Gender in the Climate Negotiations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Gender entered climate negotiations late and by decision rather than by treaty. The 1992 UNFCCC and the 1997 Kyoto Protocol contain no gender provisions, even though the Rio Declaration adopted at the same Earth Summit had recognised that women have a vital role in environmental management and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action had named women and the environment as a critical area, with objectives to involve women in environmental decision-making, to integrate gender into sustainable development policies and to assess the impact of environmental policies on women. The first opening came through representation. Decision 36/CP.7 at COP 7 in Marrakech in 2001 invited Parties to nominate women to elective posts and asked the secretariat to track the gender composition of bodies, COP 16 in Cancún in 2010 recognised that gender equality and the effective participation of women are important for all aspects of climate action, and decision 23/CP.18 at COP 18 in Doha in 2012 set a goal of gender balance in the bodies of the Convention and made gender a standing agenda item. Women's organisations formed the Women and Gender Constituency, which became a permanent presence in the negotiating rooms, and the Green Climate Fund was established with a commitment to a gender-sensitive approach. These early steps counted women in the room but did not yet ask what the room decided.

The Paris Agreement of 2015 brought gender into the legal architecture of the regime for the first time, and also showed its limits. Its preamble names gender equality and the empowerment of women among the principles that Parties should respect when taking climate action, alongside human rights, the right to health and the rights of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, migrants, children and persons with disabilities. Article 7.5 states that adaptation action should follow a country-driven, gender-responsive, participatory and fully transparent approach, and Article 11.2 states that capacity-building should be participatory, cross-cutting and gender-responsive. Gender does not appear in the articles on mitigation and nationally determined contributions (Articles 4 to 6), finance (Article 9), technology (Article 10) or transparency (Article 13), so the Agreement carries no obligation to report sex-disaggregated data or to track gender-responsive finance. The Katowice rulebook of 2018 added only an opening, allowing countries to describe in their planning information how domestic institutional arrangements and public engagement are gender-responsive (decision 4/CMA.1). Everything the regime has since done on gender in finance, data and reporting has therefore had to be built through the gender work programme rather than the Paris text.

The gender work programme became the engine. COP 20 in Lima in 2014 created the Lima Work Programme on Gender, COP 22 in Marrakech in 2016 extended it by three years and invited Parties to appoint National Gender and Climate Change Focal Points (21/CP.22), COP 23 in Bonn in 2017 adopted the first Gender Action Plan (3/CP.23), with priority areas on capacity-building, gender balance, coherence, implementation and means of implementation, and monitoring and reporting, and COP 25 in Madrid in 2019 enhanced

the programme with a five-year plan (3/CP.25). By COP 26 in Glasgow in 2021, 94 countries had appointed a focal point, and decision 20/CP.26 asked for a report on their roles and for submissions on progress. The intermediate review concluded at COP 27 in Sharm el-Sheikh with decision 24/CP.27, which recognised with concern that the pandemic had set back implementation, urged Parties to accelerate it, welcomed the gender content of the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report, added activities on support from constituted bodies and on reporting, encouraged Parties and public and private entities to make climate finance more gender-responsive and to simplify access for grassroots women's organisations, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and stressed the urgency of scaled-up support for developing countries. That session also held dialogues on gender budgeting and on Indigenous women's climate leadership. COP 28 in Dubai set the process for the final review (15/CP.28) and saw more than 60 Parties endorse the Gender-Responsive Just Transitions and Climate Action Partnership, and COP 29 in Baku concluded the review and extended the programme by ten years (7/CP.29), after a synthesis of submissions that shaped the design of a new plan.

