Gendered dimensions of climate-related security risks in the OSCE area

sipri

This study was commissioned by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and authored by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

This publication has been produced under the OSCE extrabudgetary project **"Strengthening responses to security risks from climate change in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia"** (project No. 1102151), funded by: Andorra, Austria, Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Suggested citation Magalhães Teixeira, Barbara and Gretchen Baldwin. Gendered dimensions of climate-related security risks in the OSCE area. Solna: SIPRI, 2025. Commissioned by the OSCE.

Legal note

Publishers Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)

Commissioned by Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

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Layout and Design MaxNova Creative

Status December 2025

Acknowledgements We would like to express our gratitude to the OSCE Field Operations, Executive Structures and as well as other partners for their valuable review, expert insights, and contributions to this report.

Executive Summary

This report analyses how gender and other intersecting identities shape people's exposure to, experience of, and ability to respond to climate-related security risks across four sub-regions of the OSCE: Central Asia, the South Caucasus, Eastern Europe, and South-Eastern Europe. It combines a literature review with a mixed-methods evidence base: 31 interviews with 37 stakeholders conducted April-June 2025, and a mapping of national policies (Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans, UNFCCC's Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans, and available National Security Strategies) across 16 jurisdictions. The report identifies gendered and intersectional vulnerabilities, national and regional policy responses, and inclusion in decision-making processes, and highlights promising practices and actionable recommendations for OSCE participating States, civil society and multilateral institutions.

Key findings

- **Gendered and intersectional vulnerabilities are systemic:** Differences in social roles, access to resources and services, and representation in decision-making shape exposure sensitivity and adaptive capacity. Women often carry high unpaid care and informal agricultural workloads while having less access to land, credit, extension services and formal decision spaces. Men face distinct, under-analysed risks linked to occupational exposure and livelihood change.

- **Rural contexts concentrate risk:** Out-migration, ageing populations and limited services leave many rural women as de facto heads of household without commensurate rights or resources; elderly people and people with disabilities face mobility barriers during hazards and displacement.

- **Institutional capacity and governance gaps amplify harms:** Limited climate impact monitoring, fragmented institutional mandates, and constrained participation in decision-making on environmental matters erode trust and reduce effectiveness in the prevention of and response to climate-related security risks. Women environmental defenders face harassment, including SLAPPs, which affects civic engagement and accountability.

- **Conflict and militarization reshape vulnerabilities:** In Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, damage to ecosystems and infrastructure, displacement, and narrowed decision-making space increase household and community burdens.

- **Information access is uneven:** Many communities (especially rural women, youth, minorities and low-income groups) have limited access to timely, usable climate and hazard information and to consultation processes.

- **Local leadership is present but under-resourced:** Women- and youth-led initiatives in adaptation, water governance and decentralized energy hold promise and demonstrate practical pathways that merit recognition and scale.

Policy landscape

- **Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans (WPS NAP):** Around half of the reviewed jurisdictions have current WPS NAPs with explicit but inconsistent linkages to climate-related security risks.
- **UNFCCC's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC):** all reviewed texts reference gender, but few operationalize differentiated impacts or connect to security through indicators, budgets and delivery mechanisms.
- **National Adaptation Plans:** Where present, they more consistently acknowledge vulnerable groups than NDCs, but adoption and resourcing remain uneven.
- **National Security Strategies:** References to the environment, disasters and climate change are common across jurisdictions, but gender mainstreaming and links to WPS are limited.

Sub-regional snapshots

- **Central Asia:** Glacier melt, changing precipitation patterns and transboundary water stress intersect with rural dependence on agriculture and pastoralism, increasing household burdens. Women's and youth networks around water and agriculture provide practical entry points that would benefit from further institutional anchoring.
- **South Caucasus:** Climate shocks interact with patterns of human mobility, displacement and border constraints, while legacies of armed conflict entrench gender roles and vulnerabilities. At the same time, mentorship and sectoral entry programmes (including in the energy sector) show early promise for resilience building.
- **Eastern Europe:** War-related damage to energy and water systems raises household energy insecurity and care burdens, while environmental harm and contamination pose long-term risks for vulnerable groups. Sustainable energy projects are demonstrating great potential in centering the agency of women and youth groups.
- **South-Eastern Europe:** Heatwaves, floods and wildfires exacerbate energy poverty and air pollution, while concerns over civic space complicate accountability and programme delivery. The European integration process provides important entry points for inclusive environmental governance.

Emerging practices

- **Inclusive decision-making architecture:** The establishment of gender and youth focal points with mandates, budgets and training embedded from municipal to ministerial levels has proven effective. Meetings designed to account for caregiving and mobility constraints of marginalized groups are helpful to enable wide participation in consultations and decision-making processes.

- **Localized adaptation with equity elements:** Participatory risk assessments, gender-sensitive early-warning systems, and local adaptation plans that recognize community knowledge from different groups can boost both resilience and equity.

- **Targeted resilience investments:** Expanding access to clean energy, safe public transport, water, and digital services can reduce time poverty and enable broader participation. Protective labour measures can help safeguard women entering male-dominated sectors as well as men who are forced to migrate in search of work.

- **Civic space protection:** Measures to deter harassment, provide rapid-response legal support, and publicly recognize environmental defenders' contributions to democratic participation and decision-making help protect civic space.

Summary of recommendations[1]

- **Mainstream gender and inclusion:** Integrate gender, age, and diversity considerations into all climate and security policies, plans, and budgets, expanding the understanding of "gender" beyond women and ensuring the meaningful participation of all segments of society.

- **Strengthen the evidence base:** Collect disaggregated and context-specific data on gender, climate change and security linkages through regular needs assessments and gender-sensitive monitoring systems and by integrating local knowledge.

- **Invest in resilience and livelihoods:** Enhance community resilience by improving rural infrastructure and services, expanding access to clean energy, and promoting women's leadership and participation in key climate-related sectors.

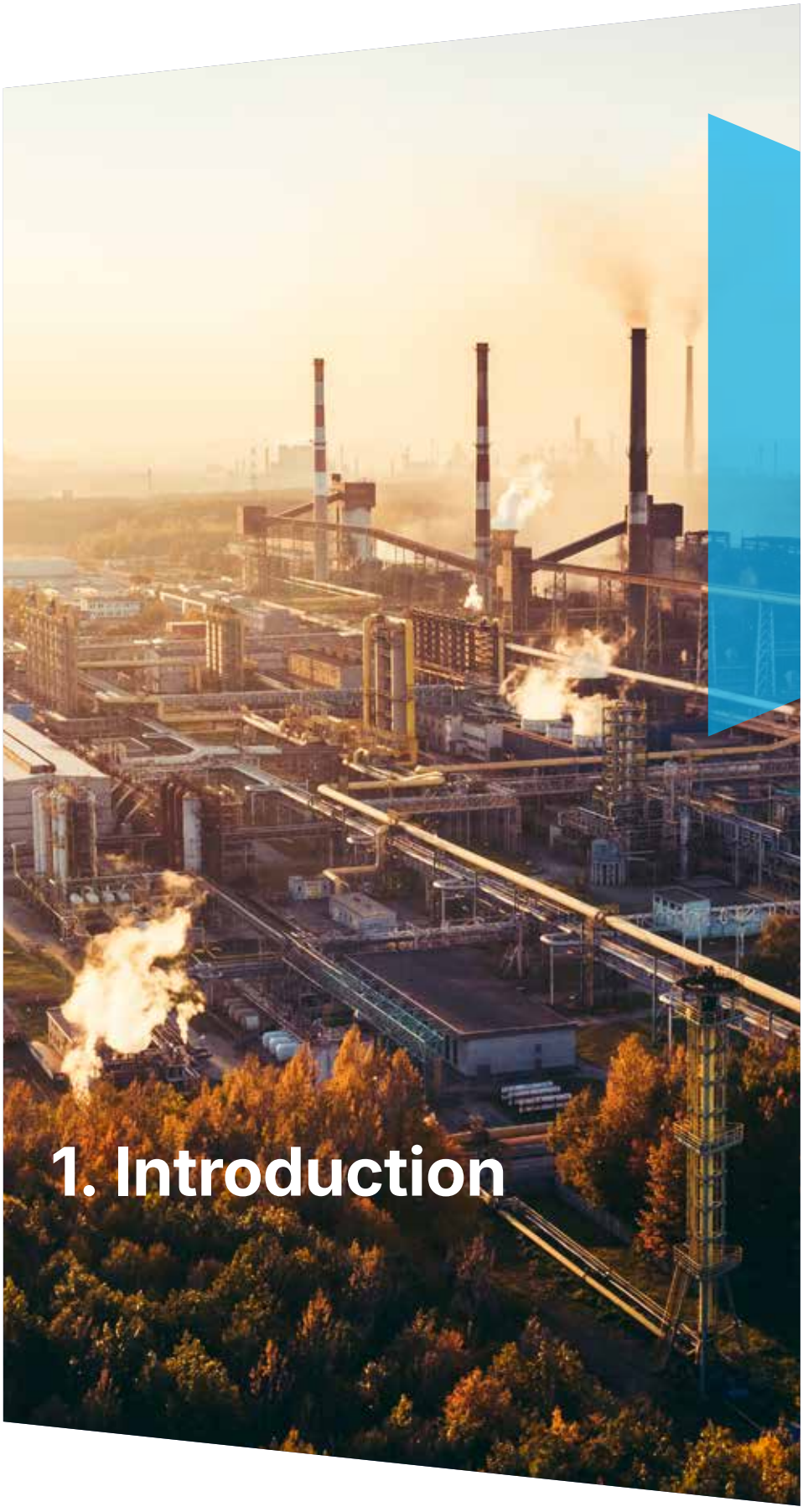
- **Promote transparency and protection:** Protect environmental rights defenders and promote participatory, gender-sensitive governance through transparent decision-making and robust accountability mechanisms.

- **Foster cooperation and capacity:** Strengthen intersectoral and cross-border collaboration by establishing institutional focal points at all levels, supporting multi-stakeholder platforms, and building the capacity of institutions and communities.

1 The full set of recommendations can be found at the end of the report.

Table of content

1



1. Introduction

As the impacts of climate change intensify globally, the links between environmental changes and security risks are becoming increasingly evident.

Rising temperatures, changing precipitation patterns and more frequent extreme weather events are not only disrupting ecosystems and livelihoods but also compounding existing inequalities and undermining peace and stability – especially in vulnerable or conflict-affected contexts. While much attention has been paid to the environmental and geopolitical dimensions of climate security, less focus has been directed toward how gender and other intersecting social factors shape people's differentiated exposure to, and experiences of, climate-related risks.

As well as being mainstreamed internationally through the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda, gender issues in peace and security have been linked with climate considerations through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). However, the integration of all three areas of the nexus – gender, climate change, security – in the same policies remains uneven; in fact, the connections across all three are missing from most policies and strategies. The OSCE area presents a diverse and dynamic context for exploring these interlinkages, encompassing a wide range of ecological and climate vulnerabilities, socio-political structures, and institutional capacities. Understanding who is most affected by climate risks, how these risks are shaped by gender and other social identities, and how gender-responsive and intersectional approaches can be effective in addressing them is essential for promoting stability and security in the OSCE area and beyond.

To address these gaps, this report presents a targeted analysis that highlights the critical intersections between gender, climate change and security in the OSCE area. By examining how climate-related risks can exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities and create new vulnerabilities, the report underscores the importance of integrating a gender perspective into all stages of policy and programme development. Through the collection of evidence, case studies and stakeholder insights, this analysis aims to raise awareness among policymakers

and practitioners of the specific challenges and opportunities faced by women, men, and sexual and gender minorities in the context of climate and security risks. While expertise on the intersection of gender, climate and security is still developing in the OSCE area, there is growing consensus among stakeholders that these issues are deeply interconnected and should be addressed through integrated approaches.

This report is part of the OSCE's ongoing efforts to address the complex interlinkages between climate change and security, as reflected in its Stockholm Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/21 on strengthening co-operation to address the challenges caused by climate change (MC.DEC/3/21). As part of this mandate, the OSCE has been working since 2018 on the extra-budgetary project "Strengthening Responses to Security Risks from Climate Change in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia", in partnership with the "think-and-do-tank" adelphi global and in close collaboration with OSCE field operations.[2] Through these efforts, the project seeks to empower policymakers and practitioners to design and implement more inclusive and effective responses to climate-related security challenges, thereby advancing gender equality and resilience throughout the OSCE area.

The report makes three key contributions to the evolving field of gender and climate security policy and practice. Firstly, it bridges disciplinary and policy silos by integrating insights from gender and climate security frameworks, offering a more holistic approach to understanding and addressing intersecting vulnerabilities. Secondly, it offers valuable empirical contributions both by mapping the gendered climate-related security risks in the OSCE area and also by mapping relevant policies and assessing the extent to which climate risks are integrated into WPS National Action Plans, and how gender considerations are incorporated into the UNFCCC's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National [climate] Adaptation Plans. Thirdly, it addresses a major blind spot in existing climate security literature and policy, which has largely focused on Africa and South-East Asia, by generating new knowledge on gender-climate-security linkages in the OSCE sub-regions in focus: Central Asia, South Caucasus, Eastern Europe and South-Eastern Europe.

2 A cross-regional toolkit is expected to be produced in 2026. On the basis of the findings of this report, it will provide a guiding tool and practical recommendations to policymakers in the OSCE area to integrate a gender perspective aimed at advancing gender equality in their policies and programmes aimed at addressing potential security risks stemming from climate change.

Box 1. Methodology

The report examines how gender and other intersectional factors (such as age, ethnicity, disability, class, religion, migration status and sexual orientation) shape vulnerabilities to climate-related risks, as well as the security implications of those dynamics in four OSCE sub-regions. Further, it explores the policy landscape in each of these sub-regions, mapping the gender-climate-security nexus in policies which arise from the global frameworks mentioned above. The report is based on a mixed-methods approach combining desk-based research, semi-structured expert interviews, policy analysis and related sessions at the Global Mountain Dialogue for Sustainable Development held in Bishkek in April 2025 and at a workshop during the 2025 Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development held in May 2025.

