

# **CLIMATE POLICIES ARE NOT GENDER NEUTRAL**

**How climate policies  
impact gender and vice  
versa in a Nordic context**



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This publication is also available online in a web-accessible version at <https://pub.norden.org/temanord2021-548>.

# Why talk about climate policies' impact on gender?

*"No policy response to climate change is gender neutral."* (UN Women, Undesa, UN Climate Change Secretariat, 2016)<sup>1</sup>

All the Nordic countries have set-out ambitious climate mitigation targets that require structural changes of the Nordic societies in terms of how we move, live, eat, and consume in a low carbon manner. Climate action plans have been prepared to draw the paths of how each of the Nordic countries are to realise these climate mitigation targets and the Paris agreement. The climate action plans impact citizens across gender, age, income, education, geography, and ethnicities differently. Likewise, our attitudes towards climate mitigation solutions differ. In general, women worry more about the impact of climate change, are more positive towards changing their own behaviour, and more supportive of radical climate mitigation policies such as product bans and economic incentives than men<sup>2</sup>.

The fact that climate policies impact men and women differently has been recognised by the Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG) and its Gender Action Plan (GAP), through which the Nordic countries have committed themselves to gender mainstream climate policies.

## How is gender understood in this study?

An intersectional understanding of the binary sociobiological categories of 'men' and 'women.' Intersectionality means that gender is seen in relation to age, socioeconomic background, education, geography, ethnicity, etc.

This policy brief presents the findings of a study on how climate policies impact gender and vice versa in a Nordic context (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden have been included). The project is based on an extensive literature review, a survey with relevant Nordic governmental agencies and six focus groups interviews with policy makers, associations for women rights as well as representatives from the mobility, energy, construction, and agricultural sector. The four sectors have been selected based on their carbon impact and the gender representation in the sectors.

The study has been commissioned by the Nordic Working Group for Climate and Air under the auspice of the Nordic Council of Ministers, and has been carried out by the sustainability consultancy, PlanMiljö in cooperation with Environmental, Social and Human Rights Specialist Gabriela Factor.

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1. UNDESA, UN Women & UNCCS (2016). Implementation of Gender-Responsive Climate Action in the Context of Sustainable Development.
  2. Naturvårdsverket (2021). Allmänhetens kunskap och attityder till klimatfrågor. Retrieved from: <https://www.naturvardsverket.se/amnesomraden/klimatomställningen/sveriges-klimatarbete/allmanhetens-kunskap-och-attityder-till-klimatfragor>

# Climate policies tend to be framed in a technical and culturally masculinised way

Climate change has predominantly been put on the global agenda as challenge that must be solved through highly scientific, technical, and therefore culturally masculinised solutions<sup>3 4</sup>. Studies show that men are more likely to take-up new green technologies due to a gendered upbringing that tends to expose boys to mechanics and technologies. Men to a larger degree than women find their motivation for a green transition in the interest in new technology and are for example often the driver of domestic solar panels. At the same time, women in general tend to lack the competences and/or interest in novel green technology<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, statistics show that men are more likely to use new green mobility services such as car sharing and e-scooters. This is explained by the fact that women culturally feel less safe by using car-sharing and more often have to run several errands, which the payments scheme of the new mobility services make more expensive<sup>6</sup>. These low-carbon mobility services thus tend to be designed for men.

The framing and focus of climate policies impacts the way investment and funding are allocated – as well as the priorities and planning of the infrastructure. As an example, the framing of green mobility as a question of technical innovation and electrification challenges funding and investment of non-motorised modes of mobility such as walking and cycling<sup>7</sup>.

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3. UNDESA, UN Women & UNCCS (2016). Implementation of Gender-Responsive Climate Action in the Context of Sustainable Development. [https://unfccc.int/files/gender\\_and\\_climate\\_change/application/pdf/egmreport.pdf](https://unfccc.int/files/gender_and_climate_change/application/pdf/egmreport.pdf)
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  5. Standal, K. et al. (2020). Engaging men and women in energy production in Norway and United Kingdom: The significance of social practices and social relations.
  6. Uteng, T. P., Christensen, H. R., & Levin, L. (2020). Gendering Smart Mobilities.
  7. Focus group interview 3 with mobility experts

# Climate policies impact the gender-segregated labour market

The framing of climate policies and actions as a rather scientific and technical matter demands competencies from the male-dominated fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Statistics show that STEM is highly dominated by men and this framing thus tend to privilege STEM-professions, while downplaying social interpretation, contextual considerations and social-science professions, which are female-dominated<sup>8</sup>. Policy makers preparing climate policies likewise are often economists or engineers that are educated to focus on societal costs and technical solutions rather than the social context<sup>9</sup>. Yet, social and cultural changes are crucial to realise socially sustainable low-carbon societies. To achieve absolute reductions of energy consumption, kilometres driven, and domestic energy use must decrease, which implies behavioural change<sup>10</sup>.

