



THE EU'S TRANSITION TO CLIMATE JUSTICE & GENDER EQUALITY

HOW JUST AND HOW EQUAL?

ABSTRACT

The EU's top priorities include 'a just transition to a climate-neutral economy' and 'strengthening the EU's commitment to inclusion and equality in all of its senses', including gender equality. However, the two priorities exist in parallel and rarely intersect. This is a problem because climate change is gendered. There are gendered differences in exposure to the impact of climate change; in the ability to adapt to climate change; in attitudes towards climate change; in the production of climate change; and in climate leadership, participation and activism. These gendered differences are cut through by other structural inequalities, including class, ethnicity, age, location and ability. An approach which attends to the intersections between these structural inequalities is therefore essential in order to achieve a gender- and climate-just future. While awareness has been raised of connections between gender and climate change, the main EU climate policy documents are still gender blind. Unless gender equality is explicitly included in policies, programmes and projects, gender inequalities, which are deeply embedded in social norms, practices and institutions, will persist.



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Introduction

The European Green Deal states that the EU aims to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 and that ‘the transition must be just and inclusive’.¹ However, despite the fact that the Just Transition and gender equality are both high on the European Commission’s agenda, EU climate policy remains largely gender blind.²

Looking at the Just Transition through a gender lens means thinking about the ways in which climate change and actions taken to address it impact differently on different people according to where they are situated on a series of structural inequalities. Gender is one of the most pervasive inequalities in societies around the world. In the EU, gender inequalities are reducing very slowly – and in some cases stalling or even regressing in the context of COVID-19.³ The Gender Equality Index shows that it will take nearly three generations to achieve gender equality at the current pace, with COVID-19 expected to slow down progress even further. In 2019, the gender income gap was 14%, the gender pension gap 29% and the gender poverty gap was wider than in 2010.⁴ The pandemic has further exacerbated gender inequality and women’s poverty.⁵

The regions targeted by Just Transition measures overlap with those that perform the least well on gender equality. On the one hand, the main impacts of coal-related job losses will be felt in the large coalmining regions of Poland, Romania, Greece and Bulgaria. On the other

hand, the least progress on gender equality since 2010 has been recorded in Czechia, Hungary and Poland whereas Greece, Hungary and Romania rank the lowest on gender equality in the EU overall.⁶ In the domain of work, negative scores were recorded in five countries, including Poland and Romania. This illustrates the necessity of taking a gender lens to the Just Transition agenda from the earliest stage.

Recovery from the COVID-19 crisis will coincide with efforts to respond to the even greater climate crisis, and it is crucial that a gender perspective is applied to all aspects of this work.⁷ This means more than looking at the situation of women. It means more than adding policies aimed at women onto unchanged structural approaches to greening the economy. Instead, it means looking at how gender relations operate within the affected societies and how this can be changed in order to remove gendered inequalities. This means thinking about health, care, education and violence, as well as employment. COVID-19 has shone a light on existing inequalities and the way that they can be reinforced or even exacerbated in times of crisis. This offers an opportunity to rethink what it means to mainstream gender throughout all policy issues and at all stages of policy making. Recovery from COVID-19 is an opportunity to make a transition to a green economy which is both climate just and gender just.

What does gender have to do with climate change?

The harshest effects of climate change are being felt in countries in the global south and, within them, in the poorest and most marginalised parts of the population. Since women are disproportionately present amongst the poor and marginalised, they are more likely to be exposed to the harmful effects of climate change.⁸ It has become increasingly clear in recent years that Europe is not exempt from the impact of a changing climate.⁹ Key risks in Europe are heat, droughts, flooding and wildfires, resulting in mortality and morbidity of people, ecosystems disruption, and loss in agricultural production.¹⁰ The European heatwave of 2019 was the world's deadliest disaster that year, killing 2500 people.¹¹

In Europe, as elsewhere, the impact of climate change is different for different groups and individuals. Climate change exacerbates existing inequalities and has particularly harsh effects on those who are disadvantaged and marginalised.¹² Socially disadvantaged groups are more exposed to climate risks.

For example, they are more likely to live in flood-prone areas and in housing that cannot be cooled to comfortable levels in summer. They are also less able to adapt to these risks. People who already face energy poverty are particularly vulnerable to risks from increasing heatwave days in European cities.¹³ Women are disproportionately present in the poorest and oldest sections of the population¹⁴ and are therefore more likely to be adversely affected and to lack the resources necessary to adapt.¹⁵

Studies have exposed the gender differences in the impact of climate change and the ability to adapt to it. They have also revealed gender differences in behaviours which contribute to climate change; attitudes towards climate change; willingness to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and leadership, protest and activism. For example, men are more likely to own and drive a car, less willing to recycle, and dominate climate decision making.