A total of 31 interviews were conducted between April and June 2025 with 37 interviewees, both in-person and online. Respondents included government officials (6), civil society representatives (17), expert researchers (8), and representatives from international organizations (9) from Central Asia (10), the South Caucasus (9), Eastern Europe (6), and South-Eastern Europe (12).[3]

Furthermore, the report provides analysis of the most recent versions of available policy documents. These included National Action Plans (NAPs) for the WPS agenda from Central Asia (4), the South Caucasus (3), Eastern Europe (2), and South-Eastern Europe (6).

It also includes analysis of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) (16), one from each of the jurisdictions studied, and National Adaptation Plans (climate NAPs) from South-Eastern Europe (3), the South Caucasus (2), and Eastern Europe (1).[4]

Within the scope of the study, we encountered three key limitations. Firstly, security policies proved difficult to compare with gender and climate policies. While the latter are anchored in international frameworks such as the WPS agenda or the Paris Agreement on Climate Change of 2015, security policies are formulated at the national level and vary in many respects.

Secondly, expertise at the intersection of gender, climate and security remains limited. As many interviewees themselves observed, few practitioners or researchers work across all three fields. Within the scope and time frame of this study, the focus was therefore on gender and climate experts, and on incorporating their assessments of how security risks intersect with these issues. Despite this, there was strong consensus that climate, gender and security challenges are deeply interconnected and should be addressed in an integrated manner.

Thirdly, gender was often equated with "women and girls". Many interviewees did not raise gendered experiences on the part of men or boys, or questions of masculinity, unless explicitly prompted, reflecting a broader lack of disaggregated data on these dynamics. Where possible, the report adopts a more holistic approach to gender analysis in order to move beyond this narrow framing.

3 A list of all interview details is found in the Annex.

4 A list of all policy documents analysed is found in the Annex.

2

2. State of play in the literature: Gendered and intersectional vulnerabilities to climate-related security risks

The intersection of gender, climate and security has gained growing scholarly and policy attention in recent years, as it becomes increasingly clear that women, men, youth and other social groups are affected differently both by climate change and by its associated security risks.

The gendered and intersectional dimensions of these risks are not inherent to climate change itself but are shaped by the social, economic, political and cultural systems that mediate its impacts and organize responses. Inequalities based on gender, age, ethnicity, disability, class, religion, migration status and sexual orientation influence the extent to which people are exposed to harm, their capacity to adapt, and their inclusion in – or exclusion from – decision-making processes. Understanding these dynamics requires a closer look at how vulnerability is conceptualized and socially constructed.

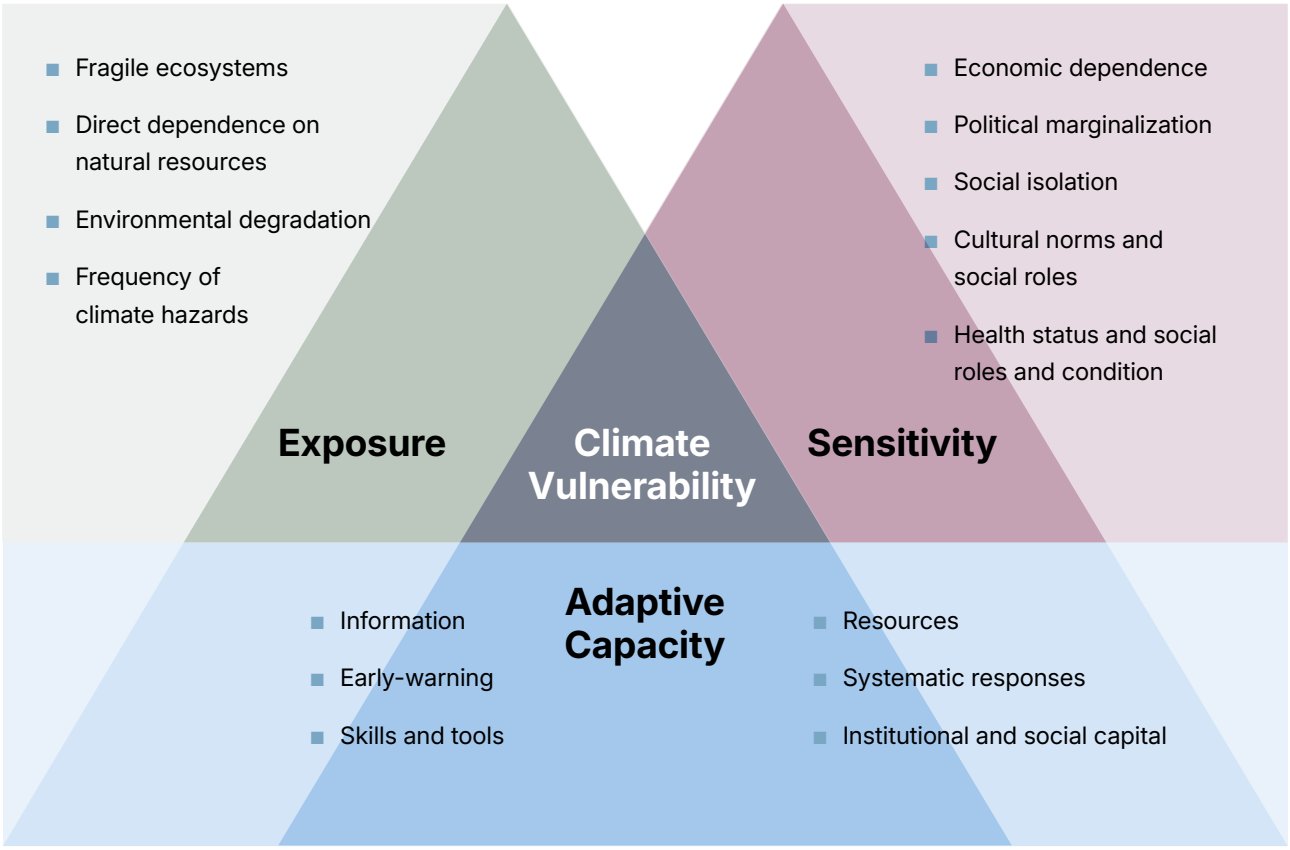
2.1 Conceptualizing vulnerability

Understanding why certain groups are more affected by climate-related risks than others require more than just looking at climate impacts themselves. Vulnerability is not simply a result of environmental change, but is shaped by social, economic and political conditions. This report builds on the 2001 multidimensional framework of vulnerability of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which assesses it as a function of exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity (see Figure 1).

Exposure refers to the degree to which people, communities and ecosystems are exposed to significant climatic variations, such as floods, droughts or heatwaves. *Sensitivity* reflects the extent to which those exposed are affected by climatic events, depending on their livelihoods, health status, cultural norms and social roles. *Adaptive capacity* is the ability to anticipate, cope with, and recover from these climate impacts; it is shaped by access to financial resources, social networks, education, information, political power and institutional support.

This approach makes it clear that vulnerability is not solely determined by environmental and climate conditions but is deeply rooted in structural and social inequalities. This framing highlights not only physical exposure, but also the social marginalization and systemic disempowerment that limits people's ability to respond to climate shocks.

Figure 1. Climate vulnerability as a function of exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity



Source: adapted from IPCC (2001)

Understanding vulnerability through this lens also clarifies why gender and intersectionality are central to climate-security analysis. Social norms and institutions shape both the expectation that certain groups will absorb risk and also their ability to do so. For instance, women and girls are often expected to shoulder the burdens of unpaid care work, which increases their exposure and sensitivity to climate impacts while simultaneously limiting their access to the resources needed for adaptation, such as land, credit, education or decision-making power (Carvajal-Escobar et al. 2008; Carr and Thompson 2014; Agarwal 2018; Paudyal et al. 2019; Khatri-Chhetri et al. 2020). These dynamics particularly affect women, traditional and rural communities, ethnic minorities, the young, and the elderly, who are all frequently excluded from the spaces where climate, security and related policy frameworks are shaped.

Vulnerability, then, is not only a measure of climate risk but also a sign of underlying structural injustices. Effective climate and security policy recognizes and responds to these root causes, not just to their symptoms.

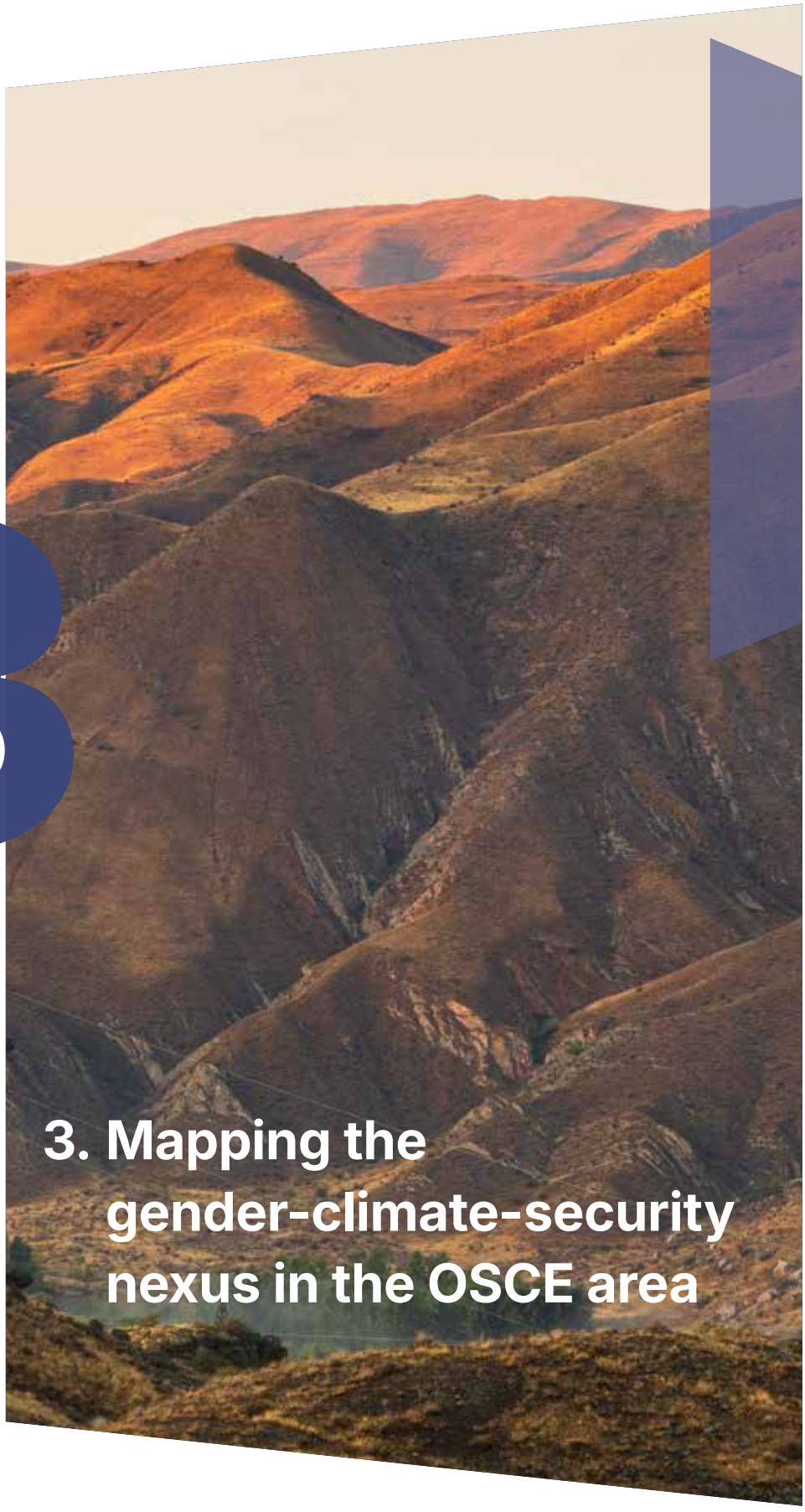
2.2 From vulnerability to insecurity

Understanding vulnerability as shaped by access to power, resources and institutional responses helps explain how impacts of climate change translate into differentiated experiences of security and insecurity. While climate change is increasingly recognized as a security risk, research shows that it does not cause conflict directly (Hendrix et al. 2023). Rather, its effects are mediated through social, economic and political systems that influence how risks are experienced and addressed (Mobjörg et al. 2020).

The relationship between climate change and security is complex and context-dependent. Climate-related disruptions such as droughts, floods or rising temperatures interact with pre-existing challenges such as limited institutional capacity, uneven development, livelihood insecurity and long-standing patterns of political exclusion. In such contexts, climate impacts can strain access to water and land, exacerbate political and economic grievances, and erode trust in public institutions if and when they are not able to respond effectively or equitably to these challenges (Mobjörg et al. 2020). These dynamics underscore the need to look beyond physical hazards alone and examine how climate change interacts with structural inequalities to generate or intensify risks to human and political security.

Gendered and intersectional inequalities play a critical role in shaping both vulnerability and security outcomes. Social norms and institutional arrangements determine who controls land and resources, who migrates under stress, who receives aid, and who participates in decision-making over adaptation or recovery. Women, girls and sexual and gender minorities often face cumulative disadvantages that heighten their vulnerability – such as constrained mobility, exclusion from political spaces, or increased caregiving burdens – and limit their ability to cope with climate-related security risks (Agarwal 2018; Ide et al. 2021; Kakota et al. 2011; Coomaraswamy 2015). At the same time, men and boys also face distinct risks shaped by dominant expectations of masculinity. In contexts of livelihood loss and displacement, for example, the inability to act as providers can contribute to psychological distress, stigma or social marginalization (Ashamole 2019; Lwambo 2013). These gendered dynamics are further shaped by other intersecting factors such as race, ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, class, religion and migration status – all of which affect men's and boys' ability to access resources, protection and institutional support in times of crisis (Smith 2022).

Climate-related security risks, therefore, do not arise from climate impacts alone, but emerge through a range of intermediary mechanisms – such as livelihood loss, displacement, contested access to natural resources, or rising social tensions – that are shaped by underlying inequalities and governance challenges. These mechanisms do not affect everyone equally: they are experienced differently depending on how people are situated within systems of power. Understanding these differentiated risks is essential to developing inclusive responses that address both immediate climate pressures and the deeper structures of vulnerability and insecurity.