Participation is where the regime can show measurable progress, and the secretariat's 2026 gender composition report (FCCC/CP/2026/4) puts figures on it. Women were 43.6 per cent of Party delegates at COP 30, up 5.8 percentage points on the previous report, and 36.5 per cent of heads and deputy heads of delegation. At SB64 women were 50.6 per cent of Party delegates and 43.2 per cent of heads and deputy heads. Women were 44 per cent of the delegates supported by the trust fund at Belém, up from 37 per cent at COP 27. Across the Convention's constituted bodies women held 44 per cent of positions in 2026, up from 40 per cent in 2025, with seven bodies at or above gender balance, nine of 17 bodies at 40 per cent or more, and 13 women among the chairs and co-chairs. The gaps remain visible. The Adaptation Fund Board is 31 per cent women, the Article 6 Supervisory Body 33 per cent, the CDM Executive Board and the enforcement branch of the Compliance Committee 20 per cent, and the COP Bureau 36 per cent. Women's share of Party delegates falls with age, from 63 per cent of those under 26 to 29 per cent of those over 66, which shows a pipeline that fills at the bottom and thins at the top. Civil society trackers that count differently report lower shares, including 40 per cent of Party delegates and a third of heads of delegation at COP 30, and delegations of least developed countries remain below the global average.

Money is where the architecture of gender in the regime is weakest. The funds under the Convention and the Paris Agreement have adopted gender policies, beginning with the Green Climate Fund's gender-sensitive approach and its 2019 Gender Policy, and the Belém plan now gives them an annual dialogue on gender-responsive finance and a workshop on their gender mandates planned for SB66, covering the Adaptation Fund, the Global Environment Facility, the Green Climate Fund and the Fund for responding to Loss and Damage. The evidence shows how little of this reaches outcomes. The GCF's own independent evaluation of 20 projects found that 86 per cent delivered some benefit to women but only 12 per cent produced structural change, that gender capacities remain siloed in designated teams, and that gender analysis works largely as an approval mechanism. Of roughly US$2 trillion in global climate finance, the share reaching women is unknown, 78 per cent of private climate finance is not gender-aware, and women's

grassroots organisations received about 4 per cent of government adaptation aid in 2022 and 2 per cent for mitigation. Adaptation finance, on which the burden of care and health falls hardest, fell from US$28 billion in 2022 to US$26 billion in 2023 against a need of US$310 billion to US$365 billion a year by 2035.

COP 30 in Belém in November 2025 marked the moment when this momentum produced a new plan, but only after a fight over its words. Parties adopted the Belém Gender Action Plan for 2026 to 2034 under decision 7/CP.30, with five priority areas, 27 activities and 98 deliverables. It asks Parties to submit national assessments of health, violence against women and girls and care work by March 2027, and it sets an annual dialogue on gender-responsive climate finance, an expert dialogue on gender- and age-disaggregated data and a global dialogue on gender and environment data. It calls for travel funds for focal points and women delegates, for safe and accessible meetings and the protection of women environmental defenders, for gender-responsive budgeting, for direct access to finance for grassroots women's organisations, and for voluntary reporting of the gender composition of delegations and Presidency teams from COP 31, and its preamble recognises Indigenous women, migrant women, women with disabilities, smallholder and rural women and women of African descent. Elsewhere in the Belém package, the Belém Adaptation Indicators carried a recommendation to disaggregate data by gender, the just transition work programme referred to care work and informal labour, and Parties agreed to triple adaptation finance by 2035. The negotiation was bitter. The draft opened with 99 brackets in Bonn and reached 496 in its last public version, the Holy See, Argentina, Paraguay and Iran sought footnotes defining gender as biological sex, none of which entered the final decision, and the words sexual and reproductive health were dropped.

The same conference showed how much was left undone. The Belém plan carries no dedicated finance: it invites funds and finance entities to support implementation but makes secretariat actions subject to the availability of financial resources, so delivery in developing countries depends on goodwill. It dropped explicit references to human rights and to sexual and reproductive health, replaced intersectionality with the phrase multidimensional factors, named no gender-diverse people and set no indicators with which to measure implementation. Civil society described the outcome on gender-responsive finance as a failure. The tripling of adaptation finance was set for 2035 with no agreed baseline and no share for women's organisations, and the new work programme on climate finance under Article 9 had no agreed gender tracking. Little of this yet translates into support for the things that decide whether women and girls can cope with a climate shock. Community research in the Lake Victoria Basin in Uganda, published in Frontiers in Global Women's Health, found that floods destroyed two health centres within two years, cutting off antenatal care, family planning, immunisation and HIV services, and that a flooded harvest set off a chain from lost income to male stress to violence against women and girls. Belém therefore delivered a plan and left financing, indicators and rights language open.

