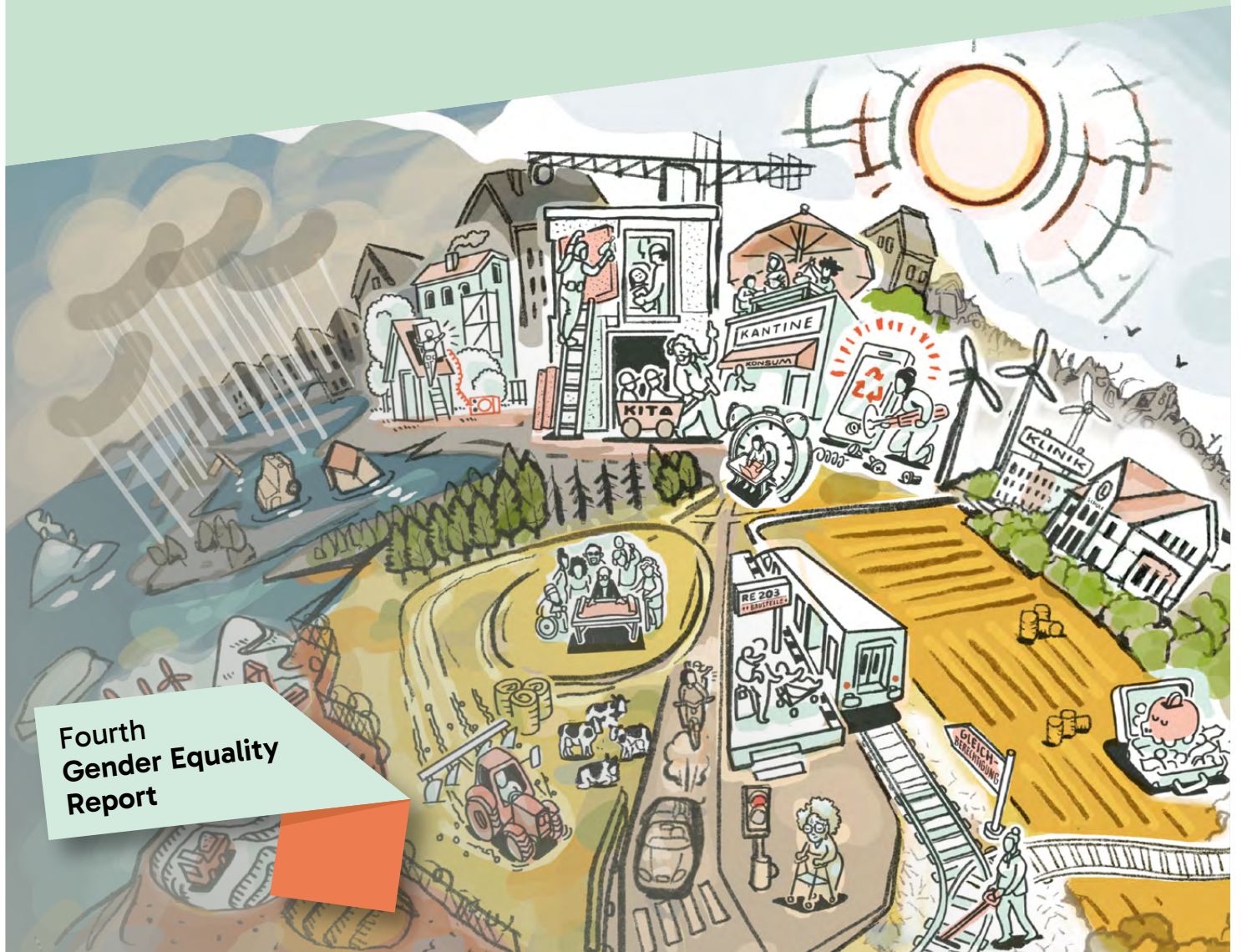


Summary of the Expert Opinion of the Fourth  
Gender Equality Report of the Federal Government

# Gender equality in the socio-ecological transformation



Fourth  
Gender Equality  
Report

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# Imprint



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Gender Equality Report of the Federal Government**

# **Gender equality in the socio-ecological transformation**

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<https://www.gleichstellungsbericht.de/gleichstellungsberichte/vierter-gleichstellungsbericht>

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# Preface

The Fourth Gender Equality Report, “Gender equality in the socio-ecological transformation”, of the German Federal Government, addresses a pressing issue. With this, the Federal Government accepted the request from policy associations promoting gender equality, as well as from the Conference of Equality and Women’s Ministers and Senators of the federal states (GFMK).

In March 2023, the Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Lisa Paus, mandated an Expert Commission of multidisciplinary composition under the direction of Prof. Dr. Silke Bothfeld with the preparation of the Expert Opinion. In January 2025, the Expert Commission presented the finished Expert Opinion to the minister. Alongside a short statement from the Federal Government, the Expert Opinion was published as the Fourth Gender Equality Report in March 2025 (Bundestag document no. 20/15105). The report was delivered to both Bundestag and Bundesrat for the purpose of information and discussion.

The expert commission’s intensive work process was supported by additional experts and practitioners who are simultaneously active at the interface of climate change and gender equality. These reports, as well as findings from numerous professional discussions, were incorporated in the creation of the Expert Opinion.

In addition, the work on the Expert Opinion was scientifically and organisationally supported by the Department for Gender Equality Reports in the Federal Foundation for Gender Equality. The Foundation was established in 2021 to promote equal opportunities for women and men in Germany. To that end, the Foundation provides information relevant to gender equality, supports stakeholders of gender equality policy, such as municipal equal opportunities officers, and contributes to the development of new ideas for gender equality. The establishment of the Foundation stems from a recommendation in the Second Gender Equality Report to create a scientific consulting, service and transfer institution.

This summary of the Fourth Gender Equality Report presents the main contents of the Expert Opinion in concise form. Due to its brevity, not every topic and recommendation for action could be included. The aim was rather to give an insight into the pertinence of the issue and to

introduce those aspects analysed in the Expert Opinion that are relevant to gender equality.

To allow a brief overview, this summary does not include scientific references. The actual Expert Opinion, however, lists all sources.

The Expert Commission sought to integrate its analyses of gender relations with other dimensions of structural inequalities, such as origin, social class, age and sexual orientation (intersectionality). The available data, however, oftentimes only allows conclusions on women and men (if any). For gender equality reporting to reflect gender in a contemporary, intersectional way, differentiated data across multiple axes of inequality are required. Only then is it possible to explain gender-related structures of inequality and hierarchy.

The Fourth Gender Equality Report is available on the website of the Federal Ministry for Education, Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth: <https://www.bmbfsfj.bund.de/bmbfsfj/themen/gleichstellung/gleichstellungsberichte-der-bundesregierung>

In addition, the Gender Equality Report, supplementary expert reports, additional information on gender equality in the socio-ecological transformation, and a Policy Brief on the Fourth Gender Equality Report in English are available on the Gender Equality Reports website: [www.gleichstellungsbericht.de](http://www.gleichstellungsbericht.de)

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# Relevance, mandate for the report and areas of action

## Relevance of the issue

Melting glaciers, increased sea levels, rising temperatures: on an almost daily basis, we hear in the news about the importance of gender equality in the socio-ecological transformation or rather, climate change. Not only are countries in the South affected by climate change. Currently, Europe is the fastest-warming continent. Greenhouse gas emissions increase global warming, which causes extreme weather events such as heat waves, torrential rains and floods – also in Germany.

In response to climate change, the international community of states agreed in the 2015 Paris Agreement to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius, ideally to 1.5 degrees if possible. Yet according to the European Copernicus Climate Change Service, in 2024, the global average temperature exceeded 1.5°C above the pre-industrial level for the first time.

The recognition that our ways of living and doing business are harming the environment and humanity is not new. Both the Club of Rome (1972) and the Brundtland Report (1987) pointed this fact out. It is increasingly clear that climate change does not affect everyone in the same way. The same applies to climate policies that respond to climate change.

Structurally disadvantaged people are particularly burdened. Among them are often women and low-income earners. For example, extreme weather events require greater care for children and people in need of assistance, as they are more vulnerable to the heat. This largely unpaid care work is still provided primarily by women. At the same time, elderly and pregnant women are at a higher risk of suffering during heat waves. Current climate policies also have very different effects: CO2 pricing increases heating costs, which disproportionately affect low-income earners, including many single mothers. One reason is that they often live in older rental apartments.

Studies show that men and high-income households contribute more to climate change than other groups of people. On average, women produce lower greenhouse gas emissions due to their mobility, consumption and dietary behaviour. These differences result from unequal shares of paid and unpaid care work, unequal distributions of income and assets and gender-stereotypical behavioural patterns.

## Mandate for the report and contents of the Expert Opinion

Against this background, the Expert Commission was instructed to

- outline the causes and effects of climate change as well as the impacts of environmental and climate policy measures on gender relations,
- develop recommendations for shaping a gender-equitable ecological transformation and
- develop recommendations for structures, instruments and institutional mechanisms for gender equality, environmental and climate policy based on Art. 3 para. 2 and 3 of the German Basic Law (Grundgesetz).

## Areas of action

The Expert Commission discusses the most frequently addressed areas of action related to climate change. These areas focus on climate protection measures to reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions and resource consumption. Also, these areas concern climate adaptation measures. These areas of action include energy production, circular economy, agriculture, urban and spatial development, mobility, housing, food and nutrition.

Furthermore, the experts researched areas of action crucial to gender equality policy. In addition to health, an area of action that belongs to both worlds, they also included the labour market, work and time and finance. Similar to previous Gender Equality Reports, institutional mechanisms are recommended in the last part of the Expert Opinion. These are meant to ensure that

the report's findings and recommendations for action are being transferred into political and administrative actions.

The Expert Commission deliberately uses the term socio-ecological transformation as the climate targets stipulated in the Paris Agreement cannot be reached solely through technical solutions. Instead, the social causes of climate change and the related structural inequalities also need to be addressed. Fundamental changes to the predominant ways of living and doing business are therefore needed. The aim must be the protection of natural resources, which encompasses respecting the planetary boundaries. Transformation needs to be shaped equitably. This includes gender equality.

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# Key statements of the Expert Opinion

Whether gender equality in the context of climate change increases or decreases depends significantly on the broader conditions of transformation. The state plays a crucial role here, as it sets the framework for the transformation through legislation, infrastructure and support programmes.

**Gender-equitable transformation and climate policies need to take three different levels into account: everyday practices, supply systems and fundamental principles and structures of social governance.**

Respecting planetary boundaries and protecting our natural resources can only be achieved if our everyday behaviours change. These routines are often shaped in gender specific ways. Examples are people's diet or mobility. However, responsibility for transitioning to climate-friendly, gender-equitable daily routines must not be placed solely on individuals. Changes in everyday life do require individuals to rethink their habits. Above all, however, the structures that determine these routines must be adapted. These structures encompass, in particular, supply systems such as energy, transport and industrial production. These need to be transformed to enable and promote climate-friendly, gender-equitable everyday practices. Simultaneously, the principles and control mechanisms that define everyday practices and supply systems must be strictly aligned with climate and gender equality targets. The federal law governing public traffic (Road Traffic Act, Straßenverkehrsgesetz), for instance, prioritises the smooth flow and safety of road traffic. This implies that car drivers are the mobility norm, so that cyclists and pedestrians, much more often female than male, are being neglected as they are seen as a deviation from this norm. Taxation of food is likewise based on an outdated prioritisation of specific foods as everyday goods. This results in greenhouse-gas-intensive foods, such as meat and dairy, being taxed at a lower rate than climate-friendly alternatives, including meat substitutes and oat milk. This type of legislation needs to be adjusted.

**The Expert Commission stresses the importance of a broad understanding of transformation.**

To date, climate policy has focused primarily on emission-intensive sectors such as the steel, energy and automotive industries. This means that, especially in male-dominated sectors, support is being provided for their transition to greater climate-friendliness. Female-dominated sectors, especially social services, the care sector, education and social work, are overlooked. But they are crucial to a successful transformation essential, as these services are necessary to society, especially during periods of change.

**Climate policies must not be limited to technical solutions alone.**

So far, policymakers and administrative bodies rely on new technologies to address environmental challenges, such as wind energy, e-mobility, underground carbon storage and green hydrogen (Technofix). The rationale behind this technofix dogma is to achieve ecological modernisation through green growth. This is intended to drive economic growth while limiting increases in greenhouse gas emissions. The development of such technologies is associated with significant technical and ecological uncertainties, as well as substantial government expenditures. At the same time, this often implicates a focus on male-dominated sectors. Most of all, the negative ecological and social effects in other countries are being overlooked. Mining of rare earth for the production of green hydrogen, for example, causes considerable environmental damage, poor working conditions and a deterioration of local supply structures.

**A twofold understanding of care should be anchored in economic and social change.**

This understanding of care encompasses care for people, often mentioned in gender equality policies, and care for the planet, i.e., our natural resources. Therefore, the action-guiding strategy in climate policies must not be limited to efficiency; it must also include sufficiency. Sufficiency means aligning the right measures with a good life and basic needs for today and future generations. Infrastructure must be designed to conserve resources and prevent excessive consumption, as in the case of fast fashion. Instead, consumption should be designed intelligently, for example, through shared use of goods and repairable electronic appliances. The principle of sufficiency offers the opportunity to relieve daily routines and, in turn, improve quality of life. An example is a canteen that offers healthy, organic food and is accessible to all residents of a neighbourhood. At the same time, it is necessary to ensure that sufficiency does not come at the expense of those who already use fewer resources due to lower income or responsibility for unpaid care work. The global effects of national climate policies have to be borne in mind. Ecological and social downsides must be avoided.

**Social and gender-equitable ecological transformation is not only politically desirable but legally required.**

The German constitution (Basic Law, Grundgesetz) contains several state obligations, which are pertinent to the socio-ecological transformation such as environment protection and climate neutrality (Art. 20a of the Basic Law), the principle of the welfare state (Art. 20 para. 1 of the Basic Law) and the promotion of gender equality (Art. 3 para. 2 of the Basic Law). These obligations interact and create a constitutional mandate for a social, ecological and gender-equitable transformation. This mandate applies to the German Federal Government and to public officials at the state and municipal levels. Legal obligations also result from the right to health in Art. 2 para. 2 of the Basic Law. Furthermore, the Federal Constitutional Court, in its 2021 decision, underlined the urgency of effective climate policy. Similar obligations result from the international level. In its Expert Opinion on state obligations published in 2025, the International Court of Justice explicitly points out that climate change endangers the human rights of women, children and indigenous peoples. According to the Paris Agreement, state measures to address climate change must protect the rights of these groups and respect, promote and consider gender equality.

