

CLIMATE CRISIS AND GENDER EQUALITY IN THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN REGION

EMERGING SECURITY RISKS



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MedWE Programme

The **MedWE (Mediterranean Women Empowerment)** Programme is a joint initiative of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed). The primary objective of this program is to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Within the framework of MedWE, a series of joint activities focusing on gender issues will be organised, including seminars and conferences that will bring together researchers, policymakers, and civil society members. The goal of these gatherings is to generate fruitful dialogue and exchange knowledge and experiences to promote gender equality in the region.

In this context, **Policy Studies** will be regularly published, dedicated to disseminating research findings generated during these activities. These studies will be published once a year and aim to strengthen the connection between research and public policies. The documents will provide reflections and recommendations aimed at researchers, policymakers, and civil society members working to promote women's empowerment in the Mediterranean.

MedWE Policy Series

Published by the European Institute of the Mediterranean

Editing

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Layout Núria Esparza

Print ISSN 2604-2487

Digital ISSN 2604-2495

March 2025

IEMed.

The **European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed)**, founded in 1989, is a think and do tank specialised in Euro-Mediterranean relations. It provides policy-oriented and evidence-based research underpinned by a genuine Euromed multidimensional and inclusive approach.

The aim of the IEMed, in accordance with the principles of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), is to stimulate reflection and action that contribute to mutual understanding, exchange and cooperation between the different Mediterranean countries, societies and cultures, and to promote the progressive construction of a space of peace and stability, shared prosperity and dialogue between cultures and civilisations in the Mediterranean.

The IEMed is a consortium comprising the Catalan Government, the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, the European Union and Barcelona City Council. It also incorporates civil society through its Board of Trustees and its Advisory Council.



Union for the Mediterranean
Union pour la Méditerranée
الإتحاد من أجل المتوسط

The **Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)** is an intergovernmental organisation that brings together 43 countries to strengthen regional cooperation and dialogue through specific projects and initiatives that address inclusive and sustainable development, stability and integration in the Euro-Mediterranean area. As a direct continuation of the Barcelona Process, the launch of the UfM in 2008 was the reflection of its member states' shared political commitment to enhance the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

The Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean, based in Barcelona is the first permanent structure dedicated to the intergovernmental Mediterranean partnership. It ensures operational follow-up of the regional priorities identified and in partnership with key international actors promotes region-wide cooperation projects and initiatives that address the root causes of the current regional security and socio-economic challenges.

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Policy Study

MedWE Programme

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FOREWORD

Senén Florensa

Executive President, European Institute of the
Mediterranean (IEMed)

It is with great pleasure that we present the second edition of the annual MedWE (Mediterranean Women Empowerment) IEMed Policy Study. Building on the inaugural work of the UfM-IEMed MedWE Programme, “Towards More Inclusive Economies: Advancing Women’s Economic Empowerment in the Mediterranean Region”, this new publication advances our shared commitment to promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment across the Euro-Mediterranean region.

The MedWE initiative, a collaboration between the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), has long focused on addressing pressing and emerging gender challenges. Through conferences, research and policy publications, it works to implement practical strategies that promote women’s empowerment while facilitating inclusive dialogue to create sustainable societies.

In this second edition, MedWE focuses on a critical and timely intersection: gender equality and climate change. Under the title “Climate Crisis and Gender Equality: Emerging Security Risks in the Euro-Mediterranean Region”, this publication highlights the disproportionate impact of climate change on women, especially those living in climate-vulnerable rural areas. The Euro-Mediterranean region is warming 20% faster than the global average, exacerbating the overlapping challenges of climate change and gender inequality and posing significant risks to human security and regional resilience.

This publication is the result of discussions held during the session “Climate Crisis and Gender Equality in the Euro-Mediterranean Region: Emerging

Security Risks” at the High-Level Conference on Women for the Mediterranean, co-organised by the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the Commissioner for Gender Equality of the Republic of Cyprus on 30-31 May. The event brought together experts from the region to share insights, challenges and policy recommendations, highlighting the importance of empowering women in climate decision-making processes to effectively address these emerging risks.

In particular, this year’s focus on climate change and gender responds to the growing recognition that women, especially in rural and marginalised areas, bear the brunt of the climate crisis. At the same time, they play a crucial role as agents of change. Research shows that women’s leadership in climate action increases the effectiveness of policies, particularly in sectors such as agriculture, water management and renewable energy, where they are disproportionately affected by climate change. However, barriers such as limited access to finance and technology and under-representation in green sectors continue to hamper their potential to drive climate solutions.

The importance of integrating gender considerations into climate resilience strategies is reflected in the 5th UfM Ministerial Declaration on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society (2022), which emphasises the need for gender-responsive climate policies. By addressing the specific vulnerabilities women face due to climate change, this publication aims to highlight actionable strategies to ensure that women’s voices and leadership are central to climate decision-making.

By sharing research, best practices and policy recommendations, this publication

provides valuable insights for policy-makers, practitioners and stakeholders working towards more inclusive and sustainable societies. IEMed and UfM remain committed to ensuring that gender equality remains central to sustainable development and regional stability. Through the MedWE programme, we aim to inspire collective action, promote gender-responsive climate policies and ensure that women are empowered to lead the green transition in the Mediterranean.

FOREWORD

Ambassador Stephen Borg
Deputy Secretary General of Social and Civil Affairs
Division, Union for the Mediterranean

MedWE (Mediterranean Women Empowerment) IEMed Policy Study it's a perfect example of win-win collaboration between the Union of the Mediterranean and the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) launched in 2024 and witnessing our shared commitment to promoting gender equality.

As a regional dialogue platform bridging policy making actors, CSOs and regional stakeholders, the UfM benefits from IEMED's knowledge inputs to better shape the policy debate on the priorities of the 5th UfM Ministerial Declaration on Women (2022).

The UfM Member States are committed to promote mainstreaming climate concerns into national gender equality frameworks, action plans and strategies and at the same time to boost women's leadership and full participation in climate action to design solutions and responses to climate emergencies

The Ministerial declaration has identified specific lines of actions to secure more gender-sensitive climate and environmental initiatives which require to amplify women's participation in decision-making, to secure land and resource rights for women, to ensure that women are not only included but actively benefit from emerging opportunities in the green and blue economies and to enhance women's access to STEM education in environmental and climate fields.

We acknowledge the insightful contributions of the authors of the 2025 Edition of MedWe "Climate Crisis and Gender Equality: Emerging Security Risks in the Euro-Mediterranean Region" as they confirm that these priorities are not just aspirational goals but actionable pathways to a more equitable and sustainable future.

In an era defined by the dual challenges of climate change and gender inequality, the urgent need to bridge national climate policies with the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda has never been more apparent. This publication underscores the critical importance of aligning climate action with gender-responsive strategies to foster sustainable development and peace in the region.

Disparities in gender inclusion across countries' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) reveal significant gaps that must be addressed. Comprehensive policies, supported by measurable key performance indicators (KPIs) and gender-responsive budgeting for climate action, are essential to ensure that women are not only included but actively empowered in climate initiatives.

Equally pressing is the need for innovative financial products and intermediaries that align with emerging business models. Such tools are vital to supporting climate-resilient agro-food systems, which are often the backbone of communities in the region. Women's political participation remains a cornerstone of effective climate governance, and their leadership must be prioritised to drive meaningful change.

Collaboration is key. Governments, civil society, knowledge hubs, and international organizations must work together to bridge the gap between policy and implementation. Only through collective action can we ensure that climate strategies are both inclusive and impactful.

We want this publication serves as a call to action, urging stakeholders across sectors to embrace these priorities and work collaboratively toward a future that leaves no one behind.

Unveiling Realities of Women Vulnerabilities to Climate change in MENA: Opportunities within Challenges

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Introduction

The MENA gender gap remains substantially unchanged in the economic empowerment sphere. Women in the region still hold the lowest entrepreneurial activity at 4% of the overall population (OECD, 2022). When starting or growing business, Arab women continue to face a series of overwhelming constraints. These include a gender discriminatory environment, as well as lack of knowledge and access to networks to start to expand business, which together act as a powerful barrier to women's entrepreneurship (LSE, 2022). Similarly, over 50% of agricultural workers in the region are women. Yet, they are disadvantaged in agriculture because of entrenched gender roles and responsibilities, restrictive sociocultural norms, and lower access to productive resources, technology, markets, finance, and information. These problems are further exacerbated by the gender and social norms that limit the mobility of women in some areas in MENA countries and limit the participation of women in certain sectors, such as the renewable energy sector, as these sectors have always been nominated "as male dominating sectors" (ICARDA, 2023). Arab businesswomen and women entrepreneurs face lack of access to knowledge and information that would enable them to start, expand and grow their business. They also face challenges in relation to accessing needed finance because of limited control over resources. Moreover, rural women suffer from struct culture and social norms that in most cases limits mobility and access to resources.

In addition, the region is experiencing a range of weather and climate hazards, namely extreme heat, floods, droughts, and dust storms. The region's climate is mainly characterized by hot and dry con-

ditions, with heat stress limiting daily life for much of the population for most of the year. The current climate is around 1–1.5°C warmer than previous periods. Water stress is being experienced in the region. Food insecurity, increasing urbanization, and poor health are foreseen impacts from experienced extreme weather and climate variability. It presents significant and growing threats to sustainable development globally, and particularly in MENA, given the existing vulnerabilities in the region (Bacon et al. 2022).

Women are more vulnerable than men to the adverse environmental effects of climate change because of the inherent and systematic inequalities they confront (Ahmed and Shaheen, 2022). Moreover, Gender norms and the social culture create inequalities in the rights of men and women to own and manage land, access agricultural inputs, markets, extension services and much more. Within the Egyptian context, especially in the rural parts of the country, gender is critical in defining and assigning roles and responsibilities to men and women within and outside the household. For instance, women are usually expected to engage in unpaid domestic care work. However, due to long-term economic challenges and male out-migration from agriculture, women are increasingly engaging in irrigated agriculture. This, however, has not led to an opening up of their participation in water and food governance. Women landowners and laborers are mostly not recognized formally as farmers and are not proportionately represented as members of water users' associations (WUAs) and agriculture committees (ACs).

Within this context, the international Water Management Institute (IWMI) -MENA office took the lead in research and conducted evidence-based research on wastewater

treatment that serves as a key solution to address water scarcity in the region, as well as it has led gender transformative interventions for addressing climate change adaptation in collaboration with other partners such as the Water Energy for Food MENA Hub program.

The objective of this paper is to present research findings of wastewater reuse related projects and programs to support SMEs within the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem (WEFE) nexus using holistic gender transformative approaches that resulted in laying the ground for changing the narrative of rural women, women led/ managed SMEs' and women workers in targeted countries starting from the selection of SMEs' to provided tailored support of women led/ managed SMEs', women workers and women customers.