SB64, held from 8 to 18 June 2026, delivered the three events that the Belém plan mandates, and each produced evidence that Parties can use. The expert dialogue on gender- and age-disaggregated data on 10 June concluded that there is still no globally standardised set of gender indicators for climate action, that gender analysis should be mandatory across

climate policy, budgeting, monitoring and reporting, and that data must be rights-based, ethical and non-extractive, and it laid the ground for the 2027 national assessments and for the first global dialogue on gender and environment data at COP 32. The first in-session workshop for National Gender and Climate Change Focal Points on 12 and 13 June heard that 159 focal points from 125 countries have been appointed, that only 49 per cent have a formal ministerial mandate, and that limited capacity (51 per cent) and funding (37 per cent) are the largest gaps, with Rwanda's minimum gender guidelines and Belize's cross-sector NDC 3.0 offered as models. The first interactive dialogue on gender-responsive climate finance on 15 June, with the Green Climate Fund, the Global Environment Facility and the Adaptation Fund, put the evaluation findings above in front of the funds themselves. Coordination also advanced. The Least Developed Countries Group and the African Group of Negotiators met daily to align positions on predictable finance, technology and capacity for the plan, African women formed a task force to carry priorities on leadership, finance and adaptation into regional and global processes, the new Gender Action Plan was welcomed, and a package of texts for the Belém-Antalya just transition mechanism moved forward.

On the questions that decide whether the plan can be delivered, however, SB64 did not succeed. Negotiations on the Global Goal on Adaptation ended without agreement, because Parties could not settle the make-up of the task force that will develop the methodologies for the Belém Adaptation Indicators, and because the EU, supported by Norway, Canada, Switzerland, Japan and the UK, pushed for text without the commitment to triple adaptation finance while the G-77 and China pressed for it. The Co-Facilitators referred the matter to the SB Chairs. The EU and the UK would not accept finance reporting text that referred to Article 9.1 on developed countries' obligation to provide finance, developing countries and the African Group flagged a 27 per cent cut in the climate focal area in the ninth replenishment of the Global Environment Facility, which the UK and Japan resisted recording, and the governance and fifth review of the Adaptation Fund were left unresolved. Gender and health were largely absent from the Mitigation Work Programme discussions, including interventions on mitigation co-benefits that made no reference to health. The Women and Gender Constituency also warned that with an anti-rights agenda intensifying, the Belém plan risks becoming a paper victory.

The balance sheet of three decades is therefore clear. What has been achieved is a permanent mandate that has survived repeated reviews, a plan with 98 deliverables, a network of 159 focal points in 125 countries, measurable gains in women's presence in delegations and bodies, gender policies in the funds, dedicated dialogues on data and finance, and legal footholds in the Paris Agreement's articles on adaptation and capacity-building. What has failed is almost everything that requires money, measurement or accountability: the plan has no dedicated finance and makes support conditional on resources, the Paris articles on finance, technology and transparency are silent on gender, there is no standard set of gender indicators, reporting is voluntary, most focal points lack a formal mandate, grassroots women's organisations receive a sliver of adaptation aid, and the language on human rights, sexual and reproductive health and intersectionality did not survive Belém. Recognition has grown at every step while the means have been deferred, and for least developed countries, small island developing states and African countries,

whose women carry the heaviest burden of floods, drought, disrupted health services and violence in climate emergencies, this gap between recognition and delivery is the central concern. The next stage, COP 31 in Antalya, is where it can begin to close.