Climate policies tend to create employment in male-dominated sectors such as energy, construction, industry, mobility, and forestry due to the mobilisation of investments and increased sector-activity. Within the energy sector, employment will move from fossil fuels to renewables. Conversely, employment in female-dominated sectors (such as consumers services, tourism and restaurant services) is decreasing<sup>11</sup>.

At the same time, studies show that sustainable decarbonisation approaches tend to attract more women to otherwise male-dominated sectors, as evidence shows that women are more concerned with climate change than men<sup>12</sup>. The transition to a low-carbon society thus also holds an opportunity of both increasing 'green' competencies (understanding the issue and responses to climate change) among women and increasing diversity within traditionally male-dominated sectors.

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8. Kronsell, A. & Magnusdottir, G. L. (2021). Gender, Intersectionality and Climate Institutions in Industrialised States.
  9. Kronsell, A. & Magnusdottir, G. L. (2021). Gender, Intersectionality and Climate Institutions in Industrialised States.
  10. Lettenemeier et. al (2019). 1.5-degree lifestyles. Targets and options for reducing lifestyle carbon footprints – A summary
  11. The Finnish Government (2019). Gender impact assessment of the Finnish Climate and Energy Sector. According to data from Eurostat (2017)
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# Climate policies impact the gendered income-level

In the Nordic countries, we see an average gender pay gap of 14.3 %. This gender pay gap is partly due to the gender-segregated labour market, yet differences persist when occupation, industry, education and age are held constant<sup>13</sup>. The gender pay gap implies that any carbon taxes placed on products will affect women more than men, assuming men and women have a similar consumption pattern. Yet, due to the gendered consumption patterns, any taxes on meat and fuel will impact men more, whereas all low-income groups are more vulnerable to increases in energy prices.

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13. NIKK by NCM (2021). Equal Pay in the Nordic countries – the law and policy strategies: [https://nikk.no/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/NIKK\\_Equal\\_Pay\\_in\\_the\\_Nordic\\_Countries.pdf](https://nikk.no/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/NIKK_Equal_Pay_in_the_Nordic_Countries.pdf)

# Climate policies impact the gendered patterns of consumption

An average single man has a larger carbon footprint (10,000 kg/year) than an average single woman (8,100 kg/year), which is not due to higher expenditure levels (men only spend 2% more than women), but rather due to culturally shaped patterns of consumption. Men tend to spend more money on carbon intensive products and services such as fuel and meat, whereas women spend more money on furniture and clothing<sup>14</sup>. This implies that any climate tools targeting climate friendly consumption may impact men and women differently.

As men have a larger intake of food and consume more meat, they have a higher carbon footprint from their food consumption (44% more than women)<sup>15</sup>. Research has found that men are more likely to choose meat, particularly red meat, when compared to fruits and vegetables<sup>16 17</sup>. Studies on the interlinkage between food patterns and gendered patterns find that eating meat is culturally associated with allowing one to be seen as masculine, and the avoidance of meat with being seen as culturally feminine. Thus, meat consumption is in general seen as closely tied to the production of a strong masculine identity<sup>18</sup>. Climate policies – such as carbon taxes on meat – may therefore impact men more than women.

The car-centric planning of mobility implies that investment and innovation are channelled into e.g. the electric-car infrastructure at the expense of pedestrian, public transport and cycling, which are predominantly the mobility patterns by women. Women are more positive towards car-use reduction measures and more likely to reduce their car use<sup>19</sup>.

The conventional gendered distribution of roles and tasks in the households, where the woman is the primary caregiver, and the man is the primary earner is still present in the Nordic countries<sup>20</sup>. Any climate policies targeting households and everyday practices such as green consumption, material care and waste sorting tend to raise the burden of informal unpaid work often carried out by women. For example, data shows that women are more likely to sort out food waste<sup>21</sup>.