Approach

The objectives of this paper is to provide details about the research findings on the gendered implications of polluted drainage water in Egypt and the gender transformative approach utilized by the Water Energy for Food program (WE4F) – MENA Hub using a qualitative description starting from the sample size and sample selection, and including the selection criteria of the SMEs, provided gender technical assistance for on-boarded SMEs, and lessons learned that would lay the groundwork for long-term social transformation, namely in relation to economically empowering women laborers (in the agriculture sector, which is one of those that suffers the most from the negative impacts of climate change) through getting around social norms that limit the mobility of rural women and availing knowledge and information and finance that enable SMEs, specifically women-led SMEs, to reach out to more women customers.

Main Findings

Conducted research on polluted wastewater highlights that while both women and men are increasingly involved in agricultural production, only men are engaged in the management of agricultural support services as members of Water User Associations (WUAs) and Agriculture Cooperatives (Acs). Only men are able to gain access to credit, and technical and material inputs such as seeds, fertilizer, etc. Men also dominate the sale and marketing of produce. This is particularly true in the case of using polluted drainage water for irrigation, where produce is sold far away from the actual location of production because of the prevailing perception that using polluted drainage water for irrigation is not safe. Furthermore, marginalized women engage in using polluted drainage water for irrigation not because it is a choice, but because it is a compulsion. The most marginalized women (landless tenant farmers) face the biggest challenges and the most unequal trade-offs.

To the same end, women farmers, especially if they are single or spouses of ailing men, have no access to subsidized inputs and services, or any say over water use and access. In sum, the most marginalized of women are left to the vagaries of highly volatile market forces and denied the means to request freshwater for their fields. Thus, we can conclude that **patriarchy extends beyond private spaces to influence women's identity in the public domain**. Thus, Women's engagement in public spaces alongside men is considered inappropriate. Often, women themselves believe this to be true.

The WE4F program objectives are to increase food production along the value chain through a more sustainable and efficient usage of water and/or energy, in-

crease income for base of the pyramid women and men in both rural and urban areas, sustainably scale innovators' solutions to meet the challenges in the water-energy-food nexus and promote climate and environmental resilience and biodiversity. In doing so, the MENA RIH provided cash grants and technical assistance to 60 SMEs (among which are 18 women-led or -managed SMEs) that have water- and/or energy-saving innovations for food production in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Gaza and West Bank, Morocco, Tunisia and Iraq. These cash grants are linked to achieving specific milestones including increasing the number of women end-users and, in most cases, implementing a gender-sensitive intervention such as the GenderUp training that walk innovators through a process of scaling up their innovations in a gender responsible way and developing and adopting gender-sensitive HR policy. What is unique about the program methodology is the integration of gender aspects, starting from the design of application questions, screening methodology, evaluation of applications, to providing tailored gender technical support. Thus, the program managed to foster in its design and implementation a holistic gender transformative approach that resulted in laying the groundwork for changing the narrative of women-led/managed SMEs and women workers in targeted countries.

The MENA RIH ensures it fosters a gender transformative approach in the design and implementation of the project as follows:

- The program initially allocated a weight of 15% for the presence of women in the company board and senior management for initial screening of the concept note and full proposals.

- A complete sub-section in the concept note and full proposal that tackles gender integration.
- An advisory committee that consists of one internal gender expert and one external gender expert evaluates the full proposal and interviews shortlisted SMEs.
- ESG assessment is conducted at the time of application screening/pre-award process and giving the SME a rating of beginner/intermediate/advanced.

Dedicating one milestone is dedicated to mainstreaming gender in the SMEs' operations, i.e., drafting and adopting, with the support of the RIH gender specialist, a gender-sensitive HR policy for SMEs working in the renewable energy sector (male dominated sector in MENA). While the last cohort, based on lessons learned from previous cohorts, supporting innovators to integrate gender starts with an introductory session on gender integration during the onboarding bootcamp. That is followed by GenderUP training, which is a tool to highlight to innovators how to scale up their innovations in a gender responsible way and to understand the needs of women and marginalized communities who can possibly be impacted by their innovations. This is followed by a one to one gender clinic with each innovator to develop a gender action plan, that each innovator have to implement throughout the program.

- The RIH provides gender-focused TAs to several SMEs in different countries focusing on specific sectors as follows:
 - First 3 Cohorts: Developing gender-sensitive human resource (HR) manuals for two companies working

in renewable energy (Agrisolar and Green Eagle Tech) in Egypt and one company (Irma SAL) working in the food sector in Lebanon that include a harassment policy and work-life balance arrangements for women workers, such as maternity leave, flexible working hours arrangements, and transportation arrangements. While for the last Cohort, developing gender sensitive HR manuals are integrated in the PAS TA's that all innovators have to recover upon their acceptance and signature of the grant.

- Implementing a gender impact technical assistance (TA) that focuses on developing an action plan to empower women in the surrounding community by providing literacy classes and skills training for women to enable them to improve their livelihood and increase their agency. This TA was designed for Chitosan Egypt, an SME that collects shrimp peel from a vulnerable village in Egypt and processes it to produce organic pesticides and fertilizers.
- The RIH implemented a gender focused TA for an SME in Egypt (EgyMag) that implements an innovation for the production of protein from the black soldier fly larvae through providing a sustainable income generating project for rural women at their homes through providing them with needed finance to start their own micro project. The TA assessed the current business model of the SME and provided recommendations on how to target new locations through reaching out to NGOs' that operate throughout Egypt to expand its operations and how to

refine its business model to reach out to more rural women and ensure that they have a sustainable stream of income.

The RIH implemented a gender focused TAs that tackle women cooperatives in Egypt, which includes a thorough market assessment for a sample of women cooperatives and for women members in cooperatives in Delta and Upper Egypt to better understand their needs and suitable marketing channels for water- and/or energy-saving innovations. It provides recommendations on how the on-boarded SMEs namely Chitosan Egypt, Rapptor and EgyMag can meet the needs of these women cooperatives and reach out to them in order to increase the number of women end-users. It is important to note that the RIH is currently scoping a similar gender focused TA for women cooperatives in Jordan and Morocco.

Recommendations and Way Forward

The paper revealed that the most marginalized cultivators tend to be women from landless families. In addition, gender combines poverty and marginality to produce diverse challenges, such as a lack of access to agriculture and irrigation support services and institutions that are shaped by a deep-rooted culture of masculinity. Technical improvements in agriculture and irrigation have to reckon with gender and social exclusion issues, including women's lack of ownership of land and predominant masculinities in irrigation and agriculture collectives.

Water governance needs to address structural barriers. Thus, technical changes in irrigation efficiency have to be complemented by interventions to tackle

gender-power disparities such as measures to ensure that women are compensated for their labor, promote their active engagement in irrigation and agriculture cooperatives, and institute changes that bring more productive livelihood opportunities and choices for women.

Gender mainstreaming is a good start, but the aim is a gender transformative approach, which addresses the root causes of gender inequality by challenging and changing norms and values while reconfiguring power relationships. A transformative agenda needs to be developed to change social, cultural, economic, institutional, financial, and political structures, and enhance the ability of women and girls to become influential actors in the water reuse project cycle.

The paper demonstrates that changing the narrative of gender transformation in the MENA region through development programs can be accomplished by embedding a holistic gender mainstreaming approach in the design and implementation of the project that would enable businesswomen and women entrepreneurs to have access to information and

business opportunities, avail access to finance and get over strict gender norms. This holistic approach starts with a targeted selection of SMEs that already have fundamental awareness of the direct and indirect benefits of integrating gender throughout their projects. The program clearly demonstrates that changing the mind set of SMEs' management for the employment of women in male dominated sectors is possible. This is achieved through conducting and introductory gender training for innovators at the onboarding bootcamp and integrating developing gender sensitive HR manuals in the onboarding basic TAs' for all innovators.

Throughout supporting 5 cohorts for gender integration, the program managed to develop a holistic approach that is tested with the last cohort for gender transformation starting by delivering the GenderUp training and one to one gender clinics to developing gender action plans for each innovator that ensures that innovators are able to scale up their innovations in a gender responsible way and bridge any gap in order to access gender lens investment.

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Women and Climate change in the context of Regional Instability: Lebanon and Syria

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Introduction

The Middle East stands as one of the most climate-vulnerable regions in the world, grappling with rising temperatures, intensifying heatwaves, and prolonged droughts. These environmental changes exacerbate preexisting vulnerabilities, particularly in conflict nations like Syria and Lebanon. In Syria, years of severe drought have ravaged the agricultural sector, fueling financial hardships and social unrest. The compounding effects of these challenges are evident in the large-scale displacement of Syrian populations, with Lebanon bearing a significant share of the refugee influx.

While climate change acts as a stress multiplier, attributing regional instability solely to environmental factors oversimplifies the issue. Persistent governance failures, socioeconomic inequality, and protracted conflicts are key contributors to the region's fragility. Marwa Daoudy (2023) emphasizes that overlooking these underlying causes risks creating one-dimensional policy solutions that fail to address the root drivers of instability (Daoudy 2023).

This complex intersection of climate stressors and political unrest, particularly in the context of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, underscores the urgent need for multidimensional strategies. Addressing immediate humanitarian concerns while fostering long-term resilience requires policies that account for the intertwined dynamics of environmental and political challenges.

The Mediterranean region's increasing environmental stresses poses a threat to political stability, especially in North Africa and some portions of the Middle East (Scheffran 2010). The region is especially susceptible to stress brought on by climate change because of its weak governance

systems, high unemployment rates, and reliance on agriculture for economic growth. Political instability and societal unrest can worsen when governments are unable to control the growing shortage of resources, particularly water. For example, the Nile Basin is a major geopolitical hot spot where Egypt, which depends on the Nile for 95% of its industrial and drinking water, may become tense with Ethiopia and other upstream water users.

These disputes are made more difficult by climate change, which may lead to violent conflict or diplomatic crises over access to essential resources. Stronger institutional structures and governance protect wealthier Mediterranean countries, like Southern Europe, from direct political instability.

Within this broader context, women face disproportionate challenges. Climate change intensifies existing gender inequalities, particularly in conflict-affected areas where women often bear the brunt of displacement, food insecurity, and economic precarity. In both Syria and Lebanon, women in vulnerable communities experience heightened risks of gender-based violence, reduced access to education and healthcare, and increased responsibilities in securing household livelihoods as environmental and political crises unfold.

This paper explores the intersection of climate change and women's experiences within the broader landscape of regional instability in Lebanon and Syria. It examines how the environmental issues coupled with weak governance and conflict dynamics shape women's vulnerabilities. By analyzing these interlinked factors, the paper seeks to contribute to policy discussions on gender-responsive climate adaptation and conflict-sensitive governance in the Middle East.