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3. Mapping the gender-climate-security nexus in the OSCE area

Building on the previous discussion of how climate-related risks interact with structural inequalities, this section presents findings from interviews across the four OSCE sub-regions.

It explores how these dynamics play out in practice, focusing on the interconnected ways that gender roles, climate impacts and security challenges shape people's lived experiences – which will be referred to throughout this report as the "gender-climate-security nexus". The analysis is structured around key thematic areas that emerged from the expert interviews, including livelihoods, migration and mobility, institutional capacity and governance, decision-making, health and mortality, and natural resource management.

3.1 Overview of climate-related security risks

Across the OSCE area, climate change is intensifying environmental and human security risks. While specific hazards vary from sub-region to sub-region, many areas face increasingly frequent and severe droughts, floods, heatwaves and land degradation (Rüttinger et al. 2021a; Rüttinger et al. 2021b; Mosello et al. 2023).

> **These impacts intersect with existing socio-economic vulnerabilities, governance challenges, and in some cases armed conflict, creating region-specific vulnerabilities with broader, interconnected consequences.**

Many countries in the OSCE sub-regions rely heavily on agriculture and natural resources for employment, income, and food security, particularly in rural and mountainous areas. Demographic pressures – including youth unemployment, ageing rural populations and growing urban migration – put further strain on adaptive capacity. Weak infrastructure and unequal access to services compound vulnerability and security risks across the sub-regions, as does political instability in some contexts.

In Central Asia and the South Caucasus glacial melt is a growing concern, threatening long-term freshwater ac-

cess, irrigation, and hydropower generation, particularly in mountainous areas.[5] Drought, erratic precipitation and land degradation are already affecting agriculture and pasture-based livelihoods across the sub-regions, while desertification, deforestation and overgrazing compound soil degradation and resource depletion.[6] In both Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe, increased incidence of floods, heatwaves and wildfires were reported, with several countries facing heightened disaster risks owing to weak infrastructure and limited institutional capacity.[7]

In Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, political instability and armed conflict further exacerbate environmental risks. The war in Ukraine has damaged water and energy infrastructure, increasing environmental contamination with potential long-term implications and exposing vulnerabilities in transboundary water governance in the broader region.[8] Similar patterns were reported in the South Caucasus, where the legacy of armed conflict has limited access to water and pastureland, especially for displaced and border communities.[9] Meanwhile, across South-Eastern Europe, slow renewable energy transitions, political fragmentation and fossil fuel dependence were flagged as barriers to resilience.[10] Adaptation is further hindered by governance issues such as weak enforcement of environmental legislation and the politicization of emergency responses. Perceptions of uneven distribution of emergency resources can undermine public trust and leave already marginalized communities particularly exposed to climate-related risks such as pollution, extreme heat and energy insecurity.[11]

5 CA 1-3; CA 4; CA 6; CA 7; CA 9; SC 1; SC 2-3; SC 4; SC 5-6; SC 7; SC 8; SC 9.

6 CA 1-3; CA 4; CA 5; CA 6; CA 7; SC 2-3; SC 8; SC 9.

7 CA 1-3; CA 4; CA 5; CA 6; CA 7; SC 2-3; SC 4; SC 8; SC 9; SEE 6; SEE 3; SEE 4.

8 EE 3-4; EE 5-6.

9 SC 2-3; SC 7; SC 9.

10 SEE 3; SEE 2; SEE 5.

11 CA 9; SEE 10; SC 5-6.

Table 1. Climate impacts and contextual pressures* influencing vulnerability reported** in the OSCE sub-regions

Central Asia	
Climate impacts	Contextual pressures
Floods Droughts Mudflows Mudslides Heat waves Land and soil degradation Glacier melting Change in precipitation patterns Air pollution	Transboundary water Border demarcation process Water scarcity (especially in border regions) Food insecurity Cattle overgrazing Migration Livelihood loss Energy insecurity Rising gender-based violence

South Caucasus	
Climate impacts	Contextual pressures
Floods Droughts Temperature rise Heatwaves Land degradation Intensive hail Frost (out of season) Glacier melting Landslides Mudflows Deforestation Desertification Wildfires	Transboundary water Legacy of armed conflict Cattle grazing near borders Displacement Environmental impacts of conflict Isolation of rural communities Rising gender-based violence

Eastern Europe	
Climate impacts	Contextual pressures
Seasons changing Natural disasters Rising temperatures Wildfires	War in Ukraine Potential fallout of military activities Transboundary reliance on natural resources Waste management Unauthorized dumping Geopolitical influence and instability

South-Eastern Europe	
Climate impacts	Contextual pressures
Droughts Rising temperatures Heatwaves (longer and more frequent) Extreme weather events Land degradation Water pollution Declining precipitation Deforestation and subsequent mudslides Decreasing natural resources Wildfires Air pollution	Historical and political tensions Geopolitical influence and instability Increased polarization of politics Business-centric governance (as opposed to people-driven governance) Strain on health system Water scarcity Livelihood insecurity Food insecurity Nuclear threats Threats to environmental activists Dependence on hydropower

* "Contextual pressures" refer to broader social, political and economic dynamics that interviewees identified as interacting with climate impacts and shaping vulnerability and response. These do not imply direct causality or official assessments.

** Based on interviews carried out by the authors with key interviewees. This list is not exhaustive.

3.2 Overview of gendered and intersectional vulnerabilities to climate-related security risks

While the literature broadly recognizes that climate risks affect different groups differently, many interviewees did not initially identify gendered vulnerabilities to climate-related security risks unless explicitly prompted. Where such dimensions were acknowledged, their focus was almost exclusively on women's and girls' vulnerabilities. This framing tends to overlook both the capacities of women and girls as leaders and agents and also the specific vulnerabilities faced by men and boys. One interviewee observed that this hyper-focus on women's and girls' vulnerabilities to climate-related security risks also affected the collection of holistically gender-disaggregated data, leading to gaps in information on men's and boys' specific vulnerabilities.[12]

This disconnect between anecdotal evidence and mainstreamed vulnerability frameworks reflects broader social perceptions about who is seen as vulnerable. Several interviewees observed that although women were typically assumed to be at risk, may also experience serious but under-recognized impacts. They highlighted how men might experience different but significant risks linked to climate-exposed livelihoods, such as stress, physical strain or deteriorating health, though these are rarely framed as vulnerabilities.[13]

Such assumptions also shape broader public attitudes. Interviewees noted that women were often perceived as more concerned about environmental issues and more likely to engage in climate-related initiatives than men, reinforcing gendered ideas about who cares and who suffers.[14] Yet, as one interviewee pointed out, these patterns may reflect prevailing social expectations more than they do actual experiences of climate vulnerability. [15]

Furthermore, rural-urban divides were understood to compound intersecting vulnerabilities. In Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe, interviewees observed that women were more likely to remain in rural areas owing to male out-migration or caregiving responsibilities. In these contexts, existing gendered vulnerabilities tended to deepen.

> **Women in rural areas often faced overlapping constraints related to mobility, resource access and political participation.**

Meanwhile, rural men might encounter identity loss and economic marginalization owing to livelihood decline, but these were rarely framed through a gendered lens.[16] The gendered and intersectional vulnerabilities discussed by interviewees were wide-ranging, often shaped by a combination of geographical exposure, livelihood structure and social norms. In particular, rural settings were identified as locations where multiple inequalities converged, deepening existing exclusions and creating new forms of climate-related insecurity. Table 2 summarizes key vulnerabilities reported across the OSCE sub-regions, highlighting how gender, age, disability and social status shape differentiated experiences of risk and access to support.

12 SEE 6.

13 CA 5; SEE 6; SEE 4; CA 1-3; CA 4; SEE 10.

14 SEE 12; CA 5.

15 SEE 12.

16 SEE 4; CA 1-3; CA 4; SEE 10.

Table 2. Gendered and other intersectional vulnerabilities reported* in the four OSCE sub-regions

Vulnerability	CA	SC	EE	SEE
Rural women having limited access to land, credit and agricultural support	X	X	X	X
Low female participation in energy sector and governance bodies	X	X	X	X
Limited renewable energy access affecting women's roles in rural areas	X	X	X	X
Women relying on informal agriculture for livelihoods	X	X	X	X
Women bearing disproportionate unpaid care burden during climate shocks	X	X	X	X
Women-headed households, single women and elderly women being more vulnerable to energy poverty	X	X	X	X
Men being seen as the stronger sex who shoulder the burden in times of crisis, which puts them at risk, especially physically	X	X	X	X
Men often being the first ones to migrate on account of climate impacts on livelihoods	X	X	X	X
Limited mobility for disabled people, particularly if displacement or forced migration occurs	X	X	X	X
Men being more exposed to pollutants or overheating owing to outdoor labour (air pollution, open sun, open air, work with pesticides, industries such as transport and construction, etc.)	X	X		X
Climate-induced wildfires reducing crop yields, thus affecting rural women		X	X	X
Women facing increased household responsibilities during war		X	X	
Young girls and boys facing disrupted schooling in the aftermath of climate shocks	X	X		
Girls more likely to be withdrawn from school during climate crises to assist with household duties; boys more likely to leave school to seek economic activities to help at home	X			
Disasters destroying infrastructure, which in turn negatively affects schooling and access to education	X			
Single mothers and elderly women using hazardous fuels		X		
Communities with limited access to basic services feeling the effects of climate change especially strongly, e.g., the Roma and Sinti communities living in settlements				X
Emergency response toolkits often lacking women's hygiene products				X

**Based on interviews carried out by the authors with key interviewees*

While the patterns presented in Table 2 offer an overview of recurring vulnerabilities, the interviews also revealed more specific and context-dependent dynamics that warrant closer attention. The following sections expand on them in greater detail.

3.2.1 Livelihoods

Climate change is placing growing pressure on livelihoods across the four OSCE sub-regions, particularly in rural and agriculture-dependent areas where environmental degradation directly undermines food production and income generation. These risks are deeply gendered, reflecting differentiated access to land, credit, training and decision-making. In many communities, men's migration to cities or abroad has left women as the primary labour force in agriculture, even though they remain excluded from land ownership, agricultural extension services and leadership positions.[17] Rather than signalling empowerment, this shift often increases women's work burdens without improving their rights, resources or recognition.

Interviewees repeatedly stressed that livelihood was one of the areas where gendered and intersectional vulnerabilities were most visible. Across the sub-regions, women are heavily engaged in informal subsistence work, often caring for small plots of land near their homes.[18] Rural women typically carry a double burden – unpaid care work and household chores, plus agricultural labour – while being excluded from decision-making and deprived of access to productive resources.[19] Climate-related stresses – such as floods, droughts and shifting seasons – increase their workload, especially in water and food collection, while further limiting their ability to adapt owing to poor access to land, credit, technology and agricultural services.[20] As one interviewee from the South Caucasus observed, "Because of climate change, this income is lost. Women have less access to land ownership, they get less access to services … this means they are carrying the double burden of social and gender roles, and also the burden of work." [21]

In Eastern Europe, respondents highlighted how climate disruption directly threatened subsistence-based livelihoods: "With climate change, it will not be possible to grow crops, and the people will lose this source of income, and these are usually women and especially elderly women in the rural areas."[22] Similar concerns were raised in South-Eastern Europe, where rural women often live in remote areas with limited access to support services, making it harder for them to recover from shocks such as floods or droughts. Women-headed households were also identified as particularly vulnerable owing to their having less in the way of financial resources and weaker social networks.[23]

Meanwhile, men face a different set of livelihood-related vulnerabilities. With climate change eroding traditional provider roles, some men experience psychological distress or social dislocation. As one interviewee explained, "Men face pressure to provide economically in climate-affected sectors. Loss of livelihood can affect identity, leading to stress or depression."[24] In several contexts, this dynamic has been linked to increased outmigration or even a rise in gender-based violence, as shifts in gender roles and patriarchal family structure create tensions and instability within households and communities (Brox Brodtkorb et al., forthcoming).

Despite these challenges, rural women demonstrate remarkable adaptive capacity. They diversify crops, manage household energy, and sustain subsistence production even with limited resources.[25] Yet these efforts are often individual and unsupported. As one interviewee from South-Eastern Europe put it, "There is no systematic approach. Women are trying to address this individually, or via international organizations and civil society."[26] This highlights the urgent need for gender-responsive, community-based adaptation strategies that recognize both the burdens borne by rural women and the contributions they make to building climate resilience.

17 CA 1-3; CA 8; SEE 1; SEE 4; SC 4; SC 5-6

18 SEE 7; SEE 3.

19 CA 8.

20 SEE 1; CA 1-3; SC 4; SC 5-6.

21 SC 4.

22 EE 3-4.

23 SEE 4.

24 CA 9.

25 CA 8; CA 11; SC 4.

26 SEE 2.

3.2.2 Migration and mobility

Climate change is increasingly shaping migration and mobility patterns, particularly where environmental degradation, livelihood loss and disaster risks make it difficult for people to remain in place. This mobility is deeply gendered and shaped by intersecting norms, roles and power structures that determine who moves, who stays, and under what conditions (Smith 2022).

> **In many rural contexts across the OSCE sub-regions, men are reported to be the first to migrate in response to slow-onset climate impacts or declining agricultural livelihoods.**

As several interviewees explained, men typically leave to seek construction or agricultural work abroad, either seasonally or permanently.[27] This pattern reflects both the social expectations of men as providers and their greater access to mobility, decision-making power and financial resources. However, men also face risks when they migrate: when employment is precarious or exploitative, the loss of traditional roles and separation from family can result in psychological stress and social isolation. These vulnerabilities are rarely addressed in policy frameworks (Brox Brodtkorb et al., forthcoming).

At the same time, women often stay behind to manage households, care for children and the elderly, and sustain subsistence agriculture.[28] Their power to influence migration decisions (either their own or that of male relatives) is often limited.[29] This gendered migration pattern reinforces caregiving burdens on women and girls and deepens the rural-urban divide. In Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, interviewees noted that this dynamic contributed to the depopulation of villages, leaving behind elderly populations whose vulnerabilities increase owing to neglect and economic marginalization.[30]

Interviewees from Central Asia, South-Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus noted how recent environmental and climate events such as floods, mudflows, landslides and other localized disasters were driving internal migration and displacement of affected communities.[31] One interviewee in Central Asia even noted that these populations were referred to as "ecological migrants".[32] Displacement further heightens vulnerabilities. It was noted that elderly people and persons with disabilities, especially in rural areas, faced significant barriers to mobility and often remained in hazard-prone areas with limited access to infrastructure, transport or recovery services.[33]

While climate was rarely cited as the sole driver of migration or displacement, its indirect role in exacerbating economic precarity and deepening political instability was acknowledged, particularly in regions with rising nationalism and under-resourced public services.[34] In such contexts, displacement can heighten competition over resources, strain public institutions, and fuel local tensions, particularly where host communities and incoming populations face shared vulnerabilities (Tarif et al. 2023).