Diversity and intersectionality

Taking a gendered approach to climate change does not mean simply focusing on women. Women are not a homogenous group, and gender inequalities intersect with other structural inequalities, including class, ethnicity, nationality, health, sexual orientation, age and place. Intersecting inequalities can dramatically increase disadvantage in relation to others within the population. An intersectional approach recognises that where social categories intersect, specific forms of marginalisation and inequality can be found. These inequalities are not merely the addition of their social location, but a unique locus of disadvantage.¹⁶ An intersectional approach reveals that those most likely to be

left behind are groups whose disadvantage and marginalisation intersect along different dimensions, reinforcing and exacerbating one another. This can explain the persistence of marginalisation processes for certain groups, whose economic disadvantage intersects with cultural, spatial and political disadvantage.¹⁷

Rather than designating women as vulnerable victims of climate change, an intersectional approach demonstrates that intersecting structural inequalities influence the responsibility, vulnerability and decision-making power of individuals and groups. For example, research on Sweden and the EU shows that there are

gendered differences in energy consumption and transportation, but that gender is not the only relevant factor: class sometimes matters more than gender, women are not a homogenous group, and there are considerable differences within the global north and within the global south.¹⁸ Magnúsdóttir and Kronsell, for example, argue that, 'Well-educated, female climate experts most likely have less in common with low-income working class women across Europe than with their male colleagues at the Commission and this applies to their climate impact as well as climate vulnerability.'¹⁹ An intersectional approach leads us to ask which inequalities matter in each case.²⁰ We need to ask explicitly how structural inequalities

will affect the impact of climate change mitigation efforts and the ability to adapt. This means overcoming the temptation to focus disproportionately on the quantifiable.²¹ We need to ensure that we are not just counting women because it is easy – for example, the number of women in green jobs, the number of women in climate decision making. Instead, we need to refocus on gender as a power relation and on gender in an intersectional sense. We need to ask not only where are the women (and people of all genders) but also which women (and people of all genders) are involved in, and affected by, the production of climate change, adaptation and decision making.

EU climate policy is gender blind

The EU has a long-standing commitment²² to gender equality, which is a treaty obligation, a core value of the EU, a fundamental right and a key principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 is the most recent iteration of how gender equality will be achieved, and it incorporates a recognition of the importance of diversity and intersectionality. Despite all of this, however, EU climate policy remains largely gender blind.²³

- The **European Green Deal** was announced in the same breath as the new Gender Equality Strategy and the appointment of Helena Dalli, the first ever Commissioner for Equality.²⁴ However the two priorities of climate action and equalities have remained separate from one another. The European Green Deal is gender blind, as is the Commission Communication 'Fit for 55: Delivering the EU's 2030 Climate Target on the way to climate neutrality'.

- The Section of **Fit for 55** entitled 'A socially fair transition: tackling inequality and energy poverty through climate action' has strong potential. It states: 'The transition towards climate neutrality can be a unique opportunity to reduce systemic inequality', but gender inequality is ignored. Fit for 55 introduces the Social Climate Fund, which 'will provide dedicated funding to member states to support European citizens most affected or at risk of energy or mobility poverty [...] Energy poverty alone affects up to 34 million people in the European Union today', but it does not mention the relation between gender and energy poverty, which has already been exposed by EIGE and the European Parliament, amongst others. For example, according to the EIGE report on women and poverty, almost half of lone parents across the EU are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, and almost 9 out of 10 lone parents are women.²⁵

- The **2021 Gender Equality Index** finds that 'single women, particularly in old age, are at the highest risk of poverty.'²⁶ The European Parliament study on Gender and Energy finds that 'due to their lower average income, women are at greater risk of energy poverty than men.'²⁷ The steep energy price increase since the end of 2021, exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis caused by the war in Ukraine, is amplifying these problems and having a particularly harsh impact on some groups of women, including ethnic minority women, disabled women, single mothers and older women.²⁸
- The **2021 Climate Law**²⁹ is gender blind, but states that 'the transition must be just and inclusive, leaving no-one behind'.
- The Communication '**Stepping up Europe's Climate Ambition. Investing in a climate-neutral future for the benefit of our people**' makes 18 references to 'citizens' and how they will benefit from measures and how they can contribute to the fight against climate change.³⁰ However, there is no mention of gender in the document. The citizens – and the people in the title – are not gendered, and the document as a whole is gender blind.
- The **EU recovery plan**,³¹ introduced as a special measure to support recovery from the socio-economic effects of COVID-19, specifies that 37% of spending will be allocated to climate action and 20% to digital transition. There is no such specification for gender equality.³²

Two examples of policy documents which mention gender are the **EU Adaptation Strategy** and the **Mobility Strategy and Action Plan**. However, in neither case is gender mainstreamed.