Migration trends and climate change:

In the Mediterranean, migration is increasingly being influenced by climate change. Populations are being uprooted by desertification and rising sea levels, especially in North Africa, where millions of people rely on agriculture for a living. Two to four million people may be displaced in Egypt if sea levels rose by 0.5 meters, with many of them taking up residence in Cairo's already congested cities. Rural populations are driven into cities by factors including food instability, water shortage, and dwindling agricultural options, which cause urban overpopulation, strain on infrastructure, and heightened social tensions. Since many are looking for better chances in Europe, this internal movement frequently acts as a prelude to international migration.

Syrian Workers in Lebanon:

The study "Exposure of Syrian refugee agricultural workers to pesticides in Lebanon: a socio-economic and political lens" focuses at the political and economic factors which leave Syrian refugee agricultural workers in Lebanon more vulnerable, especially when it comes to pesticide exposure (Noory et al, 2024). Although Syrian refugees make up a sizable share of Lebanon's agricultural workforce, they are subjected to dangerous working conditions with no regulations for occupational health and safety (OHS).

Several elements have weakened agricultural sustainability, as have military wars and political unrest. Agricultural workers' health concerns are made worse by the growing reliance on pesticides in response to decreasing crop yields. The need for chemical-intensive agriculture is further fueled by issues with environmental degradation and food insecurity, particularly in Lebanon.

The political and historical background of Lebanon has had a role in the agriculture sector's marginalization. Government support for farming has decreased as a result of economic policies that prioritize urbanization and financial services over rural agricultural development. Syrian refugees are forced to work in exploitative situations because they are legally only allowed to engage in construction, agriculture, and rubbish collection. They have less legal safeguards, put in more hours, and are paid less than their Lebanese counterparts.

With minimal regulatory control, the Lebanese government's disengagement from agricultural investment has resulted in a greater reliance on pesticides. The market for pesticides is dominated by big landowners and international firms that put financial gain ahead of worker safety. Without proper safety precautions, refugee laborers are additionally exposed to dangerous chemicals in agriculture due to the lack of OHS laws. This labor is extremely vulnerable because Lebanon has not ratified the International Labor Organization (ILO) standards on farm worker safety.

Noory's study highlights the reality that pesticide exposure among Syrian refugee agricultural laborers is a systemic problem with roots in political and economic systems rather than merely an occupational hazard. Government action to lessen dependency on pesticides, legislative changes, and enhanced OHS regulations are all necessary to address this situation. In order to strengthen labor laws, limit the use of dangerous pesticides, and advance sustainable farming methods that put worker safety ahead of corporate profits, the report urges international cooperation.

Maria Gabriella Trovato, Nayla Al-Akl, and Dana Ali's study "Understanding Syrian Migration in Lebanon: A Methodological Framework" (2024) looks at the circum-

stances that have led to the Syrian population's extended displacement in Lebanon, with a particular emphasis on the restrictions placed on their agency (Trovato et al. 2024). The report recognizes that wars, crises, and climate change are some of the global issues that result in the forced relocation of millions of people, even though it does not go into extensive detail about how climate change has affected Syrian displacement.

In summary, socioeconomic issues, political instability, and climate change all work together to exacerbate conflict and displacement. The authors contend that tackling the underlying causes of displacement in the Levant necessitates a thorough and coordinated strategy by highlighting the interdependence of these problems. In addition to addressing the urgent humanitarian needs, this strategy would strengthen resilience to upcoming climate-related difficulties. In order to promote long-term peace and stability in the region and stop more destabilization, policy frameworks must address the relationship between climate change and security.

How climate change and forced displacement exploit Syrian refugee women in Lebanon's agriculture (Nassar 2025)

Syrian refugee women's experiences in Lebanon's agricultural sector demonstrate how gender inequality, forced migration, and climate change combine to produce new kinds of labor exploitation. Displaced women will experience even more job instability as climate-related stressors rise, making their already poor circumstances worse. Stronger safe-

guards against exploitation, gender-sensitive labor laws, and climate adaptation plans that take into account the unique difficulties faced by refugee women are all necessary to address these problems. The cycle of economic hardship, gendered violence, and displacement will continue to shape the lives of these vulnerable workers unless there is significant intervention.

Syrian refugee women in Lebanon's agricultural industry have particular risks due to the intersection of gender, forced displacement, and climate change. According to Jessy Nassar's study "Commodified by Displacement: The Effects of Forced Displacement on Syrian Refugee Women in Lebanon's Agricultural Sector", (2025), the protracted Syrian conflict has turned these women—who were formerly seasonal workers—into an invisible and chronically exploited labor force. Their stories highlight the intertwined problems of gender-based discrimination, labor commodification, and climate change in Lebanon's economy.

The Feminization of Agricultural Work and Forced Displacement

Due to the prolonged Syrian conflict, seasonal labor migration has turned into permanent displacement, pushing an unprecedented number of Syrian women into Lebanon's agricultural employment. In the past, agricultural labor was a short-term source of income, and many workers left Syria at the end of the harvest season. But because of displacement, these women no longer have other options for employment, therefore working in agriculture is now required rather than optional. Further-

more, in order to provide for their families, refugee women who had never worked in agriculture prior to the crisis are now forced to do so. Employers have been able to lower wages and increase labor expectations due to the glut of workers brought about by the refugee crisis, which has furthered the economic exploitation of displaced women.

Labor Commodification and Gender Exploitation

The treatment of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon as cheap, interchangeable labor reinforces their lack of visibility in the labor market. Employers use their vulnerable position to enforce exploitative hiring practices, excessive hours, and low pay. The Shaweesh System, in which male labor contractors, or “shaweesh,” regulate access to housing and work, is a crucial component of this exploitation. Because they have to agree to the conditions imposed by these labor brokers in order to find employment and housing, this system pushes women into economic dependency. The fact that women are routinely paid less for doing the same physically taxing jobs as men exposes pervasive gender discrimination. Their dual status as women and migrants further reduces their negotiating leverage, leaving them more open to abuse and extortion (Nassar 2025).

Climate Change’s Effect on the Labor of Refugee Women

Due to the instability of Lebanon’s agricultural economy, climate change makes the precarity of Syrian refugee women even worse. Water scarcity, extended droughts, and rising tempera-

tures make farming more unpredictable, which lowers job prospects and increases competition for scarce labor. Refugee women are disproportionately affected by the instability of agriculture, which worsens their working conditions and incomes. Since they labor long hours in extreme weather with little to no protection, extreme weather events like heatwaves and floods provide significant health concerns. These environmental issues will intensify the cycle of economic hardship and labor exploitation for displaced women if climate adaptation measures are not taken.

Refugee Women’s Reproductive and Social Control

In addition to being exploited economically, Syrian refugee women also experience severe limitations on their personal liberties, especially with regard to marriage and the right to procreate. In order to avoid labor shortages during the busiest agricultural seasons, employers and labor contractors forbid marriage, thereby regulating women’s personal choices. Sexual harassment and gender-based violence are also common in refugee groups and workplaces, but there are little to no legal safeguards against them. The challenges these women encounter are exacerbated by limited access to reproductive health-care and sanitary facilities, especially when it comes to managing menstruation while working in demanding environments. Even when they assume new economic positions as the main breadwinners, traditional patriarchal rules nonetheless govern their lives.

Syrian refugee women manage to avoid and fight against their exploitation in spite of these obstacles. In order to ne-

gotiate lesser workloads or obtain little advantages within the strict labor system, many employ subtle tactics, such as taking advantage of gender stereotypes. Female workers' informal support systems give them a sense of camaraderie and resilience, which helps them get through the difficulties of being forcibly relocated. Although marriage frequently leads to additional limitations on their liberty, some women see it as a way to escape work exploitation. Even while their economic contributions are still underappreciated, their capacity for adaptation and resistance to exploitation shows that they have agency even in the face of a system that is incredibly repressive.

Conclusion

The intersection of climate change, forced displacement, and gender inequality in Lebanon and Syria highlights the complex and multilayered challenges facing vulnerable communities, particularly women. Climate-induced environmental stressors exacerbate existing socio-political instabilities, intensifying forced migration, economic hardship, and labor exploitation. While the region's fragile governance structures struggle to address these crises, women—especially Syrian refugee women in Lebanon's agricultural sector—face disproportionate

risks, including unsafe working conditions, economic marginalization, and gender-based violence.

The commodification of refugee labor, compounded by weak labor protections and exploitative systems like the shawesh network, leaves displaced women with little agency over their economic and personal lives. At the same time, climate change continues to undermine agricultural stability, further entrenching their economic precarity. Without gender-sensitive policies that recognize the specific vulnerabilities of refugee women, these challenges will persist, reinforcing cycles of exploitation and marginalization.

Addressing these intersecting crises requires a multidimensional approach that includes stronger labor protections, climate adaptation policies, and legal frameworks that uphold refugee and women's rights. International cooperation is crucial to implementing sustainable solutions that balance humanitarian needs with long-term resilience. The struggle of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon's agricultural sector is linked to broader regional challenges, underscoring the urgent need for policies that integrate climate justice, gender equity, to create a more just and sustainable future.

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Women and Climate Displacement: A Call for Gender-Responsive Interventions

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Introduction

Climate change is being increasingly recognized as a crisis of inequalities, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable populations, especially women. Among the many grave consequences of this phenomenon, internal displacement stands out as a critical issue, with millions of individuals forced to leave their homes due to environmental pressures. However, the impact of climate-induced displacement on women is not only significant but also deeply compounded by pre-existing gender inequalities. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, where the impacts of climate change are especially severe—characterized by extreme temperatures, water stress, and the threat of rising sea levels—these challenges are particularly pronounced. While climate resilience frameworks in the MENA region, such as those aligned with the Sendai Framework, the Paris Agreement, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, stress the importance of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and adaptation, the integration of gender considerations into these frameworks remains insufficient (Abou Dagher et al. 2023).

Drawing on case studies from across the region, this paper will evaluate the institutional and policy frameworks designed to address climate-induced displacement, highlighting the gaps that hinder their impact on women. Providing actionable recommendations, this paper calls for the adoption of gender-sensitive strategies in climate adaptation and displacement policies, ensuring that responses are inclusive, equitable, and empowering for women. Through this, the paper seeks to promote resilience, reduce vulnerabilities, and empower women who are disproportionately af-

ected by the intersecting crises of climate change and displacement.