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14. Kanyama, A. et al. (2021). Shifting expenditure on food, holidays, and furnishings could lower greenhouse gas emissions by almost 40%
  15. Meier, T., & Christen, O. (2012): Gender as a factor in environmental assessment of the consumption of animal and plant-based foods in Germany
  16. Sumpter, K. C. (2015): Masculinity and Meat Consumption: An Analysis Through the Theoretical Lens of Hegemonic Masculinity and Alternative Masculinity Theories
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  21. Secondi, L., Principato, L., & Laureti, T. (2015): Household food waste behaviour in EU-27 countries: A multilevel analysis

# Climate action plans in the Nordic countries are not gender sensitive

As argued in the above, there is no doubt that climate policies impact gender in multiple ways. However, the Nordic climate action plans, showing the pathways towards carbon-neutral societies, are only mainstreaming gender to a limited extent. Only Finland explicitly addresses gender in their climate action plans, while Sweden addresses gender in the sector plan for mobility. Finland, Iceland and Sweden have taken some steps towards gender mainstreaming. Finland and Iceland have as an example conducted Gender Impact Assessments (GIA), which focused on the labour market and consumption patterns. The Swedish Government has commissioned a strategy of gender mainstreaming the implementation of the Paris Agreement, which is currently under consideration. The proposed strategy suggests a supportive organisation allocating responsibilities and resources, developing sex-disaggregated data and promoting equal representation within STEM. Denmark and Norway have not taken any steps towards gender mainstreaming of their climate action plans, which signals a rather gender-blind approach. All the Nordic countries call for more knowledge about how climate policies impact gender – in a Nordic context in particular - that can inform the development and implementation of gender-responsive national climate action plans.

Gender blind climate actions risk perpetuating the gender segregated labour market as well as the Nordic gender pay gap. The latter, can be further reinforced if the gender pay gap are not taken into consideration in the design of climate taxes. Another way in which Nordic climate policies may impact gender equality negatively, has to do with climate policies that puts emphasis on consumer actions. As the unpaid work in households still rests on shoulders of women in the Nordics, the responsibility of conducting a low carbon everyday life will add to this unequal distribution.

## What is gender mainstreaming?

Gender mainstreaming involves the integration of gender equality in the preparation, design, and implementation of climate policies.



# Women are represented, but the representation of the female interest is low

## What is meant by representation?

The share of women in political institutions is commonly used as an indicator of the inclusion of women in decision-making. It is argued that the number of women in politics matter to make policies gender-sensitive. Gender-sensitivity requires, however, a certain level of women. This has led to the concept of critical mass of representation commonly translated into the aim of a 40% to 60 % representation range.

Despite politicians, lobbyists and experts consulted in climate policy making, civil servants also impact climate policies. Likewise, it is relevant to ask whether the climate policies reflect the gendered attitudes of climate policies?

Can it be that the climate action plans have not been fully gender mainstreamed because of low representation of women in decision-making bodies? In governments and parliaments across the Nordic countries, gender is equally represented (understood as a 40/60 share), apart from the Danish government (elected in 2019). Among civil servants in relevant public agencies, women tend to be either equally or higher represented than men, except higher position levels in Denmark, where gender equality is not achieved (these data are however from 2012). In governmental transport agencies, women are likewise lower represented (except in Sweden). Looking at lobbyists being invited to consult climate action plans, only Finland and Sweden have actively consulted organisations with a gendered perspective. Norway and Iceland have open consultations platforms that allow everyone, including women interest organisations, to have their say, but they have not used this opportunity. As the sectors with the largest carbon footprints are also male-dominated, most of the lobbyists consulted represent a rather gender-blind approach to climate policies.

One thing is representation in numbers, another is the actual representation of perspectives related to the position of women in society. Equal gender representation in the level of decision-making does not automatically translate into gender mainstreaming of climate action plans. Whether equal representation leads to gender-balanced policies are depending on the institutionalised gendered norms within the organisations and agencies preparing and implementing climate policies<sup>22</sup>. As the debate of how climate actions impact gender has been limited, awareness-raising is needed.

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22. Magnúsdóttir, G. L., & Kronsell, A. (2014). The (In)Visibility of Gender in Scandinavian Climate Policy-Making. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 17(2), 308-326. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14616742.2014.896661>

Best practice in Gender Impact Assessment, GIA, of public policies include the Canadian GIA+ and the German Climate GIA tool that both apply an intersectionality approach. Thus, the focus is not on women as a vulnerable group, but on the social, institutional and symbolical mechanisms that (re)produce gender disparities and power imbalances. It also allows to identify the intersectional vulnerability of men, women, and other genders when relevant. Experience from these countries indicate the need of these GIA to be carried out under the auspices of gender experts and include the participation of women (and when applicable genders between and beyond the binary construction) and gender associations committed with climate policy.