The Adaptation Strategy has just one reference to gender – in a footnote on p. 18 – and one reference to women: 'Men and women, older people, persons with disabilities, displaced persons, or socially marginalised have different adaptive capabilities'.³³ The Mobility Strategy and Action Plan³⁴ has only one mention of gender (para 97): 'The Commission will duly apply gender mainstreaming to its transport related policy initiatives and continue to support stakeholder cooperation and exchange of good practices on the 'More Women in Transport – Platform for Change' to increase the number of women in transport professions. It will also raise awareness on equality issues by setting up and supporting a network of Diversity Ambassadors. Any future proposal for transport will be compliant with the Commission's Gender Equality Strategy and Disability Strategy'. Although it recognises gender mainstreaming, this strategy is not itself gender mainstreamed.

Impact Assessments are rarely conducted and when they are, gender is ignored. For example, there was no Impact Assessment conducted for the 2021 Climate Law. Instead, the European Commission referred to two earlier impact assessments,³⁵ neither of which mentioned gender.

The Commission's proposal for a Regulation establishing the Just Transition Fund³⁶ relies on an Impact Assessment conducted in 2018 which does not contain a single reference to gender. On the basis of the gender-blind Impact Assessment, the Commission finds that 'the objective of the Just Transition Fund is justified, as it aims to ensure a fair energy transition through alleviating the economic and social costs the transition towards a climate-neutral economy implies'. But these economic and social costs are gendered and if this is not identified and measured at this stage, it will not be addressed.

The Impact Assessment accompanying the

Communication 'Stepping up Europe's Climate Ambition'³⁷ contains no mention of gender or women, despite the fact that all Impact Assessments must do a gendered impact assessment. It states 'The benefits of energy savings will not be enjoyed equally by all citizens. Households with higher disposable income will be able to invest in both energy efficiency and distributed renewable energy generation. Households with lower income might lack the access to capital necessary to

invest. [...] As possible negative outcome of the transition, households in the lower income deciles might have to compensate higher energy expenditures by reducing consumption of other goods. As energy costs are projected to increase, energy poverty could intensify if not adequately addressed.'³⁸ These gender-blind statements obscure the gendered realities of poverty and energy poverty, perpetuating and, in some cases, exacerbating them.

Gender mainstreaming

A positive aspect of recent attention to a Just Transition is the renewed interest in gender mainstreaming – an important and potentially transformative approach to gender equality. The notion of gender mainstreaming is now more than 25 years old, having been introduced at the Beijing Conference in 1995 and adopted by the EU the following year. Integrating the goal of gender equality into all policy areas at all stages of policy making was a radical break with an approach to gender equality which saw it as a separate issue to be addressed through separate structures and processes. It is particularly important in areas traditionally seen as having nothing to do with gender, including trade, industry and energy. Budgets also need to be gender mainstreamed, and this is referred to as gender budgeting or gender-responsive budgeting. The European Court of Auditors special report on gender mainstreaming in the EU budget found that the Commission had not yet lived up to its commitments. If the EU is to deliver on its gender mainstreaming commitments,³⁹ gender equality must be fully integrated into its budgetary structures and processes. This applies to all areas of climate financing and the green transition, along with all other areas of the EU budget.

The idea of mainstreaming has become so widespread that it has been applied to many other crosscutting issues. The European Green Deal talks of 'mainstreaming sustainability', and there are calls for climate mainstreaming, and the mainstreaming of migration, security and other strategic priorities. This is an important recognition that many issues cannot be addressed in policy silos and that a 'whole of government approach' or 'policy coherence' is essential. Climate change does have to be mainstreamed throughout all policy issues at all stages of policymaking if climate justice is to be achieved. Climate change is not a discrete issue that can be dealt with separately. The goal of climate neutrality must be mainstreamed throughout all policy in the areas of trade, agriculture, energy and employment. However, it is equally important for gender equality to be fully integrated into this joined up approach to crosscutting issues. If climate mainstreaming is gender blind, then the pervasive structural inequalities based on gender will persist. Gender mainstreaming – in all its diversity and intersectionality – must be fully integrated in all climate mainstreaming efforts. We need to explore the synergies not just between gender equality policy and climate policy, but between gender mainstreaming and climate mainstreaming to achieve a gender-just and

climate-just future. As the idea of mainstreaming continues to spread, we need to re-examine the

concept, its underlying objectives, and how best to operationalize it.