Envisioning COP 31

COP 31 will meet in Antalya from 9 to 20 November 2026 under a Presidency held by Türkiye, with Australia leading the negotiations, and it will be a delivery conference for gender rather than a drafting one. The Belém Gender Action Plan will not be renegotiated. The question is whether its first year turns into practice, and whether the gender gains of SB64 are carried into the adaptation, finance and just transition decisions where the consequences for women are largest. The pre-COP in Fiji from 5 to 8 October produced the Taku Pakasoa leaders' declaration, an Access to Finance Statement and Action Plan from Australia, and a reminder that more than US$5 billion of the over US$16 billion committed to Pacific countries since Paris has not been disbursed, but it did not mention gender. That silence is itself a signal that gender will have to be carried into the rooms of Antalya by Parties, the Presidency and the constituencies, and not assumed.

What COP 31 can expect to receive from the machinery of the plan is concrete. The secretariat's gender composition report asks the COP to use its figures when nominating members of constituted bodies and when striving for balance in delegations, and it invites Parties and COP Presidencies to report voluntarily on the gender composition of national delegations and Presidency technical teams, which the secretariat has already raised with the COP 31 Presidency. A report of the in-session workshop for focal points is due before the session, a synthesis report on submissions about gender-responsive financial instruments and methodologies is being prepared, and the composition of delegates funded through the trust fund will be reported for COP 31. A realistic expectation is a first set of voluntary reports, a visible set of numbers on who is in the room, and a test of whether the two COP 31 Presidencies publish their own team data, which would show whether the plan's accountability tools are used by those who lead the conference.

The first thing COP 31 could finish is what SB64 left behind on adaptation. The Global Goal on Adaptation negotiations stalled over the make-up of the task force for the methodologies of the Belém Adaptation Indicators and over whether to refer to the commitment to triple adaptation finance, and the Chairs' revised text was rejected by the Alliance of Small Island States as unacceptable. A final package is likely to be settled late, and the gender value of it can be small but decisive: a task force that includes gender expertise and members from least developed countries and Africa, indicators supported by methodologies and metadata that can be disaggregated by sex, age, disability and geography, and a tripling reference with an agreed baseline year. If that happens, the recommendation made at Belém to disaggregate adaptation data by gender becomes practice rather than a sentence, and the second Global Stocktake, which begins at COP 31, can draw on data that shows who is reached.

The finance track is where the plan will be tested hardest. The new Article 9 work programme and the dispute over Article 9.1 will shape whether finance discussions carry any gender tracking, the Council of the Global Environment Facility has endorsed a US$3.9

billion ninth replenishment that some members found smaller than earlier cycles, the make-up of the Adaptation Fund Board, on which women are 31 per cent, was deferred at SB64, and the Baku to Belém Roadmap to US$1.3 trillion has moved with low intensity. A plausible outcome is language in guidance to the funds or in finance decisions that encourages gender-responsive access, gender budgets and reporting of outcomes, while the larger commitments on money are traded in the closing days. The annual finance dialogue under the plan and the workshop on the funds' gender mandates at SB66 give COP 31 a way to commit to a standing process, so that the evidence of 86 per cent benefit and 12 per cent structural change becomes a baseline that the funds are asked to improve, with grassroots women's organisations able to reach the funds directly.

The just transition track offers the clearest chance for gender to move beyond the gender agenda item. A package of texts for the Belém-Antalya just transition mechanism advanced at SB64, and the review of the Just Transition Work Programme meets at SB65 in November 2026, at the same time as COP 31. The Women and Gender Constituency wants the mechanism established as a body with developed countries funding its budget, grounded in inclusion, consent, care, human rights and gender equality. The COP 28 partnership on gender-responsive just transitions is due a second convening at COP 31. What could be expected, if the champions hold, is a mechanism whose terms of reference carry care work, informal labour, social protection and the participation of women, Indigenous Peoples and communities, with a funded role for civil society, and a partnership review that turns voluntary pledges on data, finance and equal opportunity into reported results.

Evidence and health offer a second line of opportunity. The first dialogue under the second Global Stocktake process and the first global dialogue on gender and environment data at COP 32 depend on data being collected now. The national assessments of health, violence against women and girls and care work due in March 2027 can be linked to the Presidency's choice of dynamic and resilient health systems as a priority theme and to the standalone health item in its Action Agenda, so that health is not treated as separate from the safety, care burden and reproductive health of women and girls. The risk is that the words sexual and reproductive health, dropped at Belém, stay out of the health and adaptation outcomes, and the hope is that the evidence from community research and from the 2027 assessments moves Parties to restore explicit references to health, safety and rights, in light of the 2025 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice that climate change harms the rights to life and health.