In many cases, migration patterns mirror patriarchal family dynamics: interviewees reported that women may follow male relatives for family reunification rather than migrate independently, limiting their agency and heightening their exposure to risk.[35] In other cases, as one Eastern European interviewee noted, women are actually more likely to migrate owing to the ease with which they can find care work in Western Europe, leaving behind single-father households and bringing about shifts in traditional gender roles and family structures.[36]

27 CA 1-3; SC 1; SC 2-3; SC 5-6; SEE 12; SEE 7.

28 SC 8; CA 1-3.

29 CA 5; SC 2-3; EE 3-4; SEE 12.

30 EE 3-4; SC 2-3; SC 8.

31 CA 1-3; CA 5; CA 8; CA 9; SC 1; SC 2-3; SC 5-6; SEE 12; SEE 7.

32 CA 8.

33 SEE 1; CA 1-3; SC 4; SC 5-6.

34 SEE 7; SEE 3.

35 SEE 2; SC 2-3; SC 8; CA 1-3; CA 9.

36 EE 1; SC 4.

3.2.3 Institutional capacity and governance

A number of interviewees noted that governance was a key issue as a barrier to decisive, sustainable action to address short-, medium- and long-term climate-related security risks. While shifting political contexts, governance and institutional capacity issues were raised in all sub-regions, interviewees from Central Asia, the South Caucasus and South-Eastern Europe brought them up more frequently than those from Eastern Europe. In South-Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, the trend, according to interviewees, is for governments to prioritize corporate interests over the environmental and health needs of the population, and to pursue corrupt infrastructure development that threatens biodiversity and skirts democratic processes.[37] In Central Asia, interviewees also pointed toward corruption in development space and government relationships with corporations.[38]

In many cases, State institutions lack the capacity to monitor impacts of climate change and adopt measures for adaptation and mitigation – a problem which is exacerbated by a general lack of relevant data.[39] Some interviewees interpreted their governments' lack of investment in mitigation, adaptation and disaster response as short-sightedness and, in some cases, as symptomatic of corruption and prioritization of multinational business partnerships over human security and social needs, particularly in Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe.[40] This being the case, these regions contend with limited systematic responsiveness to the changing circumstances, with people either being left on their own or having to over-rely on international organizations to remedy their situation or find solutions for them.[41] Competing interests, political pressure and consolidation of government resources can also negatively impact how governments respond to community-level needs related to climate and security risks. It is also becoming harder for tools and programmes to reach the most local level, particularly when financial resources are scarce or unregulated. If national governments set their priorities in this way, garnering political will to pursue clean energy reforms or just transitions become nearly impossible.[42]

> **Marginalized communities, including women, that are already under-represented in decision-making and political processes are more prone to the risks created by poor governance and lack of institutional capacity.**

These are also the first communities to feel the effects of biodiversity loss or other environmental damage resulting from practices such as over-mining or other unregulated infrastructure expansion, because they typically have less social and financial stability, are easier to displace owing to a lack of political power, and often rely on agriculture for their livelihoods.[43] In South-Eastern Europe, the environmental defenders and climate activists who come out of these communities often face significant hurdles in order to have their voices heard and protect the ecosystems within which they live, which are in turn further endangered by existing social dynamics such as gender inequality.[44] Some face threats of violence or other targeted harassment; one example of this is expanded on in case study 1, see below.

37 SC 2-3; CA 8; SC 8.

38 CA 5; CA 7.

39 SEE 5; CA 8; SEE 10; SEE 1; SEE 4; SEE 6; CA 7; CA 1-3; SEE 9; SEE 3; EE 1; SEE 2; CA 9.

40 SEE 9; CA 7; SEE 1; SEE 7; CA 8; SEE 2; SC 8.

41 SEE 1; SEE 2; CA 8; SEE K10; EE 1.

42 SEE 12.

43 CA 5; SEE 1; CA 7; SC 1; SEE 11; SEE 9; CA 8; SEE 3; SC 2-3; SC 4.

44 SEE 2.

Case study 1: Targeting of environmental justice activists through SLAPPs

When community leaders, civil society organizations or journalists, or simply concerned citizens, take action as environmental defenders, the parties they target sometimes respond with what are known as Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs). These abusive lawsuits "aim to silence those working in the public interest on matters such as fundamental rights, the environment, and public access to information" (European Commission 2024). They seek to silence or intimidate vocal members of the public who "criticize or expose the wrongdoing of those in power, including governments and corporations", and are deliberately designed to demoralize and drain resources from individuals (most often journalists or activists) (Amnesty International 2022). As distraction or intimidation measures, they are intended to have a chilling or self-censoring effect on public critique, advocacy, assembly and journalism, unduly assigning criminality to their targets. SLAPPs can go on for years, draining financial resources, time, attention and energy for the targeted individuals or groups. In the sub-regions studied for this report, twelve out of sixteen jurisdictions had multiple recorded SLAPPs between 2010 and 2023.[45]

SLAPPs are on the rise globally and can be found across all four sub-regions studied in this report, though data is mostly available for South-Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. In 2023, environmental issues made up the second most targeted subject of all the SLAPP suits reported in Europe, behind corruption (CASE 2024).

Some interviewees noted that corruption undermined environmental protection, because of business and profit outcomes or other capital incentives being prioritized over social goods, climate adaptation, environmental protection and clean energy transitions. It is a fact that environmental SLAPP litigation is often carried out by oil and gas companies, "big agriculture", and other corporate interests.

As there is very little information available on the gendered patterns of SLAPPs except in cases of gender-based violence litigation, determining the gender element of environmental SLAPPs will require further research. SLAPP litigation is often accompanied by online smear campaigns that include sexist narratives and misogynistic attacks on women activists. When an environmental defender in the South Caucasus publicly criticized environmental damages caused by a gold mine, for example, she and other activists were not only sued and surveilled, but also attacked in a targeted online smear campaign. The campaign sexualized and degraded the women activists, notably by discrediting their professional skills in an attempt to undermine public trust in their work (International Federation for Human Rights 2019).

45 As publicly available SLAPP data for Central Asia is very limited, none is included in this analysis. Original research for this report found that between 2010 and 2023, South-Eastern Europe recorded 128 SLAPPs, the South Caucasus 38, and Eastern Europe 44.

Another recent example from South-Eastern Europe illustrates how community grievances intersect with gender and political marginalization. An interviewee reported the use of SLAPP cases to suppress environmental activism, including cases targeting women environmental defenders. In one instance, two young women – students from low-income backgrounds – faced prohibitive legal costs and institutional pressure after speaking out against an environmentally harmful project led by a Western European hydropower company. They have relied on support from activist networks as they publicly contest the charges; the legal proceedings have been going on for nearly three years.[46] While power imbalance is innate to any SLAPP case, pre-existing gender norms and societal imbalance dictate that women can face stronger pressure and have less access to the financial and institutional means to successfully seek justice and win out against corporate or government litigation.

To date, the approach of multilateral institutions to addressing SLAPPs has been focused on journalism and media. For example, in April 2024, the EU adopted Directive 2024/1069 on protecting persons who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded claims or abusive court proceedings, and the OSCE's Representative on Freedom of the Media has spoken about SLAPPs in the context of disinformation and legal harassment of journalists (OSCE 2024). However, with rising tension around climate change and increasing numbers of cases against environmental activists, more attention explicitly directed at protection for environmental defenders is needed. Likewise, given the patterns identified elsewhere in this report, SLAPP cases may further discourage women and young people from participating in political action, activism, public advocacy, or media because they already have more limited resources and are more structurally disadvantaged than other groups. Future legislation must therefore also be gender-responsive and protection-focused, considering the unique risks these groups face.

46 SEE 1; Amnesty International 2022.

3.2.4 Decision-making

Women are under-represented in climate decision-making at every level. For example, increasing women's political participation is a slow process in the jurisdictions of all four sub-regions considered in this report, owing to issues such as lack of political will on the part of power-holders and historical patterns of exclusion from public life. At the household level, traditional gender roles often dictate that women defer to their husbands for any decision-making at the community or household levels (e.g., in regards to crop diversification in the light of loss of livelihoods, or whether or not to migrate).[47] Young people, too, are often under-represented in climate decision-making, though they tend to be more "climate aware" than the older generations, and are therefore over-represented in climate activism.[48]

According to some interviewees, there can be tension within civil society on account of larger, more institutionalized or professionalized organizations tending to have more access to decision-making spaces. This often results in further marginalization of more localized groups or issues.[49] For climate change in particular, consultations are perceived to happen more at the highest, expert level, rather than the public being engaged in wider dialogue, or gendered and intersectional needs and vulnerabilities being factored in.[50] This often leads to women being excluded, as – at least in part on account of gendered stereotypes – they are not seen as having the technical expertise required to participate in such discussions.[51]

According to interviewees, civil society engagement has been fairly common in the development of National Adaptation Plans (climate NAPs) and WPS NAPs in the sub-regions, often including gender expertise and representation from other vulnerable populations. This has been helped by the involvement of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes such as UNDP, particularly given the capacity limitations and lack of understanding of "gender" in governments.[52] While civil society participation is beneficial, it can be difficult to bring intersectional and localized perspectives into national-level processes.[53] Other interviewees point to a consistent sidelining of gender and climate priorities alike, particularly with rising securitization and military spending in parts of the OSCE area.[54]

Quota systems, though imperfect, can improve representation of historically under-represented groups. However, quota requirements should be gender-responsive; otherwise, they have the potential to backfire. An interviewee from Central Asia observed that a 30 per cent quota for youth representation in local municipalities had improved young people's political participation and empowerment.[55] However, there was no gender quota within that youth quota, making boys over-represented among youth representatives even though girls might want to be involved. Interviewees from both Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe pointed out that when gender quotas existed only at the national political level, without a similar municipal quota, girls and young women were significantly limited in their access to formal decision-making power, which would very likely have a negative effect on their participation throughout their lives.[56] In the South Caucasus and South-Eastern Europe, gender quotas not taking into consideration the mobility challenges faced by rural women or the care requirements for women wealthy enough to afford external childcare, for example, could have a homogenizing effect in which the women able to participate represent a limited geographical, socio-economic, age or racial scope.[57]

Across the OSCE sub-regions, interviewees emphasized that international organizations and donor agencies had played a key role in opening civic and institutional space for the participation of women and young people in climate governance. In some contexts, it was noted that donor organizations were requiring gender mainstream-

47 CA 1-3; CA 8.

48 EE 1; CA 5; SEE 2; SEE 4.

49 SEE 2; SEE 12; SEE 10; CA 6; CA 1-3; EE 5-6.

50 SEE 2.

51 SEE 4.

52 CA 1-3.

53 EE 5-6.

54 SC 2-3; EE 3-4; SEE 12; EE 5-6; SEE 10; SEE 7; SEE 3; CA 5.

55 CA 5.

56 CA 5; SEE 4.

57 SC 2-3; SC 5-6; SEE 4.

ing and gender action plans, making it easier for local organizations to engage with governments that previously resisted the topic. The European integration process had also created important entry points for inclusive environmental governance, particularly in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. One interviewee noted that, "because of European integration … positive things are happening," citing the fact of the EU Green Deal being part of the integration protocol as an incentive mechanism for integrating States.[58]

Youth participation is similarly being driven by external actors such as UNICEF or the OSCE, as youth delegations are participating in COP delegations and national consultations on climate policies such as the NDCs. Interviewees noted that when they launch a gender or youth-inclusive initiative, they "go directly to the international organizations, never to the government", though this raises questions about whether it would not be better for inclusion to be institutionalized within State structures rather than outsourced.[59]

Case study 2. Women and youth participation and leadership in climate adaptation

Across the OSCE sub-regions, women and youth are already leading innovative efforts to adapt to climate change, build resilience and promote environmental stewardship – often with limited resources and recognition. These initiatives demonstrate the importance of supporting local leadership and the transformative potential of inclusive climate action.

In Central Asia, the Central Asia Youth for Water (CAY4W) network has emerged as a key platform empowering young people to engage in water governance. The initiative brings together youth from across the region to co-develop solutions, raise awareness and participate in cross-border co-operation on shared water resources. Notably, the network emphasizes gender equality in leadership, ensuring that young women's voices are represented in climate and water diplomacy (CAY4W, n.d.).

In Armenia, the Women in Climate and Energy (WICE) initiative is breaking gender barriers in a traditionally male-dominated sector. Through mentorship, capacity-building and policy engagement, WICE supports women professionals working in the energy transition and climate governance. The initiative fosters intergenerational dialogue and highlights the role of women not only as beneficiaries but as experts and decision-makers in shaping resilient energy systems (WICE, n.d.).

In Ukraine, the Green Road network of ecovillages and permaculture communities illustrates women-led climate adaptation and crisis response. Initially created to provide shelter to people displaced by war, the initiative quickly expanded to include agroecological food production, livelihood opportunities, and education. Women have been central to its success, demonstrating strong leadership and advancing sustainable community-based resilience strategies (Shevchuk and Duncanson 2024).

In Serbia, the Save the Village Association has empowered over two hundred rural women through training programmes and local engagement initiatives supported by the EU and UN Women. The initiative focuses on strengthening women's voices in self-government and enhancing their role in rural development. By promoting rural tourism as a catalyst for change, the Association not only creates economic opportunities but also positions

58 SC 8.

59 CA 10.

rural women as key actors in building climate-resilient and socially inclusive communities (UN Women 2024).