How can we achieve a gender-just and climate-just transition?

Deliberate measures are required to bring about change;⁴⁰ it is not going to happen by some kind of natural evolution. Unless gender equality is explicitly included in policies, programmes and projects, gender inequalities, which are deeply embedded in social norms, practices and institutions, will persist.

Achieving a gender-just and climate-just transition requires a concerted effort by all EU institutions and by those responsible for policy areas such as trade, energy and transport. Gender mainstreaming is not fully integrated into the work of the Commission and some key policy areas remain gender blind. The European Parliament has produced some excellent gender analyses and has reintegrated gender equality into gender-blind Commission proposals. However, it is difficult to add gender equality on to already formulated policies – gender mainstreaming was intended to address this problem by insisting that gender needed to be integrated from the very outset. Ex ante gender impact assessments should identify the gendered implications of proposals and inform the direction they take, but are rarely, if ever, conducted. Gender budgeting is also essential, ensuring that all budgetary decisions are informed by gender analyses and are gender-responsive.

Just Transition and Leave No-one Behind can together build an inclusive approach to the creation of a sustainable future. But climate justice cannot be achieved without gender justice. To bring gender equality and climate change together, we need a framework that prioritises policy coherence and maximises the synergies between policy issues, such as transport, energy and agriculture, but also between crosscutting issues such as climate change and gender equality. Climate mainstreaming has become widely accepted. It builds on the idea of gender mainstreaming, but is itself gender blind. We need to reinvigorate gender mainstreaming and work on the synergies between gender mainstreaming and climate mainstreaming. A framework that increases gender justice in climate action increases social justice more broadly. Deep inequalities have a detrimental impact on women who are more often exposed to poverty and marginalisation. Gender justice and climate justice go hand in hand, and this is the moment to ensure that both are mainstreamed in all policies, at all stages and at all levels of government in order to make the transition to climate neutrality truly just.

Recommendations

Gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting

- Gender must be mainstreamed throughout all policy, even in areas that appear to be gender neutral. This includes climate change, but also energy, transport, trade and agriculture.
- Gender mainstreaming must also be applied to the EU budget. Gender budgeting must be fully integrated into climate policies and the Just Transition and must be monitored and evaluated.
- Gender must be mainstreamed in an intersectional way. This means recognising that gender inequality intersects with other structural inequalities, including region, age, ethnicity and disability, but it does not mean replacing a concern with gender equality with a gender-blind equalities agenda.
- Gender mainstreaming must take place at all stages of the policy process, from issue definition through policy formulation, to implementation and evaluation. Gender impact assessments are a crucial part of this process and must identify who is affected by the impact of climate change and by measures taken to address it.
- Just Transition must be informed by gender impact assessments and must be gender mainstreamed throughout, including its financing.

Tackle gender inequality and poverty

- Use the transition to a carbon-neutral economy as an opportunity to achieve gender equality in employment, skills and pay.
- Close the gender pay and pensions gap.
- Tackle energy poverty through a combination of renewables, energy efficiency, and poverty eradication.
- Address the structural causes of gender inequality to benefit the economy, health, the environment, peace and stability.
- Build the resilience of women and girls so that they are less vulnerable to the impact of climate change through decent work, social protection, health systems, education, and the reduction and redistribution of women's and girls' disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work.
- Promote and support public transport as a sustainable alternative to private cars in such a way that it meets the needs of all users and breaks the link between masculinity and car ownership.

Inclusive decision-making

- Equal and meaningful participation, representation and leadership of women in all their diversity, at all levels of climate change decision making.
- Meaningful participation of gender and climate change civil society organisations at local, national and international level.

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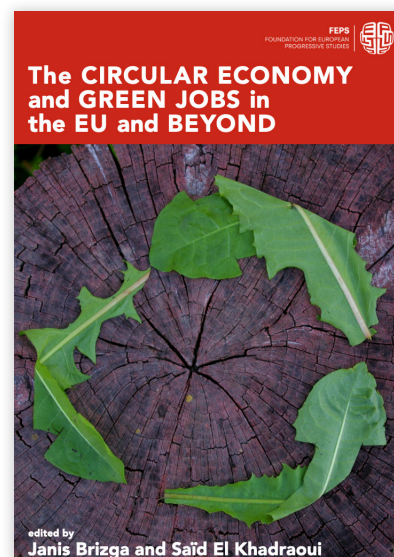
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