Legal and Policy frameworks for Climate Displacement

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the General Assembly in 2015, is guided by two core principles: *leaving no one behind and prioritizing those most marginalized*. These goals collectively underscore the urgency of addressing systemic vulnerabilities and fostering equitable, sustainable development. It emphasizes urgent action to address climate change, as reflected in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13: Climate Action, which calls for immediate efforts to combat its impacts. Additionally, the Agenda highlights the vulnerability of migrants to exploitation and abuse, focusing on specific targets to combat human trafficking and related issues under SDG 5: Gender Equality, SDG 8: Decent work and Economic Growth and SDG 16: Peace Justice and Strong Institutions, as follows (United Nations, 2023):

- Target 5.2 aims to eliminate all forms of violence, including trafficking and sexual exploitation, against women and girls.
- Target 8.7 calls for the eradication of forced labor, modern slavery, human trafficking, and the worst forms of child labor, with a commitment to end child labor entirely by 2025.
- Target 16.2 seeks to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against children.

The 1951 Refugee Convention is an example is the lack of protection for climate displaced people under the international legal framework. While most climate-displaced individuals remain internally displaced rather than crossing international borders, climate migrants who cross borders often fall outside this legal framework, which protects only those fleeing persecution for specific reasons like politics, race, or religion. Consequently, legal frameworks for climate displaced people protection remain limited (IOM, 2024).

Human Rights Law is considered a key framework within this context: it provides protection for climate migrants by addressing rights to life, housing, justice, and non-discrimination. The principle of non-refoulement prohibits returning individuals to places where they face irreparable harm, which may include climate risks. And finally for internally displaced people, states hold the responsibility to protect their human rights (UN, 2023).

Current Gender-Responsive Approaches in the MENA Region

The need for a gender-sensitive legal framework and national plans and strategies in the MENA region is finally recognized. However, there are still gaps in their implementation. The main MENA Regional Strategies and commitments are the following:

- **Arab Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (2018-2030):** Advocates for the inclusion of risk reduction in national/local policies. It focuses on women and IDPs, ensuring their participation in disaster

preparedness and recovery and calls for women's leadership in decision-making related to DRR.

- **Arab Water Security Strategy (2018-2030):** Aims for equitable water governance, sustainable resource management, and financial stability.
- **Climate Risk Nexus Initiative (2015):** Links climate change, DRR, food/water security, and social vulnerability across Arab states.
- **League of Arab States Initiatives:** Facilitate regional cooperation to mitigate climate change impacts, emphasizing women and girls' vulnerabilities.
- **African Women's Climate Adaptive Priorities Initiative (AWCAP, 2022):** Promotes gender-sensitive adaptation and mitigation and advocates for women's roles in green economies and sustainable consumption.
- **Kampala Declaration on Migration, Environment, and Climate Change (KDMECC-Africa, 2023):** Recognizes gendered impacts of climate mobility and advocates for gender-responsive health policies.

Nationally, few governments offer migration pathways addressing climate displacement and mechanisms such as resettlement, family reunification, or labor migration are not designed for climate migrants. Moreover, the MENA region experiences frequent internal displacement due to disasters like droughts and floods, for instance, over 223,000 new internal displacements occurred in 2021 (IOM, 2024).

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in MENA vary in their recognition of gender, but there are emerging trends. For instance, 11 out of 15 NDCs reference gender inclusivity, seven identify women as vulnerable to climate impacts, 10 incorporate gender mainstreaming and five NDCs address GBV. More specifically, Jordan and Tunisia have included measures to support GBV survivors as health-related adaptations. Moreover, Jordan's NDCs and policies show strong integration of gender equality, including a dedicated roadmap linking gender and climate change.

To date, only Sudan (2016), Kuwait (2019) and Morocco (2024) in the MENA region have submitted their **National Adaptation Plans (NAPs)** to the UNFCCC. While Sudan emphasized capacity-building and women's empowerment in climate migration responses, Morocco highlighted that adaptation planning should be *socially inclusive, gender-sensitive, and flexible*. Whereas, in Kuwait's NAPs there is no mention to gender responsive actions nor to climate displacement.

Many community-based organizations in the MENA have empowered women through small-scale entrepreneurship programs, driving local economic development and reducing migration pressures (Waha et al. 2017). Expanding such grass-roots programs can help women sustain their livelihoods and adapt to climate stressors, strengthening community resilience. Examples of successful initiatives that could inspire future policies include:

- **RISE2030 in Lebanon:** This program focuses on empowering women and youth in Lebanon's deprived areas through education, employment, and sustainability projects. The initiative has engaged and directly benefited 600 women in the Bekaa region,

supported by German government funding.

- **Fog Harvesting in Morocco:** Implemented by the women-led NGO Dar Si Hmad, this initiative uses fog nets to provide potable water to villages in arid regions near the Sahara. This system leads the way in climate adaptation by harnessing fog as a valuable resource, with a special emphasis on empowering women in their vital role as water guardians.
- **The Oasis Program in Jordan and Syria:** Since 2012, UN Women has set up 22 centers across Jordan, offering safe and inclusive spaces for Syrian refugees and vulnerable Jordanian women. This initiative provides skill development, childcare services, and cash-for-work opportunities, to more than 30,000 people, including many women with disabilities. It empowers participants to achieve financial independence while building resilience against the socioeconomic impacts of displacement.

Recent awareness campaigns in the MENA region have been increasingly focused on educating women about climate change and adaptation strategies, particularly for those displaced by climate-induced crises. For example, in Jordan, a series of Training programs have focused on improving climate resilience for displaced women, especially those who rely on agriculture for their livelihoods (D'Chunha, 2023).

Women Speak: Stories, Case Studies, and Solutions from the Frontlines of Climate Change: is an online database and initiative aimed at reshaping the narrative around women and climate justice. It challenges systems of exploitation and oppression by showcasing

stories of women leading efforts in climate justice across diverse themes. Its purpose is to provide accessible resources for Earth defenders, policy-makers, activists, educators, and others seeking to understand the critical role of women in advancing equitable climate action and protecting life on Earth.

Organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) play an essential role in gathering and sharing migration data globally. This data is often broken down by sex, age, and other demographics to provide a clearer picture of migration patterns. However, these institutions rarely segregate data by drivers of displacement/migration (climate change, disasters, droughts, etc.) and gender at the same time.

Institutional and Policy Recommendations

The following recommendations are not new; they have been consistently echoed across almost all reviewed documents. This text consolidates and organizes these widely endorsed actions into three key areas: 1) Developing gender sensitive policies, 2) Including the gender dimension of climate displacement in legal and strategic frameworks and 3) Strengthening international and regional cooperation.

To develop effective policies addressing climate-induced displacement, it is essential to comprehensively understand gender dynamics. Governments should prioritize investing in data collection and analysis to identify the distinct needs, challenges, and vulnerabilities faced by displaced women. Additionally, inclusive decision-making processes must be established to ensure that

women actively contribute to the design and implementation of adaptation strategies, promoting equitable and sustainable solutions. (Abou Dagher et al. 2023).

Data Collection and Analysis is critical for addressing the gendered impacts of climate-induced migration and displacement. This can be done through:

- **Gathering and enhancing Gender-Disaggregated Data:** This involves prioritizing the collection of data disaggregated by sex and age, conducting gender analyses, and supporting knowledge management efforts. Investing in national data collection systems is necessary to gather accurate and comprehensive data. Additionally, prioritizing publicly accessible, high-quality data that captures baseline metrics, environmental impacts, and year-over-year changes will contribute to informed policy and planning.
- **Standardizing Methodologies:** Develop standardized approaches for data collection that can be adopted across regions and organizations. This will ensure consistency, comparability, and reliability in understanding gender-specific impacts.
- **Expanding Research on Gender Dynamics:** Conduct in-depth studies to explore women's roles, agency, and contributions in the context of climate displacement. Move beyond the vulnerability framework to highlight their leadership and adaptability.
- **Investing in Capacity Building:** Provide resources and training to local and regional institutions to

enhance their ability to collect, analyze, and utilize gender-disaggregated data effectively.

Promoting Women's Leadership in Climate Adaptation and Displacement:

Women bring unique knowledge and skills critical for DRR and climate resilience. Efforts should focus on merit-based recruitment, adapting professional settings to be more inclusive, and reforming laws that limit women's agency. To be more specific below are precise actions to be undertaken in this regard:

- **Enhance Women's Leadership in Decision-Making** by actively promoting women's leadership roles in climate adaptation and DRR by reducing barriers such as limited access to resources and social exclusion. Implement targeted programs to empower women with the skills and confidence needed to take on leadership positions in decision-making processes.
- **Create Inclusive Professional Environments.** Adapt working hours to avoid late-night meetings and host professional events in gender-neutral locations to accommodate cultural norms and address discriminatory practices in formal appointments by ensuring merit-based recruitment and promotion processes.
- **Change Social and Institutional Norms.** Challenge conservative social attitudes that inhibit women's participation in leadership by investing in awareness campaigns and social norm transformation programs. Revise discriminatory laws and institutional practices to foster gender equity in decision-making and resource access.

- **Ensure Gender-Balanced Representation.** Mandate gender-balanced participation in political, social, and environmental decision-making bodies to reflect diverse perspectives and promote more equitable outcomes.

Gender-specific socio-economic empowerment. Women in the MENA region face significant barriers to socio-economic development, particularly in the context of climate-induced displacement. To foster true empowerment, it is essential to address these barriers through targeted, gender-specific socio-economic policies that ensure women's inclusion in the green transition and in decision-making on climate adaptation:

- **Enhance Women's Access to Resources:** Ensure equitable access to economic, social, and political resources to enable women to better adapt to climate-induced challenges and to exercise greater agency in their communities.
- **Diversify Employment Opportunities for Women:** Create alternative employment opportunities for women, particularly in non-agricultural sectors, in both areas vulnerable to climate change and in destinations where women have migrated due to climate impacts.
- **Support Gender-Specific Empowerment Initiatives:** Design programs that include gender-specific socio-economic and political empowerment initiatives to challenge patriarchal traditions. These programs should be responsive to women's concrete needs.
- **Ensure Access to Essential Services and Protection Mechanisms:**

Guarantee that women, especially those displaced by climate change, have access to essential services, including sexual and reproductive health services and protection from GBV, during migration. This involves providing safe spaces, legal assistance, and support services for affected women and girls.

- **Transform Social Norms and Enhance Gender Equality:** Initiate programs engaging men and boys to change discriminatory attitudes and support the transformation of legal frameworks that perpetuate gender inequality.

- **Improve Financial Literacy and Access to Financial Products for Migrant Women:** Partner with national authorities to prioritize programs that improve financial literacy among women migrants and enhance their access to financial products. This will allow women to make better use of their earnings from labor migration and support their economic independence.

- **Develop Green Skills and Close the Gender Gap in Green Sectors:** Focus on developing green skills among women to enable their participation in the emerging green economy. This includes supporting women's engagement in renewable energy and energy efficiency sectors, which are predicted to create millions of jobs in the MENA region by 2050 and address the growing gender gap in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields by investing in education and training programs that encourage female participation.

