable industrial agriculture. These misplaced investments lead to further exclusion and inequalities. Currently, one of the great obstacles to gender-equal climate protection and environmental restoration are the continued funding and subsidies going into non-sustainable, highly concentrated, climate-destructive, industrial sectors with a majority of men in decision-making.

On the light side, women and feminist organisations globally are cooperating through the Women and Gender Constituency at the United Nations UNFCCC proposing strong gender-equal climate action for all national climate plans, as well as promoting inspiring women-led climate actions (5).



Recommendations beyond Beijing+25

Engaging feminists in all their diversity, young and old, women, men and non-binary, will contribute to the much-needed acceleration of climate action, as shown by young women leaders such as Greta Thunberg (Sweden), Autumn Peltier (Wikwemikong First Nation),

Shalvi Sakshi (Fiji), Jamie Margolin (USA) and many others. The global climate crisis can also be an opportunity. An opportunity to give new impetus to sustainable innovations, to rethink the existing structures, to open up breaches to transform the system for more equality and an opportunity to listen to people's voices on the ground, especially women's.

- **Funding** should go to promote research, capacity building and inclusive participation of feminist civil society and community groups that know how to ensure gender-just climate and environmental policies, and active engagement of feminists in decision-making on climate and gender issues (6). In particular, support women's direct access to smaller-scale climate funds (from approximately \$100,000 up to \$10-\$15 million USD) to go to women's organisations, Indigenous organisations, and local communities directly via the mechanisms created by the UNFCCC such as the Green Climate Fund. We strongly warn against using mechanisms outside of the framework of the Paris Agreement; for example, we oppose a recapitalization of the Dedicated Grant Mechanism under the Climate Investment Fund, which should sunset as planned.
- **Governments should commit to a 2nd Gender Action Plan** under the Paris Agreement that would include progressive targets to reach gender parity in all main decision-making bodies and delegations that are negotiating on climate. Also included should be gender-responsive national climate measures. In particular such measures should commit to implementing gender-just climate technologies (7).
- **Ensure the protection of women environmental and climate defenders** who are persecuted for trying to defend their environment and communities.
- **Indigenous women's** very survival is intimately connected to the health of the land and climate. To restore balance and ensure Indigenous women's voices are heard in environmental debates and concerns within our own territories we need to disrupt the current systems of investment through critical investments in community based Indigenous women's groups in all member states. Indigenous women, Roma Women and Sami Women need to represent themselves and have investments into their own political and social development. We need to disrupt the traditional systems of investment in women in order to make systemic change.
- **The displacement and relocation** of Indigenous women and their families due to climate change, and resulting climate disasters, as well as the impacts of resource extraction industries have significantly impacted the level of violence against Indigenous women including Human Trafficking, Sexual Exploitation, Missing, and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. This crisis is rooted in the pervasive poverty that has resulted from the exploitation of Indigenous lands and resources.
- **Decision-makers and civil servants need to build capacity** on how to plan and budget for gender-equal climate and environmental actions. Governments and local authorities should create, apply or adapt gender environmental indicators, especially in link with the SDGs
- In the UNECE region, countries should set targets - in line with the OECD gender-markers - to ensure that all climate and environmental funding promotes gender equality.
- Governments at both national and local levels should **divest from all extractive and fossil fuel related activities** and invest in sustainable, renewable, local sectors that

have committed to gender equality and ending all discrimination against women in all their diversity (CEDAW). In the UNECE region, this would include divesting from coal, shale-gas (fracking) and nuclear power, as well as a moratorium on hydropower plants. The EU and the UN should provide audits and legal support for countries in the region to exit contracts in fossil fuel-related areas, including contracts in Indigenous lands, territories and communities that have not been accorded governance authority to address these issues consistent with their own values and goals.

- Support creation and replication of **local climate-positive economic and social sectors** with gender equal funding, impact, and leadership roles in all sectors – sustainable agriculture and food, energy, transport, building, scientific research, technology and communication – by creating enabling conditions and by eliminating unfair support to unsustainable sectors, including, for example, imposing higher tax rates on aviation, shipping, private vehicles, etc.
- **Obligatory gender and environmental impact assessments** of all climate policies and programmes, with full participation of local women and feminists.
- **Align National Climate Plans with the global chemicals conventions** aimed at eliminating hazardous waste and chemicals, the Basel Rotterdam Stockholm Convention and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM).
- **Clean up all chemical and waste polluted ‘hot spots’** to protect populations living nearby and avoid further contamination.

Useful sources

- (1) <http://climate.org/can-improving-womens-representation-in-environmental-governance-reduce-greenhouse-gas-emissions/>
- (2) <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/feb/11/the-energy-industrys-power-problem-too-few-women>
- (3) <https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/each-countrys-share-co2-emissions>
- (4) <https://www.wecf.org/gjcs>
- (5) <https://unfccc.int/topics/gender/what-s-new/2019-gender-just-climate-solutions-awards>
- (6) https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/27615/Gender_Environment_Statistics.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
- (7) <https://www.wecf.org/cop25-wgcs-position-on-the-lima-work-programme-and-its-gender-action-plan/>