# Energy production

The transformation of the German energy sector primarily follows technological and economic approaches. These approaches neglect the ecological and social downsides in countries of the Global South arising from the mining of raw materials needed to produce green hydrogen. A just energy transition must be designed to consider the global and national regenerative capacities of natural and social resources.

In 2023, 84.5 per cent of German greenhouse gas emissions were attributable to the combustion of fossil fuels. Public power and heat generation in power plants accounted for 37 per cent of emissions. The reduction of greenhouse gas emissions required by the German Federal Climate Change Act (Bundes-Klimaschutzgesetz) is therefore only possible through the decarbonisation of the energy sector. In recent years, the Federal Government has focused primarily on expanding renewable energy for power and heat generation. Additionally, the Federal Government promotes the production of green hydrogen via electrolysis powered by renewable energy.

The energy sector is male-dominated across both conventional fossil fuels and renewable energy generation. This dominance influences policymaking, employment and decision-making structures within the energy sector. This also goes hand in hand with economy and technology-centred perspectives. Hence, new technologies are regarded as the decisive solution for reducing greenhouse



gas emissions while continuing economic growth. The ecological and social costs associated with an energy transition designed this way are frequently ignored. This is particularly evident in countries of the so-called Global South, where many raw materials required for the energy transition are mined.

## Social and ecological costs of the current energy transition

Today, more than 50 per cent of German electricity demand is generated by renewable energy sources, particularly wind, solar (photovoltaics) and hydropower. These technologies require raw materials such as copper, aluminium and rare earth elements. Pollution is a consequence of mining these raw materials. Additionally, mining destroys on-site social structures. Due to their wide range of raw material deposits, countries such as Chile, Peru and South Africa are at the highest risk of experiencing these ramifications.

Studies indicate, in particular, the existence of problematic working conditions in the mining sector. These include slavery, child labour, discrimination and a lack of

health protection. Precarious working conditions affect many women, but also men, who constitute the majority of workers in the mining industry.

There are no detailed data on the ecological and social consequences of hydrogen production. Yet similar risks as in mining regions are to be expected. Green hydrogen is intended to replace fossil fuels, especially in energy-intensive sectors such as the cement and steel industries. To meet demand in Germany, global production would have to increase considerably by 2030. Because hydrogen production is highly energy-intensive, the power required from renewable sources cannot be supplied entirely in Germany. Germany, therefore, turns to solar

energy from regions in the Global South with abundant sunlight, such as Namibia, Egypt and Colombia.

Hydrogen production requires large quantities of drinking water. This compromises the supply of drinking water in regions where clean water is scarce anyway. Dried-up or polluted water sources make the provision of drinking water more difficult, time-consuming and sometimes more dangerous, a task that is mostly

performed by women. Moreover, hydrogen production changes land use. This risks narrowing access to and use of water for the local population and, consequently, endangering their livelihoods. Simultaneously, the public infrastructure is threatened by overexertion. In the case of sanitary facilities, this can increase health hazards and the risk of violence among the population.

## A just and inclusive energy transition

The energy transition in Germany must not entail ecological and social downsides for other countries. Therefore, the transition needs to protect natural resources on the one hand and avoid global and regional social inequalities on the other. Hence, it must be environmentally and socially sustainable.

At the core of a just and inclusive energy transition is a care that extends beyond children and relatives to encompass nature and the planet (care for people and the planet). Care for the regenerative capabilities of nature and society is key. A regeneration-oriented energy transition accounts for the forces of self-preservation and self-renewal in both the environment and the population. Replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy in one part of the world must not lead to the destruction of social and ecological regenerative capabilities in other regions.

A just and inclusive energy transition is based on feminist and intersectional perspectives. It is decolonial, decentralised, questions established growth targets, and is committed to an economy oriented towards the common good. It raises awareness of the environmental and social impacts of energy production on individual

ecosystems, the planet, and the people living in areas where raw materials are mined. At the same time, this transition is oriented towards gender equality and community. It is committed to a culture of care.

The planetary boundaries cannot be respected without a substantial reduction in energy consumption. It is therefore necessary to not only use energy efficiently, meaning the economical use of energy through improved technologies, but also to place particular emphasis on energy sufficiency. This includes intelligent, demand-oriented energy use, leading to lower overall consumption. By 2050, when combined, these strategies could reduce energy consumption by more than half relative to 2019 levels.

Nevertheless, it should be recognised that unpaid caregivers should not be burdened with additional energy-efficiency tasks. The energy transition must also not come at the expense of people who use fewer resources due to their lower income.



### Recommendations for action

#### Developing and implementing guidelines for a just and inclusive energy policy

The Expert Commission advises the Federal Government to align its policies with the aims and principles of a just and inclusive energy policy. To this end, guidelines to nurture the regenerative capacity of nature and society must be developed and implemented. In doing so, findings from intersectional (i.e., gender-related) research on energy and transformation should be considered. At the same time, the guidelines should be developed in collaboration with key stakeholders across the energy transition sector. These guidelines should be aligned with those of other departments. An advisory board composed of representatives of the Federal Government, state governments and local authorities, as well as experts on gender-equitable energy transition, should support the development and implementation of these guidelines.

The guidelines should be embedded within fundamental energy policies. This includes the Renewable Energy Sources Act (Erneuerbare Energien Gesetz), which can serve as a model for other energy-sector acts, especially the Building Energy Act (Gebäudeenergiegesetz) and the Energy Efficiency Act (Energieeffizienzgesetz). The implementation needs to be secured by institutional mechanisms.

Energy sufficiency must be established as the central pillar of the energy transition. To that end, the Federal Government and municipalities need to integrate energy-efficiency measures into programmes to expand and promote renewable energy. The same applies to emission-reduction and energy-saving strategies. The focus should primarily be on households and individuals with high incomes.



### Involving municipalities in shaping the energy transition

Municipalities are indispensable for a just and inclusive energy transition, as targets and principles such as decentralisation and care-orientation are particularly relevant. The municipal level can serve as an accelerator for gender equality oriented transition. Therefore, the experts advise the Federal Government to support municipalities in shaping a regenerative energy transition and in contributing to the existing body of knowledge. The Federal Government could adjust the municipal guideline of the National Climate Initiative (Kommunalrichtlinie der Nationalen Klimaschutzinitiative), which supports municipal actors in reducing their emissions sustainably. The relevant federal department should align energy-sector measures with guidelines for a regenerative energy transition. Additionally, funding must be provided at the municipal level to shape and implement these guidelines in a gender-equitable manner.

Municipalities also receive support from the Agency for Municipal Climate Action (Agentur für kommunalen Klimaschutz), commissioned and funded by the Federal Government. The Agency's consultations, workshops and networking meetings for community actors should focus on a regenerative approach to the energy transition.



### Ensuring protection from ecological and social downsides in the Global South

As long as Germany relies on renewable energy and green hydrogen from other countries, the associated ecological and social downsides must be mitigated. Currently, German enterprises are obligated under the Act on Corporate Due Diligence Obligations in Supply Chains (Lieferkettensorgfaltspflichtengesetz, LkSG) to identify and prevent potential harm to humans and the environment. Enterprises must prevent or remedy these risks through measures such as training or financial support for suppliers.

The experts furthermore advise including specific gender equality standards in the Act on Corporate Due Diligence Obligations in Supply Chains. This requires gender-differentiated risk and impact assessments. The Act should be closely monitored, and violations should be dealt with effectively. For specific proposals to modify the Act, the Expert Commission refers to the position paper "Gender Equality in Global Supply Chains" prepared by 12 NGOs.

The European Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (2024/1760/EU) already demands the disclosure of risks along the entire value chain and includes a gender-equitable due diligence approach. Accordingly, when exercising due diligence, enterprises must pay particular attention to the adverse consequences for people at greater risk due to marginalisation or vulnerability. Moreover, the Directive contains a subjective right to bring legal action for persons affected by severe breaches of the law. For this reason, the experts advise the Federal Government to implement the Directive swiftly.

The Expert Commission recommends that the Federal Government incorporate the perspectives of people from the Global South into energy transition strategies and evaluations. Local organisations could be commissioned to survey local demands. The effects on the population associated with hydrogen production facilities and raw material mining should be continually monitored. Contracts with partner countries and enterprises should include protections for people who are structurally disadvantaged.

## Decentralised energy production from renewable energy

Currently, energy production from renewable energy is strongly centralised. One alternative approach is decentralisation, i.e., individual or collective energy production near its point of consumption. Examples include energy communities such as Energy-Sharing and Bürger\*innenenergie (renewable energy community or citizen energy community). In Bürger\*innenenergie communities, citizens collectively fund and operate a regional renewable energy plant and supply electricity to the grid. Energy-sharing functions similarly, except that each person involved can use the energy produced. Only an energy surplus is fed into the grid.

Such energy communities can supply households, less energy-intensive industrial sectors, microenterprises, small and medium-sized enterprises and public administrations.

Local economies would benefit from decentralised energy production because jobs and revenue would remain close by. This would also increase the local community's acceptance of renewable energy plants. Producing one's own energy can also foster a deeper awareness of self-generated energy and, hence, greater energy sufficiency.

Women have been less involved in these energy communities than men and, to date, underrepresented on their boards of directors. For the energy transition to progress democratically, everyone has to be involved, especially women and people on low incomes. For example, at Bürger Energie Bremen e.G., women were proactively approached and invited to a qualification programme required to apply for a position on the supervisory board.



### Recommendation for action

#### Removing barriers to energy sharing and shaping gender-equitable energy production

The Expert Commission highlights the need for a framework that promotes self-determination and personal initiative among citizens and includes persons who are structurally disadvantaged. This requires the Federal Government to reduce bureaucracy and barriers to energy sharing. The experts suggest anchoring the consideration of structural inequalities in the Renewable Energy Sources Act to increase the involvement of low-income persons. Municipalities should also enable low-income residents to participate in renewable energy projects through innovative models. Examples of such models include the option to join without paying the full contribution upfront or to buy shares at a nominal price.

# Circular Economy

**The current take, make, waste-economy and consumer society not only damages nature but also reinforces social and gender-specific inequalities. A circular economy focuses on recycling, resource reduction and the sharing of common goods. In doing so, it can reduce environmental impacts. Still, risks of furthering structural inequalities remain. Therefore, a circular economy has to be developed within a circular society. It must consider gender equality at both the national and global levels, particularly in the Global South.**

The conventional economic model in industrial societies follows a linear path. This means that resources such as rare earths and metals are extracted, products are manufactured, and the products are disposed of after a short lifespan (take, make, waste). Disproportionate amounts of primary raw materials are utilised this way, meaning unprocessed raw materials that have to be extracted from nature first. Simultaneously, products' short lifespans generate significant waste.

Linear production is not only linked to high resource consumption, but also to social problems. One example of this is the production of electronic devices. Gender-specific inequalities can be detected along all stages of their production and marketing. Research, development and design of electronic products are shaped by gender stereotypes oriented towards male-dominated norms. Additionally, more men work in these sectors. Women in the Global South producing these devices are systematically disadvantaged with regard to wages, working conditions and workplace security, for example, because they are used as cheap labourers in factories. The mining sector, where, for example, lithium is being extracted to be used in smartphone batteries, affects women more severely in negative ways. They are exposed to environmental damage, experience gender-specific violence, hardly profit from the companies' revenue, and rarely have a say in their decision-making. In the waste management industry in the Global South, women are more often employed in informal, non-specialised, low-paid recycling roles, including collecting waste from households and landfills. Here, improper waste disposal and landfills can compromise their health.



The circular economy focuses on upcycling and recycling, meaning designing and producing products that are durable, easy to repair and reusable, and reprocessing raw materials. For example, designing a smartphone with an easily removable battery is a simple way to make the device repairable. After use, the materials are recycled and reused in new devices.

The circular economy currently focuses solely on production and economic cycles. When viewed through a gender lens, however, a societal transformation towards a circular economy is necessary. Following that, the principle of a circular economy is extended and applied to social structures, ways of thinking, and lifestyles. The circular society aims to preserve natural resources through democratic, transparent, cooperative economic cycles and strives for a just society that enables social participation and a high quality of life for everyone.

## Gender equality relevant gaps in the National Circular Economy Strategy

In 2024, the Federal Government adopted the National Circular Economy Strategy (Nationale Kreislaufwirtschaftsstrategie, NKWS) as the central strategy for a circular economy. The primary aim of the strategy is to reduce the use of primary raw materials. This is intended to help secure the supply of raw materials, save resources and protect the climate. For example, raw materials for electronic devices should be used more efficiently, and the amount of recycled materials should be increased. In addition to these technical innovations, the NKWS also addresses people's everyday behaviour. Information on sustainable purchase decisions should help people to change their consumption patterns. In addition, the consumption of durable goods should be promoted, for instance, through sharing models such as tool or clothing rentals, or through shops that lend goods.

So far, the NKWS doesn't address participation in the circular economy and the social effects of the measures. First and foremost, people are viewed as consumers who, with more information, can make more sustainable consumption decisions. This is insufficient, however, since many people still cannot afford eco-friendly products manufactured under fair labour conditions. In 2024, 15.5 per cent of society was at risk of poverty. To support their families, low-income single mothers are facing substantial restrictions in their quality of life and health.

More importantly, it is not enough to change specific production and marketing practices and adjust them to be more environmentally and economically sustainable. Instead, people are affected by unsafe and unjust labour conditions along the global supply chains, which need to come into focus (see chapter Energy production). Here, the NKWS already states that raw material supply chains must be designed responsibly and sustainably. This implies considering social and ecological principles of sustainability. Global projects such as negotiating fair supply chains require partnerships, communities and networks. Competition for good solutions is more useful than competition for economic and technological top spots. Most importantly, economic cycles need to be better aligned with the regional level to conserve resources and promote social equity.

Strategies that lead to resource reduction and a rethinking of consumption behaviour warrant changes in everyday actions. Circular consumption and long-lasting goods, for example, require more time (see chapter Work and time). Things need maintenance and care. People, therefore, have to make personal contributions to consume and use goods sustainably. In order to implement society's circular transformation, a greater amount of care work is required – not only for persons but also for things.

## Further development towards a circular society

One approach that addresses this criticism is the circular society. The concept of a circular society extends the concept of a circular economy. Thus, the target is not only an economic but also a societal transformation. According to this concept, the circular economy is expanded by focusing not only on material cycles, resource reduction, and waste avoidance but also on enabling new societal ways of thinking and lifestyles. Humans and their social connections are at the centre of a circular society. An enhanced understanding of work not only includes gainful employment but also care work and unpaid work, such as do-it-yourself and community work. This promotes a gender-equitable society in which all its members participate in the circular economy. The transition from a throwaway and consumer society to a culture of longevity,

durability and communal use of goods is in the hands of all members of society.

