

Area K — Women and the environment: climate change is gendered

Introduction

The climate change policy agenda in the EU is driven by the EU's 2020 climate and energy package, which sets out broad targets to be achieved by 2020. The package is based on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Paris Agreement, which commits to keeping global warming 'well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius'. Consequently, the EU has set binding climate and energy targets to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 20 % (by 2020) and eventually by 40 % (by 2030) of 1990 levels. Key to reaching these climate change goals are a shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy and a drastic improvement in energy efficiency. Decarbonisation can be improved by reducing air pollution; the energy, trans-

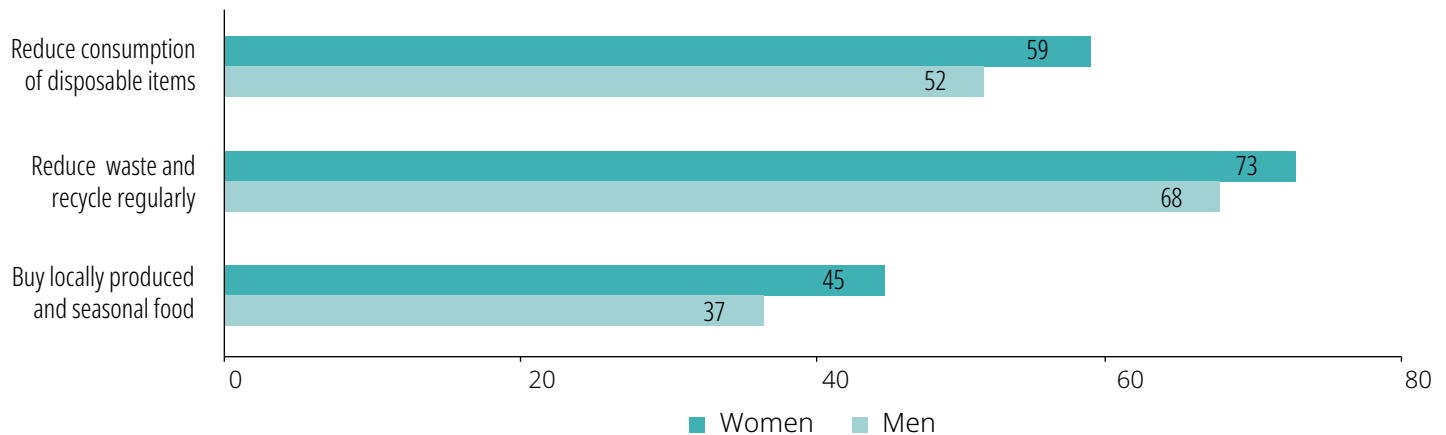
port and agriculture sectors are central to further reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Under the UNFCCC, the EU is expected to integrate gender equality concerns into its climate change and other environmental policies. Furthermore, under the strategic engagement for gender equality (2016-2019), the Commission has committed to reporting on the extent to which a gender perspective is mainstreamed across different policy areas, including transport, energy, agriculture, trade and the environment. However, the efforts to incorporate a gender perspective in the EU environmental policy have been largely fragmented and they have not translated the EU commitments in this area into concrete actions, as discussed in the third section of this document.



Environmental behaviours, attitudes and consumption are gendered

Figure 1. Selected personal actions taken to fight climate change, EU-28, 2017, (%)



Source: Special Eurobarometer 459, Climate Change

Women seem to show more concern for the climate in their behaviours than men. The 2017 Eurobarometer survey on climate change demonstrates that women have slightly greater concern than men when it comes to environmental and climate change, and also that they are more likely to take actions in this area (see Figure 1). This might relate to gendered patterns of consumption and behaviour; masculinity is often linked to products with high levels of carbon emissions, while femininity is often linked to environmentally friendly behaviour such as recycling. As recycling adds to the unpaid work done in households, which is still provided disproportionately by women (see Area F policy brief), a move towards a zero waste lifestyle creates additional pressures on women. At global level, most electronic waste is shipped to low-income countries, where it creates a disproportionate burden on women and children.

The transition towards a clean, efficient and renewable energy sector is a key part of the climate change policies of many EU Member States. In addition to promoting behavioural changes at individual level, smart home technologies are one way to improve household energy consumption and to stimulate energy efficiency. However, technologies such as smart meters and zero-emission heating systems are often targeted at the male end-user, taking a technology-driven approach in their language and marketing. This ignores women's agency as energy consumers. Encouraging energy efficiency at the household level needs to take account of

gender roles and gender differences in energy consumption in order to fully reap the potential benefits of energy efficiency from smart homes. At present, these technologies frequently ignore gender-differentiated use and user needs in new equipment and devices. In future, they may have potentially transformative effects for care and domestic work (for example through ambient assistant systems).

The transport sector has a high, often polluting, impact on the environment. The gender differences in mobility and transport use are well documented, although poorly reflected in transport and mobility policies. Women are less likely to own or use a car. They also travel shorter distances, have more complex trip patterns, and walk, cycle or use public transport more frequently than men. Women's continued role as primary caregivers also affects their mobility needs. New transport technologies, such as e-mobility (electric cars, e-bikes, etc.) and automated driving systems, are promoted for their prospective benefits in terms of efficiency, traffic safety and convenience. These technologies may also provide opportunities to challenge gender differences in environmentally friendly behaviours, and promote greater behavioural change on the part of men. For example, autonomous driving could challenge the symbolic connection between cars and masculinity, which may help to redefine the gendered human-car relationship, thereby reducing car use in favour of more environmentally friendly forms of mobility.

