

Fourth Gender Equality Report of the German Federal Government

Gender equality in the socio-ecological transformation

Each legislative period, the German Federal Government submits a report on gender equality to the Bundestag and the Bundesrat. The most recent Fourth Gender Equality Report focuses on climate change and climate policies in Germany from a gender equality perspective. The report shows that climate change affects women, low-income earners, and other structurally disadvantaged persons particularly hard. At the same time, transformation strategies that focus solely on technology- and industry-oriented solutions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions risk exacerbating gender inequalities. Therefore, climate policies must address the fundamental economic and social causes of climate change and be designed in a way that is conscious of social and gender inequalities.

The report highlights the gender-related **effects of climate change** as well as **the impacts** of respective **climate protection and adaptation measures** with regard to gender equality in various fields. It emphasises that a socio-ecological transformation must link the protection of natural resources with social objectives. This includes anchoring gender equality as a cross-cutting task in all transformation measures. To this end, the report provides numerous **recommendations for action**.

The report focuses on areas of action that are frequently addressed when it comes to the challenges of reducing greenhouse gas emissions or responding to climate change. These include **energy production, circular economy, agriculture, urban and spatial development, mobility, housing, food and nutrition**. Furthermore, the report addresses areas of action that play a vital role in gender equality policy. These include **health**, the **labour market**, with a special focus on the female-dominated service sectors, the area of **work and time**, and **financing**. The final part of the expertise recommends **institutional mechanisms** to promote a gender-equitable socio-ecological transformation.



An English abridged version is currently being prepared and will be published on the website of the Gender Equality Reports:
<https://www.gleichstellungsbericht.de>.

A social and gender-equitable transformation is not only politically desirable but also legally required. The combination of the federal state's obligation to achieve climate neutrality under Article 20a of the Basic Law (GG), the Social State Principle in Article 20(1) GG, and the obligation to promote substantive gender equality under Article 3(2) GG leads to a **constitutional obligation for a gender-equitable socio-ecological transformation**.

At the heart of the Gender Equality Reports is an Expert Opinion prepared by an independent, interdisciplinary Expert Commission. The experts conduct a scientifically sound analysis of the current state of gender equality in Germany, identify areas for action, and formulate specific recommendations.

For the Fourth Gender Equality Report **the Expert Commission was commissioned to**

- outline the causes and effects of climate change as well as the impact of environmental and climate policy measures on gender relations,
- develop recommendations for a gender-equality-oriented shaping of the ecological transformation, and
- formulate recommendations on structures, instruments and institutional mechanisms for a consistent gender equality, environmental and climate policy in line with the German Basic Law (Grundgesetz) that states, that men and women shall have equal rights and discrimination is prohibited.

Why is this issue relevant to gender equality?

Numerous studies demonstrate that not only climate change but also the transformative measures developed to protect against or adapt to it have gender-specific consequences. Differences result from structural gender-related inequalities and the fact that these have not yet been sufficiently taken into account when designing transformation measures. They add to existing inequalities, particularly between the rich and the poor as well as between the so-called Global North and Global South. The following examples provide an insight into the correlations and gaps.

- Transitioning to a more environmentally friendly form of **agriculture** does not automatically lead to greater gender equality. However, the transformation of agriculture provides an opportunity to examine existing structures and transform deeply entrenched asymmetries – if specific gender equality policy measures are implemented simultaneously.
- Green spaces in cities make a measurable contribution to lowering temperatures, thereby reducing urban “heat islands” caused by climate change. At the same time, green spaces can facilitate care work. However, gender equality needs are often not sufficiently considered in **urban and spatial development**. This applies, for instance, to play areas and sports facilities as well as regarding safety issues for women and LGBTIQ* persons.
- Current **transport policies** contribute to high emissions, favour the expansion of car-friendly infrastructure, and are primarily geared towards employment-related needs. Travel patterns of people with care responsibilities, modes of transport such as walking and cycling, as well as public transport services are being neglected.
- People on low incomes, including women living alone and single mothers, are more likely to be **housed** in buildings that have not been renovated for energy efficiency. Compared to the general population, single parents are almost twice as likely to struggle to heat their homes adequately.
- Different food preferences and eating habits cause varying amounts of greenhouse gas emissions; a plant-based diet, for instance, reduces the nutritional footprint. These preferences are also influenced by gender stereotypes. Also, women bear the brunt of the mental load for climate-friendly consumption decisions, as they do twice as much **food- and nutrition-related** work as men.
- Climate-friendly behaviour takes **time**. As long as women do more unpaid care and nourishment work than men, they bear greater responsibility for sustainable behaviour in everyday life. At the same time, they are likely to have less control over how they allocate and spend their time.
- A **circular economy** strives to preserve resources and protect the climate. The German National Circular Economy Strategy focuses primarily on technological and economic solutions. Issues relevant to gender equality, such as the risks of discriminatory technologies or approaches that include everyday efforts for sustainable consumption, are rarely considered.
- Because of the climate crisis, the already overburdened **healthcare system** faces further challenges. Due to the gender-segregated distribution of paid employment and care work, and because women dominate the health and care sectors, the increasing burdens are affecting women – including many migrant women – harder.
- Climate policy strategies and public investments mostly focus on industries with high carbon emissions – which are often male-dominated. The impact of climate change on female-dominated sectors and the relevance of the transition, especially **social services** such as health care, care work, and social work, is neglected.
- The financial burden of **carbon pricing** affects men and women differently, for instance, due to differences in income and mobility. However, gender equality objectives are not taken into account when it comes to the allocation of the carbon pricing revenues from the climate and transformation fund, earmarked to support energy transition programmes and other climate-friendly policies.
- The raw materials, such as rare earth elements, needed for the **energy transition** in Germany, including the production of green hydrogen, are linked with ecological and social downsides in the so-called Global South. For instance, mining in these regions is known for highly problematic working conditions and inadequate health protection. Structurally disadvantaged people, among them many women and indigenous peoples, suffer particularly from these social and environmental impacts.