Sufficiency and commons are essential principles of a circular society. Current transformation strategies particularly rely on a more yielding use of raw materials (efficiency) or the use of more environmentally friendly raw materials and technologies (consistency). Sufficiency, by way of contrast, strives for lower consumption while maintaining the same standard of living or being able to satisfy basic needs. There are numerous examples of economic activity aligned with the principle of sufficiency: using refurbished electronic products, renting products (such as bicycles, cars or tools), and consciously reducing unnecessary consumption or certain travel.

Commons in this context refer to jointly managed resources shared, used and cared for by a community. This can be communally managed resources as well as knowledge or digital goods. Economic systems based on commons are open-source software and hardware. Since there are no patent restrictions, these can be used, modified and developed by anyone. Open-source ecology enables the development of construction plans for agricultural and industrial machines, which can then be produced at a lower cost. Commons also promote more sustainable, fairer economic systems that prioritise solidarity and cooperation over competition.

The concept of operating in a circular economy can be adopted by entire cities or regions, the so-called circular cities and circular regions. They promote local and regional economic models based on joint ownership and shared use, i.e., commons. Empirical studies show that new jobs are created in these areas, especially in the fields of re-use and repair. Local knowledge and craft skills are essential to these developments as they are the basis for sustainable solutions.



### **Recommendations for action** **Introducing a cross-sectional initiative on the effects of a circular economy on gender**

Knowledge about the effects of a circular economy on gender relations is currently lacking. This includes, for example, information on how a circular economy can enhance employment opportunities for women, or how gender, origin, education, income and age affect access to circular products. The Expert Commission recommends that the German Federal Government establish a cross-sector initiative that pools existing knowledge on the effects of a circular economy on gender relations across sectors and federal ministries. They recommend launching new funding programmes to close knowledge gaps and organising dialogue forums to further develop the NKWS. Additionally, it should be researched how the allocation of public funds for circular transformations within commercial enterprises can be more socially oriented. It should also be examined, which indicators and instruments are suitable to assess and monitor the gender impact of the NKWS. Monitoring and assessment should include factors such as the quality of work, time for care and unpaid work, health and employee participation.



### **Incorporating social innovations in the Circular Economy Strategy**

The Expert Commission recommends incorporating political initiatives and strategies to promote social innovation within the NKWS. This can be approached in a similar way to the National Programme for Sustainable Consumption (Nationales Programm für nachhaltigen Konsum). Social innovations are designed to solve social problems in a sustainable and socially viable way. These can include repair initiatives, platform switching, zero-waste shops, or urban gardening. In addition, instruments – including fiscal instruments – should be considered that support women from disadvantaged groups, such as unemployed women, migrant women, or single mothers, in participating better in circular initiatives like sharing or swapping communities, commons and open-source initiatives. This requires equal pay for typically unpaid and communal work and the provision of materials such as tools and discrimination-sensitive spaces. A competency centre for the circular economy should be set up, similar to the competency centre for sustainable consumption (Kompetenzzentrum Nachhaltiger Konsum). The centre would be tasked with monitoring the implementation of a gender-equitable circular economy and with providing advice and support to circular communities, with a focus on inclusiveness and gender equality.



## Enabling active participation in the Circular Economy Strategy

The circular transformation extends far into everyday life and requires active consumer participation. Large-scale dialogues and participatory processes should be facilitated rather than decisions made top-down about essential everyday questions of the future. These dialogues and processes should include a range of participation formats. It is reasonable to further regionalise and decentralise the NKWS processes in the future. Additionally, federal states and, in particular, municipalities should be involved in these processes. The experts recommend convening a citizens' council on "Ways towards a circular society" to develop recommendations for policymakers to improve participation in circular consumption and production. The citizens' council should comprise people from all genders, age groups, life situations, and social milieus. Also, a programme should be initiated to support municipalities in aligning their regional roadmaps for a circular region to the needs of their citizens.

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# Agriculture

**The basic structures of the agricultural sector and particularly agricultural businesses and farms, are shaped by gender-specific inequalities. The shift towards more organic farming does not automatically lead to greater gender equality. The ecological transformation, however, offers opportunities to create gender equality oriented framework conditions and incentives.**

Agriculture plays a key role in the German economy and is vital to the country's food security. Yet the industrialised conventional agriculture contributes substantially to climate change. Problems arise primarily from factory farming and the use of fertilisers and pesticides, which damage soils, groundwater and surface waters, as well as from production processes that exploit natural resources. In this context, meat production poses a particular climate challenge and accounts for the largest share of carbon emissions in the agricultural sector. 60 per cent of the effective areas are currently used for growing animal feed. In turn, these surfaces can no longer be used for food cultivation.

Due to global competition, farms are under significant economic pressure. Small-scale farming is increasingly being replaced by agricultural holdings. These further industrialise production. Both rising prices of and competition for agricultural land make it more difficult for women and small farms to establish and assert themselves in the sector. At the same time, agriculture is characterised by great gender inequalities. Disadvantages for women arise from the unequal division of labour, unequal distribution of land and funds, and a lack of social security, including maternity leave, parental leave, and pensions. 89 per cent of farming businesses are managed by men. Women are also significantly underrepresented in agricultural interest groups and associations. Precisely these groups could drive the agricultural sector towards greater ecological and gender equality.

The transition to organic farming supports more sustainable production methods and substantially reduces carbon emissions. This transition is supported by vari-



ous programmes and strategies. At the EU level, these include, for example, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the 2020 Farm to Fork strategy. At the federal level, there are the Federal Programme for Supporting the Transformation of Livestock Farming (Bundesprogramm zur Förderung des Umbaus der landwirtschaftlichen Tierhaltung), as well as the 2030 Organic Strategy (Bio-Strategie 2030), according to which 30 per cent of agricultural areas should be organically operated by 2030. In 2024, the share of organic production was only half of the target (11%).

The transition to more eco-friendly structures, however, does not automatically lead to equal opportunities for all genders. The CAP example shows that gender inequalities are being neglected.

## Funding structures in agriculture

Agriculture is heavily subsidised within the EU. In Germany, EU subsidies under the CAP are divided into two pillars. Subsidies under the first pillar are paid out to owners as flat-rate area premiums based on the number of hectares cultivated. In doing so, the CAP primarily supports conventional agriculture. The second pillar mostly promotes sustainable projects but is significantly less well funded. Subsidies largely go to conventional farms owned by men, even though one of the CAP's targets is gender equality, and the current funding period focuses on eco-friendly production methods. Landowners,

including public institutions, agricultural holdings, and non-agricultural organisations, benefit disproportionately from these subsidies. Only farm owners can apply for funding. Because women's ownership of farms, including small-scale businesses, is low, women do not have equal access to these subsidies. In addition, environmental associations and the Federal Environment Agency (Umweltbundesamt) criticise that the newly introduced eco-schemes in the EU CAP are insufficiently funded to adequately support more environmentally friendly production methods.



### Recommendation for action

#### Linking agricultural subsidies to ecological and gender equality-oriented targets

The Expert Commission recommends that the EU replace the flat-rate area premiums in the first pillar with subsidy strategies that can secure farmers' livelihoods. This is intended to shift production from inefficient animal products to primarily plant-based products. The EU's main goal should be to substantially advance small and medium-sized farms, animal welfare, biodiversity, and gender equality in agriculture. The Expert Commission also recommends that the German Federal Government support the transition of farms towards organic production through programmes that provide consultation and funding. The German Federal Government should tax greenhouse gas emissions from livestock farming by introducing a so-called methane tax, comparable to the Danish initiative. This tax revenue should be used to promote sustainability in the agricultural sector and to fund nature conservation initiatives, such as reforestation and methane-reducing feed substitutes.

## Gender relations in agricultural businesses

Gender-specific inequalities are deeply rooted in agricultural organisation and operating principles. The traditional image of a family-owned farm depicts a man as head of the business and the family. In addition to working on the farm, women are solely responsible for household, family, and care work. Field and machine work is attributed to men, while looking after animals and cultivating fruit and vegetables is attributed to women. Such stereotypical ideas contribute to the fact that only very few women manage farms themselves (11%) or take over family farms (18%). 40 per cent of women working on family farms have neither an employment contract nor their own income. This undermines their financial security in retirement and their position in the event of divorce or separation. Self-employed women in agriculture are not protected by the Maternity Protection Act (Mutterschutzgesetz). Taking parental leave is difficult

for all farm workers, regardless of gender, due to a shortage of skilled workers to cover their absence. Most women working on farms are seasonal workers. They are at the bottom of a farm's social hierarchy and carry the highest risk of discrimination, for example, through unfair pay or assaults in shared accommodation. These problems exist equally in conventional and ecological agriculture, although the share of women managing organic farms is slightly higher overall. The transition to organic farming offers an opportunity to create incentives for greater gender equality in agriculture. Not only are women disadvantaged within the agricultural sector, but also marginalised groups such as sexual and gender minorities, people of colour, refugees, the immigrant population, and people with disabilities.



### Recommendations for action

#### Initiating funding programmes for women to start their own business or acquire existing farms

In line with key actors in the agricultural sector, such as the German Association of Rural Women (Deutscher LandFrauenverband), the Expert Commission recommends that the German Federal Government establish funding programmes to advise and support people who are structurally disadvantaged, including many women, particularly in setting up businesses and taking over existing farms.



#### Improving working conditions and facilitating gender-equitable parental protection

The Expert Commission recommends that the German Federal Government introduce measures to improve working conditions, particularly occupational safety, for seasonal labourers and migrant workers. Financial security should be provided to self-employed women during pregnancy and the period before, during and after childbirth. Parental benefits (Elterngeld) for self-employed should be simplified.



#### Increasing the representation of women

There should be a binding minimum quota for women in management positions across the agriculture and food sector, as well as in the Chambers of Agriculture (Landwirtschaftskammern) and rural associations. Particularly disadvantaged groups such as LGBTQI\* and seasonal workers and their networks should consistently be supported. Also, targeted publicity campaigns featuring female role models are needed to overcome prevailing gender stereotypes.

## Challenges posed by the food industry

International food corporations are powerful actors within the food industry. Individual enterprises, or a small number of businesses, partly dominate the market and therefore dictate supply. These corporations can set food prices and sales, thereby influencing production methods and working conditions in the agricultural sector. Farmers are not always in a position to negotiate cost-covering prices for their goods. Currently, the global food system relies on a small number of selected grain varieties distributed by a few corporations. These grain

varieties are cultivated for export in a small number of countries specialised in that task, such as Ukraine. Their cultivation is highly industrialised. These production practices cause countries, especially in the Global South, to depend on the international cereal market. If wars disrupt food market stability, food crises can arise. Strengthening agriculture at the regional level and supporting local family farm structures could help counter such global dependencies.

## Regionalisation of agriculture through Alternative Food Networks

Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) are emerging forms of agriculture that address challenges in the global food industry and establish regional structures. AFNs are diverse: they include production models such as community-supported agriculture (Solidarische Landwirtschaft), land-shareholding cooperatives (Landkaufgenossenschaften), agricultural land joint-stock cooperatives (Bürgeraktiengesellschaften), and urban gardening initiatives. This way, they provide farmers with access to agricultural land and resources. They can also focus on distribution channels such as food cooperatives (Lebensmittelkooperationen) or community kitchens (see chapter Food and nutrition). In addition, alternative economic systems can evolve. Land shareholding cooperatives, for example, purchase agricultural land and lease it to organic farms at cost-effective rates. In community-supported agriculture, its members become long-term

purchasers of a share of the farms' crops and also share the risk of crop failures. Hence, these farms are less dependent on conventional markets and can sell their products more directly.

Since these Alternative Food Networks provide women with access to agricultural areas, they increase their chances of taking over a farm outside their family. Men also get the chance to depart from gender-specific life paths and choose not to take over their family farms.

To equitably shape Alternative Food Networks for all genders, support and incentives for greater gender equality are required. As of now, AFNs are still based on traditional social gender roles, for example, in terms of division of labour.



### Recommendations for action

#### Setting up a federal programme for Alternative Food Networks

The German Federal Government should establish a funding programme to try out Alternative Food Networks and subsequently expand them to other regions. These programmes should include gender equality considerations, such as fair wages, women in leadership positions and the promotion of women in machine work, as part of the funding eligibility criteria.



#### Enabling equitable land policy

Municipalities should lease public agricultural areas according to criteria that serve the common good. In this process, women and other disadvantaged groups should be given preferential consideration. Funded by agricultural land funds, municipalities should purchase and lease additional areas. The German Federal Government should participate in the refinancing of municipal land.

# Urban and spatial development

**Urban and spatial development provisions appear inherently gender-neutral. Yet planning processes lack nuanced perspectives that could highlight diverse needs. To achieve a socio-ecological transformation, spatial distribution and planning must consider the care for humans and the care for the planet, thereby encompassing care work, public interest, and the preservation of natural resources.**

The consequences of climate change are particularly evident in urban areas due to higher temperatures and more frequent extreme rainfall events. Cities need to adapt to these changes, for example, by incorporating green spaces and reducing concrete surfaces. The changes also affect rural areas, for example, the phasing out of brown coal and the deployment of wind turbines. Measures for climate adaptation and climate protection intensify competition for land. This is evident, for example, in the need for areas for flood protection, renewable energy, and additional cycle paths and railways.

Until recently, the design of cities was largely based on the concept of functionally segregated spaces, such as living, working and recreation. Concepts like commuter



towns or satellite cities exemplify how this segregation relates to traditional gender roles: work was reduced to the gainful employment of men. Care work, carried out mostly by women, took place in private households and therefore remained invisible. Cities were planned from the perspective of people whose everyday lives were “care-free”. The ideal of a city separated by functions has been replaced by new models. However, the effects are still felt today. Additionally, people with disabilities, queer people, or other persons experiencing discrimination are most often overlooked in urban and spatial planning. Data on the needs of people subjected to multiple forms of discrimination in urban planning remain scarce.

## Sustainable concepts of urban and spatial planning

Several strategies and planning concepts for urban and spatial development already account for ecological and gender considerations. The UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, for example, includes gender equality as a cross-sectional principle (Sustainable Development Goals, SDG 5). Gender equality needs to be considered within the framework of sustainable city development accordingly (SDG 11). Additionally, governments that adopted the New Urban Agenda committed to gender-equitable city development, mobility planning, climate protection and climate adaptation. However, these requirements are rarely taken into account.

