

A progressive model for gender-transformative climate action

Beyond doubt, both the climate crisis and gender inequality are two of the greatest challenges of our modern times. While progress has been made to tackle both issues, environmental and gender policies have remained largely disconnected. It becomes clear that, as cross-cutting issues affecting our lives, they need to be addressed together. Living up to the challenges of climate change, now coupled with the severe consequences of the Covid-19 and health crisis, will require good governance, a socially and gender just green recovery which supports not only more sustainable but also more gender-sensitive policies.

This document encapsulates, on the one hand, our main priorities and core demands for gender equal climate justice as social democratic and progressive feminists. These offer a meta perspective on a gender-transformative approach to climate policy that ideally should be applied at all levels of governance, regardless of specific targets and numeric goals. On the other hand, it proposes concrete policy demands underpinning those principles.

A. Priorities for progressive, sustainable and gender-equal societies

- **Women at the centre**

Climate change and environmental crises are feminist issues: while they affect all living creatures, women and girls are disproportionately affected by them, and are nevertheless much less represented in dealing with them. Girls and women are more environmentally sensitive, and they lead the majority in environmental movements. But the passage of women from the front lines of the movements to politics, parties, institutions, and decision-making centres is extremely slow and has many obstacles. Therefore, deconstructing power structures which uphold barriers for women and an unfair society is a fundamental step we must take. These structures are deeply rooted at all levels of society, including politics. Fighting the root causes of inequality must be our central and long-term objective

Like all policy areas, environmental policy is not gender neutral. We must put a stop to gender blindness. Solutions that do not take gender equality and the different effects on specific social groups into account are not good, effective nor sustainable solutions. Women's intersectional perspectives, experiences and expertise must be fully integrated into climate governance at all levels.

Gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting is key, as is meaningful rather than a token representation of women in groups of decision-makers in politics and industries, scientists, experts, activists and community representatives. The important role of women as active agents of change in the fight for climate justice must be recognised and supported.

- **Hearing and integrating marginalised voices**

As well as meaningful representation of women, intersectional feminist climate policy cares about giving a platform to and listening to the voices of marginalised group in general. Everyone suffers from climate change, but prevention and mitigation are not possible without the input of perspectives from groups that hitherto have been underrepresented in decision-making, such as indigenous people and people of colour, LGBTQ+ communities, people with disabilities as well as the young and old generations. An intersectional and inclusive approach that challenges gender and binary norm to environmental policy is therefore key. This includes the integration of marginalised voices in future climate-proof businesses and practices.

Climate justice and social justice go hand in hand, and one is not complete without the other. The climate crisis, with its extreme weather phenomena, creates conditions of vulnerability for women, especially those whose work and income are affected by the climate and thus remain extremely exposed. Climate change is therefore linked to poverty, as women are, in most societies, the poorest part of the population with the least access to resources.

- **Cooperation as a cornerstone**

Holistic climate justice requires that we, as a society, start prioritising cooperation over competition. The benefits of cooperation have long been visible to feminist economists, and it is time this is brought to the core also in climate policy. Cooperation means moving beyond just token gatherings of heads of state and experts, towards a re-evaluation of the capitalist ethos which puts people and groups against each other in a zero-sum game. It means investing time and resources at all governmental levels in exploring bottom-up approaches to climate justice that involve grassroots movements, local communities, and informal knowledge, as well as top-down solutions.

- **Care before profit**

The principles of care economy are central to feminist economic thinking[1], and this approach deserves a stronger consideration in gender just climate policy. Firstly, caring for the wellbeing of people and the planet before profit is a key principle of progressive feminism and a cornerstone of a sustainable, social economy. Moreover, as demonstrated by the Covid-19 pandemic and other crises, environmental policy is a global health issue. Not only is the health and wellbeing of women and marginalised groups disproportionately affected by environmental concerns, but environmental crises generate an increased need for formal and informal care, which is often carried out by women. Care and climate change resilience go together, and all climate policy with feminist aspirations must incorporate care concerns as a central tenet.

- **Effective and immediate action**

Progressive feminist climate policy requires thoughtfulness but not stagnation. On the contrary, gender-just climate action requires immediate and long-term action. Every day, women's lives and livelihood are threatened by climate change. Every minute of environmental decline equals a decline in women's human rights and in gender equality. Passivity and indecision stopped being feasible options long ago. A gender-transformative approach to the environment means marrying effectiveness with immediacy at all levels of governance.