Environmental policies fail to consider gender

Protection of nature and biodiversity, efficient resource use, and management of materials and products to create a circular economy are key elements of environmental policy. Appropriate policies to adapt and mitigate climate change are reflected in policies at all levels in the EU. However, climate change and environment policies affect people differently, depending on various intersecting factors, including gender, age, income, education, ethnicity and religion. Those most vulnerable to the consequences of climate change often tend to be women. This is due partly to persistent societal inequalities, whereby women have fewer resources than men to protect against the impacts of climate change (see Area A policy brief).

Despite gender differences in environmental behaviours and attitudes, and growing evidence of the gendered impacts of climate change, EU climate change policy has remained largely gender blind. Current EU policies on climate change are certainly relevant to gender, especially within the context of the global debate on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); climate action and gender equality are both key SDGs. However, the current environment action programme, guiding EU environmental policy until 2020, does not incorporate a gender perspective, and neither does the EU energy policy. Likewise, the 2015 Energy Union strategy and the 2016 clean energy for all Europeans policy framework (which aim to facilitate the transition towards clean and efficient energy in Europe) do not incorporate a gender perspective. Positively, there have been stronger attempts by the EU to promote

gender analysis within environmental research, as part of the Horizon 2020 programme.

Some progress has been registered in the use of gender impact assessments on environmental policies. For example, an impact assessment of the Environmental Goods Agreement — a key development in environmental policy, with the potential to create millions of jobs, particularly in the renewable energy sector — was carried out in 2016 to explore its potential effects on gender equality. Relatedly, a 2015 European Parliament resolution called for the Commission to collect sex-disaggregated data to conduct gender impact assessments in the areas of climate, environment and energy policy.

At national level, the draft national energy and climate plans (NECPs) submitted by the EU Member States to the European Commission rarely take a gendered perspective, with few positive examples. Finland has organised an open workshop on gender effects of the climate change plans. Spain acknowledges that a higher proportion of women in the renewable energy sector is necessary. The need for more sex-disaggregated data is reflected in the NECPs of Croatia, Latvia, Romania, Slovenia and Finland.

In addition to the fragmented mainstreaming of gender into environmental policies, women continue to be underrepresented in decision-making bodies that deal with such policies. That further hinders progress. In 2018, women accounted for only a fifth (21.6 %) of all government ministers dealing with environment, climate change, energy and transport in EU Member States, compared with 30.2 % of all ministers.

Recommendations for action

To reflect gendered differences in environmental behaviours and attitudes and to ensure women are not disproportionately affected by the burdens of climate change, environmental policies at EU and national levels should reflect a gender perspective. This could involve, for example, promoting inclusion of gender-sensitive goals, targets and indicators in Member State NECPs and undertaking systematic gender mainstreaming in EU environmental and climate change policies.

EU and Member State institutions should consider increasing their use of gender-mainstreaming tools and methods, for

example gender and participatory budgeting, gender audits, public-sector equality duties, gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation, and sex-disaggregated indicators. The EU already has a comprehensive suite of gender-mainstreaming tools; their regular use would strengthen the gender equality perspective in climate change policy at Member State and EU levels.

Generally, structured initiatives to increase gender equality in decision-making at all levels related to climate change policy are essential to ensuring equal representation of women and men in policymaking.

Further information

There are many other inequalities and challenges in the area of women and the environment. Women remain under-represented in environment-related occupations, as well as within critical arenas of environmental decision-making (such as water governance, energy policy, smart mobility and waste management). In addition, single female households and lone parent households (mostly headed by women) are disproportionately affected by energy poverty in most Member

States, suggesting that they are unable to adequately heat their homes.

Further information on EU policy developments and trends in the area of women and environment can be found in EIGE's Beijing + 25 report. Some other policy briefs based on this report also present challenges that are closely related to women and the economy (such as Area A, Women and poverty, and Area C, Women and health).

EIGE regularly produces reports reviewing different areas of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) or other EU policy priorities, as requested by the presidencies of the Council of the European Union. This factsheet is based on the report *Beijing + 25: The fifth review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States*, prepared at the request of Finland's Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Other publications include:

- [Tackling the Gender Pay Gap: Not without a better work–life balance](#) (2019)
- [Gender Equality and Youth: Opportunities and risks of digitalisation](#) (2019)
- [Women and Men in ICT: A chance for better work–life balance](#) (2018)
- [Study and Work in the EU: Set apart by gender](#) (2018)

You can explore all of EIGE's previous BPfA reports and publications at <https://eige.europa.eu/beijing-platform-for-action>

European Institute for Gender Equality

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is the EU knowledge centre on gender equality. EIGE supports policymakers and all relevant institutions in their efforts to make equality between women and men a reality for all Europeans by providing them with specific expertise and comparable and reliable data on gender equality in Europe.
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