These examples also highlight the intergenerational and intersectional nature of local leadership. Many initiatives intentionally bridge age, gender and class divides – recognizing, for instance, that young people often act as entry points to engage more women or introduce new technologies. As interviewees in the South Caucasus noted, "At first, youth was not our target, but we saw that through youth we can reach more women."[60] In Central Asia, young people made contact with peers from neighbouring countries for the first time through the Regional Conference of Youth on Climate Change, organized by the OSCE in the past three years (OSCE 2023). These new relationships have helped stimulate them to create a new youth-led platform aimed at preparing young people from the region to engage in international climate diplomacy forums.[61] In South-Eastern Europe, environmental activists have reported that solidarity and knowledge-sharing from more experienced human rights activists have helped them navigate legal frameworks and create solidarity to push for broader institutional change.

Such cross-cutting alliances underscore that effective climate adaptation is not only technical but deeply social and political – built through shared experiences, collective action and inclusive governance.

60 SC 5-6.

61 CA 10.

3.2.5 Impacts of armed conflict and militarization

In both Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, armed conflict and militarization were identified as key factors shaping both environmental degradation and gendered vulnerabilities to climate risks. Interviewees emphasized how conflict weakened environmental protection, disrupted infrastructure, and diverted political attention away from long-term climate adaptation efforts.[62] At the same time, growing militarization reinforced patriarchal norms and limited the participation of women, young people and marginalized groups in decision-making.[63] These dynamics undermine efforts to advance the interconnected goals of climate resilience, gender equality and inclusive recovery.

Gendered impacts of armed conflict and militarization are often overlooked in climate and security discussions. Several interviewees described deeply rooted national expectations in which "boys are expected to defend their country" while women "are valued for raising future soldiers".[64] These militarized narratives influence how roles and responsibilities are assigned both within households and in public institutions. As one interviewee noted, current efforts to promote women's participation in peace and security through the WPS agenda often frame inclusion narrowly within militarized terms, focusing on women's roles in defence and resilience rather than in governance or environmental protection.[65]

Post-conflict environments often intensify gendered inequalities. One interviewee described how following armed conflicts, rates of domestic violence spiked significantly, particularly when psychological support for returning soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder was lacking.[66] This aligns with evidence from other conflict-affected settings, where trauma, economic insecurity and shifting gender roles contribute to increased gender-based violence (Smith 2022). Women's caregiving burdens also increase as they assume responsibilities for elderly relatives, children and people with disabilities – often under challenging conditions such as electricity outages and service interruptions that further complicate household management. In some cases, women were also expected to contribute to household income through informal labour, subsistence farming or caregiving-related services.[67]

In Ukraine, ongoing warfare has shifted climate concerns down the policy agenda (Zhou and Magalhães Teixeira, forthcoming), with some interviewees noting that "thinking about climate change is a privilege you can only afford when society is safe".[68] Still, the long-term impacts of conflict – such as the destruction of ecosystems, resources and energy systems – are expected to disproportionately affect women, youth and low-income groups who already face limited access to resources and decision-making structures. One interviewee warned that militarization might deepen existing gender inequalities over time – as "men who are at the frontlines will have more social and political power" – unless deliberate efforts were made to increase political and social leadership on the part of women and young people.[69]

These findings underscore how armed conflict and militarization can deepen both environmental degradation and gendered inequalities, with long-term consequences for climate resilience and inclusive recovery. The erosion of ecosystems, disruption of services, and narrowing of political space all contribute to heightened vulnerability – particularly for women, youth and marginalized groups. At the same time, militarized narratives and institutional structures mean that the very voices that are needed to rebuild more equitable and sustainable systems may be sidelined. Recognizing the compounded effects of conflict on both social and environmental systems is critical for understanding how recovery and climate adaptation processes unfold – and who they serve. Without deliberate efforts to address these intersecting dynamics, recovery may reproduce existing inequalities rather than transform them.

62 SC 2-3; EE 3-4; SC 9.

63 EE 3-4.

64 SC 2-3; EE 3-4.

65 SC 2-3.

66 SC 2-3.

67 EE 3-4.

68 EE 3-4.

69 EE 3-4.

3.2.6 Health and mortality

Health and mortality constitute an area where many interviewees emphasized men's unique experiences as well as women's, and in addition the specific effects of climate change on child and youth health.

For example, interviewees noted that men suffered significant detrimental health effects from air pollution, pesticide poisoning or overheating owing to the type of labour they typically engage in. Yet they are often left out (at least as explicitly gendered subjects) of assessments or policy interventions to address such risks. Indeed, interview data suggests that men are often not included at all in data collection, thus reinforcing existing assumptions about who is or is not "vulnerable" to certain risks. In the example of worsening air pollution, anecdotal evidence challenges those assumptions.[70] Interviewees also pointed to indoor pollution caused by highly toxic fire fuels such as plastic or waste oil, a problem which – owing to societal roles in cooking or caregiving – typically most affects women in poor or rural households, single mothers or elderly women.[71]

Furthermore, people whose livelihoods hinge on land use or who work outdoors (e.g., construction workers, farmers or transportation workers) and people who are particularly prone to health risks related to climate hazards (e.g., firefighters or other first responders) are often not informed about these risks or do not have access to protective equipment or knowledge-sharing.[72] Communities with limited access to basic services feel the effects of climate change especially strongly, especially nomadic or transient communities in South-Eastern Europe or refugee populations living in settlements.[73]

Mortality rates related to extreme weather events and other climate-related security risks vary depending on a number of factors, including gender. In many cases, women's limited access to information, and primary responsibility for children can slow their responses to disasters and increase mortality rates. Pregnancy is also a compounding health factor, with pregnant women facing higher health risks owing to extreme heat and air pollution.[74] Interviewees from the South Caucasus, South-Eastern Europe and Central Asia noted particular health vulnerabilities for men as well, who, for example, die more often in floods or wildfires owing to their disproportionate representation as official first responders or rescue actors, as well as their high rates of participation in certain riskier industries such as mining.[75]

While gender-based violence is not directly caused by climate change, global rates tend to increase in times of crisis, particularly with regard to domestic violence against women and children (Smith 2022; Spotlight Initiative 2025). This is borne out in the OSCE area, where interviewees from all four sub-regions noted that climate-related disasters and security risks exacerbated gender-based violence, particularly against women and in under-resourced and already marginalized communities.[76] Two interviewees in South-Eastern Europe also pointed to heightened rates of suicide among men linked to decreasing economic opportunities as a secondary or tertiary effect of climate change, compounded by societal pressure on men to be providers.[77]

3.2.7 Awareness-raising, access to information, education

Populations' and decision-makers' access to information regarding climate issues is a challenge that was named in almost every interview conducted for this report. Lack of access to information limits preparedness with regard to climate-related security risks, particularly at the community level. And without comprehensive information-sharing, education or data collection on these issues, the interconnectedness of gender, climate and security remains an abstract idea rather than helping States, communities, regions and individuals to build in-

70 CA 5; SEE 6; SEE 4.

71 SEE 6; SC 5-6; CA 5.

72 SEE 5; SEE 6; CA 6; CA 1-3; EE 5-6; SEE 12.

73 SEE 6; CA 7; EE 1; SEE 2; EE 1; EE 2; SEE 12; SEE 4; SEE 3; SEE 8; SEE 7.

74 SEE 4.

75 SEE 1; CA 5; SEE 3; SC 2-3; CA 8; SC 8.

76 SEE 2; CA 7; CA 1-3; SC 1; SC 2-3; SC 9.

77 SEE 2; SEE 5.

tegrated approaches to climate risk prevention, mitigation and response.

> **Several interviewees noted that it was only when people were directly impacted by environmental events that they became aware of climate change or the growing risk in their regions.[78]**

As one interviewee succinctly noted, "It often takes something happening directly to a person for them to accept the reality and the urgency."[79] Rural communities are especially lacking in reliable information, and interviews indicate that rural women tend to feel the divide more than men, because rural women tend to be less mobile and have fewer opportunities for formal political participation. Building on this, a recent study shows that when populations understand extreme weather events as linked directly to climate change – a connection that can and should be shared with less informed populations – they are more likely to give essential public support to climate policies (Cologna et al. 2025).

Even information-sharing about participatory consultations on climate policy matters does not reach a wide range of populations in the sub-regions studied, or the information is presented in a way that is not accessible to marginalized communities. For example, if a municipality publishes information on social media or their municipal website, people with limited or no access to the Internet will not see it and therefore lose their opportunity to engage. In addition to technological challenges, language, literacy level, and geographical location, it is clear that gendered cultural norms dictating who has access to information outside the home or schooling (in some cases high-quality schooling), and exclusionary stereotypes about certain groups can all limit access to knowledge on climate-related issues, including their connection to everyday life, livelihoods and physical security.[80] One interviewee noted that municipalities supported by international agencies and donors tended to do better in this than those without external support.[81]

Education at the community level is very important, particularly for school-age children. Increasing young people's awareness of the available training activities for responding to various crises, for example, instils not only practical knowledge and mindset change, but also fosters solidarity and community care, which interviewees from South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia noted could be lacking with regard to climate-related security concerns (particularly in disaster situations). Interviewees in South-Eastern Europe and Central Asia note that instilling community care values around crisis and disaster response, for example, can help to decentralize responsibilities for response to those crises and close gaps left by poor governance, through volunteer fire brigades, for example, or flooding response.[82] Educating young people about complex issues related to climate at an early age also helps to engage them in decision-making early on. As one interviewee noted, if young people feel ownership over their futures and the futures of their communities, they are more likely to stay and help make those better futures into reality.[83]

78 CA 1-3; EE 5-6; CA 5; SEE 5; SC 8; SC 5-6; SEE 3; SEE 2; SEE 1.

79 CA 1-3.

80 SEE 6; CA 5; CA 7; SEE 2; SC 9; SEE 12; CA 10; SC 5-6.

81 SEE 6.

82 SEE 2; EE 1; SEE 9; SEE 5; CA 5; CA 7; SEE 7.

83 SEE 6.

3.2.8 Natural resource management

Across the sub-regions, interviewees pointed to environmental degradation – driven by both climate impacts and human activity – as a growing challenge for the equitable and sustainable use of natural resources, especially land, forests and water.

> **These dynamics often intersect with social inequalities and governance challenges, shaping how access is distributed and contested.**

This includes the exclusion of local communities from decision-making processes, which has a negative impact on trust in institutions and on social cohesion.

Interviewees described how women and other marginalized groups are often excluded from decision-making processes related to land use, irrigation systems and forest management – even though they are frequently responsible for resource collection, food production and household adaptation. These exclusions can increase labour burdens and deepen climate-related risks, especially when governance is top-down or captured by local elites (Merkle and Price 2024).

Amid these tensions, interviewees highlighted the importance of traditional knowledge as a tool for sustainable resource management. Yet such knowledge – often held and put into practice by women and members of the older generation – is rarely integrated into formal decision-making. As one interviewee remarked, "People have known for a long time what the environment needs, but they are not asked."[84]

Without inclusive and participatory governance, climate-related pressures on natural resources risk amplifying social tensions and reproducing structural inequalities. Ensuring equitable access to land and water – and to meaningful participation in their governance – will be essential to building climate resilience.

84 CA 7.

Case study 3: Gendered impacts of water and energy insecurity[85]

Across the four OSCE sub-regions, the effects of climate change are placing increasing stress on water resources and energy systems – two deeply connected sectors, particularly in regions reliant on hydropower and irrigated agriculture. In Central Asia and the South Caucasus, melting glaciers already trigger disasters such as glacial lake outbursts and mudflows, while also threatening long-term freshwater and energy availability. In regions where hydropower provides most electricity and agriculture depends heavily on irrigation, declining water levels can disrupt both energy production and food systems, exacerbating economic pressures and compounding existing vulnerabilities.

The war in Ukraine further complicates energy supply and security. Over and above the direct destruction of energy infrastructure, the war has severely disrupted electricity supply chains, reduced domestic energy production, and contributed to soaring energy prices both regionally and globally (Conflict and Environment Observatory/Zoï Environment Network, 2024). These impacts are disproportionately felt by women and low-income households, particularly in rural areas where access to alternative energy sources is limited, putting further strain on security and resilience.

Women are often the most affected by these insecurities. As the primary managers of household water and energy, single mothers, elderly women and those with low-income are especially and disproportionately exposed to resource poverty. Interviewees noted that water scarcity increased the time and effort women and girls spent collecting water, aggravating the physical burden upon them and reducing time for education, income generation or rest. During energy disruptions, women resorted to burning highly toxic fuels such as plastic or waste oil for heating and cooking, putting household health at risk. Low water levels reduce hydroelectric output just as demand peaks, and ageing or fragmented infrastructure increases system vulnerability.

Despite their central role in managing energy at the household level, women remain under-represented in water and energy sector decision-making. In Armenia and Ukraine, interviewees reported that war and armed conflict have prompted some shifts in gender roles, with women entering operational or support roles in energy utilities and infrastructure when men are mobilized to the front lines. However, without broader structural change, such shifts may expose women to new forms of precarity – such as low wages, informal contracts or unsafe working conditions – rather than transforming gender relations in the sector concerned.

In the OSCE sub-regions, community-led initiatives are emerging that offer scalable models for inclusive energy resilience and security. *RePower Ukraine* is a local initiative that installs solar panels in hospitals and shelters to strengthen energy security during wartime disruptions. Women make up 60 per cent of the team, and the initiative also retrains displaced persons and veterans, supporting inclusive recovery and workforce resilience (Zahorodnia 2025). In Tajikistan, the youth-led organization *Little Earth* works with rural and mountainous communities to promote climate education, solar energy access and environmental stewardship, with a strong emphasis on engaging women, youth, and ethnic minorities. The organization directly addresses energy security by pro-

85 SE 4; SC 5-6; SEE 6; CA 1-3; CA 8; SEE 10; EE 3-4.

viding efficient stoves that reduce fuel use, harmful emissions and cooking time. They also provide shower bags that heat water for use at home or on remote summer pastures, accompanying the nomad lifestyle of traditional groups (Little Earth, n.d.). The OSCE notes that such efforts are being complemented and scaled up by the Energy Security initiative on supporting communities affected by energy poverty and instability, particularly in the Tajik-Afghan border area.[86]

On a regional level, the *Women in Water Management Network in Central Asia and Afghanistan*, established and supported by the OSCE, engages female water experts in joint capacity- and skill-building activities to improve gender equality in decision-making on transboundary water resources. The network provides women with tailored training and educational programmes and helps them access new job opportunities and advance into managerial and leadership positions. It has also enhanced their visibility by involving them in delegations to major international water and climate events, offering a platform for meaningful engagement and exchange.[87]

In many parts of the OSCE area, just transitions and inclusive energy strategies remain underdeveloped. The lack of mid-level actors capable of implementing green technologies, weak institutional support, and limited civil society participation continue to hinder inclusive energy transformation, especially in countries reliant on fossil fuels.