B. Proposals for feminist climate change policies

1. Gender **mainstream** all EU policies related to the **EU Green Deal** in alignment with **SDG 5**, including policies on climate, energy, agriculture, industry, environment and oceans, transport, finance and regional development, and research and innovation. This must be implemented in all phases of the mainstreaming process: a) Defining (collecting gender-sensitive data, impact assessments, and stakeholders' consultations); b) Planning (implementing gender budgeting, procurement and indicators); c) Acting (gender equality trainings and institutional transformation, raising awareness); and d) Checking (monitoring and evaluation of policy and actions taken).

The **Conference on the Future of Europe** has a strong focus on environmental issues, and therefore, all the proposals should be gender-mainstreamed as well, considering the high levels of EU citizens who agree with the priorities of protecting the planet and ensuring gender equality.

2. Integrate a gender perspective into **fiscal and monetary policies** focussing on an economy of wellbeing. Especially in the aftermath of the Covid crisis, austerity and deflationary policies, which already had disproportionately negative consequences for women after the last financial crisis, must be avoided. The **economic cost of inaction** in climate and social issues will be much higher than the investments these areas currently require.

Implement **gender budgeting and gender mainstream financial tools** to ensure gender responsive policies such as through the Recovery and Resilience Plans, the Multiannual Financial Framework, and the European Semester. Targets and spendings for a green economy and just transition in those programs must promote gender equality and integrate social issues to better benefit women. A gender-proof Social Scoreboard in the European Semester will contribute substantially to monitor gender equality.

3. In line with the COP26 gender and climate change conclusions, ensure equal and inclusive **representation of women** in all political and economic decision-making bodies, including those dealing with climate related topics, given that only 25% of climate negotiators are women. The EU and its Member States should reinforce their collaboration with other governments and stakeholders to ensure gender is effectively mainstreamed in COP27. In particular, the EU should spearhead gender-equal delegations and the adoption of a gender equality lens in all discussions. Additionally, more synergies should be created between the COP and the CSW, the UN Commission on the Status of Women. The commitments made at these summits must be abided by, and governments must be held accountable.

Include youth and marginalised voices of underrepresented communities, specifically those most effected by climate change and its consequences such as displacement, property loss, health impacts, and so on. At EU level, parity zipped lists for EU elections, the unblocking of the Women on Boards Directive and the creation of formal Council configuration for gender equality, diversity and anti-discrimination would be good starting points to establishing structural solutions to women's underrepresentation. On a practical level, we call for gender-sensitive trainings for people in decision-making positions, politics and positions of power, and for establishing focus groups on gender and inclusion in all organisations and companies.

4. Ensure gender equality at all levels of **education and training**, as well as in **employment** and long-life learning. Governments must support women's opportunities and careers in STEM fields to ensure women also benefit from the energy and digital transition, given their huge potential to create jobs. This includes target investments in women-led SMEs and innovation projects. We call for equal access to green, innovative and digital jobs by also implementing gender quotas in those sectors, including in relevant industrial sectors, such as construction, as well as in environment decision-making institutions. Offering women who want to migrate into these green jobs retraining opportunities and capacity building could be a mid-term step.

We must ensure the implementation of the 2009 European Council conclusions on climate change and development and the 2012 Council conclusions on gender equality and the environment.

5. Enhance the collection of **research and sex aggregated data** to explore how climate change affects women and men differently and how gender stereotypes affect people's consumption and mobility habits. Overall, women tend to prefer modifying their habits, whereas men tend to prefer technical solutions to climate change – this is a relationship worth exploring for future policies and solutions. Further we need more evidence on the damage to health caused by consumer goods and on the role of women in driving change towards more sustainable production and consumption patterns.

6. The EU Green Deal, the **Renovation Wave and the Social Climate Fund** must be linked to **social justice**. As the green transition moves forward, EU citizens will experience numerous socio-economic improvements, at the same time, decarbonization policies will have redistributive consequences, and poverty could in some countries deepen in default of mitigation measures.

Women are particularly affected by carbon pricing as they represent 85% of single parent families. Single parent families have a particularly high risk of child poverty. Thus, **gender is a significant determinant of poverty**, and it must be taken into account in the design of measures that will aim to mitigate negative social consequences of climate measures and energy transition.

Gender is rarely recognised as a contributor to **energy poverty** which means that interventions might be incorrectly formulated and potentially miss groups of 'vulnerable' consumers. In this context, creating sound and save living environments, including decent, affordable and resource-efficient housing is key.

