

TAKING STOCK:
**SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE
HEALTH AND RIGHTS**
in **CLIMATE**
COMMITMENTS

**AN EASTERN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA
REVIEW SUMMARY**

Sexual and reproductive health and rights and rights-based approaches in national climate documents: **A review of Nationally Determined Contributions since 2020 in Eastern Europe and Central Asia**



INTRODUCTION

Climate change has lasting impacts on the health of human beings, and it disproportionately and differentially affects women, girls, youth and older persons as well as other vulnerable groups.

Emerging evidence shows the direct and indirect impacts of climate change on women and girls and their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Heat, air pollution and climate-related diseases have adverse impacts on maternal and neonatal health outcomes, while increased poverty and food insecurity driven by climate-related loss of livelihoods also negatively impact maternal health.

Climate change also results in decreased access to essential services, increases in gender-based violence (GBV) and harmful practices such as child marriage, and intensified needs for bodily autonomy. Importantly, these impacts are not being felt evenly, and women, girls and marginalized groups are being hit the hardest.

Evidence is now available on the direct and indirect effects of climate change on maternal health, including anaemia, eclampsia, low birth weight, preterm birth and even miscarriage. A multi-country study has shown that if a woman is exposed to an increase in ambient temperature of 1°C in the week before delivery, she has a 6 per cent greater likelihood of stillbirth.¹

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are key national climate policy documents and include descriptions of how each country will work to mitigate climate change in its territory. They are submitted every five years by signatories of the 2016 Paris Agreement, a legally binding agreement adopted under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that sets a target of keeping the rise in global temperature in the twenty-first century below 2°C and to pursue efforts to limit it further to 1.5°C.



¹ Vicedo-Cabrera, A. M., and others, 2021. "The Burden of Heat-related Mortality Attributable to Recent Human-induced Climate Change." *Nature Climate Change* 11: 492–500.



The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) leads implementation of the Programme of Action adopted by the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) – a transformative agenda that has advocated for balance and moderation in production and consumption as well as between people and planet for peace and prosperity. UNFPA has committed to three transformative results by 2030: ending preventable maternal deaths, ending unmet need for family planning, and ending GBV and other harmful practices. The rapid pace of climate change over this decade will make each of these transformative results more difficult to achieve.

UNFPA supports governments to ensure national climate policies incorporate population dimensions vis-à-vis a range of vulnerable groups and the thematic issues of SRHR and GBV in the design of climate policies and solutions, with women, young people and

vulnerable groups at the heart of innovative solutions to improve climate resilience. The lack of specific interventions in the NDCs that address the underlying structure of inequalities are likely to leave essential gender, health and geospatial inequalities and impacts faced by population groups insufficiently addressed. A people-centred focus will reduce the likelihood of certain groups being left behind.

To address these gaps, UNFPA, in collaboration with Queen Mary University of London, undertook a global review of 119 NDCs via a series of regional reviews of SRHR references and related thematic areas. In the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region, 12 NDC documents were reviewed. This analysis will hopefully provide an opening for dialogue and action on considering the ways that climate change and SRHR intersect and allow for the identification of areas for greater and more meaningful inclusion of aspects of SRHR in climate policy.



PURPOSE OF THE STUDY



This study, commissioned by UNFPA in collaboration with Queen Mary University of London, aims to provide an overview of the integration of SRHR, GBV, harmful practices and related themes in the NDCs.

The findings provide an entry point for dialogue and action at the global, regional, national and local levels on the intersections between climate change, SRHR, GBV and harmful practices. This

study also identifies the necessary actions for their more meaningful inclusion in climate policy and action, highlighting gaps, opportunities and best practices to allow for stronger language on the aspects of gender and climate negotiations at the global level.

METHODOLOGY

The review includes 12 NDCs from countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia submitted in or after 2020. Out of these, 11 are updated versions of the first submitted NDCs and one is an intended NDC (Türkiye).

Five countries or territories have not submitted an NDC since 2020 or are yet to submit their first NDC (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Serbia and Turkmenistan, as well as Kosovo [UNSCR 1244]). A process of systematic content analysis was undertaken in relation to six thematic areas: SRHR; gender; health; population dynamics; human rights, participation and vulnerable groups; and youth. The review analyses to

what extent certain thematic areas are addressed in the national climate documents and reviews the extent of the integration of SRHR issues in national climate policy in terms of inclusion and climate action. The analysis aims at identifying region-specific entry points for climate action, highlighting gaps as well as opportunities and best practices in the region.