At the national level, the New Leipzig Charta (2020) serves as a strategic basis for integrated city planning and mobility. The Charta’s goals are equal opportunities and environmental justice for all, regardless of gender, socio-eco-

nomic status, age, and origin. These goals are intended to be achieved through an urban policy oriented towards the common good and that considers the interests of all citizens equally. Based on the Charta, the Federal Ministry of Housing, Urban Development and Building published guidelines for gender-equitable urban planning in March 2025.

Furthermore, there are planning concepts that combine social justice, gender equality, and sustainability in urban planning and spatial development. An alternative concept to a city organised by function is the “city of short distances”. Cities such as Barcelona and Paris are already pursuing this concept. Housing, work, and infrastructure, such as stores and doctors’ offices, are located in the same district. This promotes climate-friendly forms of mobility and facilitates care work. Green spaces in the densely built-up neighbourhoods of Barcelona, for example,

not only help regulate temperature but also support care work by providing spaces to retreat or interact.

For climate-sensitive and gender-equitable planning, it is also important to focus on transforming and refurbishing existing buildings rather than using all available space for new buildings and streets. To create more living space in Germany, for example, commercial buildings are converted or roofs extended. At the same time, it is necessary to

base the planning, especially in concentrated city centres, on social utilisation concepts in order to avoid gentrification and thus the displacement of low-income people.

The needs and interests of every section of the population, as well as their living conditions, have to be already included in the construction planning of any project. So far, participation processes have often been neglected in favour of accelerated planning.



### Recommendations for action Implementing the concept of Caring Cities

The Expert Commission builds upon these considerations and recommends incorporating Caring Cities as a general concept and model in spatial planning. The concept of Caring Cities is based on a sustainable infrastructure near residential areas. Care for the people and care for the planet are combined as a twofold concept of care. This is achieved by including principles of climate adaptation and of care into open space planning. Additionally, synergies between climate and care can be used to improve the planning process. Examples can be found in Madrid and Barcelona, where citywide action plans focus on public welfare and care work. Other examples include care hubs (Sorgezentren), which offer spaces for health-care providers, childcare, repair cafés and other sustainable services under one roof, in close proximity to residential areas.

Federal, state and local governments should promote model projects and innovations that advance the Caring Cities concept. Positive examples should be adopted by other regions. Establishing Caring Cities as a new guiding principle in spatial planning and research and promoting projects that put this approach into practice, must be prioritised. Financial support for construction projects should only be granted if gender-equitable planning is included.



### Expanding participation for the socio-ecological transformation

The Expert Commission recommends making regional participation procedures more inclusive. In doing so, it is important to integrate diverse people and develop innovative participation methods. These can range from performative or creative to narrative approaches. This way, historically underrepresented groups, such as women, people with a migration background, and young people, can be more easily involved. Processes should be designed for transformation. They should promote gender equality and account for the diverse realities of life. The Expert Commission recommends funding model projects and guidelines to ensure gender equality is considered in planning, despite increasing pressure to accelerate these processes.

## Guidelines for climate protection in urban and spatial planning

The aim of the 2024 Federal Climate Adaptation Act (Bundes-Klimaanpassungsgesetz) is to minimize the negative effects of climate change on, amongst other areas, public health, infrastructure and nature. Although, the Act states, that an increase in social inequalities needs to be prevented. There are no concrete requirements in the Act to implement gender equality-oriented climate

adaptation measures. Yet the explanatory memorandum to the Act's legislative proposal clearly states that climate change affects women and men differently.

The Climate Adaptation Act nevertheless offers opportunities to consider gender equality in urban and spatial planning. This applies, in particular, to the clusters "Infra-

structure”, “urban development”, “spatial planning”, and “civil protection”. In the cluster “social justice and vulnerable groups”, gender equality is regarded as an important cross-sectional requirement. Yet concrete measures or

measurable objectives are missing. A gender-differentiated analysis of climate-related risks for people in cities and rural areas could create more clarity.



### Recommendation for action Including gender aspects in regulations for climate adaptation

The experts recommend considering gender equality objectives in the early stages of climate adaptation processes. For this, issues relevant to gender equality, must be integrated into programmes that finance, advise and provide information on the development and implementation of climate adaptation measures. It is also important to consider structural inequalities when implementing the Climate Adaptation Act. The climate impact risk analysis required under the Climate Adaptation Act should be combined with a social vulnerability analysis, that analyses why and how people are affected by climate change, differentiated by gender. Such analyses should also be included in funding programmes for climate adaptation at the municipal and regional levels. In addition, indicators must be developed to monitor a gender-responsive implementation of climate adaptation measures.

## Legal framework for spatial and urban planning

Competencies for urban and spatial planning are divided among the Federal, state and local governments. The Federal Government and state governments address national and interregional issues. Municipalities are responsible for planning on a local level. They, for instance, decide on the distribution and use of land and concrete measures to protect the population from heat. According to these competencies, several acts of legislation define whether and how urban and spatial planning decisions can be made. Today, certain laws, such as the Spatial Planning Act (Raumordnungsgesetz), already require a sustainable development. The Federal Building Code (Baugesetzbuch) also requires considering different needs and effects during the planning process, in particular regarding families, different ages, people with disabilities and the impact on men and women.

Other laws and planning instruments lack gender or climate considerations. Furthermore, existing requirements for sustainable or gender-equitable planning are often not implemented effectively. For example, gender issues are not fully considered in urban land-use planning because, in practice, economic interests are often given greater weight than social or ecological concerns. In some instances, setbacks can occur. For example, until 2020, the Urban Development Support Programme (Städtebauförderung) of the Federal and state governments stipulated that gender equality had to be observed. This wording was subsequently weakened and changed to the more general wording of enabling “participation for all”.



### Recommendation for action Gender-equitable shaping of the legal framework

The legal framework should be adapted to support the gender-equitable and sustainable development of cities and rural areas. To this end, it is necessary to adjust the states’ building regulations and the Federal Building Code accordingly. It should aim to facilitate the seamless integration of social infrastructure with residential and business areas. Additionally, agricultural buildings should be repurposed to minimise land usage. It should facilitate converting these buildings into stores, businesses, healthcare facilities, or childcare facilities. Combining these functions in close proximity can improve the balance of care work and gainful employment. The Federal Building Code should explicitly include the accessibility of care facilities as a planning factor.

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# Mobility and transport planning

**Current transport policies favour the development of car-friendly infrastructure, and are primarily geared towards employment-related needs. For a successful transition of the mobility sector within the socio-ecological transformation, it is essential to treat all modes of transport equally and to consider gender diverse living realities and mobility needs.**

Mobility is a critical sector in the socio-ecological transformation. Nearly a quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions in Germany is caused by traffic, especially by motor vehicles. Nevertheless, policymakers and legislators continue to focus on motorised private transport, placing commuting routes at the centre of transport planning. The effects are evident in greenhouse gas accounting: between 1990 and 2023, the transport sector achieved the lowest carbon reduction among the sectors covered by the German Climate Protection Act (Klimaschutzgesetz).

Climate policy measures in the transport sector primarily focus on federal funding and economic incentives to encourage a shift from petrol- and diesel-powered vehicles to electromobility. These measures include funding for charging stations, purchase subsidies and tax reliefs for electric cars. By contrast, legislative measures that restrict climate-harmful behaviour, such as speed limits, are largely absent. In addition, investments in roads and railways are unevenly distributed. The German rail sec-



tor is considerably less well funded than those of other countries. In Switzerland, the per capita investment in rail transport amounts to 477 euros annually, which is approximately four times as much as in Germany.

## Transport poverty

By prioritising car traffic, key mobility needs of the population are left unmet and must be addressed individually or replaced through alternative arrangements. This particularly affects low-income households, people with care responsibilities and those living in rural areas. In rural or suburban areas, limited access to mobility often leads to transport poverty. When public transport is reduced, public service institutions often close as well. Subsequently, without owning a car, it becomes impossible to

participate in social and economic activities. Women are disproportionately affected, as they are frequently more reliant on accessible everyday infrastructure. In cities, mobility poverty can also arise from barriers for people with physical impairments, technical barriers for people without smartphones, or insufficient consideration of security requirements in public transport.



### Recommendation for action Relieving households affected by transport poverty

In the future, revenue from the extended European Emissions Trading System will be allocated to the European Social Climate Fund. European member states can use the revenue to finance measures to combat energy and mobility poverty. States must present a National Climate Social Plan in order to access funds. Hence, the Federal Government would be well advised to fulfil its obligation swiftly by presenting a National Climate Social Plan. The plan needs to account for gender impact and include measures that promote gender equality.

The Expert Commission especially recommends targeted measures, income support and funding, considering the specific circumstances of single mothers, women with disabilities and elderly women living alone. One option is to extend the Mobility Bonus (Mobilitätsbonus) in the German tax code. This provision complements the tax-deductibility of commuting costs in order to relieve people with low income, that do not benefit from the tax deductibility. To date the Mobility Bonus is limited to distances of more than 20km. This excludes many women, who often have shorter commutes. Another option could be supporting the social leasing of electric cars for low-income households, similar to France.

## Automotive normativity in transport planning

The traditional German concept of urban planning, segregating cities according to their functions, (see chapter Urban and spatial development) also favoured the expansion of car-friendly infrastructure and prioritised motorised private transport. Transport planning prioritises the needs of commuters and commercial transport, with the aim of fast and secure transportation. This leads to higher costs for transport infrastructure, such as highway expansion, and higher carbon emissions. People with care responsibilities are often neglected, as their travel patterns are often shorter and more complex, with multiple stops in between. They are more likely to use alternative modes of transport, such as cycling, public transport, or walking. In Germany, the researchers Urmila Goel and Ulrike Mausolf coined the term “Autonormativität” (Automotive normativity) to illustrate the structural prioritisation of motorised private transport. The term comprises

the focus on cars as such but also the prioritisation of the automobile related industries, traffic infrastructure, and legal regulations. Transport planning, for example, is primarily defined by the Federal Road Traffic Act (Straßenverkehrsgesetz). The historic “Law on Transport with Motorised Vehicles” from 1909 was renamed the Road Traffic Act in 1952. Yet to this day, it primarily regulates the use of motor vehicles. Pedestrians – significantly more often women than men – are mentioned only once. Other modes of transport, such as bicycles, are treated as deviations from the norm and therefore neglected.

Transport planning is still dominated by male perspectives. The Federal Ministry of Transport, for example, has never been headed by a woman. Out of 30 members in the Transport Committee of the German Federal Parliament, only four are women.

## Focusing on mobility rather than transport

Proposals for a gender-equitable transition of the transport sector stand in contrast to the focus on motorised private transport. These proposals are based on the concept of mobility, that integrates all modes of transport, considers diverse mobility needs, and addresses transport poverty. Such integrative planning requires a change of thinking, from transport towards mobility, of both legislators and planners. Mobility is a prerequisite for participating in social, economic and political life. This includes the op-

tion to reach multiple destinations for different purposes within a set timeframe. Transport, on the other hand, refers to vehicles, infrastructures and rules that make movement possible. Hence, transport planning focuses primarily on building more roads, wider highways, and traffic regulations to optimise traffic flow. A mobility-focused approach, by contrast, considers how people travel to their workplace, school or supermarket. For this, accessible public transport and safe cycle paths are crucial.

## A Federal Mobility Law as a solution

Already in 2022, the German Transport Club (Verkehrsklub Deutschland), a federal association dedicated to sustainable mobility, drafted a Federal Mobility Act. The draft was developed to align German transport policy with the requirements of sustainable mobility. It aims to limit the adverse impact of the transportation sector on the environment, climate, health, society and living conditions. The law includes corresponding key objectives (§§ 4–11).

The Act already considers gender equality relevant challenges and issues in the transport and mobility sector, and helps addressing them. An example is the key

objective of securing the transport of goods and the provision of services, which includes care work such as trips to and from care facilities (§ 5). Traffic safety, injury patterns, and risk factors must also be considered with regard to gender (§ 7). The key objective of health protection takes into account that traffic-related emissions along busy roads affect women more heavily than men (§ 8). To further social justice, the proposal emphasises the accessibility of public transport for all (§ 9). On top of that, the quality of stay in public spaces should be improved in order to create cities and regions worth living in (§ 11).



### Recommendations for action

#### Integrating gender equality targets and care work considerations in the mobility legislation

The Expert Commission supports the adoption of a Federal Mobility Act. Laws and other relevant regulations governing mobility and transport planning, as well as the corresponding funding, should be further developed to align with gender equality targets and measures. Care work demands should systematically be integrated into relevant regulations and strategies at the federal and state level.

To successfully transform the mobility sector, it is especially required:

- to treat all modes of transport equally, including public transport, transport by bike and on foot, as well as rail transport,
- to provide for spatial equality between built-up areas, open spaces, and areas used for traffic, and
- to consider requirements relevant to social and gender equality.



#### Linking funding and gender equality in the mobility sector

When introducing funding guidelines and subsidies to the transport and mobility sector, the allocation of public funding should be linked to gender equality-relevant targets. A requirement for funding cycle paths could be to consider routes typically taken with children and routes used for care work. This could mean building wider paths and connecting them to everyday destinations and multiple city districts. Additionally, funding should be linked to mandatory monitoring to verify whether the envisaged gender equality targets have been met.

# Housing and energy consumption

**Due to their lower income, women are particularly affected by increasing housing and energy costs. Funding programmes and instruments that promote climate-neutral conversions of existing buildings do not adequately account for gender-specific differences. They can further aggravate energy poverty and increase financial strain, especially for women living alone or single mothers. Funding programmes and offers should therefore support low-income households and enable climate-neutral housing for all.**

Safe and affordable housing is one of the most important domestic policy issues of our time. Ever-increasing rents put many people in situations that threaten their livelihoods. Since 2015, rents in large cities have increased by 50 per cent. Due to unequal distribution of income and assets, women are disadvantaged in the rental market. Simultaneously, they own fewer residential properties than men. The lack of available living space for families with children makes care work in low-income households more difficult. Since these flats also lack private spaces, this places a significant strain on women when managing everyday life. Increasing energy costs are also a hardship for low-income households.

At the same time, housing has substantial effects on the climate. About 40 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions in Germany are caused by the construction and upkeep of buildings. Approximately 80 per cent of energy consumed in private households is accounted for by heating buildings and producing hot water. A considerable reduction in energy demand and the transition to renewable energy for energy supply are therefore crucial to the socio-ecological transformation in the housing sector.