The political setting will shape every outcome. The fight over footnotes defining gender, over sexual and reproductive health, over human rights and over the word intersectionality at COP 30 has not gone away, and consensus decision-making allows any Party to bracket or block text. The champions of the plan, namely the least developed countries, small island states, AILAC, the European Union and Brazil, will need to act as an alliance in the closing days, and the developing countries that have asked for finance will need developed countries to match their support for words with support for means. What can be expected is pressure on gender language in the cover decisions, quiet trade-offs in packages, and a premium on bracket-tracking by the constituencies that make regression visible before the final plenary.

Three landings are possible, and none is guaranteed. The floor is a conference that holds the line: no loss of agreed gender, health and care language, voluntary delegation reporting started, travel funds for focal points and women delegates confirmed, and the plan left intact. The most likely landing is incremental: a tripling reference with a baseline year and a task force with gender expertise, gender-responsive access language in guidance to the funds, care and gender equality in the just transition mechanism, a second convening of the partnership, and the first published delegation and team data. The ceiling would be a conference that funds the plan, with a named and predictable finance line for implementation in developing countries, outcome-based tracking of gender-responsive climate finance across the funds, a core set of gender indicators agreed for development before COP 32, and restored references to human rights and sexual and reproductive health in the health and adaptation tracks. These are projections drawn from the plan's calendar and the state of the negotiations at SB64, not forecasts of the final text.

Beyond Antalya, the calendar gives the light to read by. National assessments on health, violence against women and girls and care work are due in March 2027, regional workshops on safe participation and the protection of women environmental defenders are due by the same date, the Subsidiary Bodies meet again at SB66 in June 2027 with the workshop on the funds' gender mandates and the technology workshop for women and girls, and COP 32 in Addis Ababa in 2027 hosts the dialogues on the evidence base, on data and on gender across the Rio Conventions, with a Gender Day dialogue and the first compilation of progress. The review of the plan begins at SB70 in 2029. COP 31 is the conference at which the first year of the Belém plan can turn from adoption into practice, and the signs to watch are plain: money named for the plan, indicators that can be disaggregated, focal points with mandates, delegations and Presidencies that report on themselves, and language on health, safety and rights that is still in the text at the final plenary.

Annex: Abbreviations

AGN – African Group of Negotiators

AILAC – Independent Association of Latin America and the Caribbean

AOSIS – Alliance of Small Island States

BTR – Biennial Transparency Report

CDM – Clean Development Mechanism

CMA – Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement

CMP – Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol

COP – Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (for example COP 30 in Belém and COP 31 in Antalya)

CP – Decision of the Conference of the Parties (for example 3/CP.23)

EU – European Union

FCCC – Document symbol used by the UNFCCC secretariat (for example FCCC/CP/2026/4)

G77/China – Group of 77 and China, the largest developing-country negotiating group

GAP – Gender Action Plan

GCF – Green Climate Fund

GEF – Global Environment Facility

GGA – Global Goal on Adaptation

HIV – Human immunodeficiency virus

ICJ – International Court of Justice

IPCC – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

JTWP – Just Transition Work Programme

LDCs – Least Developed Countries

LWPG – Lima Work Programme on Gender

MDCs – More Developed Countries

NAP – National Adaptation Plan

NDC – Nationally Determined Contribution

SB – Subsidiary Bodies (the SBI and SBSTA meeting together); SB64 is the June 2026 Bonn session, SB65 the November 2026 session

SBI – Subsidiary Body for Implementation

SBSTA – Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice

SRHR – Sexual and reproductive health and rights

UK – United Kingdom

UNFCCC – United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

VAWG – Violence against women and girls

WGC – Women and Gender Constituency

YOUNGO – Youth Constituency of the UNFCCC