FINDINGS

Sexual and reproductive health and rights

- SRHR is integrated in only two of the 12 NDCs reviewed, focusing on GBV and negative effects on pregnant women.
- Albania describes the increased risk of violence against women due to climate change and refers to the Council of Europe's 2011 Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence ("The Istanbul Convention") and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
- Albania also outlines the negative effects of high temperatures and floods on pregnant women, such as bronchitis, infections and disruptions in access to health.
- The Republic of Moldova highlights pregnant women as a vulnerable group with increased cost in people's assistance.

Gender

- Gender features prominently in the NDCs, with nine of the 12 documents having references to gender and all of these integrating some degree of gender mainstreaming and responsiveness. Other references to gender include the disproportionate impact of climate change on women (5) and women's participation and decision-making (5). Only Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Türkiye do not refer to gender.

- Examples of gender mainstreaming include gender budgeting (Albania and Tajikistan), gender-disaggregated data (Georgia), gender analysis (Albania, Georgia and Kyrgyz Republic), gender indicators (North Macedonia and Tajikistan) and gender mainstreaming in national policies (Republic of Moldova and Tajikistan).
- Women's vulnerabilities to climate impacts are described by five countries. Albania highlights women's poor access to assets, employment, land ownership and decision-making, as well as the differentiated impacts they feel from climate change in areas like agriculture, health and energy, and gendered inequalities in the enjoyment of rights. The Kyrgyz Republic focuses on women's domestic task burdens such as water fetching, and on their access to financial resources, technologies and decision-making. The Republic of Moldova describes gender inequalities due to the gender pay gap as well as food prices. Tajikistan highlights inequalities due to traditions, stereotypes and issues faced by female-headed households.
- Interventions to address gender and climate change include improved policies for climate emergencies focusing on gender aspects (Kyrgyz Republic), research and projects on climate impacts focusing on gender aspects (Kyrgyz Republic), strengthened institutional capacity to integrate gender (Albania), gender in vulnerability assessments (Republic of Moldova), gender in healthcare access and data collection (Republic of Moldova), and gender communication strategy and inclusion of gender and climate in school curricula (Republic of Moldova).





Health

- Ten of the 12 NDCs mention issues related to health, with most acknowledging the impact of climate change on health. Eight NDCs describe pollution and waste and sanitation, four NDCs reference climate-related diseases, and five NDCs link gender and health.
- Some of the climate-related health risks outlined include injuries; vector-borne, waterborne and respiratory diseases; non-communicable diseases; and heat- and drought-related diseases and deaths (Albania, Georgia, Kyrgyz Republic and Republic of Moldova).
- Three NDCs describe the need for more climate- and health-related research to study the impacts of climate events on healthcare and human health (Georgia and Kyrgyz Republic) including with a focus on gender (Republic of Moldova).
- Five NDCs link gender and health, and four of these propose measures to ensure more gender-responsive action in health.

The Republic of Moldova recognizes that there is a lack of studies on climate and health with a gender lens and proposes to strengthen disaggregated data for, and assessments on, climate change and health with a focus on gender. Other measures include strengthened gender-sensitive indicators for health (Tajikistan), actions to develop health policies that integrate a gender focus (Kyrgyz Republic), and empowering women as agents of change in climate-related health issues (Georgia).

- Other interventions to address climate change, disasters and health include building capacity of health systems and health workers on climate change, early warning systems and surveillance, gender-disaggregated data on effects of climate change on health, health information and awareness of dangers (Republic of Moldova), disaster plans and emergency funds (Albania), building climate-resilient health systems (Kyrgyz Republic), climate and health budgeting (Tajikistan, Republic of Moldova and Kyrgyz Republic) and awareness on climate hazards and early warning (Uzbekistan).



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Population dynamics

- Eight of the 12 NDCs include a description of the national population and other aspects of population dynamics, such as urbanization, migration and displacement.
- Urbanization is described in three NDCs, with Albania describing the risk of infrastructure vulnerability due to urbanization and Türkiye using the argument of high levels of urbanization to justify the fairness and ambition of the mitigation measures included in the NDC.
- Migration is presented in three NDCs, with Tajikistan including migration as a cross-cutting priority in adaptation and noting that large-scale male labour migration leads to a high number of female-headed households.

Rights, participation and vulnerable groups

- Nine of the 12 NDCs contain some reference to public participation in climate policy and/or action, with the majority focusing on public participation in the NDC review. Seven countries highlight some level of vulnerability in sections of their population and four countries refer to human or civilian rights.

- The NDCs outline vulnerable groups to include older persons, women, children, persons with disabilities, persons with chronic diseases, migrants and persons living in poverty (Albania, Georgia, Kyrgyz Republic and Republic of Moldova).
- Some key human rights issues are mentioned in four NDCs. Albania mentions how women face obstacles in enjoying their equal rights and makes a commitment that mitigation and adaptation measures will contribute to human rights. Georgia outlines how its NDC is in line with the constitutional right to equality. The Republic of Moldova describes how it will observe human rights and freedoms in climate strategies and ensure equal opportunities in gender policies. Tajikistan commits to adopting policies that ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men.