European and national public funding and financing should be deployed to ensure the principle of cost neutrality and must contribute to the protection of tenants from evictions after the renovation of the rented property.

7. Include a gender perspective in the sectors of **transport, mobility and agriculture** that are key to the green transition. There must be a particular focus on gender-sensitive urban planning programs and policies, including the New European Bauhaus, as well as for rural areas.

The **Common Agriculture Policy** (CAP) and all other EU agricultural and farming policies must integrate a gender perspective, including budgeting, notably regarding land ownership where women are highly underrepresented, and which does not consider other factors such as that female farmers tend to use more environmentally friendly practices. A great majority of women are either not recognized as co-owners, or face issues with co-ownership, even when the daily routine of running the farm is shared equally with their partners. This leaves them without social protection, child care services, leave or accident insurance. Thus, investments into women-led farms, creating mentoring and training programmes, as well as positive incentives so that landowners sell their property/land to women, will be important steps. Young female farmers in particular can benefit from these measures. Conditionality for CAP funds related to all these proposals should be considered. Strategic investments in services in rural areas (from infrastructures to digital services) would also benefit women.

While **transport poverty** is still an underdeveloped concept, a gender dimension must be taken into account as it will follow the trend of income poverty and might also be deepened without measures that can mitigate social impacts of decarbonisation policies. In this area, the EU's Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy and related policies should consider that while women tend to opt for more eco-friendly options, such as public transport, they are at higher risk of harassment and, in the sector overall, they are inadequately represented, especially in higher-earning positions. Currently, only 22% of transport workers are women. The situation is even worse in the air sector that suffers from great discrepancy between the female and male rates of employment for pilots and cabin crew. As the transport sector transitions towards more sustainability, women should be given an equal opportunity to participate. The transport sector as a whole has the potential to be improved concerning work-life balance, which would contribute to attracting more women.

The **local and regional levels** will play an important role, as many of these areas fall under their competence, so cooperating vertically is crucial. The New Leipzig Charter adopted in 2020 highlights the role of urban and local development to contribute to the common good and addresses the transformative power of cities with regards to the green, productive and just city, all key to gender equality.

8. Guarantee **affordable healthcare** for all, safety at work and equal chances for a healthy lifestyle, which is strongly connected to the environment. Environmental health challenges expand from air pollution (ambient and indoor), unsafe water, waste and noise pollution, but also exposure to harmful chemicals through the use of everyday consumer goods. As part of ensuring a just transition, it is therefore vital that we take a **"One Health" approach** that understands the linkages between the planet's health and that of humans.

Measures must be taken to improve environmental health and meet the health, social and economic needs of the most vulnerable, including women who often have poorer working conditions and are more exposed to detrimental pollutants. The link between healthy environment, physical and mental health, including for pregnant women, cannot be overlooked.

9. Provide climate **protection measures with a social dimension**. We must implement social and feminist principles in economics, especially while exiting the temporary measures taken to help Member States during the worst months of the pandemic. We must also apply them to green-transition policies, as we must give value to unpaid and low-paid care work, which are highly valuable to society, also because female-dominated sectors tend to be low-carbon and community-based activities. Targeted investments in those female-dominated sectors are a must.

10. Solve **women's and nature's problems together**, as oppression and inequalities are bound by the same structures and institutions that have fuelled ecological destruction and the climate crisis. Ensure equal access to human rights, bodily autonomy and safety, to healthcare and justice, including reproductive justice, which are intrinsically linked to the environment. Ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention, the ILO 190 Convention on Violence and put forward an EU Directive to end all forms of gender-based violence against women.

11. Recognise the **international dimension** of climate change: women and girls are at a higher risk when extreme weather conditions hit and will make up large proportions of climate refugees, who will require international protection. Climate adaptation methods, as acknowledged by the Paris Agreement, should be gender responsive. Regarding third countries, the EU Adaptation Strategy acknowledges climate change has worse effects on vulnerable groups, including women, but fails to mainstream gender in the rest of the document.

Prevent human rights violations and bad working conditions in heavily polluting industries, such as that of clothing. Gender and sustainability must be at the centre of the EU's strategy on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and applied to products created in and outside the EU. Therefore, a framework for international relations that is centred around the social and economic well-being of marginalised individuals and communities, as promoted through a feminist foreign policy, is needed to combine these cross-cutting and to implement them worldwide.

12. Support and fund **progressive civil society and community-based projects** that foster women's equality in climate justice and the green economy.