86 **https://www.osce.org/oceea/575587**

87 **https://siwi.org/women-water-management-central-asia-afghanistan/ca-a-network-members**

3.2.9 Political and economic grievances

Across the OSCE sub-regions – but particularly in Central Asia, the South Caucasus and South-Eastern Europe – grievances are emerging at the intersection of climate change, environmental degradation and resource governance. Interviewees described growing dissatisfaction among rural and low-income communities, who are often most affected by extractive activities and large-scale infrastructure development, even projects connected to climate mitigation, but are least included in decisions about land, water and development. These grievances are not only environmental or economic but also deeply political, shaped by questions of power and inclusion.

Hydropower development was cited as a recurring source of tension in mountainous and riverine areas, where poorly communicated infrastructure projects have led to local protests. In several cases, interviewees described contested public hearings, operations being halted, and broader mobilizations around democratic participation, transparency and community consent.[88] Women's exclusion from these processes was repeatedly noted, despite their roles in managing water use for household and agricultural needs. Interviewees also emphasized that even when women were formally invited to participate in meetings and consultations, the process was often not genuinely gender-responsive. Sessions were generally scheduled during times when women were expected to collect children from school or perform household chores, effectively limiting their ability to engage.[89]

Mining projects are another key source of grievance, particularly in areas experiencing rapid environmental change. Respondents highlighted the negative effects of extractive activity on land, water and biodiversity – including pollution, forest loss and long-term health concerns.[90] These burdens disproportionately affect women, who are responsible for collecting water, growing food and protecting family health. At the same time, men working in extractive industries or agriculture face high exposure to pollutants, unsafe working conditions and respiratory illness. Yet across all the sub-regions, women and other marginalized groups were described as being consistently sidelined in decision-making, despite bearing the brunt of the environmental risks. As one respondent noted, "All solutions require resources, which women or anyone else who is not a profit-maker doesn't have."[91]

These grievances were compounded by a perceived lack of government accountability and, in some contexts, restrictions on civic space that hindered public scrutiny.[92] Importantly, extractive projects were also viewed as symptomatic of deeper inequalities within the broader OSCE area. As one interviewee put it, "If we are going to produce batteries, we are going to damage resources and agricultural land … and all of this for rich Western European countries to be able to drive their fancy electric cars."[93] Such concerns underscore how climate mitigation, if not designed equitably, risks extractive dynamics being reproduced and power imbalances between marginalized communities and wealthier States driving global climate agendas becoming entrenched.

3.2.10 Gendered assumptions and stereotypes

In all four sub-regions studied for this report, societal notions about identity, particularly gender identity, significantly affect and in some cases exacerbate vulnerability to climate-related security risks. These gendered assumptions and stereotypes about women, men, girls and boys are deeply engrained and influence all the other issue areas noted earlier.

The conflation of "gender" with "women", "women and girls", or "women and children" is a persistent problem in international peace and security (Carpenter 2006; Enloe 1990). This has been especially widely critiqued in security, humanitarian and development spaces, but the policy mapping below shows that it also occurs in climate policies. Women tend to be assumed, by default, to be always having gendered experiences, while men are

88 CA 5; SEE 1; SC 8.

89 SC 4; SC 5-6.

90 SC 2-3; CA 8; SC 8.

91 SEE 9.

92 CA 8; SC 7.

93 SEE 9.

far less frequently understood to be gendered subjects. This often plays out through the protector-protected binary, in which men are understood to be strong, protective and agentive, and women to be passive victims requiring protection (Enloe 1990). Interviewees in all four sub-regions noted similar stereotypes and assumptions playing out in the climate policy and implementation spaces.[94] Indeed, these cultural barriers can be stronger than bureaucratic barriers when it comes to women's social and political participation.

Acknowledging the privileges that come with certain gender identities is critical to understanding the vulnerabilities created by other identities. When implementation of programming around the gender-climate-security nexus includes men (and boys, where relevant) as uniquely gendered alongside women, and adaptation and mitigation work go hand in hand with continued work toward women's inclusion, the implementation will be more effective at meeting whole-of-society needs. All gendered experiences and needs are interconnected.

Importantly, while gender mainstreaming is gaining traction across the sub-regions, it is not without its limits. Interviewees explained that equality between men and women was widely accepted, but discussions on feminism or the rights of sexual and gender minorities remained politically sensitive.[95] Still, even within these boundaries, gender-sensitive framing is no longer a taboo, and inclusion efforts continue to evolve.

94 SEE 2; SC 2-3; SC 1; CA 8; CA 6; EE 5-6; SEE 1; SEE 5.

95 SEE 2; SCA 8; CA 6; SEE 1; SEE 5.

4

4. "State of play" of the gender-climate-security nexus in policy

On the international stage, climate and gender policy both began in earnest in the 1990s with the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action toward the advancement of women's rights and gender equality. Following the adoption of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) in 2000 and the foundation of the women, peace and security agenda (WPS agenda), these policies took some time to take off internationally and gain traction in their implementation.

While the triple nexus connecting all three issues at the policy level remains underdeveloped, linkages between any two of the three issues have been established.

While the triple nexus of gender, climate and security explored in this report is often borne out organically at local, community levels, institutionalizing systemic change (notably by learning from those local experiences, practices or norms) is difficult if policies do not share language or central goals. In many cases, still, gender, climate and security policy documents are not integrated and do not speak to each other, which limits the effectiveness of the individual documents in the long term. Institutions that carry out these policies implement whatever actions are laid out in the documents. For example, if climate NAPs do not mainstream gender, or if WPS NAPs do not link climate as a key factor affecting modern human security concerns, these issues will remain siloed. Siloing risks the missing of crucial opportunities for integration between these inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing issues, given that "the realization of the WPS agenda requires transformations to social, political and, most importantly, economic structures that are precisely the same as the transformations needed to ward off greater climate catastrophe" (Cohn and Duncanson 2020).

4.1 Relevant policies and bodies

While research and policy addressing gender, climate and security issues together are still fairly limited, there are a wide range of policy types at international, regional, subregional and local levels through which gender-responsive action to address the linkages between climate change and security can be taken. At the subregional level, these include disaster risk reduction (DRR) policies, gender equality policies, quota requirements for political participation, and more. Multilateral institutions such as the United Nations (particularly the Security Council in the case of the triple nexus), the European Union and the OSCE also play an important role in calling on their mem-

ber or participating States to adhere to relevant shared commitments, including bringing a gender and climate perspective to the security discourse. One such example is OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/21 on strengthening co-operation to address the challenges caused by climate change (MC.DEC/3/21). This decision was adopted by consensus by the 57 OSCE participating States to promote the effective participation of women in decision-making processes on climate change prevention, mitigation and adaptation, and also girls where appropriate. It further encourages a multi-stakeholder approach in tackling climate change, not least through the active engagement of women's organizations.[96]

The policy mapping in section 4.2, below, analyses publicly available WPS National Action Plans, UNFCCC Nationally Determined Contributions, UNFCCC National Adaptation Plans, and national security policies in the sub-regions. The first three were chosen for analysis because they stem from shared international frameworks and therefore can be reasonably compared for patterns. National security policies have no such shared framework but are nevertheless relevant to the triple nexus. Those that are publicly available have been included here.

4.1.1 Trends in gender policies

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) was a progressive milestone for global commitments to advancing women's rights and gender equality. Critics now argue that much of the progressive foundation has been lost, particularly where security is concerned (Baldwin and Bertea 2024; Zakarian 2025). Five years later, UNSCR 1325 was adopted, establishing the foundation for what would become the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda, a framework for addressing the unique impact of conflict on women and girls through four pillars: protection, prevention, participation, and relief and recovery. Over the years, gender-related policies have become far more mainstream – despite slow initial uptake – and countries, regions, and even local municipalities in the OSCE area and throughout the world have adopted WPS Action Plans to guide implementation of the agenda, as well as gender equality policies and strategies at all levels.

National security strategies, often directly because of the WPS agenda, have increasingly included increasing women's participation in security institutions as a top priority, though this trend has faced criticism for "defanging" the feminist origins of the agenda, co-opting it into security spaces at the expense of peace efforts, and reinforcing the fallacy that "gender" refers only to women (Baldwin and Bertea 2024). Additional criticism notes that the agenda – like gender policies more generally – has over time become hyper-focused on superficial participation and women's protection (specifically from conflict-related violence), which can encourage stereotypes of women as perpetual victims without agency (Cronin-Furman, Gowrinathan, and Zakaria 2017). Critics also note that localization of gender policies is inadequate in much of the world, not least owing to elite control of civil society participation in decision-making processes (Sharman 2023). However, many best practices have also become firmly established, including the introduction of gender advisors and focal points across multilateral institutions, security institutions and all levels of many governments. Gender advisors and focal points contribute a great deal to mainstreaming and integrating gender perspectives and analysis in their institutions (DCAF 2015).

Within the ten UNSCRs comprising the United Nations WPS agenda, one – UNSCR 2242 (2015) – links the impacts of climate change to the broader scope of the agenda. The subsequent Secretary-General's Report on WPS (S/2019/800) expanded on this, naming climate change and environmental degradation as "poised to exacerbate the already increasing number of complex emergencies, which disproportionately affect women and girls". While the language used in UNSCR 2242 to create this link is cursory, its inclusion opened up opportunities for policymakers and practitioners alike to advocate for a better integration of gender equality, analysis, and mainstreaming and climate change and environmental issues.

96 OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/21 on strengthening co-operation to address the challenges caused by climate change (MC.DEC/3/21), **https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/507050**

4.1.2 Trends in climate policies

Climate policy has evolved from a marginal concern to a widely recognized global issue. Adopted in 1992, the UNFCCC entered into force in 1994, with the aim of achieving "stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. Such a level should be achieved within a time frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner" (UNFCCC 1992).

The 1997 Kyoto Protocol and 2015 Paris Agreement proceeded to build on the Convention by introducing binding (Kyoto) and non-binding (Paris) emission reduction commitments, which are specifically linked to human activity. The Paris Agreement represented a "turnaround in the global approach" to climate change with its call for "bottom-up" emissions reduction (Naser and Pearce 2022), and was a milestone for the international community. Attendance at, engagement with and attention to the annual Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP), which takes place to bring together key stakeholders and set goals for advancing the Paris Agreement's implementation, have grown exponentially, particularly since the Glasgow COP26 of 2021. COPs have traditionally functioned as opportunities to link climate change with a range of other issues, including security, as well as for civil society to access decision-makers and make their voices heard. However, recent years have brought critique over the commodification of COPs and sidelining of critical issues such as gender and indigenous rights in order to give priority to more powerful political and economic actors (Sharman 2023).

There has since been a growing body of work by the United Nations – particularly its Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – and regional organizations emphasizing how climate risks pose security risks at various levels. As climate change is increasingly recognized and discussed prominently in security spaces and its impacts are more severely felt, many argue that more can and should be done toward improving the connections between work on gender, climate and security (Smith 2020). As with gender, securitization of climate – referring broadly to the framing of climate risk as a security threat – is a growing concern for many, not least owing to risks of human rights violations, militarization, and the reinforcement of corporate interests over people's needs (Warner and Boas 2019; Baldwin and Hynes 2022; Cohn and Duncanson 2022).

4.1.3 Trends in security policies

While security policies are not the main focus of this study, the expanding definition of security in recent decades is relevant to its context. "Security" has moved from a mainly military, defence, and national concept rooted in the threat of armed conflict between two countries to the far broader concept of human security. The mainstreaming of human security began with its introduction as a concept in the United Nations' 1994 Human Development Report, which aimed to bring about a shift from national security to the well-being and safety of individuals (UNDP 1994). Over the last three decades, this more holistic approach to security has normalized the integration of numerous important topics into the global security landscape, notably human rights, development, peacebuilding, gender equality, disarmament and public health. In this tradition, climate issues are now increasingly being integrated into security architectures. The policy linkages between climate and security began in earnest with the 2007 United Nations Security Council open debate that first framed climate change as a threat-multiplier[97]. While there has been some progress, gender and climate could both be more systematically integrated into security policies, as indeed could the concept of human security itself. Prevention, a concept at the core of the human security concept, is still rarely present in security policy in the human security sense; putting this right would involve prioritizing tools such as early warning systems and addressing gendered root causes of conflict and climate risk, including gender inequality.

97 More information: **https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/news/climate-change-recognized-%E2%80%98threat-multiplier%E2%80%99-un-security-council-debates-its-impact-peace**

4.2 Mapping subregional policies and strategies

Internationally, there are two main frameworks which provide formats relevant to the triple nexus, but there is little guidance at the regional level on these topics and still less on the nexus. The WPS agenda is the key international framework. Since 2005, the WPS agenda implementation has been driven by National Action Plans (WPS NAPs) and, though to a far lesser extent, through regional action plans and local action plans as well (though the latter two are not analysed in this report). When it comes to climate change, the key framework is the 2015 Paris Agreement, which called both for the UNFCCC Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) at the State level and also for follow-on National [climate] Adaptation Plans (climate NAPs). Though security policies are relevant to the nexus, they are initiated at the national and sub-national levels and therefore do not have a corresponding international mandate such as the WPS agenda or the Paris Agreement.

All sixteen jurisdictions across the four sub-regions included in this analysis have adopted at least one of the four policy types mapped for this study – WPS NAPs, NDCs, climate NAPs, and national security policies – and have made them publicly available. Only four of the sixteen jurisdictions had an active and publicly available version of all four policy types at the time of writing (see Annex). In the present mapping, the most recent available version of each policy type is analysed through searches for keywords related to each component of the triple nexus (listed in Tables 3–7), identifying patterns, and linking these to interview data about lived experiences in the four sub-regions.