To reduce the carbon footprint of existing buildings, the German Federal Government relies on a mix of measures. The Buildings Energy Act (Gebäudeenergiegesetz) stipulates, for example, that when old fossil heating systems are being replaced, the new systems must produce up to 65 per cent of their heat from renewable energy. The Federal Funding for Energy-Efficient Buildings (Bundesförderung für effiziente Gebäude, BEG)



supports building owners and users in energy-efficient renovations and energy-efficient new construction. Since 2021, a carbon price has also been levied on fossil fuels such as heating oil and natural gas. The carbon price will increase, substantially raising heating and hot water costs. Public revenues from the carbon price are allocated to the Federal Climate and Transformation Fund (Klima- und Transformationsfonds) and, in the future, the European Social Climate Fund. The Climate and Transformation Fund finances measures to protect the climate, such as promoting energy-efficient renovations and building more energy-efficient buildings. The Social Climate Fund supports, amongst other measures, initiatives that help low-income households and people affected by energy poverty cope with rising energy prices. To date, however, gender differences in housing provision and the burden of energy costs have not been adequately considered.

## Energy poverty

Unrenovated buildings and legacy heating systems are driving the enormous energy demand. In 2023, approximately three-quarters of all flats in Germany were heated with gas, oil, or coal. High energy costs, which will further increase due to carbon pricing, particularly affect households in poorly insulated buildings with higher energy consumption. Women living alone and single mothers have to spend a higher proportion of their income on heating and electricity than men in comparable household types.

Energy poverty arises when a household can no longer afford the energy demand necessary to provide an adequate living standard. Women are particularly affected by energy poverty. According to calculations by the German Oeko-Institut, about 7 per cent of households in Germany are considered to experience energy poverty. According to this research, women were much more likely than men to report that rising energy prices pose a problem for them. 15.5 per cent of single parents report being unable to sufficiently heat their flat. This figure is almost twice as

high as the figure for the total population, at 8.2 per cent. Many women manage these rising costs by reducing their quality of life. They, for example, heat their flats less or lower their spending in other areas.

Homeowners can also be affected by energy poverty. Many poorly insulated one- or two-family houses have gas or oil heating systems and require major renovations. People over 60 account for one-third of homeowners. If elderly homeowners are unable to raise the funds needed for home renovations, they are particularly vulnerable to rising carbon costs from poorly insulated buildings heated by fossil fuels. Additionally, older adults face difficulties due to organisational processes and age-related discrimination when applying for loans. Older women who live alone after their partners have died are especially vulnerable to these disadvantages. They have to stem maintenance and energy costs in their own right. Yet funding programmes seldom consider these specific barriers.



### Recommendations for action Fighting energy poverty in a comprehensive way

The Expert Commission recommends that the German Federal Government develop measures to recognise and fight energy poverty. These measures should then be incorporated into the national energy and climate strategies and the National Building Renovation Plan (Nationaler Gebäuderenovierungsplan). In a National Social Climate Plan required for the disbursement of funds from the European Social Climate Fund, the German Federal Government should consider the disproportionate burden on women from rising carbon prices. Premium models are important for low-income households in order to facilitate the purchase of energy-efficient devices. Electricity-saving checks, which advise households on energy-saving options, should be expanded and funded on a permanent basis. The experts also demand that electricity providers be prohibited from disconnecting service for non-payment of bills. Instead, preventive action should be taken.



### Supporting homeowners with low or middle income

The experts recommend further developing the income bonus granted for replacing one's heating system. To date, this subsidy provides households with a 30 per cent discount on the cost of installing new heating systems, up to a gross income of 40,000 euros. Homeowners with low incomes should be eligible for up to 100 per cent relief, graded by income, provided they live in their own home.

The experts recommend supporting innovative financing models, such as social leasing, for heating systems. In doing so, the state would support the lease of heating systems for low-income households. Models that pre-finance the renovation costs and offset them by energy cost savings would also be useful – so-called revolving energy efficiency funds.

## Gender-related effects of control mechanisms

To achieve climate objectives in the housing sector, not only must renovation efforts double, but the funding model must change. Currently, the Federal Funding for Efficient Buildings aims to reach a very good energy rating. For many old buildings, this is only achievable through considerable effort, if at all. Renovating a house with a good energy rating in order to achieve a very good energy standard saves less from a climate-political standpoint and favours households with higher incomes.

Landlords can choose whether they want to use public funding for renovation or pass on modernisation costs to their tenants. Many choose not to apply for public funding and instead add the modernisation costs to the rental price. Currently, 8 per cent of modernisation costs can be passed on to tenants annually. In many cases, rent increases exceed energy cost savings, creating additional financial burdens for tenants.



### Recommendations for action Favouring renovations with high energy-saving potential

Programmes for funding renovations, such as the Federal Funding for Efficient Buildings, should be oriented towards renovating existing buildings. They should no longer fund new construction projects. Funding should be measured by the extent to which the renovation improved energy efficiency, rather than by achieving the lowest possible energy demand. This way, funding initiatives would focus on the high proportion of poorly insulated residential buildings (so-called worst-performing buildings). This would especially benefit women living alone and single mothers, who are often tenants in those buildings.

Approximately half of private real estate assets are owned by the richest 10 per cent of households. Linking subsidies to the property owners' wealth can prevent state funding from increasing this wealth.



### Limiting the passing-on of renovation costs to tenants

The Expert Commission recommends creating renovation incentives for landlords. For this, the Federal Funding for Efficient Buildings (BEG) should provide an additional bonus for renovating rented flats with particularly poor energy standards. To relieve tenants, a general reduction in the allowed modernisation charge should be considered. Also, renovations through the BEG should be financed only up to a rent cap to prevent further rent increases. It is also important that the Federal Government provide additional funding for energy-efficient renovations in social housing and for neighbourhood-based funding programmes in socially disadvantaged areas.

## Housing sufficiency and collaborative forms of housing

The average living space per person has risen continually over the past decades. This is problematic from an ecological standpoint since energy consumption increases alongside living space. This is why new approaches aligned with the principle of sufficiency are increasingly important. They aim to promote the economical use of both heat energy and living space. More than half of all one- and two-family houses are inhabited by one or two persons, while many families live in confined spaces. Many houses have unused apartments or rooms. At the same time, people living alone often face loneliness. By subdividing one-family houses, homeowners could create additional living space and generate revenue for energy-efficient renovations. Moving into smaller and more accessible flats could be an option for old-age

pensioners. This way, older adults can adjust their living arrangements to meet their needs in old age. However, affordability remains a prerequisite.

Living forms such as co-housing can be implemented by sharing individual flats or by using other communal spaces. These types of housing are often characterised by mutual support. They offer environmental benefits because shared spaces reduce resource use. Simultaneously, the individual housing space is reduced. Co-housing can mitigate loneliness, especially among older adults. Women in particular hope that this type of living arrangement can help overcome traditional gender roles and lead to a more equitable division of housework and care work.



### Recommendations for action Promoting space-saving housing

The German Federal Government, in cooperation with the states, should create funding programmes that enable people to move into smaller, accessible and affordable flats in their neighbourhood once the family phase is over, meaning when children have moved out. States could support such moves by promoting the acquisition of needs-based flats through a reduced real estate transfer tax (Grunderwerbssteuer). Existing funding programmes that support young families in buying older houses or funding renovations to make flats more accessible and age-appropriate should be extended and made permanent. Banks could develop financial products for older adults, for example, by securing loans against the property rather than the owner. Additionally, municipalities could offer consultation services on reducing living space.



### Better tapping into the potential of communal living

The experts recommend better tapping into the potential of communal living. To improve women's access to co-housing projects, municipalities must provide spaces for such initiatives. This could be done, for example, by awarding contracts on a conceptual basis, such as leaseholds (Erbpacht). When allocating funds, municipalities should prioritise cooperatives and non-profit housing. At the same time, municipalities should be obligated to only award contracts when housing for low-income persons is created. Local communal living networks should be supported.

# Food and nutrition

**Gender stereotypes influence nutritional habits and, thereby, specific food preferences that contribute to climate change in different ways. At the same time, women are more often responsible for making sustainable consumption decisions. Opportunities for a gender-equitable transition in the food and nutrition sector include promoting plant-based foods, expanding communal catering, improving access to healthy food, and supporting healthy dietary decisions.**

Nutrition is inextricably linked to climate change impacts. The 2024 Harvest Report (Erntebericht 2024) of the German Federal Ministry of Agriculture, for example, shows that harvests of cereals, potatoes and fruit declined due to extreme weather events such as drought and torrential rainfall. This increases food prices.

Conventional agriculture and the food industry also significantly contribute to climate change. Carbon emissions arise from deforestation and methane gases from livestock farming or from biogas plants (see chapter Agriculture). Upstream and downstream processes in agricultural production, such as fertiliser production and transport, storage, processing and packaging, are increasing and raising greenhouse gas emissions. Carbon emissions from the food sector could be reduced significantly if society adopted a plant-based diet. The international dietary guidelines for the Planetary Health Diet recommend such a dietary shift. The guidelines were published in 2019 by the scientists of the EAT-Lancet Commission. These guidelines could contribute to both human health and planetary health. By 2050, twice as much fruit, vegetables, nuts and seeds should be consumed worldwide as today. The consumption of meat, on the other hand, needs to be reduced by half.

For a transition in the food and nutrition sector, not only must methods of production, processing, and distribution change, but also everyday eating habits. These are not only expressions of taste preferences; they are also closely linked to individual ideals, identity, self-perception and social status. Eating habits are especially influenced



by societal gender roles. Buying organic and animal-welfare-friendly products that are regionally grown and minimally packaged helps conserve resources and reduce emissions. Concurrently, these decisions also affect day-to-day food operations, such as meal preparation and storage. As shown by the gender food work gap, women are responsible for significantly more food work than men. Therefore, they face greater pressure to make sustainable decisions.

## Gender-specific dietary habits

Dietary habits are influenced by gender stereotypes and contribute to greenhouse gas emissions to varying degrees. The difference is particularly clear in meat consumption, as the meat industry is a significant contributor to climate change. Men eat twice as much meat as women. This difference is anchored in cultural gender roles. Historically, meat was considered essential for muscle development. Today, it still symbolises strength, power and superiority. Certain food components, such as protein, are associated with male body norms. One reason is that men have a higher protein requirement due to their higher average muscle mass. As a result of female body norms, women place a higher value on avoiding fat and calories and eat plant-based food more often. Hence, food has a gender-specific connotation.

At the same time, organic products are often more expensive than conventionally cultivated foods. People on a low income often cannot afford the high prices of organic food. The taxation of food also contributes to these high costs. Oat milk and meat substitutes, for example, are being taxed at the regular VAT rate of 19 per cent. Meat, fish, dairy products, and other animal-based products are taxed at the reduced rate of 7 per cent. This makes animal-derived food cheaper. Climate-friendly lifestyle choices, in turn, are more expensive. As women, on average, eat more plant-based products than men, they are generally more heavily burdened by these tax rates.



### Recommendation for action Setting financial incentives for a plant-based diet

The Expert Commission recommends that the German Federal Government introduce financial incentives to promote a healthier, less meat-based diet. This would have a positive impact on the environment and on gender equality. The experts propose abolishing or lowering the VAT tax on plant-based basic foods to a maximum of 5 per cent. For products made from animals, an animal welfare cent (for non-organically produced meats) or a higher VAT rate could be levied. The aim is to make healthy, sustainable food more financially attractive.

## Unequal distribution of food work

The 2022 German Time Use Survey (Zeitverwendungsstudie) shows that women and men spend varying amounts of time preparing and conserving meals. The gender food work gap quantifies the time difference spent on this type of food work: women, on average, spend twice as much time on food work as men. On a daily basis, this amounts to 27 additional minutes of work. In families with children, this gap is even wider: as the number of children increases, mothers spend more

time preparing meals than fathers. Therefore, women bear greater responsibility for making sustainable consumer decisions. Climate-friendly changes for women often mean additional time, financial and mental load. This is especially challenging if they have to manage these tasks on a low household income and organic products are hardly affordable.



### Recommendation for action

#### Creating awareness for gender equality in nutrition

Food work must be distributed more evenly between genders. As with the gender care gap, there needs to be greater public awareness of the gender food work gap. Media covering nutrition should examine and challenge stereotypical gender perceptions and role attributions. This includes showing how gender roles influence consumer decisions and encourage people to engage in harmful behaviour. To this end, a task force to close the gender food work gap (Gender-Foodwork-Gap schließen!) should be established and led by federal ministries responsible for gender equality, food, and agriculture. The experts recommend introducing a mandatory school curriculum titled “Anyone can cook” (Alle können kochen) to empower young people to adopt sustainable, healthy eating habits. It should address boys and girls directly. A national citizen science project should be introduced to document everyday nutrition and highlight the diverse realities of nutrition.

## Communal catering as an approach for an eco-friendly dietary transition

People need framework conditions that incentivise an eco-friendly and healthy diet and support those responsible for food work. Communal catering is a key institution for achieving this. These include canteens, cafeterias, and catering services in schools, day care centres, and hospitals, which provide food to more than 16 million people every day. Communal catering can offer affordable meals to people with limited income. At the same time, communal catering relieves private households of the need to prepare and organise meals.

To support climate-friendly dietary habits, communal catering must be expanded and improved. To this end, it is important to increase the use of organic food, reduce animal products, and reduce food waste. One successful example is the Danish Copenhagen House of Food, a centre for competence, education and networking that ex-

isted until 2019. Through the Copenhagen House of Food, communal kitchens received guidance on increasing the share of organic products. With new concepts in purchasing, planning, and meal preparation, the share of organic products in communal catering in Copenhagen rose to 88 per cent within a few years. In Germany, similar initiatives exist: the Frankfurt House of Food connects local farmers and canteens. This way, regional supply chains are established. The Hessian networking centre for school catering (Vernetzungsstelle Scholverpflegung) supports schools in providing healthy and sustainable food. The German Federal Government’s coalition agreement, adopted in 2025, also includes this aspect. The governing parties agreed to introduce standards for communal catering to increase demand for organic products. Yet the standards have not been further substantiated.



### Recommendation for action

#### Expanding communal catering and increasing its quality

The Expert Commission recommends expanding communal catering and increasing its quality. To achieve this, the share of organic and regional products in communal catering must be increased to 90 per cent, while reducing meat consumption. Yet the prices must not rise disproportionately. Therefore, it is important to pool good offers and to adapt them to local conditions. To reduce costs, communal catering needs support from public funding. The experts recommend that the German Federal Government fund model projects that encourage communal catering to expand its range of plant-based foods and offer them at lower prices than meat-based meals. They recommend establishing institutions similar to the Copenhagen House of Food or the Frankfurt House of Food to provide advice, training, and networking.