Youth

- Eight of the 12 NDCs integrate special consideration for youth to some degree. In notable references, seven NDCs describe youth participation, four mention youth in regard to education or awareness, and three recognize young people as particularly vulnerable to climate change.
- Youth participation will be achieved through the engagement of young people in decision-making and access to environmental justice (Albania), training and awareness of young people (Georgia and Kyrgyz Republic), uptake of climate-resilient technology and job creation targeting young people (Republic of Moldova), and involvement of young people in the NDC review, including youth-led environmental groups (Kyrgyz Republic, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova and Uzbekistan).
- North Macedonia plans to design a Youth for Climate Platform to broaden conversation and recognize youth-led climate action.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Data and evidence

1. Strengthen national-level evidence on the impacts of climate change on SRHR, GBV and harmful practices. This should include improving data systems to better account for and forecast the differentiated impacts of climate change on SRHR, GBV and harmful practices, including through the conduct of gender-responsive

climate vulnerability and risk assessments that integrate SRHR and GBV. Detailed country-level research, preferably led by local researchers, on the intersections between climate, SRHR and GBV is required to better support communities at the local and national level but also to contribute to the global evidence base.



2. Scale up efforts to collect and use disaggregated data and account for the differentiated impacts of the climate crisis. The demonstration of such efforts in the NDCs is encouraging. Gender-disaggregated data supports the identification of groups that are more vulnerable to the climate impacts and can help mobilize more sensitive and accurate climate action. This better represents the differentiated impacts of the climate crisis while supporting research, data, planning and intervention to reach better outcomes. This also enables gender-sensitive budgeting, including for components related to SRHR and GBV.

Financing and accountability

3. Increase support, funding and evaluation for adaptation and resilience-building efforts, including within NDCs and in the development of climate policies. While adaptation sections are increasing in frequency and detail within NDCs, greater support, evaluation and financing are required to ensure these policies reflect the needs of underserved populations and topic areas, such as SRHR and GBV.

4. Strengthen the integration of costed SRHR and GBV interventions across sectors in climate policy and action. Include SRHR and GBV issues in domains such as gender and health, as these represent entry points for their inclusion in national climate policies. Costed action, tied to monitoring and indicators that reflect impacts on gender, health and SRHR and GBV, requires more financial and technical support. Many existing interventions, particularly related to gender and health, could begin to provide or increase the integration of programming on SRHR and GBV.

5. Strengthen health systems' resilience to climate change by ensuring the inclusion of SRHR and GBV. This includes ensuring the inclusion of SRHR and GBV in vulnerability risk assessments, disaster preparedness plans and health information management systems. Ensure appropriate human resources are available for health, monitoring and evaluation indicators, the allocation of funds and a coordination mechanism.

Gender equality and representation

6. Scale up and strengthen gender-transformative climate action through the inclusion of SRHR, GBV and harmful practices issues. This includes the appointment and strengthening of the role of a National Gender and Climate Change Focal Point to be placed in the relevant ministry, as recommended by a decision of the 2019 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP25); the review of existing gender-related climate policies; and the integration of gender-transformative approaches in all aspects of climate change policies and programmes/interventions, based on a solid foundation of context-specific analysis.



7. **Recognize the impacts of climate change on the drivers of GBV and harmful practices.** Support the development of best practices for responding to GBV and harmful practices, and for ensuring the resilience, including financial, of essential services to prevent and respond to GBV. This can be achieved through partnership with gender and rights actors such as organizations of persons with disabilities, women-led organizations, indigenous peoples' groups, youth-led organizations and front-line responders.
8. **Ensure inclusion and a minimum standard of representation in the development and implementation of climate policy at multiple levels.** This includes the inclusion and representation of women, youth, people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), indigenous peoples' groups, older persons, persons with disabilities and others as relevant.

Human rights and leaving no one behind

9. **Improve the understanding of the impacts of climate change on SRHR and GBV for people with diverse and underrepresented SOGIESC.** There is insufficient understanding and recognition of the impacts of climate change on people with diverse SOGIESC. Increasing this understanding will require specific, local and sensitive action that is participatory, accountable and calls on existing best practices.
10. **Mobilize and support young people.** Support youth climate networks and establish a permanent youth engagement mechanism on climate change at the national level to ensure the mainstreaming of youth priorities across the design and implementation of national climate policy and action.
11. **Take an intersectional approach to develop, review and implement climate policy that recognizes the structural drivers of inequality and accounts for multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.** Climate policy and action must recognize how many of the people who already face barriers to SRHR and GBV services and the realization of their reproductive rights are likely to be disproportionately affected by climate change.



