

## **On women's rights, gender and climate change in Europe**

The European Union has a long-standing commitment to gender equality: it is a Treaty obligation, a core EU value, a fundamental right, a key principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and a necessary condition for achieving the EU objectives of growth and social cohesion. The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 recognises the importance of diversity and intersectionality. It also outlines a set of key actions including ending gender-based violence and stereotypes, ensuring equal participation and opportunities in the labour market, and achieving gender balance in policy- and decision-making.

Yet, and although the first Commissioner for Equality has been appointed, climate action and gender equality remain compartmentalised. The European Climate Law, adopted in June 2021, does not take into account gender inequalities, but states that "the transition must be fair and inclusive, leaving no one behind". The EU Recovery plan states that 37% of spending will be allocated to climate action and 20% to the digital transition. But the allocation of spending on gender equality is not specified. The adjustment to Objective 55 includes the Social Climate Fund, which states that "Fuel poverty alone affects up to 34 million people in the EU today", however it makes no reference to the links between gender and fuel poverty.

Obviously, in Europe, just as elsewhere, the impact of climate change differs between groups and individuals. Socio-economic factors and social norms deeply rooted in our societies lead to the marginalisation of specific population groups of our society, such as persons with disabilities among others, and especially vulnerable groups of women, including trans people, and everyone who does not fall into the binary categories of women and men. Existing inequalities, along with climate change, exacerbate social injustices and have a profound impact on the living and work conditions, and societal participation of vulnerable and disadvantaged populations.

The European Parliament study on gender and energy notes that "because they have a lower average income, women are more at risk of fuel poverty than men". Moreover, since the end of 2021, the sharp rise in energy prices particularly affects women and girls from racial and ethnic minorities, migrant women and girls, women with disabilities, single mothers and older women. Studies show that almost half of single-parent families in the EU are threatened by poverty and social exclusion, and almost 9 out of 10 single parents are women. Moreover, lower-income single women, especially ageing women, are most at risk of poverty. Women are the ones who suffer the most from inequality in the workplace, whether it is unequal pay, which continues to be perpetuated in thousands of companies, unequal access to employment, maternity issues, the reconciliation of work and family life or even fighting against various forms of violence and discrimination. If women are disproportionately present in the poorest strata, they are also present in the oldest strata of the population and therefore the most vulnerable. These concerns fuel a major justice issue where women are on average more affected by climate change, but generally contribute less to emissions because they have less spending power.

In the EU, for example, severe consequences of climate change are currently being observed in the southern countries, where the factors of warming in the Mediterranean region and the warmth of the Mediterranean Sea are mutually reinforcing the effects. However, increasingly severe climate events also can and will be seen in other regions of Europe. Women - especially in the Mediterranean region - are disproportionately affected by the consequences. They are more likely to live in flood-prone areas or in homes that are not air-conditioned during summer heat waves - as we experienced again this summer. They are also the ones who suffer the most from the consequences of underfunded social systems, as they bear more responsibility for running the household and being the primary caregivers of the population. They are more likely to live in flood-prone areas, or in housing without air-conditioning during summer heat waves – as we experienced once again this summer.

Furthermore, health problems caused by climate change during pregnancy are growing – heat waves increase premature births – or mental health issues caused by stress. Even more, in recent years, climate change in Europe has increased the threat of vector-borne illnesses such as malaria, dengue fever, and Zika virus, which are linked to worse maternal and neonatal outcomes. The number of respiratory diseases are worrying, with air pollution among the main risk factors for respiratory diseases. Elderly women with low incomes have the greatest difficulty in accessing health care, are more vulnerable to illness and therefore more vulnerable to the need for home care, which is provided mainly by female relatives in the poorest families.

Women in poor communities are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihoods, particularly in rural areas where the effects of climate change and climate hazards have unequal impacts. Agricultural policies based on intensive production models and greater investments in fossil energy production and in mining activities in ecologically vulnerable areas, not only leave women – whose economic activities largely depend on equitable access to natural resources – more vulnerable, but also put the balance of ecosystems at risk. Women in rural areas play a central role in the socio-economic development of a region. They are agents of change, especially for the sustainable use and conservation of resources, even though women have less access than men to resources such as land, investments, agricultural inputs, decision-making structures, technology, training and extension services that would enhance their capacity to adapt to climate change. When disasters strike, women are less likely to survive and more likely to be injured due to long-standing gender inequalities that have created disparities in information, mobility, decision-making, and access to resources and training.