# We lack relevant sex-disaggregated data for gender mainstreaming of climate policies

The knowledge on how climate policy and gender mutually impact each other is currently insufficient to fully inform and support gender mainstreaming. On the basis of the study, it is highly recommended to conduct Gender Impact Assessments in all the Nordic countries. Furthermore, it is recommended to support the generation of more systematically collected data and analyses, while also developing a common Nordic platform for information and resources on the intersecting issue. Thereby, the study hopes to inform and inspire further research, debate, awareness raising and gender mainstreaming activities within the development and implementation of national climate policy.

The table below shows where data is:

- **Available**, meaning that the gender gap is known, indicators are identified, but some improvements are needed in terms of consistency, completeness, and availability.
- **Not systematically collected:** The gender gap is known or suspected and indicators are identified.

Data is available:		Disaggregated is not systematically collected
Representation and participation (of gender climate policies)	Sex-disaggregated data on representation in decision-making bodies	Sex-disaggregated data on civil servants across levels of position in agencies working with climate policies
	Proportion of women in top-ministerial position in environment-related sectors	Sex-disaggregated data on the support of specific climate policies, combined with age, income, household status and location.  Sex-disaggregated data on the stakeholders consulted in making of climate policies.
Monitoring gender mainstreaming in climate policy making		Targets and indicators on gender equality in climate action plans e.g., in terms of resources allocated, number of initiatives being gender sensitive
		Qualitative assessments of whether dynamics that enable gender equality outcomes are reflected in climate action plans.
		Qualitative analyses and assessments of gendered norms and patterns influencing and being influenced by the policy.
		Number and percentage of climate policies measures that have been assessed in terms of gendered impacts and benefits.
		Number and percentage of policy measures where gender participation and gender impacts and benefits are identified and monitored.
Use and consumption patterns	Sex-disaggregated preferences and patterns of use of mobility and gender-sensitive mobility analyses	Sex-disaggregated data on energy consumption and behaviour, and the intersection of gender, income, demography, age and how these may affect energy choices.
	Sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive analyses on food consumption (this data might not be collected routinely)	Sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive analyses on the informal and unpaid work of the green transition in everyday life.
Sector specific data	Sex-disaggregated data on representation in STEM	Sex-disaggregated data on the accessibility of agriculture land, access to credit, low carbon housing, non-fossil driven mobility, and energy options.
	Sex-disaggregated representation in relevant sector (with varying detail and completeness depending on country and sector)	The gendered distribution of funding, loans, and investments, differentiated between intersectional categories as well as sustainable/conventional production.
	Proportion of women in boards	Sex-disaggregated data on adoption of green technology and innovation in productive sectors and households (by dwelling and enterprise ownership in combination with sector, size, demography, age.)
	Women's leadership in energy companies	Sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive analysis of energy poverty, including comprehensive sex-disaggregated data (drivers, causes and effects of energy poverty).
	Gender balance in research groups relevant to climate policies and relevant sectors	Gender-sensitive analyses of gendered patterns and norms affecting green transition of specific sectors as well as gendered effects of the sector-specific climate policies.
	Sex-disaggregated data on participation in the agricultural and food production and activities, per type and size of activities/production (with varying detail depending on country and type of activities)	

## RECOMMENDATIONS TARGETING THE NORDIC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

### 1. Common guidelines for Gender Impact Assessment for the Nordic Countries

*The Nordic countries should develop common guidelines and procedures for Gender Impact Assessment, GIA, of climate policies, programs and projects. This will allow synergies in data collection and assessment, shared learning and the possibility to compare and benchmark the gendered impacts and benefits of policies and interventions.*

The common GIA guidelines should:

- Be implemented in all the Nordic countries, if possible, within the next two-three years.
- Be applied to climate action plans, policies, programs and projects, including relevant sector specific action plans
- Be informed by and implemented with the participation of gender experts
- Include the participation of women (and when applicable diverse genders) and gender associations committed with climate policy
- Apply an intersectional approach, addressing the social, institutional, and symbolical mechanisms and norms that (re)produce gender disparities and power imbalances and enquire into the intersectional vulnerability of men, women and other genders when relevant.
- Incorporate targets and indicators of social sustainability and gender equality to monitor gender mainstreaming. Accountability frameworks, such as mechanisms of monitoring and evaluation should be developed at each country and financial resources and professional expertise allocated accordingly.