## Alternative Food Networks

Alternative Food Networks, such as food cooperatives and communal kitchens, connect food producers and consumers. Food cooperatives allow joint purchases of organic products at wholesale rates. The members are responsible for ordering, storing, sorting, and distributing food. In communal kitchens, people who cook and

eat regularly come together. They share the cost of food. These Alternative Food Networks offer opportunities to develop sustainable dietary habits, but they also require time and collaboration. Oftentimes, they are run and organised by women. So far, these networks have received little political support.



### Recommendation for action

#### Strengthening Alternative Food Networks

The experts recommend a federal funding programme to expand Alternative Food Networks (see chapter Agriculture), including communal kitchens and food cooperatives. Existing food networks should serve as best-practice models. The experts suggest establishing a gender equality competency centre for grassroots organisations. It should promote gender competencies, offer gender trainings and help to counteract gender-specific division of labour in grassroots organisations. This competency centre could offer a gender equality award and provide financial support to grassroots organisations based on a gender equality certification.

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# Health

**The health risks of climate change hit structurally disadvantaged people harder. This is why climate and health policies must prioritise vulnerable groups. Women working in healthcare bear the brunt of the climate change-related challenges this sector faces. This requires strategies to address the shortage of skilled professionals and ensure equal access to healthcare providers for everyone. Low-threshold healthcare services are therefore particularly important.**

Extreme weather events such as heatwaves, floods and droughts increase health risks. Climate change not only affects physical health directly, for example, in the form of cardiovascular problems. Rising temperatures also accelerate the spread of infectious diseases transmitted by insects and rodents. Fears induced by climate change can lead to psychological disorders and impair mental health.

Yet the consequences of climate change do not affect everyone equally. Studies show that women and other marginalised people are more severely affected by the physical and mental ramifications of climate change. In this context, heat is a particularly critical factor: statistically, there are more heat-related deaths among women than men. Pregnant people are also especially endangered, as heat can cause premature contractions. Health risks are furthermore closely linked to socio-economic inequalities. For example, people with low incomes are disproportionately likely to live near roads with high noise and air pollution levels in neighbourhoods that tend to overheat. Simultaneously, the combination of air pollution and heat increases health risks for people with respiratory diseases.

The concept of Planetary Health combines climate and health considerations. According to this concept, human



and planetary health are inextricably linked. Human health depends on an intact ecosystem and biodiversity. Climate-friendly and gender-equitable urban development, for example, can positively affect human health through improved air quality and reduced noise pollution (see chapter Urban and spatial development).

The effects of climate change and the demands for gender-equitable climate adaptation measures are also visible in the healthcare system.

## Climate change as a challenge to the healthcare system

Climate change increases the need for healthcare services by accelerating the rise of existing and emerging illnesses. During heat waves, for instance, cardiovascular problems become more frequent. Since specific trees and plants bloom longer, allergies also increase. Global warming makes it easier for mosquitoes and ticks to spread their pathogens.

The healthcare system itself causes considerable amounts of carbon emissions. Above all, many healthcare institutions are not sufficiently prepared for the effects of climate change. Torrential rain, for example, poses a significant risk to patients if hospitals are not prepared for flooding and power failures. The necessary climate adaptation measures will cause additional costs.

These compounded challenges strain the already overburdened healthcare system. Many hospitals have been privatised since the 1990s. By introducing flat-rate payments that do not cover actual treatment costs, hospitals were placed under enormous financial pressure and the personnel under tremendous stress. An investment backlog hinders necessary improvements. This is because different authorities are responsible for financing: while health insurance covers hospitals' operating costs, the states are responsible for investment financing. The shortage of healthcare providers and hospitals in rural

areas is expected to rise within the next two years. Furthermore, it is increasingly more difficult to find and retain skilled staff.

As more than three-quarters of all nursing staff are female, it is mainly women who are affected by the added burdens arising in the healthcare system. Migrant women contribute substantially, particularly in nursing the older adults. Simultaneously, women are underrepresented in management positions within healthcare institutions and health insurance.



### Recommendations for action Improving working conditions in nursing care

The Expert Commission recommends significantly improving nurses' working conditions. Regarding the shortage of skilled professionals, they propose a skilled-worker initiative to recruit new staff. Health institutions should provide international professionals with greater support in obtaining professional accreditation and visas. The Federal Government should support efforts to reduce gender segregation in the nursing and healthcare sectors, for example, through job orientation initiatives. Simultaneously, strategies should be developed to ensure equal representation in senior roles across the healthcare sector. Measures to tackle the investment backlog in hospitals are required. The Federal Government should ensure hospitals receive sufficient funding to meet demand without placing an excessive burden on health insurance companies, states and municipalities. The Expert Commission also recommends anchoring sustainability, climate protection, and climate adaptation in training programmes for health and care professions. Additionally, the needs of vulnerable groups should be considered.

## Gaps in healthcare provision

According to the principle of health equity, everyone should have equal opportunities to be or become healthy, regardless of gender, origin, income, or dimensions of structural inequality.

Yet in practice, this is often not guaranteed. Especially rural, sparsely populated areas often lack sufficient healthcare services. Long distances to the nearest doctor's office, waiting times, and a shortage of skilled personnel lead to inadequate healthcare provision in provincial areas. Climate change and insufficient climate policies aggravate these shortcomings. Rising energy prices and a lack of public transportation, for example, make it more difficult for people with low incomes, among them often women, to travel long distances to healthcare facilities (see chapter Mobility).

Patients with a migration or refugee background often suffer from a lack of medical care. Language barriers, lack of information, and formal and bureaucratic hurdles

make it more difficult to access necessary medical care. Additionally, health insurance generally does not cover interpreter costs. Negative experiences and insufficient social support can further impede the medical treatment of migrants. LGBTQ\* individuals also experience discriminatory disadvantages when accessing the healthcare system. In addition, discriminatory experiences in the past or the fear of prejudice can also prevent queer people from getting medical treatment.

A low-threshold healthcare infrastructure could improve access to care for marginalised people. This includes free, local, social, and health-improving services as well as preventive measures. An example of low-threshold healthcare services is the so-called medical kiosk (Gesundheitskiosk). This refers to information centres near residential areas that help people navigate the healthcare system and improve their health. This could help reduce barriers, in particular for migrants. Women would also benefit from nearby institutions, as they make it

easier to combine paid and care work. A positive example is the Local Integrated Health Centre for All (Lokales Integriertes Gesundheitszentrum für Alle, LIGA) in the Gröpelingen district of Bremen that combines medi-

cal, nursing, and social services. Another example are DORV-centres. They provide food services, social and medical care, cultural activities, and other services under one roof in economically disadvantaged areas.



#### Recommendation for action

### Expanding and promoting low-threshold access to healthcare

The Expert Commission recommends that the Federal Government and the states ensure long-term funding of low-threshold healthcare infrastructure. In doing so, standards for gender-equitable design of healthcare facilities should be developed. The institutions should also address people who experience multiple forms of discrimination.

## Gender-relevant environmental medical research

The gap in healthcare provision is also owed to a lack of gender-specific health data. For a long time, medical studies were mainly conducted on male test subjects. This led to problems in healthcare provision for women. The so-called gender data gap shows the need for gender-specific health research. This includes not only physiological but also socio-economic and cultural aspects

of gender. Beyond that, there is also a lack of gender-sensitive research on the health impacts of climate change and other ecological crises. In order to provide adequate healthcare, differentiated data not only on gender but also on age, disabilities, sexual orientation, and other categories have to be surveyed and evaluated.



#### Recommendation for action

### Establishing a special research programme on climate and health

A dedicated research programme should enable an in-depth survey of the relationship between gender, climate and health. The natural and social sciences should be represented equally. Findings from gender studies should also be incorporated into healthcare research. This includes research on gender-appropriate heat protection as a basis for climate adaptation measures, especially.

Within the framework of legislative processes, for example, in environmental law, new findings from gender studies and health research also need to be included.



### Integrating an intersectional gender concept into research

Health research to date rarely considers that disadvantages are amplified when dimensions of inequality, such as gender, age, income or disability, intersect (intersectionality). For this reason, the Expert Commission demands the establishment of an intersectional, multidimensional concept of gender in research and health reporting. The Robert Koch Institute (RKI) and the Federal Ministry of Health should integrate intersectionality into health research and further promote its use. The RKI report on the health status of women should also include climate-related health risks.

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# Work and time

**People need more available time to act sustainably in their everyday lives and to actively shape the socio-ecological transformation. As long as women continue to perform more unpaid care work than men, they are more likely to lack control over their own time. Time structures should therefore be designed to redistribute paid employment and care work while also providing scope for social participation and sustainable daily behaviours.**

Leading a sustainable life takes time. Time for thinking, planning, shopping, repairing – in short, time for creating a more aware and climate-friendly everyday life. Yet time is exactly what many people lack, especially women. Available time is limited, particularly by long and inflexible working hours and care responsibilities. Public infrastructure, such as public transport schedules or childcare facility opening hours, adds additional time constraints. All of this makes it more difficult for people to act sustainably in daily life: time pressure leads to purchasing convenience food instead of cooking fresh meals or buying new items instead of repairing used ones.

In families, women often bear primary responsibility for caring for children and relatives. They are also more frequently responsible for cooking and household chores (see chapter Food and nutrition). As a result, they face particular time pressure, which leaves little space for sustainable decisions or community involvement.

Time management is often understood as an individual skill for managing time as efficiently as possible. In reality, however, the time structures in which we operate are shaped by various institutions such as governments, companies, and public authorities. They determine work or school schedules, public transport timetables, open-



ing hours of municipal institutions, or bank holidays. Our daily lives are largely determined by machines and schedules, such as shift work, which often conflict with the human biorhythm. Time management is therefore not only a private matter, but is determined by public and politically negotiated frameworks.

The concept of time-politics originated in the Italian feminist movement, aiming to improve the situation of women who had to balance paid employment and care responsibilities, lack of time and uncoordinated time constraints. Today, urban areas particularly exemplify many of these challenges. This is why cities such as Bolzano, Milano, and Bremen have launched exemplary initiatives addressing local time policies.

## Time-use by gender

The core problem of current time structures is the unequal distribution of paid employment and care work. In Germany, the gender care gap stands at 43 per cent. According to the Federal Statistical Office, women provide, on average, 43.4 per cent more unpaid care work than men, equivalent to 76 minutes per day. When gainful employment is added, women work an average of 45.5 hours per week—more than men, who work 44.3 hours. Despite this, women earn less and often lack adequate social security, particularly in old age. This results in less time available to women. The problem is further exacerbated in low-wage jobs, as women often need to work longer hours to earn a sufficient income.

As early as 2017, the Expert Commission for the Second Report on Gender Equality recommended adopting the Earner-Carer-Model, enabling people of all genders to reconcile paid employment with unpaid care work and voluntary work essential to society. This approach remains relevant in the socio-ecological transformation. New working time models, favourable framework conditions for a sustainable everyday life, and a new concept of time are necessary for individuals to actively engage in change and develop sustainable routines.

## Future-oriented working time models

Gainful employment occupies the largest portion of a person's waking hours and is therefore often at the centre of time policy discussions. The current legal standard for annual and weekly working hours is based on production conditions and industrial labour from the Weimar Republic. Daily working hours are capped at eight hours, six days a week. The standard full-time working week in Germany is 40 hours. This framework leaves little room outside of paid employment and relies on a gender-specific division of labour.

At the same time, the shortage of skilled workers has led to demands for even longer working hours, for example, by regulating maximum weekly rather than daily hours or providing tax-free overtime. Yet the unpaid care work, predominantly provided by women, is completely neglected. This often invisible labour limits the time available for paid work and prevents longer working hours. Many women report that family responsibilities are a barrier to expanding their working hours.

In countries such as Sweden, Denmark and France, comprehensive childcare enables higher labour market participation of women. In Sweden and Denmark, both parents often work part-time, whereas in France, the standard full-time working week is 35 hours. People of all genders would benefit from such reduced full-time norms. Long working hours and high demands on employees' time flexibility often have negative effects on health. According to a survey by the Hans Böckler Foundation, approximately one-third of full-time employees would like to reduce their working hours for health reasons or due to overload.

There are already future-oriented working-time models that facilitate the balance of family and career, health, further education, and social participation. According to the optional working-time model by Karin Jurczyk and Ulrich Mückenberger, everyone would receive a specific time budget to use throughout their working life. This allows individuals to temporarily reduce or suspend their working hours in favour of socially relevant activities. Under this model, work can be suspended for up to nine years in total: six years for caring for children, the sick, or the elderly; two years for further education; and one year for self-care. These periods are intended to be financially protected. For example, time spent on further education could be funded by employers, while care work and volunteering would be supported through taxation.

The legislative proposal for an Elective Working Time Act (Wahlarbeitszeitgesetz) by the German Women Lawyers Association (Deutscher Juristinnenbund) points in a similar direction. Under this proposal, companies would be required to present concepts for how employees can adapt their working hours to different life stages. This includes, for instance, proactive employer support for reducing working hours in favour of care work, taking into account the opening hours of in-house or external childcare facilities, or providing options for longer career breaks.



### Recommendation for action

#### Reducing and shaping working time to be more flexible

To support these future-oriented working time models, the Expert Commission recommends that the Federal Government promote company-level strategies that allow employees to reduce or flexibly arrange their working hours. The statutory temporary part-time work scheme (gesetzliche Brückenteilzeit) should be extended to smaller businesses. This scheme allows employees to reduce their working hours for a limited period before returning to their original schedule.

Furthermore, the experts endorse the German Trade Union Confederation's (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund) proposal for a "democracy hour" (Demokratiezeit). This would give employees one hour per week to discuss operational and social issues, such as working hours or topics related to the socio-ecological transformation. This time would allow female employees to participate more actively in shaping working conditions within the company.

The Expert Commission further recommends exploring the introduction of dedicated time for further education (Weiterbildungszeit) to support personal development and employability, following the Austrian model of educational leave (Bildungskarenz). To better protect low-income earners during career breaks, the basic pension (Grundrente) should be improved. Care periods for ill oder elderly people should be recognised as pension-relevant, similar to child-rearing periods.

## Conditions for sustainable everyday practices

Repairing used consumer goods instead of buying new ones promotes more sustainable consumer behaviour, but is time-intensive. Women and men spend different amounts of time on such sustainable everyday practices. According to the Federal Statistical Office's time use survey (Zeitverwendungsstudie), women invest more time in care, production, or repair of textiles: approximately 26.8 per cent do so daily, compared to just under seven per cent of men. Conversely, men are significantly more active in the exterior maintenance of the house.