There is a high percentage of women working in education, leading to the responsibility of climate education being placed mostly on them. It is therefore important to strengthen the educational and other professional areas to raise awareness and impel next generations to action, developing an inter- and intra-generational network, so that they can take well-informed and effective action in the future. Education on climate action is key as young children are far more vulnerable to climate-related disasters and associated health risks than any other social group. As such, empowering young people is a priority. Meanwhile, the number of women undertaking technical and scientific education paths is dramatically lower than the number of men, for cultural, social and historical reasons. It is fundamental to fill this gap through encouraging young women and removing any

socio-economic barrier of access. However, the role of climate education should not fall solely on any marginalised group who are more exposed to the impact of climate change, but rather be integrated into community-based learning. As such, empowering young people is a priority. Education on climate action is key as young children are far more vulnerable to climate-related disasters and associated health risks than any other social group.

Taking gender into account at all stages of policymaking is crucial because we need to:

- Provide support for litigation on climate change before national courts, the European Court of Human Rights, as well as the Court of Justice of the EU, by providing financial support to all vulnerable persons and their representing organisations, in order to define the substantive nature of the right to a healthy environment;
- Use the transition to a climate-neutral economy as leverage to achieve gender equality in employment, skills and pay; work for equal pay and pensions, and a Europe-wide minimum income, with full respect to the national welfare systems;
- Tackle fuel poverty through renewable energy, energy efficiency and energy savings, especially from most energy-using consumers;
- Strengthen the resilience of women and girls to make them less vulnerable to the impact of climate change by giving them access to decent employment, social protection, health systems, education, public services and building a "Social Union" etc.;
- Reinforce socially smart and eco-friendly housing structures that will protect vulnerable populations and especially single-parent families; Ban discriminatory practices (income etc.) for women to access housing, which affect them more, i.e. as it makes it harder to leave violent and harmful relationships;
- Create tools for a women-inclusive economy, fostering women's sustainable entrepreneurship and self-employment; Ensure safe and non-discriminatory work environments for women and all other genders which prevents any form of abuse and/or harassment, and assures that women can pursue a professional career in equal conditions as men;
- In this sense, it is necessary to promote public welfare systems to support caring, reproductive and domestic tasks and a proper involvement of men in these activities in order to guarantee an equitable distribution of these activities;
- Develop inclusive programmes to support women and marginalised communities in developing their entrepreneurial skills within the context of climate adaptation to better equip them for the future; Facilitate easier access to loans to all, at low or decent interest rates for women and marginalised communities who face economic discrimination, and specifically for women entrepreneurs; Encourage women to undertake scientific and technological academic and professional careers, especially in sectors related to the ecological transition, and in other sectors where they are underrepresented;
- Promote a gendered corporate social responsibility, requiring all companies to publicise

average remuneration for men and women per employment category and justify differences in remuneration, if any;

- Promote inclusive governance by international bodies and national governments, with the integration of more women and marginalised groups into decision-making;
- Increase the civic and associative participation of women responsible for the management of natural resources, through their empowerment, contributing to a greater visibility of their social and resilience role in addressing climate change;
- Create the necessary conditions so that women can benefit equally from the distribution of the benefits of environmental management;

Unless gender equality is explicitly included in policies, programmes and projects, gender inequalities which are deeply rooted in social norms, practices and institutions, will persist. Thus, for the European Greens, the following elements are crucial:

- It is essential that gender mainstreaming – in all its diversity and intersectionality – fully accompanies efforts to take a comprehensive and coherent approach to actions against climate change. We must recognise that gender inequalities coexist with other structural inequalities, including location, age, ethnicity, and disability, etc., while mainstreaming strategies should also reflect these aspects;
- Gender must be taken into account in the work of all EU Institutions and the Commission: it must be considered from the beginning and in all policies, even in areas that are seen by some as gender neutral: climate change, energy, transport, trade and agriculture;
- Gender mainstreaming must take place at all stages of the policy process, from issue identification to policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. Assessing gender needs and conducting gender audits are strongly recommended;
- There must be gender impact analyses of previously completed policy cycles and projects to identify gender implications in both current and future policy-making, and programming to guide them and make them more effective;
- Gender budgeting: we need gender-responsive budgeting to ensure that budget decisions are based on gender analyses and promote equality between women and men, and all other genders. Further, there must be a robust monitoring and regular evaluation of policies;
- We support the amendment of the treaties including the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union to include measures promoting gender equality and women's full participation in society including in the labour market and sexual and reproductive rights (including abortion);
- We support the proposals to enshrine in the Primary Law the gender terminology, implement gender mainstreaming at all stages of EU legislations and programmes, and ensure 'gender parity' within the EU Institutions and related bodies themselves;
- Fight against gender-based violence, advocate for a strong EU budget for Daphne and other

- funding mechanisms and policies in view of preventing and fighting gender-based violence;
- Call for the implementation of the EU Minimum Wages Directive to safeguard a decent living wage for workers, with full respect to national labour market models, so that every citizen, including marginalised groups of our society, persons with disabilities and especially vulnerable groups of women, all genders and LGBTIQ+ persons, in Europe can live a life in dignity.