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12. Enhance recognition of climate change impacts on GBV and harmful practices in NDCs and relevant climate policies.

National climate policies should more meaningfully account for the delivery of GBV services during climate-related events. This includes strengthening the engagement with national gender/GBV-focused mechanisms (e.g. ministries, parliamentary caucuses, civil society networks) as well as climate-focused national mechanisms to present regional and national analysis of the interlinkages between climate change, GBV and harmful practices, and collectively develop a consensus on policy advocacy and programming strategies and interventions. This could be achieved through the creation of a common platform for meaningful dialogue, with key mechanisms, networks and leaders engaged in addressing GBV and climate change.

13. Ensure that climate policies are based on human rights and reflect the principles of the ICPD Programme of Action, including protecting the rights of women, children, refugees, displaced persons and persons with disabilities, in climate policy development. A human rights-based approach that supports individuals to make the reproductive choices that best suit their personal circumstances is core to achieving SRHR. Population dynamics are relevant for climate policy and planning and the NDCs reflect on urbanization, changing population size and structure and the need for population dynamics analysis for forward planning.

Region-specific reflections

14. Strengthen the articulation of human rights in the NDCs and other climate policy documents to recognize the rights of all – including people on

the move – to sustainable development, protection and a healthy environment.

Climate change will likely increase the number of people on the move globally. Countries should establish more humane and welcoming regional and international policies to recognize the legal status and human rights of ‘climate refugees’. Those experiencing a loss of home and habitat need support and services, including for SRHR, to realize their full integration within host countries.

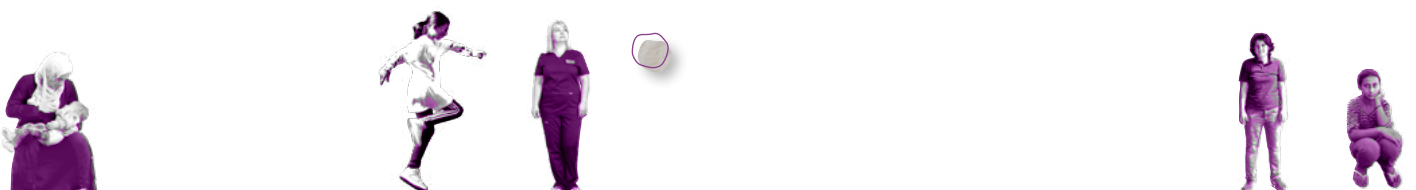
15. Adopt a whole-of-society approach that includes women, girls and young people in the development of NDCs and other climate policy documents.

Women and girls in the poorest regions and front-line communities face disruptions in livelihoods and essential services and heightened climate vulnerability and violence. Advancing climate action requires the meaningful inclusion of women and girls in national and international climate policy and decision-making, including to ensure the integration of substantive and sectoral issues central to gender-responsive adaptation in climate policy, financing, NDCs and national adaptation plans.

16. Strengthen understanding of the impacts of increased warming on male and female fertility as well as newborn health outcomes. Depending on the country, such impacts may include rises in air pollution, wildfires, heat stress, floods and emerging or worsening vector-borne diseases.

17. Broaden awareness and capacity on the multiple impacts of climate change on reproductive health and choices.

These impacts include lower fertility aspirations, greater difficulty conceiving, higher risk of miscarriage, risks to a healthy pregnancy, and, in acute climate-related emergencies, reduced access to healthcare.



18. Promote research to better understand what the climate crisis means for young people, and use this as a basis for climate education. Research should explore the implications of climate change for young people's confidence in the future, economic prospects, fertility and family aspirations, and for their long-term health, including mental health. This deeper understanding, along with more investment in climate education (especially at the primary and secondary school levels) and curriculum reforms that integrate climate change, is a route to holistically and organically achieve the systemic and behavioural change that the climate crisis demands.

19. Increase recognition of the impacts of climate change on a key population at risk in the region: older persons. For countries that are rapidly ageing, it is important to recognize the added health vulnerabilities of older persons to extreme heat, and the possibility that older persons will have

greater challenges in relocating as habitats are threatened. The increasing duration and intensity of heat waves makes this crucial and urgent.

20. Consider new data opportunities to enrich information and knowledge on climate.

Countries can generate geospatial data on populations and climate risks to map locations of persons with the greatest climate vulnerability. This could improve preparedness and shorten response times during climate events. It could also help countries prioritize climate-resilient housing, transport and related public infrastructure, including to protect older persons from climate risks.

21. Have targeted, evidence-based plans for disaster risk reduction, early warning and early action. All countries are encouraged to establish these essential plans, which should include measures to adapt and deliver essential sexual and reproductive health services.



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United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office

Istanbul, Türkiye

eecaro.unfpa.org

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