Adequate framework conditions are required to enable sustainable everyday practices for all. Repairs, for in-

stance, can be promoted through support from neighbours or family members, as well as through organised repair initiatives. Public interest-oriented projects, repair cafés, or digital platforms can also be useful. Nebenan.de, for example, is an online platform where used items can be sold or where neighbourly assistance can be offered. In Austria, an initiative enables older adults to purchase care time at affordable rates, while helpers accrue time credits through their engagement. In Bremen, a housing-for-help initiative (Wohnen gegen Hilfe) helps students find accommodation in exchange for daily assistance to elderly people.



### Recommendation for action

#### Promoting solidarity-oriented communities at the local level

The Expert Commission recommends the targeted support of local public interest initiatives and cooperative economic forms (commons) through public funding. These include collaboratively used workshop spaces, shared resources in intergenerational housing, support for families and pupils, support for immigrants, and care for older adults. Additionally, social agencies that help reduce people's time commitments should be funded. These agencies should provide information, consult on sustainable consumption, and, if necessary, help people access services.

## The right to time

To develop a new understanding of time and strengthen the appreciation of it, new time structures must be established. These time structures are meant to facilitate the redistribution of care work and gainful employment, create time for volunteer work and sustainable everyday actions.

The international Time Use Initiative advocates recognising time politics as a municipal, national and European field of action. In 2023, a legislative proposal for

a comprehensive Time Act was developed in Spain. This regulation aims, amongst other things, to organise time use and distribution in a socially just manner, to strengthen self-determined time use and time sovereignty, and to ensure an adequate amount of freely available time. In Germany, this right to time is supported by the Society of Time Politics (Gesellschaft für Zeitpolitik).



### Recommendation for action

#### Developing a multilevel strategy for time politics

The Expert Commission recommends supporting the international Time Use Initiative through a German initiative. The aim is to incorporate a right to time in the sustainability goals.

At the global level, Germany should campaign for the inclusion of the right to time in the Sustainable Development Goals. At the federal level, a research programme should be introduced. This should assess both the actual state of time-related problems in society – especially for persons with care responsibilities – as well as good practices. Furthermore, the Federal Government should support municipalities and regions in establishing local agencies that provide counselling and aid in testing new time-management approaches.

# Labour market

Measures for the socio-ecological transformation primarily target emissions-intensive, technology-oriented industries. However, a successful transformation requires a broader understanding of climate-related changes in the labour market. This includes socially essential, often female-dominated services such as care, education and social work. Labour market and economic policies must therefore ensure a balance between sustainable industrial policy and the provision of public-interest services.

The current ecological transformation is accompanied by a profound shift in the labour market. For the German economy to achieve climate neutrality by 2045, emissions-intensive sectors in particular need to shift to new, climate-friendly technologies. These sectors are, amongst others, fossil-fuelled energy production, the steel industry, and the automotive industry. Simultaneously, this transformation opens new fields of work, including the wind and solar industries, the trades and STEM professions. These are often male-dominated sectors. Yet these new fields for work offer more employment and income opportunities for women. The so-called greenness of jobs index measures the extent to which occupations involve environmentally friendly or environmentally harmful activities. The index indicates that women tend to work in rather environmentally friendly professions. Within these professions, women tend to hold qualified positions. In addition, the gender pay gap in environmentally friendly professions is 8.8 per cent, lower than in environmentally harmful professions (15.5%).

Sectors with high carbon footprints are expected to experience further job losses. Industry jobs were often well protected by collective agreements. This loss of employment must be socially compensated or mitigated through requalification and further education. Because many male-dominated sectors are under pressure, men are disproportionately affected by these job losses and in need of retraining. However, the changes also affect women working in these sectors. They are more likely to be employed part-time in less secure, lower-



paid positions. In addition, staff reductions through so-called voluntary restructuring measures are often based on headcount. For this reason, women working part-time are often disproportionately targeted. Both circumstances make women particularly vulnerable to losing their employment.

Most importantly, women often work in the social services sector where collective agreements are frequently lacking. So far, insufficient attention has been paid to this sector in discussions and measures related to the ecological transformation and it has received less financial support. Yet social services such as education, childcare, healthcare and social welfare are essential prerequisites for the success of the socio-ecological transformation.

## Broadening the concept of transformation

The 2023 Climate Action Programme of the German Federal Government (Klimaschutzprogramm der Bundesregierung) primarily focuses on industry and technology-oriented solutions. The programme, therefore, focuses on measures for energy-intensive, technology-oriented sectors that are often male-dominated. Social services, including education, healthcare and public administration, remain largely unaccounted for. This prioritisation reflects a narrow understanding of transformation.

In areas undergoing structural change, such as Lusatia (Lausitz) in Saxony, a broad understanding of socio-ecological transformation is important not only for employees but also for ensuring equal living conditions in East and West Germany. Since the lignite industry's decline in the 1990s, almost all jobs in the sector have been lost. 52 per cent of employees were women. Increased

unemployment and limited investment in social infrastructure led many qualified young women to leave the region. To date, there is a staff shortage across social services, education, healthcare institutions, and administration.

Professions that protect the environment often require higher levels of education and expertise. As a result, there is a disproportionate loss of low-skilled jobs due to ecological transformation. Therefore, greater investment in higher occupational qualifications is required. At the same time, the education sector faces the challenge of training staff for institutions responsible for retraining, education and further training. The number of employees in extra-curricular environmental education and sustainability-related studies is currently estimated at 30,500 full-time employees.



### Recommendation for action Strengthening the attractiveness of locations and allocating funds gender-equitably

In structural development and location policy, it is important to not only promote or support industries but also to consider socially necessary services. To this end, relevant public actors must allocate funding equitably and ensure a balance between environmentally friendly industrial policy and the reliable provision of social public services. To meet the projected demand for skilled professionals, investment in the education system must be a top priority.

The Expert Commission recommends initiating broader gender equality participation processes when allocating funding to regions undergoing structural transformations. Actors from the climate and gender equality movements should consistently be involved in local and regional committees, for example, by creating regional transformation councils.

Regional strategies to promote equal treatment are needed to shape the labour market transition in a gender-equitable manner. They should help to monitor and manage developments in the labour market in a gender-differentiated way. Simultaneously, working conditions that fulfil the requirements of good work (gute Arbeit) as well as gender equality must be established. The Bremen remuneration strategy (Bremer Entgeltstrategie) is a good example. It aims to improve gender equality in working life and close the gender pay gap between women and men. It was developed in collaboration with all key stakeholders from administration, economy and society and covers all stages of life for Bremen's citizens and relevant areas of action.

## Barriers facing women in STEM professions and in the trades

Sectors such as the building and renovation trades play a vital role in a sustainable energy transition. Qualified specialists are required, for instance, to install climate-friendly heating systems or for energy-efficient building renovations. Yet it is difficult for women to gain a foothold in the trades and STEM professions. Despite promising job prospects, there are still few women in these areas. The reasons include structural barriers like deeply rooted perceptions of gender-stereotypical occupations and discriminatory work cultures.

To ensure the industry's transition to renewable energy meets demand for skilled professionals, vocational training and study programmes must be adapted to sustainable technologies and methods. Green skills have to be incorporated into educational curricula and training regulations. Research on the share of women in environmental protection professions indicates that increasing green skills in education could attract more women to these professions.



### Recommendation for action

#### Empowering women in the trades and STEM professions and promoting further education

The Expert Commission recommends supporting women in STEM professions. This includes changes to corporate cultures as well as efforts to combat discrimination and sexism in the technology sector. In this context, the recommendations in the Third Gender Equality Report to support women in STEM can be built upon.

The shortage of skilled professionals requires realigning the National Skills Strategy (Nationale Weiterbildungsstrategie) to provide low-threshold services for low-qualified individuals. The Expert Commission also recommends introducing an individual right to a completed vocational qualification. This should be combined with a wide range of advisory and support services. Education grants under the Federal Education and Training Assistance Act (BAföG) and financial support for career advancement training (Aufstiegs-BAföG) must be made more accessible. Single parents should be given priority access to childcare to enable them to pursue training and education.

## Collective bargaining agreements and workers' participation in the transformation

Safeguarding working conditions that comply with “good work” standards and promote gender equality is particularly important amid current structural change. Equally essential is social acceptance of the change. Sectors with collective agreements generally offer a higher degree of financial and social protection. In this regard, collective agreements and workers' participation can also contribute to more gender equality.

Meanwhile, in sectors such as the steel industry, so-called Collective Agreements for the Future (Zukunftstarifverträge) are established. These agreements often complement Social Partners' Framework Agreements (Rahmentarifverträge), Collective Wage Agreements (Entgelttarifverträge), and Regional Collective Agree-

ments (Flächentarifverträge) to better address challenges arising from the transformation. Regulations typically address transformation-related employee qualifications or the temporary deferral of layoffs for operational reasons.

The share of employees working in enterprises with regional collective agreements has declined from 67 per cent to 42 per cent between 1996 and 2023. In many parts of the personal social services sector, social partnership is limited because welfare organisations are subject to their own separate collective bargaining labour law. As a result, working conditions in social services usually fall behind those in the industry.



### Recommendation for action

## Strengthening wage policy and minimum wages for good work in the socio-ecological transformation

To ensure favourable employment conditions during the transformation, the Expert Commission recommends strengthening collective bargaining policies. A declaration of general applicability of collective bargaining agreements (Allgemeinverbindlicherklärung von Tarifverträgen) should be facilitated in accordance with the proposal of the German Trade Union Confederation (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund). By way of a declaration of general applicability, a collective agreement not only applies to the collective bargaining parties but also to all employees not bound by a collective agreement. Where collective agreements in the social services cannot generally be declared applicable, at least salaries should be linked to regional wage levels. Refinancing of care services in nursing care is an example of this approach. Long-term care insurance funds only provide funding to facilities for personnel costs and other expenditures if the nursing staff is paid according to regional standard wages.

Additionally, the minimum wage for socially necessary services should be raised. The minimum wage regulated in the Posted Workers Act (Arbeitnehmer-Entsendegesetz), for instance, is significantly higher than the general minimum wage.

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# Finance

**Public revenue and public spending need to be more clearly aligned with ecological and gender equality-oriented targets and designed in a more socially just manner. This includes reforming environmentally harmful tax incentives and subsidies. In addition, measures are required to offset the short-term financial burdens of carbon pricing and, in the long run, facilitate the transition to climate-friendly lifestyles. Public investments must support the development of climate-friendly, gender-equal infrastructure.**

The impacts of climate change are already causing substantial costs. Between 2000 and 2021, climate-related damages, including crop failures and infrastructure damage, totalled 145 billion euros in Germany alone. By 2050, these costs could increase many times over. In addition, further expenses arise from compensating for climate change-related damages, caused, for instance, by droughts or rising sea levels. These consequences disproportionately affect countries in the Global South, even though they are predominantly caused by the Global North.



Further extensive investments are required for climate protection and adaptation. According to a survey by Agora Think Tank, at least 3 per cent of gross domestic product will be required annually between 2025 and 2045 to transform the energy, industry, construction, transport and agriculture sectors. Additional significant financial resources will be required to transform the healthcare system and the services sector.

## The role of public financing in the socio-ecological transformation

A key challenge of the socio-ecological transformation is developing a renewed understanding of the public sector's capacities and identifying ways to deploy them effectively and in a gender-equal manner to achieve climate targets. For a long time, German and European strategies have relied on funding programmes and tax incentives under the umbrella of Sustainable Finance, aiming to redirect private capital into sustainable investments. Gender equality-oriented approaches have rarely been integrated into these strategies. In this context, the public sector takes only limited action, for instance, through special funds such as the Climate and Transformation Fund (Klima- und Transformationsfonds). While this special fund enables additional infrastructure investments and supports measures to achieve climate neutrality by 2045, it is insufficient to cover the full scale of investments required for effective climate protection.

The reason lies in the widely held compensatory view of fiscal policy in Germany: the state intervenes only in ex-

ceptional circumstances, namely when competitive market solutions fail. This applies to financing central infrastructure, such as the road network and sewer system. In addition, the state finances compensation for external effects, such as the use of natural resources or excessive health risks to employees. In the context of the socio-ecological transformation, however, these supposed exceptions are often the rule. This is evident in areas such as the preservation of natural commons, the provision of social infrastructures or, as mentioned above, the use of natural resources.

Given the costs and various actions required by the transformation, it is necessary to go beyond a strictly compensatory view of fiscal policy. So far, the Federal debt brake (Schuldenbremse) has limited government investment options. It caps annual new indebtedness for the Federal Government and the states at 0.35 per cent of GDP, thereby restricting the fiscal scope for public investment. At the same time, investment targeting both

ecological and social targets is necessary. For instance, expanding public transport and developing municipal district heating systems powered by renewable energy are urgent priorities. This broader understanding of fiscal policy is reflected in the concept of the Foundational Economy, which addresses underutilised public spend-

ing capacity. Accordingly, instruments such as public lending, reformed subsidies, industrial policies and direct public investments could be used to finance climate-friendly supply structures. This way, the state could actively support the transition to a more sustainable economy and way of life.



### Recommendation for action Ensuring financing for new climate-friendly infrastructures

The likelihood of transformation depends substantially on the underlying infrastructure. The Expert Commission therefore recommends understanding the public sector as a capable actor in the socio-economic transformation, with a mandate to invest in new infrastructure. Gender equality-relevant consequences have to be reviewed and considered for all measures. Amongst other things, abolition or comprehensive reform of the debt brake is necessary. The experts especially recommend stronger financial endowments for states and municipalities, the implementation of climate action plans and regional or local transformation policies. In addition, the experts encourage the development of an investment plan to address the investment backlog in Germany. This investment plan should prioritise spending on sustainable infrastructure, such as expanding the rail network, particularly in underserved rural regions.

## Emissions trading and the Climate and Transformation Fund

The expansion of the state's responsibilities and thus increasing public spending raises the question of how the socio-ecological transformation can be financed in a socially equitable way.

Current measures for climate protection and climate adaptation are primarily financed through the Climate and Transformation Fund (Klima- und Transformationsfonds). The revenues for the fund are derived from emissions trading, more precisely, carbon pricing. The aim of carbon pricing is to incentivise climate-friendly behaviour among consumers and companies by raising the price of emission-intensive fuels such as oil, gas, coal, petrol and diesel. Simultaneously, the revenues are earmarked to fund relief measures and support programmes for energy-efficient renovations, electric mobility, the transition to heat pumps and related initiatives.

European emissions trading will be extended. With the introduction of market-based emissions trading, fuel prices are expected to rise significantly if companies pass on their higher operating costs to customers. The increase in costs will be noticeable in heating, hot water, mobility, and in the service sector.