What are the Expert Opinion's key statements?

1. Climate change affects women, low-income earners, and other structurally disadvantaged persons particularly hard.
2. Transformation strategies that focus solely on technology- and industry-oriented solutions run the risk of exacerbating gender inequalities.
3. Mitigating climate change requires a fundamental change in lifestyles and economic practices – in line with a socio-ecological transformation.
4. In addition to preserving the planetary boundaries, the socio-ecological transformation must enable all people to live self-determined lives. This includes substantive gender equality.
5. Gender-equitable transformation policies must address three levels: everyday practices, supply systems as well as fundamental principles and structures of social governance.
6. Energy and climate policies must be more intensely focused on sufficiency without reinforcing gender inequalities.
7. International requirements to design climate and environmental policies in a gender-equitable way must be respected and implemented at the national level. Gender equality must be implemented as a cross-cutting issue in all policies and measures concerning the socio-ecological transformation.
8. For the social-ecological transformation to be coherent and gender-equitable, binding cross-ministerial mechanisms for gender equality policy must be established.
9. The social-ecological transformation must measure up to the global responsibility arising from lifestyles and economic practices in Germany. This also applies to potential risks and negative impacts of climate protection measures.

What are the experts' recommendations?

A gender-equitable socio-ecological transformation requires changes to the legal framework along with climate protection and adaptation strategies and programmes. In addition, more research and data collection is needed. The following recommendations for action serve as examples.

- Area-based blanket subsidies for conventional **agri-culture** should be replaced by livelihood-securing subsidy strategies that primarily promote plant-based agricultural production and gender equality at the same time. When leasing communal land, local authorities should include criteria aimed at the common good as well as gender equality.
- Climate protection, biodiversity, the common good, and care work must become the focus of **urban and spatial development**. The concept of Caring Cities, which focuses on sustainable and local infrastructure, should be integrated as a guiding concept into all spatial planning.

- Gender equality and climate protection must be legally binding in **transport and mobility planning**. All modes of transport must be treated equally. Moreover, there must be a fair distribution of space between built-up and cultivated areas, open spaces, and transport infrastructure. Funds from the European Climate Social Fund (Klima-Sozialfonds) should be used to prevent transport poverty (i.e. lack of accessible, affordable, and available modes of transport).
- Strategies for decarbonising heat supply in **residential buildings** must prevent energy poverty: in the short term through transfer benefits, and in the medium and long term by enabling a transition to a climate-friendly and affordable heat supply. The level of funding should be based on improvements in energy efficiency, not on the amount of energy consumed.
- Value-added tax on basic plant-based foods should be abolished or reduced to a maximum of five per cent; for animal products, an increase to the regular tax rate of 19 per cent should be considered. Making **nutrition** and dietary habits more gender-equitable requires strategies that reflect on and break down stereotypical perceptions and gender-related role attributions.
- The socio-ecological transformation requires better company strategies to reduce **working hours** and distribute them in a socially acceptable manner. To this end, the statutory part-time work scheme for people returning to employment should be improved and the proposal by the German Women Lawyers Association (Deutscher Juristinnenbund) for an Elective Working Time Act should be considered.
- A cross-sectoral, interministerial initiative is needed to examine the impact of the **circular economy** on gender relations and to develop respective gender equality measures. Civil society actors must be involved in this process.
- The gender-specific effects of climate change and climate policies on **health** have not yet been sufficiently researched. The federal and state governments should promote intersectional research projects at the junction of gender, climate, and health to develop effective intervention and adaptation measures.
- To counteract injustices in the **labour market** and one-sided investment in male-dominated industries, monitoring systems, and regional gender equality strategies should be developed. To this end, transformation-related changes and their impact on gender equality in the labour market should be monitored and proposals put forward on how gender equality can be strengthened in all sectors.
- The phasing out of environmentally harmful subsidies and the taxation of wealth can support more socially and gender-equitable financing of the transformation. In addition, the SDG budgeting introduced at the federal government level should be linked to **gender budgeting**.
- A just **energy transition** must be designed in a way that is compatible with nature and society and takes into account concerns about care for the regenerative capacity of natural resources, both nationally and globally. This requires sufficiency-oriented strategies such as Energy Sharing as well as measures in the Global South to ensure protection against ecological and social disadvantages.
- To ensure **gender equality mainstreaming** in transformation strategies and measures, an interministerial working group should be set up under the leadership of the Federal Ministry, responsible for Gender Equality. This working group should strive towards the inclusion of gender equality in climate policy legislation and other measures, promote a national Gender Action Plan for climate policy and coordinate its development.

Department for Gender Equality Reports at the Federal Foundation for Gender Equality

The Expert Commission receives scientific and organisational support from the Gender Equality Reports department of the Federal Foundation for Gender Equality. The Foundation was established in May 2021 by a legislative act of the German Parliament. Its task is to provide information, strengthen practice and support the development of new ideas for equality. It is also intended to be an open house for Gender Equality in which initiatives, active in the field of Gender Equality, can work and network.

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Further information about the Gender Equality Reports of the Federal Government in English:

<https://www.gleichstellungsbericht.de/english>.

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