4.2.1 Women, peace and security National Action Plans (WPS NAPs)

Only 50 per cent of the sixteen cases analysed have a current WPS NAP, despite fifteen of them having adopted at least one previously. In the midst of rising backlash against women's rights and gender equality work globally (Brechenmacher 2025), there is a risk that countries may be moving away from WPS NAPs as a vehicle for integrating gender perspectives into security. However, comparison against a 2020 joint OSCE and London School of Economics study (Myrttinen et al. 2020) shows that between 2020 and 2025, three OSCE participating States studied for the present report adopted their first WPS NAP, while nine have updated their WPS NAPs at least once, even if those documents had expired at the time of writing. Thus, the overall trend is ambiguous; it is possible that more States will adopt new WPS NAPs despite a current lapse, particularly given that 2025 marks the 25th anniversary of the agenda.

In the WPS NAPs analysed, climate keywords are mentioned infrequently, and even in the case of UNSCR 2242 climate keywords are explicitly mentioned in only eight of the fifteen cases. NDCs, on the other hand, have higher rates of gender keywords throughout. Discrepancies may be partially explained by the fact that strategic policy documents such as NAPs are only renewed every few years, at best, and climate change as a security concern has only been mainstreamed recently. The most recent WPS NAPs in the OSCE sub-regions may signal trends regarding their responsiveness to changes both in the WPS agenda and in the "broader peace and security environment" (Myrtinnen et al. 2020). Yet interviewees have more generally noted that frameworks, conventions and policies on all three issues – gender, climate, security – do not always address their root causes (e.g., over-production and strain on natural resources caused by capitalism, gendered drivers of violence, etc.).[98] In South-Eastern Europe, citizens often perceive that their needs are not adequately reflected in policies, and sense that the documents are "copied and pasted year to year" rather than being adapted to changing contexts.[99]

98 CA 7; SEE 2; EE 1.

99 SEE 5.

Table 3. Climate keywords in WPS NAPs

	At least one mention	No mention	
climate	6	9	Total number of WPS NAPs analysed: 15
environment/environmental	7	8	
UNSCR 2242	8	7	
energy	1	14	
livelihood(s)	1	14	
disaster	5	10	
natural resources	1	14	
water	1	14	
land	1	14	
hazard	1	14	

4.2.2 Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)

The framework on which NDCs are based calls for significant gender equality provisions, as well as civil society participation, youth involvement and considerations of indigenous tradition or knowledge, which sets a solid foundation for signatories to include these issues at the national level. Within the sub-regions studied for this report, there are fifteen NDCs and one voluntary NDC; Kosovo,[100] though not bound by the Paris Agreement, adopted a first-of-its-kind voluntary NDC that follows a similar template for contributions. Kosovo's decision to adopt a voluntary NDC alongside Paris Agreement signatories could be a positive signal of the power these international frameworks hold when widespread political will is behind them.

First of all, the sixteen NDCs analysed in this report all include "gender", which shows the power of an international framework emphasizing a certain angle or level of inclusivity. That said, action should back up this rhetorical inclusion, as it can quickly be reduced to a box-checking exercise. Most NDCs also mention women explicitly, while only half mention men explicitly and even fewer name boys and girls, which is symptomatic of the typical disconnect between policy language around gender and lived realities. Even if policies refer to gender as a broad concept, if they then only refer specifically to women as gendered groups, the false assumption that "gender equals women" is perpetuated, which subsequently impacts implementation planning. Relatedly, none of the NDCs mention LGBTQ+ people or gender minorities; this group is also typically left out of WPS NAPs and other WPS documents.

Finally, twelve NDCs mention security, with the mentions being related to either food, energy, material, infrastructure, finance/income, or water security, and the vast majority of NDCs name food and energy security as the only climate security issues. Only one NDC links climate to security, calling for "peace-positive climate action", and in addition to social cohesion.[101]

100 All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text should be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council resolution 1244.

101 Kosovo's First and Voluntary NDCs, no. 20/253. **https://www.ammk-rks.net/assets/cms/uploads/files/DECISION%20GRK%20NO.%2020_253%20The%20Nationally%20Determined%20Contribution%20(NDC)%20of%20Kosovo.pdf**

Table 4. "Gender", "security" and related keywords in NDCs

	At least one mention	No mention	
gender	16	0	
security	12	4	
peace	2	14	
elderly	6	10	
youth	12	4	
disability	4	12	
indigenous	9*	7	
vulnerable groups/ populations	11	5	
civil society	10	6	**Total number of NDCs analysed: 16***
women	14	2	
girls	5	11	
children	8	8	
men	8	8	
boys	0	16	
WPS	0	16	
LGBT(Q+)	0	16	
sexual minorities	0	16	
1325	0	16	
2242	0	16	

4.2.3 National [climate] Adaptation Plans (climate NAPs)

Climate NAPs are complementary to countries' NDCs, laying out medium- and long-term specific guidance for the adaptation and implementation of NDCs. Adaptation plans can be an opportunity to more fully integrate social aspects into NDC implementation. Analysis of the six available climate NAPs in the sub-regions does indicate that consideration of vulnerable groups, particularly along gender and age lines, is prioritized. However, the fact that only six climate NAPs have been adopted at the time of writing also indicates that such integration and prioritization may be slower than advocates would like.

Table 5. "Gender", "security" and related keywords in climate NAPs

	At least one mention	No mention	
gender	6	0	**Total number of climate NAPs analysed: 6**
security	6	0	
peace	0	6	
elderly	4	2	
youth	3	3	
disability	2	4	
indigenous	3	3	
vulnerable groups/ populations	6	0	
civil society	5	1	
women	6	0	
girls	1	5	
children	4	2	
men	5	1	
boys	0	6	
WPS	0	6	
LGBT(Q+)	0	6	
sexual minorities	0	6	
1325	0	6	
2242	0	6	

4.2.4 National security policies

Of the nine national security policies publicly available across the four sub-regions, all nine make mention of "environment" and "disaster", while seven mention "climate". Hazard, water, natural resources and energy are also named in more than half the policies studied, which gives some insight into what the security sector typically sees as climate-related security concerns. This is in fairly consistent alignment with the types of security named in climate policies, which is a positive sign toward integration and communication between silos.

For gender keywords, only the terms "gender" and "women" are mentioned in slightly more than half of examples (five out of nine), and no explicit connection is made to the WPS agenda. Gender is not mainstreamed in any of the policies, with references to "gender" and "women" only appearing once or twice throughout the whole document. On the other hand, there are minor references to women's participation in security institutions, which is often the key focus of security policies and strategies with regard to gender equality.

Case study 4: Moldova's climate policy documents

As discussed throughout this mapping, national policies and strategies vary widely in their gender-responsiveness. Moldova, which has publicly available copies of all four policy categories analysed in this report, sets a positive example. Its latest NDC from 2025 and its climate NAP both go beyond simply mentioning "gender" and "women", but actually link gender to social inclusivity, just transition, identification of particular vulnerabilities, and more. Moldova's NDC 3.0 also emphasizes that climate data collection should be disaggregated by "gender, age, and other vulnerabilities", noting that this enables targeted adaptation measures (NDC, p. 63). The climate NAP is similarly detailed, pointing to concrete examples of gender-responsiveness and its relevance to specific climate risks (such as extreme heat, loss of livelihood and climate-related health impacts) throughout the document.

When men are mentioned in these documents, they are almost entirely held up as a comparison point to women, rather than being analysed as a specific gendered group. This shortcoming is in line with findings across policy types (expanded on below). However, the Moldovan NDC notably links its gender-responsive measures to the country's overall climate resilience and level of social inclusion, stating that all members of society stand to benefit from measures such as ensuring women's access to resources and decision-making processes, as well as addressing gendered vulnerabilities more broadly (NDC, p. 65). Its NAP also notes the influence on behaviour of "social and cultural attitudes and expectations towards women and men", bucking the trend of gender only referring to women that persists in so many national policies.

By highlighting the whole-of-society benefits of equity and inclusion, Moldova's policy documents stand as a particularly good example of "walking the talk" on gender-responsiveness. Future iterations could be improved by integrating more particular gendered vulnerabilities faced by both women and men, such as the ones detailed in section 4.2 of this report.

In policies across the gender-climate-security triple nexus, men are noted explicitly in fewer climate and security policies than women are (and at a much lower frequency per policy, which is however not reflected in the present visualizations). This corresponds to analysis of other policy areas, particularly the WPS agenda as a stand-alone, which shows that even if men and boys are mentioned in gender mainstreamed policies, there is rarely concrete guidance for implementation or analysis unique to them, their vulnerabilities and needs, or for the systems which very often privilege them over other identity groups. As was often the case with women and girls for so long, men's inclusion is superficial, rather than substantive and critical.

Table 6. "Climate" and related keywords in national security policies

	At least one mention	No mention	
climate	7	2	**Total number of national security policies analysed: 9**
environment/environmental	9	0	
UNSCR 2242	0	9	
energy	9	0	
livelihood(s)	1	8	
disaster	9	0	
natural resources	5	4	
water	8	1	
land	4	5	
hazard	5	4	

Table 7. "Gender" and related keywords in national security policies

	At least one mention	No mention	
gender	5	4	**Total number of national security policies analysed: 9**
elderly	1	8	
youth	3	6	
disability	3	6	
indigenous	0	9	
vulnerable groups/ populations	2	7	
civil society	8	1	
women	5	4	
girls	0	9	
children	4	5	
men	2	7	
boys	0	9	
WPS	0	9	
LGBT(Q+)	0	9	
sexual minorities	0	9	
1325	0	9	
2242	0	9	

4.3 A mixed policy landscape

While inclusion of women's rights and needs in peace and security has been an enormous win for advocates over the last thirty years, meaningful implementation remains a challenge. There is a risk that policies will replicate the phenomenon long described by feminists as "add women and stir", which is applicable not only to women and girls but also to any other vulnerable groups. It describes the process of superficially adding women into existing institutions or processes without a transformative approach to structural inequality that excluded them from those institutions or processes in the first place, and without meaningfully integrating their perspectives, needs, social roles and experiences. The inclusion of "gender" in all climate policies reviewed shows that because the Paris Agreement is very strong on gender equality language, NDCs and subsequently climate NAPs are almost guaranteed to include it as well. If anything, this gives civil society an opening for accountability, as well as potentially improving implementation.

In the case of men and boys being "added and stirred", they may not always face the same systemic exclusion as women (though racial, socio-economic, ethnic and religious factors can all play a role in creating exclusion for certain men). Nevertheless, their gendered experiences are a critical part of social cohesion and understanding, particularly when considering insecurity of any kind. This integration of men's and boys' experiences is especially needed at the local level, in evaluations of holistic community needs and dynamics related to gendered drivers of conflict or climate insecurity, and at the systemic level, where certain men's gendered experiences can often form the basis for the exclusion of other groups from participation, or lay a foundation for unequal or unresponsive systems of governance.

Particularly amid rising anti-gender movements and the aforementioned backlash against gender equality and women's rights, hard-fought gains in policy spaces are at risk (Fry 2025; Spotlight Initiative 2025). Within the OSCE, Ministerial Council Decision No. 4/14 on the Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality (2004) is the commitment through which participating States "express their political will to implement UNSCR 1325" (OSCE WPS Roadmap 2025). The OSCE WPS Roadmap notes that although updates to the OSCE's core gender equality commitments are overdue, "The significant politicisation of the WPS agenda, and acknowledgment that gender equality is subject to dispute and dissent globally and within the OSCE region, means that a recent evaluation concluded that an update of the Action Plan is not possible in the current climate."

Efforts to un-silo and better integrate policy agendas are likely to face an uphill battle, but consistent political will behind these policies across the OSCE area bodes well for the future. Thematic advisor and focal point roles are extremely useful for moving these efforts forward, one notable example being ensuring that security policy spaces have both gender and climate advisors.

The climate policies and gender policies examined in the policy mapping call explicitly for meaningful civil society engagement both in decision-making and in policy drafting and implementation, a component that is built into the international frameworks from which they originate. Interestingly, eight out of the nine State-level security policies analysed, which do not have any such international norms dictating that they engage outside of the security sector, also encourage engagement with civil society in some way. Interviewees point to disparities between rhetoric and practice regarding such engagement (see section 3.2.4), but particularly in the case of the security policies, it is a positive step.

List of national policy documents analysed

Case	WPS NAP (years active)	NDC (version number)	Climate NAP (year posted)	National security policy (year adopted)
Kazakhstan	2022–2025	2	N/A	Classified
Kyrgyzstan	2022–2024	2	N/A	N/A
Tajikistan	2019–2022	2	N/A	N/A
Turkmenistan	N/A	2	N/A	N/A
Uzbekistan	2022–2025	2	N/A	Classified (1997)
Moldova	2023–2027	3	2024	2023
Ukraine	2020–2025**	2	N/A	2020
Albania	2023–2027	2	2021	2024
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2018–2022	2	2022	N/A
Kosovo*	2013–2015	N/A**	N/A	2022
Montenegro	2024–2025	3	N/A	N/A
North Macedonia	2020–2025	2	N/A	2020
Serbia	2017–2020	2	2024	2019
Armenia	2022–2026	2	2021	2020
Azerbaijan	2020–2025*	2	2024	2007
Georgia	2022–2024	2	N/A	2011

Cases highlighted in pink are current.

* NAP was modified with new timeline midway through implementation.

** Though not a signatory to the Paris Agreement, Kosovo introduced a voluntary NDC in 2023, during COP28. This voluntary NDC is included in the policy mapping in this report.