Including the Gender Dimension of Climate Displacement in Legal and Strategic Frameworks

- **Integrate Gender-Responsive Actions into National Climate Strategies:** Embed women's specific needs, capacities, and concerns related to climate mobility into National Action Plans, NDCs, and NAPs.

- Ensure these frameworks include measures to empower women, facilitate their participation in policy decision-making, and protect those migrating as an adaptation strategy or left behind when male household members migrate.

- **Incorporate Gender-Specific Actions in Disaster and Urban Planning and Safety Plans:** Include women's needs and capacities in DRR strategies, urban resilience planning, and crisis management frameworks to address gender-specific vulnerabilities and opportunities in climate mobility ensuring local action plans incorporate safety planning and measures for vulnerable groups, including female-headed households and women with disabilities.

- **Mainstream Climate Concerns in Gender Equality Frameworks:** Use existing frameworks, such as National Action Plans on Women, Peace, and Security, to address women's concerns regarding climate change and mobility, ensuring climate issues are integrated into gender equality initiatives.

- **Leverage Climate Financing for Women's Empowerment.** Utilize climate financing to support

women's empowerment initiatives and reduce risks associated with climate mobility, such as trafficking and smuggling. Align major financing instruments with sustainable livelihoods programming to address women's specific vulnerabilities in climate-affected regions.

- **Strengthen Legal Protections for Women Affected by Climate Mobility:** Enhance national laws to protect and empower women affected by climate change and forced mobility. This includes reforms in labor laws, land and property rights, access to essential services, and creating regular migration pathways to safeguard women's rights and opportunities.

Strengthening International and regional Cooperation. International and regional cooperation is critical for addressing the complex challenges posed by climate-induced displacement. However, significant barriers hinder progress in this area. Overcoming these obstacles requires concerted efforts to enhance collaboration, mobilize resources, and prioritize inclusive, gender-sensitive strategies that effectively respond to the needs of displaced communities.

- **Enhance Cross-Border Collaboration:** Foster greater cooperation among Arab states to address climate-induced displacement comprehensively. Organizations like the Arab League should facilitate the development of region-wide frameworks for gender-responsive climate action, promoting coordinated and sustainable responses to displacement crises.
- **Establish and Expand Funding Mechanisms:** Advocate for inter-

national support to finance gender-sensitive adaptation measures. Leverage the expertise of organizations such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to scale initiatives that prioritize women's needs and contributions in climate-affected regions.

- **Support Research and Technical Assistance:** Strengthen the role of international organizations like the IOM in providing technical assistance to governments in the MENA region. Promote collaborative research efforts to address the specific challenges of climate-induced displacement and inform evidence-based policies.

Conclusion

The intersection of climate change, displacement, and gender inequality presents a critical challenge for the MENA region, demanding urgent and collaborative action. Women disproportionately bear the brunt of climate-induced displacement due to socio-economic vulnerabilities, cultural barriers, and limited access to resources. Addressing these disparities requires embedding gender-responsive measures across all levels of policy and action, from local initiatives to international frameworks.

Key recommendations emphasize the need for robust data collection and analysis, inclusive decision-making processes, and targeted community-based interventions that empower women as agents of change. Legal and policy reforms must prioritize gender equity, ensuring women's voices and capacities are central to national and regional strategies for climate adaptation and mobility.

Additionally, strengthening international and regional cooperation is vital to overcoming fragmented policies and resource constraints. Coordinated efforts must aim to develop inclusive frameworks, enhance funding mechanisms for gender-sensitive adaptation measures, and facilitate cross-border collaboration to address the complex realities of displacement.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders in the MENA region can build resilient, inclusive communities that address climate challenges equitably and sustainably. This approach not only protects vulnerable populations but also leverages women's potential as key drivers of adaptation and resilience.

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Women and climate change in Southern Mediterranean: the need to end the “Vulnerability Olympics” Game

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Introduction: Climate Change and Women in the Southern Mediterranean

Climate change is unfolding across the Southern Mediterranean region, acting as a threat multiplier, highlighting existing injustices and amplifying them (Moneer, 2024). However, it is usually indicated that women are more vulnerable to climate hazards which impact them across every aspect of daily living, including livelihoods, health, and education (IOM, 2024). However, this is only part of the story as there is less understanding of how and why these unequal impacts and differential vulnerabilities occur (Goodrich et al. 2019). Women are not more vulnerable to climate change impacts simply because of their gender (Thomas, 2020), but that there are complex power relations and socio-cultural norms that result in climate impacts being experienced differently by women (UNFCCC, 2023). In this article, I am moving beyond this shortened and stereotyped discourse about women in the region as mere vulnerable victims to climate disasters. Furthermore, I explore women's opportunities not only to take part in climate action but as leaders and innovators who should shape the trajectory of climate action and green transition in the Southern Mediterranean region.

Women and Climate Change: Moving beyond the “Victimhood” Narratives

This projection of women as victims and/or survivors of climate change overlooks the more complex realities and the power dynamics of vulnerability. This is often be-

cause “women's identities are projected as fixed, centered and uniform” (Lykke, 2009), disregarding other factors that shape women lived experiences of vulnerability such as age, wealth, class and ethnic belonging (Djoudi et al. 2016).

A recurrent theme in vulnerability research when it conflates feminization of household headship with a more generalized narrative of women's poverty (Antonelli, 2020). This emphasis on the association of poverty with the feminization of a household's headship has also legitimized the discourse of climate vulnerability and the feminization of heads of households (Djoudi et al. 2016). However, this assumption of “feminization of vulnerability” is refuted by numerous studies that indicate the crucial importance of other social factors in the context of female-headed households as determinants of vulnerability. For example, Jackson (1993) indicates that female house heads who receive remittances from migrant males' workers might be less poor than male headed households, while widows or divorced women might instead be amongst the poorest of rural people due to socio-cultural norms that deprive these women from landownership and work opportunities.

Furthermore, climate disasters and the processes of adaptation in rural communities are related with changes in gender roles and livelihoods activities which in many situations contributes to eliminating women vulnerability (Djoudi et al. 2016).

For example, due to the accelerating drought impacts and the decline of fertile lands in central and southern regions of Morocco, home to many Amazigh communities, men migrated to urban areas in pursuit of better living conditions, leaving their wives as the heads of the household (World Bank, 2024). Ammati (2024) indicates that Amazigh women play a key role

in managing the natural resources and adopting various climate adaptation practices such as diversifying their crops, selecting pastures that are resistant to droughts, maintaining healthy plants through hand weeding, pruning, grafting and other techniques, preserving seeds and dried fruits, and selling food crops in the market. By this way, Amazigh women managed to secure alternative livelihoods sources to their families, ensure food security and develop their capacities to withstand harsh weather events.

In Palestine women are impacted by the hideous impacts of the Israeli war and are suffering from a worsening humanitarian crisis, compounded by food insecurity, climate change and water scarcity (Saber, 2024). Though all these compounding and multidimensional vulnerabilities, women are coming together forging a new path of resistance and resilience through agrifood processing businesses, utilizing sustainable practices and collective efforts through women cooperatives. In Qabalan, women managed to develop alternative local food such as sambousek (samosa) taking advantage of the manufacturing experiences of local women. Further, women managed to expand their market access reaching local markets across the West Bank, including large cities like Ramallah, Nablus, and Jenin (FAO, 2024).

Therefore, it is crucial to stop seeing women as homogenous group and to move beyond the simplistic views of gender as a binary variable and instead explore and reflect on the intersectional identities that women hold (Phuong et al. 2024). We need to understand that “women’s social identities are fluid, shifting and mutually constructing”, as well as they are embedded in a historical context of long histories of systematic discrimination and ongoing power and inequality, privilege and oppression, across scales from

the micro to the macro (UN Women, 2020; Harari and Lee, 2022).

Without relying on intersectional lens to explore women’s lived experiences of climate vulnerability, current debate on climate change vulnerability runs the risk of being reduced to a mere competition to illicit “the most oppressed” in line with the concept of “oppression Olympics” (Copeland, 2021). Such “contests of oppression” or “contests of vulnerability” are associated with the foundational yet flawed belief that reform and transformation require economic resources- for example climate finance- that are scarce and must be allocated wisely and mainly to the most oppressed or vulnerable victims (Gashaw, 2021). This discourse strengthens the victimhood of women and deflect the attention to women’s agency, across social groups and classes, often discounting women’s capacities and practices adopted in their everyday struggle for justice (Arora-Jonsson, 2011). Furthermore, these discourses continue pitting women as the most vulnerable groups against other groups, which not only breed intersectional bitterness but result in ill-informed policy reforms that merely address the symptoms of injustices instead of rooting out overlapping forms of discriminatory practices and structural inequalities (UN Women, 2020; Gashaw, A. 2021; UNDP, 2023).

Mainstreaming gender into climate action: It is not mere ‘counting women in the room’

Recently, despite significant efforts to amplify women’s voices in climate change decision making circles in the Southern Mediterranean, the concept of gender mainstreaming has not yet penetrated deeply into policy making platforms and

strategies. Gender mainstreaming has its roots in feminist theory, and it implies that the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men are integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of climate change policies and programs, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated (UNDP, 2018).

Accordingly, gender mainstreaming requires both integrating the gender perspective into the content of the climate change policies, addressing the issues of representation of women and men in the decision-making institutions and institutionalization of gender equality in the structure, processes and cultures of the concerned organizations (UN Women, 2021). However, there is evidence that gender mainstreaming serves as a technocratic approach of counting 'women in the room' or 'add and stir'- which resulted in limited results in tackling gender inequalities (Huyer et al., 2020).

At the global level, in 2016, of the 161 INDCs submitted, only 65 countries made at least one reference to gender equality, demonstrating a foundation to launch additional engagement on gender mainstreaming in climate action and policies (UNDP, 2016). Referring to women as among the most vulnerable groups was recognized by 32 countries, ensuring that women are particularly susceptible to climate change impacts in relation to health, violence, access to shelter and management of natural resources. However, only 2 countries identified women as agents of change and capable of accelerating climate action efforts (UNDP, 2016).

Throughout the time, gender mainstreaming has increasingly gained momentum as at 31 July 2024, about 81.1 per cent of the 168 submitted NDCs referred to gender in their NDCs (UNDP, 2024). Promisingly,

55.7 percent of the countries that referred to gender in their NDCs affirmed their commitment to gender equality while 62 percent described concrete efforts to strengthen institutional mechanisms for mainstreaming gender consideration across climate action (UNFCCC, 2024).