**For inspiration see the Canadian GIA+ and the German Climate GIA tool.**

### 2. Common Nordic platform for information and resources on climate and gender equality for the Nordic Countries

*The Nordic Council of Ministers should support the development and maintenance of a free access platform where updated information, data, resources and tracking of indicators of climate and gender equality for the Nordic countries are available. The scope, governance and sustainability of the platform needs to be further discussed and defined.*

The information available on this platform could include, among others:

- Gender mandates and commitments related to climate policies of the Nordic countries, i.e., all relevant UNFCCC decisions, including the Enhanced Lima Work Programme on gender and its Gender Action Plan.
- Updated lists of key roles within gender mainstreaming of climate policy, such

as the National Climate Change and Gender Focal Point and other Gender Focal Points in the relevant national ministries.

- Climate measures and gendered impacts such as discussion on gender dimensions of climate policies and estimated or evaluated impact of initiatives
- Monitoring and dissemination of social and gendered climate conflicts and best practices on gender
- Gender equality and climate tracker reporting the progress on integrating aspects of gender equality into climate policy at a Nordic/national level, including tools for how to include gender in National Determined Contributions (NDCs)
- Routinely reported national sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive data, from climate relevant institutions and companies
- Introduction to links between climate relevant sectors and gender, including qualitative and quantitative information and data on climate sectors and gender.
- Directory of gender and climate networks, research groups and initiatives
- Resources and events relevant to gender and climate
- Videos, tutorials and online courses

**For inspiration see *The Gender Climate Tracker*** launched by Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO) in partnership with the Global Gender and Climate Alliance (GGCA). The app and online platform provide experts, decisionmakers, advocates etc, with on-the-go access to regularly updated information on policies, research, actions etc. related to gender and climate change. Link: <https://genderclimatetracker.org/>

### **3. Promote networking and collaboration with focus on gender and climate within and across the Nordic Countries**

*There are Nordic research groups as well as formal and informal networks and international alliances with focus on gender and climate. When such networks extend to the Nordics, mutual learning and inspiration influence national agendas and raise regional performance levels. The Nordic Council of Ministers should actively promote and facilitate formal and informal networking and alliances with focus on gender and climate mitigation in relevant sectors and within specific topics across Nordic countries. Special attention should be given to promote and support organisation and exchange across gender, generations, ethnicity and socioeconomic position, e.g., by supporting youth organisations.*

Some of the opportunities with potential for transformation and mobilisations towards gender equality that can be considered include:

- Support and promote both initiatives where networking and collaboration across the Nordic Countries is an objective in itself (e.g. Nordic Equality in Energy Network, NEEN) and where networking and collaboration is the approach to achieve common goals.

- Organise events and initiatives to facilitate mutual learning and inspiration among decision makers, department leaders and technical staff in government agencies involved in climate sectors.
- Identify opportunities to boost exposure, exchange and networking between students, academics and professionals within STEM and students, researchers and professionals from social science, humanities etc. working with sustainability and/or gender.

## RECOMMENDATION TARGETING THE NORDIC GOVERNMENTS

### **4. Identify and address institutionalised gendered norms and patterns in climate policy making and implementation**

*Government agencies and institutions involved in climate policy making and implementation should map and critically review institutionalised gendered norms and patterns in order to address barriers and gaps to gender mainstreaming.*

Measures to operationalise this may include:

- Critically review institutionalised gendered norms and patterns across relevant policy making organisations and processes as well as relevant parliamentary commissions.
- Include this review as part of GIA or as a stand-alone procedure. The critical review of institutionalised gender norms and patterns can be done in parallel in the different agencies and institutions, or piloted in a single or few institutions in order to gain insights and experience before applying more widely.
- Organise an event or a series of events where findings, lessons learned and challenges identified in relation to institutionalised gendered norms can be shared, discussed and reflected upon.
- Raise awareness and knowledge in own institutions by sharing and exchanging lessons learned, best practices, identify case studies and pitfalls to avoid among Nordic agencies.
- Consider the development of guidance/procedures and tools on how to operationalise the mapping and critical review gender norms and patterns.
- Monitor gendered citizen support (or lack thereof) of specific climate policies, programs and projects
- Monitoring the progress towards gender mainstreaming targets
- Consider other intersectional aspects, such as age, income and location.



# Footnotes

- [1] UNDESA, UN Women & UNCCS (2016). Implementation of Gender-Responsive Climate Action in the Context of Sustainable Development.
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# About this publication

## Climate policies are not gender neutral

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*Nordic co-operation* is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

*Nordic co-operation* has firm traditions in politics, economics and culture and plays an important role in European and international forums. The Nordic community strives for a strong Nordic Region in a strong Europe.

*Nordic co-operation* promotes regional interests and values in a global world. The values shared by the Nordic countries help make the region one of the most innovative and competitive in the world.

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