Carbon pricing impacts people unevenly, depending not only on income but also on gender-specific circumstances and behaviours. Single parents, who have higher

energy demand due to their children and are on lower incomes, are particularly affected. Carbon emissions depend on housing standards, for example the quality of insulation and whether one rents or owns their home. Men are more affected by the carbon price on petrol or diesel because they commute by car frequently and travel longer distances than women. In rural areas, the financial burden is higher where climate-friendly public transport is lacking and people rely on cars. This often affects women disproportionately, as they are more likely to be responsible for taking children to childcare and for grocery shopping.

Yet the financial burdens that are often distributed very unequally by gender and income are scarcely considered in the allocation of funds in the Climate and Transformation Fund. Gender-specific analyses are largely absent. It can be assumed, however, that given the focus on electric mobility, the production industry and income-related support, the beneficiaries will disproportionately be men, male-dominated industries and people with higher incomes. A 2021 evaluation of Federal Funding for Efficient Buildings (Bundesförderung für effiziente Gebäude, BEG) found that financially better-off households benefited particularly from the funding.



### Recommendation for action

#### Compensating for the financial burden and supporting climate-friendly options

A much-discussed option for financial relief is the climate bonus (Klimageld). This bonus is intended to mitigate the impact of carbon pricing. The Expert Commission recommends providing targeted relief to those particularly affected, for example, through income-based scaling. A lump-sum climate bonus would fall short of this aim. Instead, public investments are required to reduce heating and transportation costs, especially for low-income households and women in particular. This includes advancing energy-efficient renovations in existing residential buildings, expanding municipal climate-friendly district heating and implementing social leasing programmes for electric mobility in rural areas.

## Taxes and tax subsidies

To finance the socio-ecological transformation, tax reforms should also be discussed. The Federal Government, states and municipalities receive taxes, thereby financing government functions. Simultaneously, taxes can create ecological incentives and reduce social inequalities when designed with social and gender-equitable considerations. With regard to climate change, environment-related taxes are particularly important. These are levied on greenhouse gas emissions and natural resource consumption. Examples are taxes on electricity, vehicles and air traffic.

For Germany, there are no gender-specific empirical studies on the effects of environment-related taxes. However, experts note that these taxes are often levied as consumer taxes and therefore disproportionately burden low-income households, who spend a higher share of their income on consumer goods. This may further exacerbate social and gender-related inequalities.

Other types of taxation, such as income tax, also need to be considered. The commuter allowance, for example, which is tax-deductible, is problematic not only from an ecological perspective, as it incentivises car use, but also

from a distributional one. Only employees whose taxable expenses exceed the standard employee allowance (Arbeitnehmerpauschbetrag) benefit from it and the amount of tax relief increases with taxable income. As a result, higher-income earners benefit disproportionately.

The Mobility Bonus for Low-income Earners (Mobilitätsprämie für Geringverdiener), introduced in 2021 to mitigate this effect, seems to disproportionately benefit men. This is because the lump-sum payment applies only to commutes of 20 kilometres or more and men, on average, have longer commuting distances than women.

To ensure socially equitable financing of the socio-ecological transformation, the experts call for greater tax progression by raising top income tax rates, abolishing tax subsidies and increasing inheritance and wealth taxes. This would place greater responsibility on high-income earners, who account for above-average carbon emissions. Simultaneously, gender inequalities concerning income, assets and inheritances could be alleviated.

## Environmentally harmful subsidies

The Federal Environment Agency estimated environmentally harmful subsidies at 65 billion euros in 2018. That equals 2 per cent of the gross domestic product. This includes tax incentives for environmentally harmful practices, such as tax advantages for company cars or exemptions for energy-intensive companies from energy and electricity taxes. Such subsidies not only impede climate targets but also favour predominantly men and male-dominated sectors.

According to the Federal Ministry of Finance, the cost of the planned reductions in electricity tax and network charges

under the 2025 coalition agreement would amount to 10.2 billion euros. This measure could be climate-damaging as it weakens incentives for energy saving. As long as the electricity mix includes fossil fuels, higher consumption increases emissions. At the same time, the economic pressure to invest in energy efficiency is decreasing. Gender equality-relevant effects are also neglected: as it is particularly the production industry that benefits, the measure yet again favours male-dominated sectors.



### Recommendation for action

#### Strengthening the control and financing function of environmental taxes and duties

The Expert Commission recommends that the federal government make tax revenues more environmentally friendly by introducing a car toll or expanding taxes on air traffic and pesticides. In doing so, taxes, duties and fees must be systematically reviewed for their ecological and gender-related distribution and incentive effects and, if necessary, reformed. Additionally, environmentally harmful subsidies must be phased out or adapted.

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# Institutional mechanisms for a gender-equitable socio-ecological transformation

To ensure that the findings and recommendations for action in the Gender Equality Report are incorporated into political and administrative action, gender equality must be established as a guiding principle and cross-cutting task across all areas relevant to transformation. This requires cross-departmental working structures in governments and gathering the relevant knowledge. Additionally, it is necessary to further develop and enforce gender equality-oriented strategies and instruments in view of the socio-ecological transformation.

Institutional mechanisms are required to design gender equality, environmental and climate policies in accordance with Articles 3 (2) and 3 (3) of the Basic Law (Grundgesetz). These mechanisms, e.g. structures, provisions or processes, must ensure that the recommendations of the Expert Commission are implemented at the federal, state and municipal levels. The recommendations build on previous Gender Equality Reports and further develop them to support a socio-ecological transformation. The recommendations for action primarily address the Federal Government. Yet the analyses and recommendations indicate that similar mechanisms must also be established at the state and municipal levels.



## Anchoring gender equality as a guiding principle and a cross-sectional task

To implement the constitutionally required socio-ecological transformation, that is gender-equitable (see key statements of the Expert Opinion), gender equality must be recognised as a guiding principle and cross-sectional task across all areas of action relevant to the transformation.

Since 2001, this approach has been set in paragraph 2 of the Joint Rules of Procedure of the Federal Ministries (Gemeinsame Geschäftsordnung der Bundesministerien, GGO). Following this, the Federal Ministries must pro-

mote equal opportunities for women and men as a universal principle across all political, normative and administrative measures. This principle also applies to the development and implementation of transformation and climate policies, such as the Federal Climate Adaptation Act (Klimaanpassungsgesetz) and the Climate Action Programme (Klimaschutzprogramm).

In Germany's updated 2025 Sustainable Development Strategy (Deutsche Nachhaltigkeitsstrategie), which serves as a roadmap for the implementation of the 17 UN

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Germany, gender equality is already mentioned as a cross-sectional principle. Specifically, SDG5 defines gender equality as a goal that should be integrated across all other Sustainable Development Goals. In the German Sustainable Development Strategy, gender equality

is primarily addressed in areas such as healthcare, education and social justice. Gender equality-oriented approaches in other areas, such as the energy transition and climate protection, the circular economy, construction and mobility and financing, are missing.

## Securing responsibility and competencies within the government



### Recommendations for action Effectively organising cross-departmental cooperation

The Fourth Gender Equality Report shows that gender equality plays an important role across all actions relevant to the transformation and has cross-sectional effects. For instance, the way climate change affects health and the healthcare system does not only concern healthcare policy but also mobility and transport planning, urban development and labour market policy. Climate-friendly diets are linked to financial policy, as well as to working conditions across global supply chains and, in turn, to labour and economic policy.



### Establishing an interministerial working group

The Expert Commission recommends establishing effective, cross-ministerial structures to include all departments relevant to the gender equality-oriented socio-ecological transformation. This requires an interministerial working group in which representatives of the relevant federal ministries collaborate regularly. The working group should be coordinated by the Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMBFSFJ). The ministry should work to promote exchange among all participating ministries and, according to paragraph 2 of the GGO, ensure equal opportunities for women and men across all areas relevant to the socio-ecological transformation. This includes, in particular, the interministerial coordination of gender equality- and climate-relevant goals, strategies and measures. This should be based on the recommendations for action of the Fourth Gender Equality Report. In this process, the Federal Chancellor's Office should play a key role as it has been responsible for implementing the German Sustainable Development Strategy.



### Establishing focal points in all departments

The experts recommend a cross-departmental gender equality strategy, as is also proposed in the coalition agreement of 2025. The strategy should include the goal of a gender-equal, socio-ecological transformation, to be considered across departments. To this end, indicators should be developed across all sectoral policies to measure their implementation progress. Simultaneously, departments should establish and permanently secure specialist units for equal opportunities, so-called gender focal points. These units should promote the implementation in their respective ministries, for instance, by defining technical targets or through internal consultations. Such efforts can be modelled on the Federal Environment Agency, which has made gender equality a cross-cutting issue since the 2000s.



## Devising a climate change Gender Action Plan

Furthermore, the interministerial working group should coordinate the development of a national climate change Gender Action Plan. Such a Gender Action Plan is intended to make significant contributions to gender-equal climate policy. To this end, thematic priorities, concrete measures and targets, competencies, timeframes and verifiable results must be defined.

The UN Gender Action Plan, adopted in 2019 and updated in 2025, can function as a model. It focuses on capacity building, knowledge management and communication, gender balance, participation and women's leadership, coherence, gender-responsive implementation, monitoring and reporting. There are exemplary national Gender Action Plans in other countries. These are based on the respective national development and climate change policies and identify gender equality-related challenges across different areas of action. Nigeria, for example, focuses on areas of agriculture, water supply and healthcare.



## Securing the representation of women and gender competence in committees

The Expert Commission urgently recommends enforcing the Federal Committee Appointment Act (Bundesgremienbesetzungsgesetz). Accordingly, departments should make greater efforts to ensure that important decision-making and advisory boards in the context of the transformation are composed of men and women in equal numbers, taking necessary qualifications into account. Experts on gender equality should be integrated into relevant fields of action to ensure the necessary gender competence.

# Implementing gender equality-oriented strategies and instruments

Previous Gender Equality Reports repeatedly recommended strategies and instruments such as gender-specific impact assessments and gender budgeting.

These strategies and instruments need further development and strengthening to support socio-ecological transformation.



## Recommendations for action Implementing gender equality-oriented impact assessments in practice

Paragraphs 2, 44 GGO oblige federal departments to perform gender equality relevant impact assessments for legislative proposals and to explain these impacts. Such impact assessments make the effects of laws and other measures on gender equality transparent and enable relevant stakeholders to adjust legislation as needed. Yet these assessments have not been implemented sufficiently. Even climate-relevant legislative proposals generally state that there are supposedly no equality-relevant impacts.

An exception is the Federal Climate Adaptation Act of 2024. The explanatory memorandum to the bill explicitly states that climate change affects women and men differently. Yet in the act itself, there are no regulations governing a gender equality oriented implementation.

Against this background, the experts recommend strengthening the impact assessment process and making it mandatory for laws and other climate-relevant measures.

The Federal Foundation for Gender Equality supports the implementation of the gender equality-oriented impact assessment process through training opportunities and a website for the Gender Equality Check. The Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Information Technology was commissioned by the BMBFSFJ to work on an AI tool to simplify the Gender Equality Check.

The further development of the Gender Equality Check should also include research on gender equality-oriented impact assessment processes on environmental and climate policy. The dimension of public resources and infrastructure, e.g., access and use of energy, transport and service systems, is considered particularly relevant to socio-ecological transformation.



### Linking gender budgeting with green budgeting

A gender equality oriented socio-ecological transformation relies on public funding to mitigate financial burdens and support climate-friendly lifestyles and economic practices. It should be examined whether the required public revenue and expenditure within the framework of the transformation promote gender equality and are distributed accordingly (gender budgeting). The gender-equitable allocation of public investments, expenditures and funding is explicitly identified as a subgoal and indicator for SDG5 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

At the federal level, gender budgeting has been implemented insufficiently. The tenth and eleventh Spending Reviews of the Federal Ministry of Finance focus on aligning the national budget more with the Sustainable Development Goals. Yet in spite of the obligation to consider gender equality as a cross-sectional issue, gender equality concerns are still being neglected.

The experts recommend observing ecological and gender equality-relevant targets within the framework of budget management (green budgeting). For this, the approaches of sustainability, or rather SDG-Budgeting, which have been pursued, should be combined with gender budgeting. The allocation of funding through the EU Climate Social Fund, the Federal Climate and Transformation Fund and the Federal Special Fund for Infrastructure and Climate Neutrality should also be aligned with gender equality considerations.



### Developing and introducing a monitoring of gender equality

The experts recommend introducing gender equality monitoring to track the implementation of these mechanisms in line with international and national obligations. All federal departments should explain, based on specific criteria, to what extent they have implemented these mechanisms and their targets. First and foremost, this concerns the national climate change Gender Action Plan, a cross-departmental gender equality strategy, the involvement of women in transformation and climate-relevant decisions and the establishment of corresponding structures and instruments.

## Including external expertise and civil society

In legislative and planning processes for the socio-ecological transformation, gender-differentiated perspectives are vital. Different actors bring diverse impulses, share both their everyday and empirical knowledge and thereby facilitate innovation. Paragraph 47 GGO already provides for the involvement of civil society in legislative

procedures. The Expert Commission recommends introducing innovative methods to increase participation in all transformation and climate-relevant processes and, in particular, to reach people who had little involvement up to now.

## Knowledge, data and consultation



### Recommendations for action

#### Improving the database and closing research gaps

Sound evidence-based policies require an easily accessible, current and spatially differentiated database. In many areas of action, however, there is a lack of conclusive data disaggregated by gender and other categories relevant to inequality. Examples include data on energy consumption, particularly the lack of data on energy poverty; utilisation of funding; environmental health protection; agriculture; and employment patterns in the renewable energy sector. The Expert Commission therefore recommends improving the data on gender equality-relevant aspects of the socio-ecological transformation. Using specific indicators would also support gender equality monitoring.

The experts recommend closing the research gaps described in the Gender Equality Report. They therefore recommend targeted funding programmes and funding priorities that combine gender equality and ecological transformation. Gender equality should be a mandatory criterion for research funding.



#### Consolidating the Federal Foundation for Gender Equality

Since 2021, the Federal Foundation for Gender Equality has promoted and reinforced equal opportunities for women and men in Germany. From the experts' perspective, the foundation should work to make the findings and themes of the Gender Equality Reports, including those on socio-ecological transformation, better known to the public. Additionally, a competence pool of independent experts, along with expert databases and networks, should be established. These could contribute to promoting gender equality-relevant projects in the area of socio-ecological transformation. The experts recommend systematically monitoring the implementation of the recommendations in the Gender Equality Reports. However, assigning additional tasks must always be accompanied by the necessary financial and personal resources.

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