At the regional level, in the southern Mediterranean, the degree and extent of gender integration vary significantly between the countries and across the policy areas, with incoherent strategies to address the interlinkages of gender and climate change (UNECE, 2023). For example, Egypt's NDC briefly refers to gender mainstreaming efforts in a piecemeal assessment, driven mostly by the need to meet administrative targets, rather than by a careful assessment of how existing barriers to gender equality can be included in climate governance (Bulbul, 2022). Tunisia's NDC adopts a more robust approach, emphasizing gender as a driver of Tunisian agriculture policy. In addition, the government adopts gender and climate change strategy, identifying clear performance indicators disaggregated by gender (Tunisia NDC, 2021). In Lebanon, an analysis of gender in climate-relevant policies revealed that gender-responsiveness in policy-making was uneven across ministries, and that there was little understanding of its benefits (UNDP, 2019). Furthermore, while this trend of increasing gender integration in NDCs, gaps still persist (UNFCCC, 2024).

Notably, there is negligible reference to gender integration in the measurement, reporting, and verification (MRV) systems of NDCs (UNDP, 2021). MRV systems are crucial to enable governments to track the gendered impact of climate actions and the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming initiatives as described in their NDCs and take corrective actions to reduce gender inequalities and/ or reduce gaps in sectors

traditionally structured by gender (CDKN, 2025). Saying that, it is indispensable to enhance capacity-building for governments and other relevant stakeholders in the region to collect, analyze and apply sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis to better inform and evaluate gender responsive climate policies, plans, strategies and action, as appropriate (NDC partnership, 2022).

Equally alarming is the lack of gender-responsive budgeting for climate change that specifically prioritize climate financing tools for women-led grassroots initiatives and gender-responsive projects and activities (UNFPA, 2024). However, there are few Southern Mediterranean countries that managed to consolidate clear-cut commitments regarding gender-responsive budgeting and are incorporating gender data at all levels throughout the budget-making progress. Examples include Morocco that reformed financial laws to ensure that at least one in three key performance indicators across ministries are being implemented in line with gender equality (UN Women, 2024). Such good practices of integrating gender-responsive budgeting into national budgets should be shared and replicated in other countries in the region to advance gender-responsive national climate policies.

Climate change governance: Women should co-lead the green transition

Another important gender gap that impedes gender mainstreaming efforts in the Southern Mediterranean is the lack of women's leadership in policy spheres. Growing evidence indicates that climate policies and programs at multiple scales do not adequately integrate gender

based on intersectional identities such as ethnicity, class and caste in developing and implementing such policies (Bryan et al. 2024). After achieving unprecedented participation of almost 40% at the Conference of the Parties (COP 24), women's representation in country delegations has been in decline. For instance, at COP27, women delegates accounted for 36% of all national Party delegates, declining to 34 % in COP28 and rising again to reach 35 % of all national Party delegates in COP29 (UNECE, 2023).

Likewise, at COP27 women represented only 20% of Heads of Delegation, indicating an increase from COP26 (13%) but a decrease from previous COPs (Bryan et al. 2024). In Cop28, only 15 out of 133 world leaders participating in the negotiations were women (UNESCO, 2024). Women's participation as Party delegates also does not mean they enjoy the same place of power or have the opportunity to fully share their knowledge and concerns in climate negotiations. For example, the UNFCCC Gender Composition report for 2022 showed that, while men composed 51 percent of registered government delegates, they represented 60% of active speakers in the plenary—those meetings attended by all Parties—and gave talks for 74% of the time (Bryan et al., 2024).

The lack of full, equal and meaningful women participation is evident not only in climate change decision making circles and negotiations, but also in leadership positions across economic and governmental sectors. While there are emerging initiatives to include women in leadership positions, women remain systematically under-represented in key decision-making settings, limiting female representation in high-level government and corporate discussions on climate policies and decarbonization initiatives (Moneer, 2024).

According to UN Women (2023a) the Southern Mediterranean Region has the lowest share of women in managerial leadership positions (about 10 percent). This gender gap in management is prominent across the region, with the largest observed in Libya. A recent study found that companies with greater gender diversity on their boards are 60 percent more likely to reduce the intensity of energy consumption, 39 percent more likely to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and 46 percent more likely to reduce water use. In addition, a critical mass of 30 percent or more women on corporate boards positively correlates with better climate governance and innovation in climate action (World Bank, 2023).

The women share in green jobs market is even worse. In many Southern Mediterranean countries, women's average share of degrees in engineering, natural sciences, and information and communication technology (ICT) is 53 percent compared to an average of 35 percent in OECD countries (FAO, 2023). However, women's share in STEM-related occupations is very limited, representing less than 10 percent of the share working in science and engineering occupations. For example, in Egypt, while women represent 43 percent of STEM graduates; however, they represent only 10 percent of total workforce in STEM (World Bank, 2022a). Women participation in the renewable energy sector in the Southern Mediterranean countries remains one of the lowest and it ranges from 7 to 9 % and below the global average which is 32%. (UN Women, 2023b).

In order to promote gender equality, it is paramount for governments to ensure that women don't only have access to the STEM workforce but also, they have

the proper educational and professional opportunities to advance their careers, particularly in the green jobs market. In this regard, investments are needed to upskill and reskill women in green sectors and support the STEM school-to-work transition (FAO, 2023). The World Bank predicts that achieving 2030 targets in renewable energy and energy efficiency could create around 2 million new jobs in Egypt and 760,000 in Morocco by 2050 (World Bank, 2022b). Also, it is crucial to encourage women engagement in women-owned and led green enterprises by ensuring their access to resources, including credit, extension services, information and technology (ASCAME, 2024). In 2022, women-founded enterprises in the Southern Mediterranean countries received a margin share of about 2% of the \$2.4 billion funding received by the 500 startups in the region (Osseiran, 2023).

At the governmental level, the total proportion of women holding national parliament seats in the Southern Mediterranean countries is estimated at 16 %, which is lower than the global percentage of 23%. The women's limited representation in the parliament is a missed opportunity as it is indicated that countries with higher proportions of women in parliament are more likely to ratify international environmental treaties and more willing to accelerate climate action (UN, 2023).

Further, the share of female ministers remains low in most Southern Mediterranean countries and they are usually under-represented in sectors that matter for the environmental sustainability, including those related to natural resource management (CIHEAM, 2022). Empowering women in the climate change decision making circles and gov-

ernance systems, requires powerful democratic reforms and strong political will to introduce rigorous legal and policy measures that ensure gender diversity.

It is argued that measures such as mandatory gender quotas, are crucial in forcing gender-balanced composition and promoting women's representation on corporate boards and governmental authorities (Marchini et al., 2021). Furthermore, such quotas don't only disrupt the status-quo bias that has been found in companies' board of directors' appointment settings but also have spill-over on effects on environmental and social performance of the organizations (Schoonjans, 2024).

Conclusion: Seeing women differently and empowering them in climate action

The Mediterranean region is a climate change hotspot. Climate change impacts reveal existing gender inequalities and worsen them. However, representing women as traumatized victims and/or fortunate survivors of climate change is a mere part of the story. Development agencies and policy makers in the region need to move beyond this shortened and stereotyped understanding of women as a homogenous group. Women bearing the brunt of climate change should not induce a more generalized and unsubstantiated claim of women's vulnerability. However, disparities in climate vulnerability are connected to a long history of racially biased policies, structural inequalities, and patriarchal political discourses that are pitting disadvantaged groups against each other amplifying stereotypes and deepening fragmentation. Further-

more, it is essential to apply an intersectional lens to unpack the complexities and the power dynamics of vulnerability and understand the gendered lived experiences of climate change.

Women as agents of change

In addition to presenting the gendered impacts of climate change, it is equally important to acknowledge women's agency and mobilization within and across the Mediterranean borders. Looking through a resilience lens, we can see women in the region come together and building solidarities to contest the dominant understanding of climate change and form collective movement for climate justice reflecting their power and resilience in an age of global environmental change.

The latest NDCs of the Southern Mediterranean countries signaled improved efforts to include gender-sensitive priorities and dimensions into national climate policies and plans. However, gender mainstreaming is not about adding catchphrases such as "women are particularly vulnerable to climate change", "Gender analysis will be conducted", or "gender equality practices will be considered". Gender mainstreaming requires a contextual analysis of the needs, priorities, roles and experiences of women and men (UNIDO, 2015) as well as the integration of affirmative measures that guarantee the full and meaningful participation of women during the planning and implementation of gender-responsive climate policies. Key elements for the development of gender-responsive NDCs are: providing sex-disaggregated data that inform climate policy, planning, and reporting; including specific gender-responsive indicators to assess climate policies impacts on addressing gender inequalities and defining clearcut gender-respon-

sive budgeting across ministries and policy areas.

Women as policy makers and leaders

Beyond including mainstreaming gender into NDCs, women need to steer the wheel of the green transition in the region. It is true that women's leadership has increasingly gained momentum. However, only a privileged few women hold influential positions while the vast majority are significantly under-represented in decision-making roles at all levels, including within the climate change arena. Also, it is crucial to note that achieving a genuine gender-diverse leadership settings is about more than the sheer numbers and gaining parity in representation. The key is to ensure that men and women have equal voice and agency to determine their vision and priorities for action. Furthermore, it is imperative to reinforce structural changes to address institutional, legal, financial and cultural barriers that perpetuate gender gaps in climate change decision making. Rigorous national resolutions and policy tools – such as mandatory gender quotas- should ensure that women are fast-tracked to decision-making bodies involved in the fight against climate change. Ensuring the efficacy of these legal frameworks and policy tools on women leadership and climate governance requires breaking

down silos and ensuring adequate coordination, both across national governments and vertically (from the national to the local level).

Women as entrepreneurs and innovators

Women can't lead the green transition in the region while global funding for women-led climate initiative stands at this shockingly margin share. Therefore, more action is needed to increase the amount of donor climate financing that reaches women-led green enterprises. Further, policy reforms should be introduced to promote/ facilitate STEM education for girls and women and unlock the barriers preventing women-led businesses from starting up and growing their businesses.

Combining the above-mentioned conceptualization of women as agents of change, policy makers and innovators and providing the necessary institutional settings, policy tools and legal frameworks to enable them perform these roles- will not only end the 'Olympics of Vulnerability' of women in the Southern Mediterranean region. However, it will disrupt the entire rules of the game, shaking the status quo up and rewriting the rule of a different game- Olympics of "empowerment and resilience". The latter will not only ensure women's wins but everyone else's win as the green transition unfolds leaving no one behind.

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Reporting on gender and climate change: a question of justice, equity and efficiency

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“Why bring up the issue of gender in climate change? Won’t climate change be affecting everyone equally?” These questions frequently arise within the journalistic field, including newsrooms, and reflect a widespread misunderstanding on the topic. Bringing up gender issues in the frame of what is predominantly perceived as a global environmental crisis that threatens the entire life on the planet, remains a point of confusion for many. Such perspectives, however, ignore the fact that both gender and climate change are cross-cutting themes, and the link between the two cannot be neglected.