5

5. Conclusion

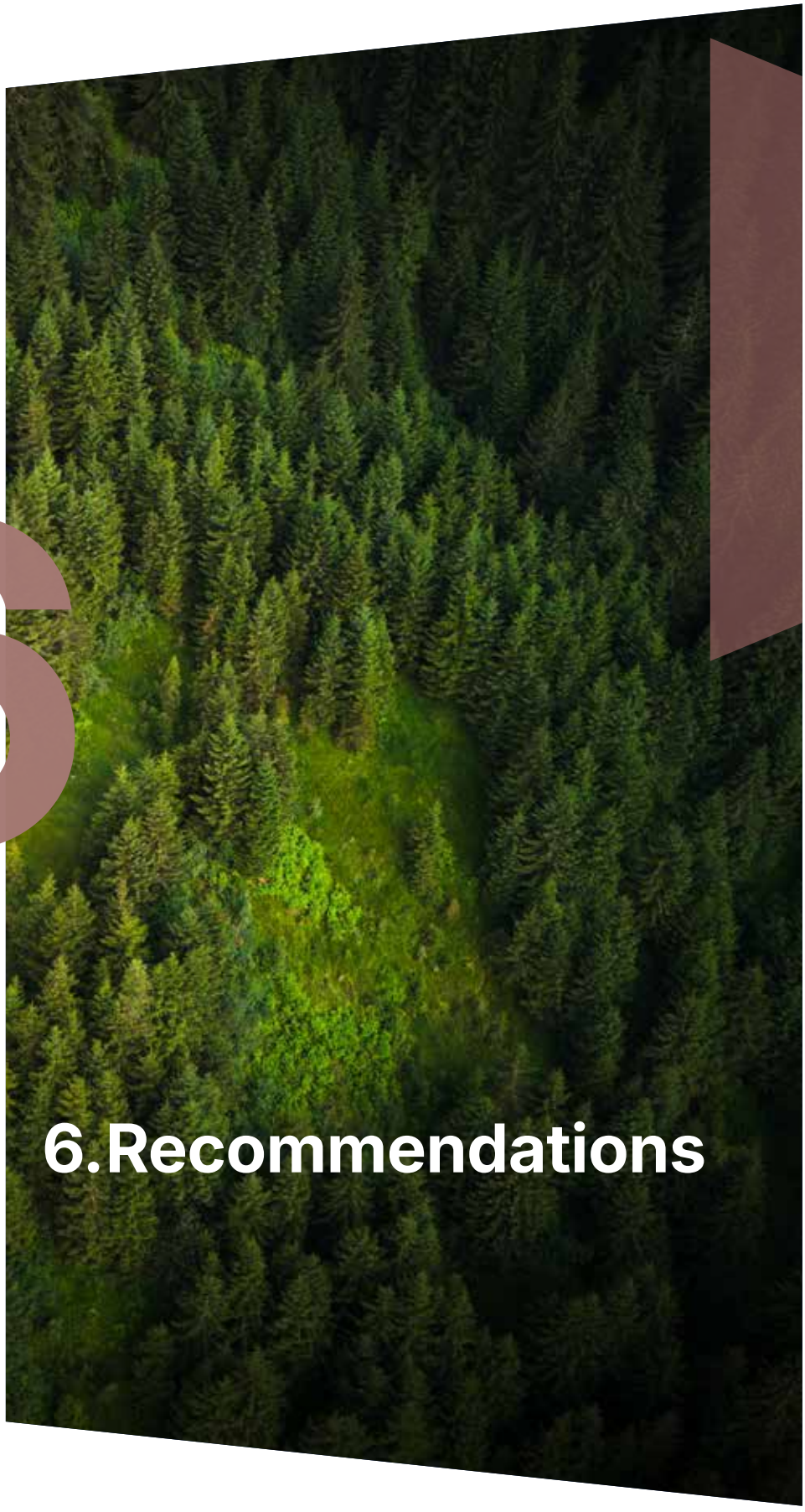
The report has shown how gendered and intersectional factors such as rural/urban divides, class, age, and disability compound climate-related insecurity and vulnerability, yet are largely invisible in data and policy frameworks.

The analysis reveals that rural women frequently bear the double burden of unpaid care work and informal agricultural labour, while having limited access to land, credit and decision-making. Men, in turn, face increasing psychological pressure tied to shifting provider roles and livelihood loss, particular in migration contexts. Across regions, women, youth and marginalized communities are excluded from meaningful participation in climate and security governance, while persistent data gaps and blind spots in institutional planning and policy implementation undermine inclusive climate adaptation, especially at the most local level.

Across the OSCE area, while climate-related security risks are highly context-specific, they nevertheless share common structural roots in resource inequality, weak institutional capacity, political marginalization, and other contextual factors.

Despite structural challenges, women and youth-led initiatives, usually at the local level, are already driving adaptation efforts and improving resilience, though they may require more institutional support and material resources in order to be sustainable in the long term. Cross-sector and intergenerational solidarity can help reshape climate security governance, both in programming implementation and in the un-siloing of policies and political agendas. Solidarity among marginalized groups in particular can improve overall representation, through the sharing of information, for example, or the synchronizing of messaging from civil society. Relatedly, donor agendas, international commitments and climate activism are opening up new spaces for participation.

When addressing the gender-climate-security nexus in policy debate and action, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Context is very important: adapting information-sharing, adaptation, mitigation and response measures will look different in most contexts, as will policy drafting and implementation. That said, the OSCE sub-regions have many positive examples, shared commonalities, and opportunities for collaboration from grassroots to legislative levels. Throughout, gender equality and social inclusion should not be treated as add-ons, but rather as foundational to effective climate and security work. There is growing recognition that just and inclusive climate action is essential for sustainable peace and resilience, but more can be done to actively address the inequalities driving both climate vulnerability and insecurity. To that end, the present analytical report provides recommendations for key stakeholders, see below.



6

6.Recommendations

On the basis of analysis of the existing literature, relevant policies and interview data, this report identifies recommendations relevant to stakeholders at the multilateral, regional, State and community levels.

All the following recommendations are directly grounded in the findings of our research and have been further concretized by the OSCE. Their aim is to provide specific, evidence-based pathways for stakeholders to effectively integrate gendered perspectives into climate security policies and plans across the OSCE area.

National and local governments can:

- **Integrate gender and age considerations into climate action and security policies**
  Develop gender, age and other inclusivity criteria, and integrate them into climate action policies – including NDCs, climate NAPs and energy transition plans – and relevant security strategies. Involve civil society, women, youth and marginalized communities in decision-making bodies and ensure that their perspectives are integrated from the outset in the design, budgeting and implementation of climate-related infrastructure and development projects, including dedicated budget lines for gender-responsive measures in all activities.

- **Strengthen data, evidence and localization**
  Develop, collect and analyse gender-disaggregated, context-specific data on climate impacts and related security risks, and conduct regular needs assessments at local and national levels to inform inclusive climate action and security planning. Ensure that this data is integrated into national and local climate strategies and monitoring frameworks, in order to enhance the effectiveness and equity of responses, grounding policies in local realities and knowledge available from under-represented groups.

- **Invest in rural infrastructure and services**
  Prioritize investment in rural infrastructure and services (e.g., renewable energy, water access, transport and communication, digital tools, health services) to alleviate the caregiving burdens and improve access to decision-making processes, particularly for women in rural areas.

- **Strengthen environmental governance and transparency**
  Ensure access to information and establish meaningful gender- and age-sensitive consultation processes and mechanisms to guarantee community consent. Ensure the active and meaningful involvement of civil society at all stages, including local women's organizations, which is particularly relevant with respect to extractive and hydropower projects. Leverage international frameworks such as the Aarhus Convention (with support from the Aarhus Centers) and Free and Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) standards to facilitate transparency.

- **Promote gender equality in strategic sectors**
  Remove structural barriers for women entering sectors critical to climate-security linkages (e.g., energy, forestry, water), notably by mandating and enforcing secure contracts, equal pay and protective labour regulations. Offer capacity-building programmes and incentives for employers to promote women's advancement and leadership in these sectors.

- **Establish gender-climate-security focal points**
  Designate focal points in relevant ministries and at the municipal level in order to co-ordinate better integration in policy and implementation. Provide a clear mandate, budget, and targeted trainings to maximize the focal points' impact.

- **Protect environmental defenders**
  Introduce and enforce legislative measures to protect environmental defenders from harassment and legal intimidation, notably gender-mainstreamed anti-SLAPP legislation. Promote legal aid and rapid-response mechanisms, and raise public awareness of the importance of civic activism for climate and security.

- **Localize gender-responsive and security-sensitive climate adaptation**
  Ensure that adaptation and resilience planning is grounded in local realities, through local adaptation plans and community action plans. Ensure that these plans are informed by comprehensive needs assessments and by improved disaggregated data collection at the local level. Integrate local knowledge – particularly from already under-represented groups such as women and youth – as well as gender analysis and equitable decision-making in adaptation planning. Accompany national legislation, such as NDCs or climate NAPs, with secondary legislation and implementation plans.

International organizations and donors, including the OSCE, can:

- **Promote inclusive participation mechanisms**
  Provide technical and financial support to strengthen gender and youth representation in climate negotiations, consultations and governance structures. This includes providing targeted support to women- and youth-led initiatives and emerging leaders building on ongoing initiatives.

- **Support research and analysis**
  Undertake or fund research to build a better understanding of gendered vulnerabilities in the OSCE area, particularly through context-specific, gender-disaggregated and unbiased data collection, and support the communication and distribution of findings to relevant authorities.

- **Support long-term capacity-building**
  Help build the capacity of institutions to enable local ownership of climate responses, reduce reliance on international actors for participation access, and facilitate rapid, inclusive stakeholder consultations. Consider developing a handbook for authorities that translates policy guidance on the gender-climate-security nexus into actionable steps.

- **Enable dialogue and create inclusive platforms for exchange**
  Facilitate multi-stakeholder exchange and co-operation to strengthen the integration of gender and intersectionality in climate action and disaster risk reduction, building on international best practice.

- **Facilitate community-based approaches**
  Work with institutions and civil society to facilitate consultations with populations that face extra challenges such as geographical remoteness, low education, unpaid care work and cultural limits on mobility.

Civil society can:

- **Document and share good practices**
  Gather, document and disseminate evidence of success from grassroots adaptation and resilience initiatives to influence national and regional dialogue.

- **Build alliances for inclusive climate and security action**
  Support intergenerational and intersectional platforms that link youth, women, rural populations and other under-represented groups, in order to enable them to collaborate on environmental protection, climate diplomacy and peacebuilding.

All key stakeholders can:

- **Conduct regular context-specific needs assessments**
  Invest in commissioning, conducting or participating in needs assessments to identify intersectional vulnerabilities to climate-related security risks. Use findings to inform community action plans that address the most pressing needs for different members of the population, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach at the local level. Include regional and local universities in research and outreach activities.

- **Pursue creative means of communication, education and awareness-raising**
  Explore creative and accessible communication strategies, not least through formal and informal networks and education for school-age children, to raise awareness of climate-related security risks and their differentiated impacts on community members. Leverage these strategies to improve public awareness, facilitate access to processes and institutions, share information about public consultations, foster civic engagement, and facilitate early warning mechanisms.

- **Expand the understanding of "gender"** More thoroughly include not only women's, but also men's, boys' and girls' needs and experiences, and those of individuals of diverse gender identities, into gender analysis of climate-related security risks, and use them to develop targeted initiatives that reflect their distinct vulnerabilities and capacities.

- **Support co-operation and networking** Strengthen communication and targeted collaboration among relevant stakeholders. While ensuring inclusive participation and benefits for all stakeholders, co-operation activities should aim to improve the livelihoods, security and resilience of communities in the context of climate change, with the ultimate goal of reinforcing trust and good-neighbourly relations.

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Annex

List of interview details

Code	Details
CA 1-3	Central Asia key interviewees (KIs) 1-3, international organization representatives, interview with authors, Bishkek, 22 April 2025
CA 4	Central Asia key interviewee (KI) 4, government representative, interview with authors, Bishkek, 22 April 2025
CA 5	Central Asia KI 5, civil society representative, interview with authors, Bishkek, 23 April 2025
CA 6	Central Asia KI 6, government representative, interview with authors, Bishkek, 23 April 2025
CA 7	Central Asia KI 7, expert researcher, interview with authors, Bishkek, 23 April 2025
CA 8	Central Asia KI 8, civil society representative, interview with authors, online, 22 May 2025
CA 9	Central Asia KI 9, international organization representative, interview with authors, online, 13 June 2025
CA 10	Central Asia KI 10, civil society representative, interview with authors, online, 16 June 2025
SC 1	South Caucasus KI 1, government official, interview with authors, online, 1 May 2025
SC 2-3	South Caucasus KI 2-3, civil society representative, interview with authors, online, 3 May 2025
SC 4	South Caucasus KI 4, civil society representative, interview with authors, online, 3 May 2025
SC 5-6	South Caucasus KI 5-6, civil society representative, interview with authors, online, 8 May 2025
SC 7	South Caucasus KI 7, government representative, interview with authors, online, 16 May 2025
SC 8	South Caucasus KI 8, civil society representative, interview with authors, online, 21 May 2025
SC 9	South Caucasus KI 9, expert researcher, interview with authors, online, 28 May 2025
EE 1	Eastern Europe KI 1, expert researcher, interview with author, online, 11 June 2025
EE 2	Eastern Europe KI 2, international organization representative, interview with author, online, 10 June 2025
EE 3-4	Eastern Europe KI 3-4, civil society representatives, interview with authors, online, 23 June 2025
EE 5-6	Eastern Europe KI 5-6, government representatives, interview with author, online, 25 June 2025
SEE 1a	South-Eastern Europe KI 1, civil society representative, interview with author, online, 26 May 2025

SEE 1b	South-Eastern Europe KI 1, civil society representative, interview with author, online, 11 June 2025
SEE 2	South-Eastern Europe KI 2, international organization representative, interview with author, online, 10 June 2025
SEE 3	South-Eastern Europe KI 3, civil society representative, interview with author, online, 11 June 2025
SEE 4	South-Eastern Europe KI 4, civil society representative, interview with author, online, 11 June 2025
SEE 5	South-Eastern Europe KI 5, expert researcher, interview with author, online, 12 June 2025
SEE 6	South-Eastern Europe KI 6, international organization representative, interview with author, online, 9 June 2025
SEE 7	South-Eastern Europe KI 7, international organization representative, interview with author, online, 10 June 2025
SEE 8	South-Eastern Europe KI 8, expert researcher, interview with author, online, 7 July 2025
SEE 9	South-Eastern Europe KI 9, expert researcher, interview with author, online, 12 June 2025
SEE 10	South-Eastern Europe KI 10, international organization representative, interview with author, online, 13 June 2025
SEE 11	South-Eastern Europe KI 11, expert researcher, interview with author, online, 10 June 2025
SEE 12	South-Eastern Europe KI 12, expert researcher, interview with author, online, 25 June 2025