Climate change repercussions on daily lives are becoming more and more frequent and visible, exacerbating existing problems, including those faced by women. It is clear that vulnerable countries and communities are hit harder than others by these variations in environmental patterns, and women are often among the most vulnerable. In many parts of the world, climate-related events are forcing people to migrate, especially in rural areas, aggravating water scarcity, affecting people’s health with the propagation of diseases and a greater difficulty to have access to proper health services...

“Evidence is increasing that climate change is taking the largest toll on poor and vulnerable people, and these impacts are largely caused by inequalities that increase the risks from climate hazards”, according to the World Economic and Social Survey 2016: Climate Change Resilience—an Opportunity for Reducing Inequalities, launched by the United Nations that year. Why is this the case? The report highlighted that most of those vulnerable communities living in poverty “systematically occupy the least desirable land to damage from cli-

mate hazards such as mud slides, periods of abnormally hot water, water contamination and flooding” (UN/DESA, 2016). A lot of them are concentrated in arid and semi-arid zones, suffering from water scarcity.

All these impacts are aggravated when women are concerned. “Persons in vulnerable situations – owing to factors including geography, poverty, gender, age, indigenous or minority status, national or social origin, birth or other status and disability – may experience heightened exposure and vulnerability to climate-induced human rights harms” (OHCHR, 2022). Gender is a significant factor contributing to vulnerability in the context of climate change. This is largely because, across the world, women often face limited access to resources, whether natural or financial, and are frequently subject to laws and customs that disadvantage them affecting their power of resilience. Consequently, in the aftermath of climate-related disasters, women are among the most severely affected.

In the case of climate change-induced migration – an occurrence already happening in countries like Iraq – women are disproportionately affected compared to men. We have observed, in the case of large migration of population in Lebanon – although due to conflict rather than climate – that women become more vulnerable to violence, particularly in an estranged environment. Having less access to financial resources such as grants, they would show less resilience facing the loss of agricultural land due to floods or mud slides. Health issues, especially those related to pregnancy, childbirth and infant care, become more acute during climate-related events.

During COP29

It is therefore unsurprising that the gender issue is regularly addressed by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), notably during its annual Conference Of Parties (COP). The subject is officially in the negotiations since 2014 through the Lima Work Program on Gender and Climate Change - referring to the COP20 in Peru - that affirmed the importance of including gender equality in the National Determined Contributions (NDC), in other words the commitments by countries for policies aimed at reducing their greenhouse gases emissions. This paper mainly asks countries to include gender prism in their reporting about progress on climate action.

An enhanced version of this Lima Work Program is under review since COP25 in Spain (hosting for Chile in 2019). This year in Baku, Azerbaijan, a review of this text was made, and it was agreed to develop a new gender action plan for adoption at COP30 (Brazil), which will set the direction for concrete implementation. Gender is therefore a recurrent theme in COP negotiations. This year, in a high-level event organized in the last days of the summit of Baku Noura Hamladji, UN Climate Change Deputy Executive Secretary, said: "A gender-responsive approach isn't only the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do" referring to a gender-responsive approach on climate action that allows better social outcomes and reporting "by breaking down data by gender, (the parties) can point to opportunities we cannot afford to miss" (Hamladji, 2024).

Gender therefore becomes a crucial indicator on the progress in climate action, since it is a sign of an inclusive action respectful of equity and human rights. The governments themselves seem more

and more convinced by the matter. A new UN Climate change secretariat report published in October 2024 reveals that "85 percent of Parties referenced gender in their latest reports and communications submitted to the UNFCCC, including in their national climate plans, known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), their National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and their Long-Term Low Emission Strategies (LT-LEDS)" (UNFCCC, 2024). In the same report, the Executive Secretary of UN Climate Change highlighted that "Combining bold climate action with progress in gender equality is one of the most effective strategies to break away from business-as-usual scenarios and drive transformative change" (Stiell, 2024).

In the media

The gender perspective on climate change has increasingly influenced negotiations and gained prominence in the media. It is essential to highlight not only the differentiated impact of climate change on women, but also the benefit of raising this issue. This message should be effectively conveyed to the general public through both traditional and new media. In this sense, reporting on the topic serves a dual purpose: advancing climate action while promoting women's rights.

Ensuring that climate policies include women is also a concern for journalists. To name but a few cases where media should be alert: making sure access to funds related to climate change is open to women, verifying that the measures taken ensure their security (in the case of forced migration for example), ensuring that health measures don't overlook the specific needs of women, etc.

In order to raise the issue of gender in climate change efficiently, journalists would have many ways to proceed. The first is

to tackle the subject directly by interviewing experts, researchers or policy makers, and using the available data about, let's say, rural women who are often on the frontlines of climate hazards. The problem is that data is often insufficient in the matter, notably in the eastern Mediterranean countries.

The other challenge would be to find researchers or policy makers capable of filling the dots and making the connection between climate related events and women's rights. The effects of repeated droughts on rural communities are an example of that: it would take an expert eye to look for the specific toll it takes on women, the reasons behind that and the adapted solutions for the problem. In any case, media must be echoing any progress on the research about gender in climate change: the collaboration between journalists and experts for that goal should be encouraged.

International conferences and climate change summits are often good occasions to meet such experts and interview them. During COP21 in Paris, this crucial summit that saw the birth of the Paris Agreement, I had the chance to meet Bridget Burns from Women and Gender Constituency, a group of women organizations created by the United Nations to follow-up on the inclusion of gender in the texts related to climate. The activist was complaining about the difficulty to integrate such notions in the executive parts of the final texts, because of the opposition made by several countries, amongst them Arab countries, for fear of binding conditions related to women's rights.

In another case scenario, the subject might come up unexpectedly – and it will inevitably. In that case, the journalist should be able to recognize the importance of it and seize the opportunity. In May 2024, I went

to a remote village in a very rural area in Akkar, North Lebanon, to report on the families of migrant men who tried to go by sea to Cyprus, in order to enter illegally to Europe. Those men were detained in the island for illegal entry, and their families were left behind. Understandably, most of the people I met in this village that day were women, whether the wives (with their children), the sisters, the mothers. It was striking to see how these women, often undereducated but also not able to seek work in this very conservative environment, were unable to get back on their feet in the absence of men. But most of all, in this fishermen's coastal village, an unexpectedly windy month of May on the eastern Mediterranean forced the people to leave their boats ashore for weeks. Those men and women were telling me that such occurrences and climate-related events were taking a toll on their work more and more often. In turn, this was particularly affecting the women in the families of the migrant missing men, who had to count on the remaining men of the family (the grandfather, the step-brother, etc.) to go on feeding their children. My report that day took a totally unexpected turn, showing how related climate change and gender issues can be on the ground.

Finally, journalists might take into consideration that promoting positive stories and not limiting themselves to grim perspectives is a constructive approach to this type of subject. It helps build up resilience among the society, by showing their readers/viewers that climate change might be met by action and that it is not necessarily a fate awaiting us. It also helps showing women not just as victims, but also, and more importantly, as actors of change.

Interviewing Hiba Abdulibdeh, a young Palestinian entrepreneur head of a company bringing solar energy solutions at

low prices in the West Bank and Gaza, was a highlight of my coverage of the Union for the Mediterranean high-level conference on women, that took place in Cyprus in May 2024. Hiba's example shows how successful women can be in combatting climate change, how essential their contribution is, including in war-torn areas.

Success stories are not the only way one can promote effectively gender in climate change: the idea of gender being a way to break from the "business as usual strategies" (Stiel, 2024), therefore pushing for a more efficient way to combat climate change, should be on every journalist's mind. In many parts of the world, women find benefits in change towards a more equitable society, and this can only meet the ideals of the combat against climate change.

How to adapt journalism to change

Adapting to a changing world is a challenge for all, but it is a particular challenge for journalists who must reflect it in their papers/videos/reports.

For newsrooms to evolve and meet those new challenges, it is useful to have more specialized reporters in the environment (particularly climate) and in women's rights. It is difficult to imagine how a media outlet could thrive nowadays without specialized reporters in those two fields, who have become so present throughout the years. But in order to integrate efficiently the gender lens in reports on climate change, it would be crucial to have journalists who have a solid background in both areas.

However, it is understandable that small and/or new media outlets don't always have a luxury for such multiple specializa-

tions. This is why journalists specialized in one of those two areas, or even in fields like health or economics, would have an interest in getting adequate training and awareness on gender and climate change. This will help have more persons on board who fill the dots effectively and are capable of a wholistic approach on this wide matter.

In this regard, it would be important to point out that trained journalists should not necessarily be women (which is often the case), having men on board for gender related topics creates more diversity and helps to stay away from stereotypes.

Raising awareness on the necessity of training journalists for such issues requires collaboration between the media outlets themselves, and with the local, regional and international organizations concerned by gender and/or by environment and development.

Media in most of the eastern Mediterranean countries are often overwhelmed by problems and struggling to survive. Issues such as gender and climate change are nevertheless crucial for them to tackle, as they will become more and more part of their daily lives. Knowing that such issues are not limited to the borders of one country, and that there are often similarities and differences interesting to point out, the role of regional and international organizations are key in helping these outlets meet their goals. They can facilitate the exchange of information from one place to the other, a particularly enriching process.

For all these reasons, networking is key in tackling efficiently issues regarding women and climate change. Creating, on a regional level, a sustainable network comprising journalists, experts and possibly policy makers from all around the Mediterranean, would be extremely helpful in building this specialized community,

able to push forward a gender-based agenda in climate negotiations and national actions. It would also bring journalists and experts with mutual interests closer together.

This network could be completed by a Mediterranean internet platform concentrating the publications around the subject, in coordination with the media outlets, thus becoming a reference in its field.

During the media session held alongside the High level conference on Women in the Mediterranean by the UFM last May, many expressed the need for a shift in narratives concerning women in media, towards a more positive and empowered approach. In the case of gender and climate change, this shift in narratives is even more necessary since the subject is still little-known, and there is a lot to do to highlight the role of women in the fight of the century.

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CONCLUSION

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As highlighted in the UN Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (2025), gender disparities in climate action and environmental governance remain deeply entrenched due to several structural barriers. One of the fundamental challenges is the lack of sex-disaggregated data, which prevents a clear understanding of how climate change and environmental policies impact women and men differently. This data gap is further compounded by inadequate financial support, with only 2% of mitigation-related Official Development Assistance (ODA) being allocated to projects where gender is a principal objective.

Leadership positions in environmental governance remain overwhelmingly male-dominated, perpetuating gender gaps in decision-making. The absence of effective monitoring mechanisms to track women's participation in environmental governance exacerbates these disparities. Additionally, women remain underrepresented in land ownership globally, with discriminatory laws and customs still restricting their rights. In many regions, legal frameworks fail to ensure women's inheritance rights, leaving them vulnerable to displacement and economic insecurity.

The gender gap extends into economic opportunities within the green transition. Limited funding is allocated to train women for green jobs, and there is a lack of gender-disaggregated data on employment in emerging climate-related sectors. Without targeted legal reforms, inclusive policies, and dedicated resources, these systemic barriers will persist, hindering the effectiveness of climate action and sustainable development.

In this global framework, the Euro-Mediterranean region. This intensifies environ-

mental vulnerabilities, resource scarcity, and socio-economic instability—challenges that disproportionately affect women and marginalized communities.

The intersection of climate change, gender, and regional stability in the Euro-Mediterranean region which is indeed experiencing climate change at an alarming rate, warming 20% faster than the global average, is not just an academic discussion—it is a critical issue, central to regional stability, sustainable development, and human security that demands urgent attention. Climate risks, coupled with existing gender inequalities, exacerbate economic insecurity, forced displacement, and limited participation in decision-making processes. This nexus has been acknowledged as a priority for regional action by the 5th UfM Ministerial Declaration on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society (2022) and tackled at the UfM High-Level Conference on Women for the Mediterranean (May 2024).

The Euro-Mediterranean Gender Lens

The contributions within this edition of the MedWE Policy Study Series highlight the climate-gender-security nexus, emphasizing how gender-sensitive policies can enhance regional resilience. This paper analyses the key areas considered most relevant for government stakeholders, focusing on processes and the institutionalization of gender equality measures that can contribute to the effective integration of gender perspectives. Furthermore, it aims to influence those engaged in the policy process, fostering positive attitudes towards gender equality and enhancing their capacity to actively address it.

To achieve these objectives, rather than merely addressing the impact of climate

change, the different articles apply gender as a lens of analysis. This perspective has resulted in a cross-cutting and insightful approach to the climate change-security nexus, allowing it to be applied beyond the study of women's issues and developed as an independent line of research and action.

Using Intersectionality: The articles generate critical and constructive insights from women's experiences. The fact that the various initiatives are linked to ongoing projects and programs—both in academic research and in applied policy and program implementation—is of major interest in a field where the subject of study is often examined without fully grasping the dynamism of its evolution.

Transforming Perspectives: One of the most interesting aspects of this approach is how it addresses the issue through the tension between vulnerability and the need for proactive policy impact. Once we better understand the relative distribution of opportunities, constraints, and power, we can develop more effective, evidence-based climate policies and actions. Climate policies that are synergized and integrated with gender equality objectives are more successful in achieving the deep transformations required to tackle the climate crisis and ensure social justice.

Scaling Up Gender-Transformative initiatives: All these approaches are aiming to effectively tackle the climate crisis and ensure social justice, by integrating gender-sensitive approaches into climate policies, planning, and interventions. By addressing systemic inequalities and ensuring that women and marginalized communities have a voice in decision-making, the recommended policies can become more inclusive and impactful.

Identified Challenges for the Euro-Mediterranean Agenda

The contributions within this edition of the MedWE Policy Study Series highlight the climate-gender-security nexus, emphasizing how gender-sensitive policies can enhance regional resilience. The increasing scarcity of clean water and natural resources, the growing frequency of natural disasters, the spread of climate-related diseases, and the displacement of communities all contribute to heightened instability and conflict. In this context, incorporating a gender perspective into the security agenda is essential for ensuring regional stability and resilience.

Economic precarity and climate change

Economic precarity is one of the most pressing challenges women face in the context of climate change. Women, particularly those in low-income and rural communities, are disproportionately affected by economic instability as climate change threatens key sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, and informal economies. Additionally, climate-induced economic shocks exacerbate wage discrimination, job insecurity, and lack of access to credit, further entrenching gender inequalities. Without targeted investments in financial inclusion, capacity-building, and employment opportunities in green economies, women will continue to face systemic barriers to economic resilience and adaptation. Strengthening women's access to climate finance, vocational training, and leadership roles in sustainable industries is crucial for building long-term economic security and resilience.

- **Women’s economic precarity in the face of climate change**, particularly in the agricultural sector, where despite making up over **50% of agricultural workers**, women **lack access to land, financial resources, and decision-making roles** is at heart at the **contribution of Dr Noura Abdelwahab** (*International Water Management Institute*).

Resource scarcity and Socio-Economic Instability

Climate-induced resource scarcity is a key factor contributing to socio-economic instability in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The depletion of water, land, and other essential resources exacerbates existing inequalities, disproportionately affecting women in rural and conflict-affected areas. Women, often responsible for securing these resources, face heightened challenges as droughts, desertification, and environmental degradation increase. Resource scarcity also fuels social tensions, exacerbating competition over dwindling supplies and increasing the risk of conflict and forced displacement.

- **Climate-induced resource scarcity** is identified a critical factor which leads to instability and forced displacement in **Syria and Lebanon** with **Syrian refugee women facing unsafe working conditions, economic marginalization, and gender-based violence** in the **article of Dr Sarine Karajerjian** (*Arab Reform Initiative, ARI*). She calls for **integrated policies that balance gender equity, climate adaptation, and security strategies** to protect the most vulnerable.

Feminisation of Vulnerability and Regional Instability

Increasing natural disasters, resource scarcity, and forced displacement contribute to instability, making a gender-sensitive approach essential. Women and youth are often grouped as a homogeneous vulnerable category, rather than recognizing their diverse experiences and agency. Women’s experiences of vulnerability must not be framed solely in terms of victimhood; instead, it is crucial to recognize their agency in mitigating conflicts and fostering sustainable peace. Addressing these gendered vulnerabilities requires integrating women into decision-making processes and ensuring their roles in climate adaptation strategies. Political and economic instability in the region further compounds the impacts of climate change on women. The disproportionate effect of climate-induced crises on women underscores the need for long-term, gender-sensitive recovery strategies that promote stability, economic empowerment, and security.

The concept of the “feminization of vulnerability” needs to be reevaluated, moving away from lumping women and youth together as a vulnerable group and instead recognizing their agency and contributions.

- *Dr Zeina Moneer*, a senior environmental and climate policy analyst from Egypt, challenges the **stereotypical portrayal of women as passive victims of climate change**. She argues for an **intersectional approach** that acknowledges women’s **agency and leadership** in sustainable agriculture, water management, and economic resilience.

Gender and climate displacement

Climate-induced displacement is a growing challenge in the Euro-Mediterranean

region, particularly in conflict-affected areas; women in these regions face heightened risks, including unsafe working conditions, economic marginalization, and gender-based violence. The issue of climate-induced displacement further underscores the necessity of a gender-sensitive response. Women and girls face distinct challenges when forced to migrate due to environmental factors, requiring targeted policies and protection measures to address their specific needs.

- The specific challenges women face in displacement, such as **wage discrimination, exploitative labour conditions, and lack of legal protections** are thoroughly analysed by *Prof. Manale Abou Dagher (Lebanese American University)* who stresses that existing migration frameworks fail to consider the gendered dimensions of climate displacement, calling for stronger legal and policy mechanisms.
- As *Sarine Karajerjian (Arab Reform Initiative, ARI)* points out, integrated policies that balance gender equity, climate adaptation, and security strategies are necessary to protect the most vulnerable.

The Role of Media in Climate Narratives

Moreover, the media plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and policy priorities. By amplifying the voices of women and showcasing their success stories in climate action, the media can drive a shift in narratives, influencing both societal attitudes and governmental approaches. This transformation is essential for fostering policy frameworks that prioritize gender-responsive strategies in addressing the climate crisis and its security implications.

- **The Role of Media in Shaping Gendered Climate Narratives** is analysed by *Suzanne Baaklini (L'Orient le Jour, Lebanon)* who challenges the **victimhood narrative** around women and climate change, rather than amplifying their role as active agents in climate adaptation. She advocates for **gender-sensitive journalism**, emphasizing the need for **better data, research, and training for journalists** to improve public discourse and influence policymaking.

Policy Recommendations

The challenges outlined in this publication demonstrate the urgent need for policies that integrate gender equality into climate action in the Euro-Mediterranean region. To address both the gendered impacts of climate change and the critical role women play in climate solutions, the following policy recommendations are essential:

- **Strengthen Gender-Responsive Climate Policies:** The findings underscore the need for policies that address both the unique vulnerabilities of women and their contributions to climate solutions. Gender-responsive financing and the inclusion of women in climate governance and decision-making are necessities. Creating opportunities for women's participation in decision-making processes at both local and regional levels can significantly contribute to reducing vulnerabilities associated with climate displacement and improving the overall security situation. Embedding women's needs and contributions into national climate strategies and the creation of legal frameworks that safeguard

women's rights and ensure their active participation in the rebuilding of their communities became a priority.

- **Advancing Women's participation in climate security and peace building:** Supporting regional coalitions to foster collaboration, solidarity and the inclusion of local voices in WPS discussions. Promoting a gender-sensitive approach to climate action must be integrated into the security agenda to ensure regional stability and resilience. Women's roles in mitigating conflict and fostering sustainable peace cannot be overlooked.
- **Enhance Regional Cooperation to support long-term sustainability of WPS initiatives:** There is a clear call for stronger EU-Mediterranean cooperation to integrate gender perspectives into climate action. Collaborative efforts can help ensure that women's involvement in climate challenges, including reforestation, water sanitation and others.
- **Promoting Women's Leadership and knowledge exchange:** Fostering inclusive professional environments and highlighted successful women-led projects in the region that can serve as replication models to be used. Women's leadership, particularly in sectors such as agriculture and green technologies, has proven to be a powerful force for transformation. Investing in women-led businesses and initiatives that focus on sustainable practices can contribute to both economic empowerment and climate resilience.

- **Promote Gender-Sensitive Media Coverage:** To further amplify women's voices, it is crucial to promote media coverage that highlights the gendered impacts of climate change. This can help change public perceptions and policy priorities, leading to more inclusive and effective climate actions. The media can also be instrumental in holding governments accountable for implementing gender-responsive climate policies, ensuring that women's needs and contributions are fully integrated into climate governance.

Final considerations

Gender equality is not a secondary concern in climate policy, it is a fundamental prerequisite for effective and just climate action. Women's leadership, economic participation, and security must be at the core of climate strategies in the Euro-Mediterranean region. By embedding gender-sensitive approaches into climate governance, building gender-disaggregated data, adopting gender analysis in climate-disaster risk management, promoting equitable investment, and targeted funding, challenging outdated narratives, the Euro-Mediterranean region can develop inclusive, resilient, and effective solutions.

The path forward demands a collective commitment from policymakers, civil society, and media actors alike—one that ensures that women are not just protected from climate change, but empowered to lead the solutions that will shape the region's future. This commitment shall be embedded in the **future Pact for the Mediterranean** as well as in the upcoming **Roadmap 2030 of the Union for the Mediterranean**, both expected to be adopted in 2025.

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