

# A GREEN AND CARING ECONOMY

## KEY MESSAGES

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POWERED BY

wbg WOMEN'S  
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#GreenCaringEconomy

## Who is this for?

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As part of our **Feminist Green New Deal** project, we found that people working or campaigning on the climate crisis rarely highlight how its impacts are shaped by gender inequality. At the same time, feminists working to end gender inequality don't always know enough about what the climate crisis means for women and girls. This guide is for community groups, activists, campaigners and organisations working in either space. It is designed to help you identify and communicate the connections between these issues and help you argue for solutions that reflect the intersectional nature of both crises. It is based on existing research, new insights from our Feminist Green New Deal project and on lessons from our workshops with grassroots women's organisations.

## What does feminism have to do with climate change?

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Climate change does not affect everyone equally. Throughout the world, **women and girls are more vulnerable to its impacts**, which amplify and interact with existing gender inequalities. This is especially true in poorer countries, many of which are already experiencing extreme climate change-related weather events such as droughts, floods, and hurricanes. As women and girls generally shoulder more of the care burden than men, they are under even more pressure when disaster strikes, often responsible for finding food and shelter for children and other relatives. And as climate-related events exacerbate conflict, women and girls are increasingly at risk of gender-based violence and face higher barriers to accessing healthcare, including sexual and reproductive healthcare.

In the UK, as elsewhere, **women face greater barriers to financial security** and to be heads of single-parent households than men, which makes them disproportionately vulnerable to the costs of climate change. These could be inflated gas bills which she would have been protected from if government had properly invested in renewable energy; or, having primary responsibility for feeding her family, being hit by rising food prices because of floods or droughts; paying for household repairs after a flood; or being unable to work on days their children's school is closed because of a heatwave.

And yet, policies to prevent and cope with the impacts of climate change rarely consider the gendered nature of these impacts and feminist organisations are excluded from planning conversations. Solutions must involve those affected to make sure they do not exacerbate existing inequalities, for example by increasing women's unpaid labour in preparing more whole and home-cooked food, or by leaving marginalised groups out of new job opportunities.

## What is a 'green and caring economy' and why is it a feminist issue?

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The climate and inequality crises have the same root: an economic system that *carelessly* exploits for profit the earth's resources and its people, especially women and marginalised groups. The system relies on care work (paid and unpaid) to produce, feed, clothe and look after a working population and keep economies running. Care work is often invisible, almost always undervalued, and disproportionately performed by women. The same logic that sees this work as inexhaustible and a 'natural' function of being a woman, sees the earth itself as an infinite source of material, energy, food and water for consumption and profit, rather than a delicately balanced system that sustains all life.

So, rewiring our economic system to care for people and planet is crucial. The pandemic showed us what is really essential - our natural resources, and the health, care and education we need to survive and thrive. It's helpful to think about this labour as part of our **social infrastructure**, which we need to invest in just as much as physical infrastructure.

Properly valuing care work and fairly redistributing it would go a long way towards addressing gender inequality. This would recognise and enable the care work that women already do while also freeing them up to pursue other activities. A green and caring economy would revolve around wellbeing rather than profit, ensuring that all living things, both now and in the future, are well looked after and that the earth is able to heal and flourish.

## Care jobs as green jobs

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Most people think of green jobs as installing solar panels, working on wind farms or planting trees. These jobs will help us take better care of the planet, but **caring for people is also inherently low-carbon work**. The average job in health and care produces 26 times less greenhouse gas than a manufacturing job, over 200 times less than an agriculture jobs and nearly 1,500 times less than a job in oil and gas.<sup>1</sup> We need to rebalance our economy away from energy-intensive sectors focused on producing more things for us to consume, and towards labour-intensive sectors that will help secure wellbeing for all. Care jobs could and should be made even greener, but investing in many more of them would both address the care crisis and offer meaningful, low-carbon work for people moving out of industries that need to shrink, such as aviation and retail.

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<sup>1</sup> WBG analysis of ONS Emissions Inventory and Business Register and Employment Survey, 2019

## An intersectional approach

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Those most vulnerable to the climate crisis are already marginalised: women, racialised groups, LGBT+ people, disabled people, older people, people on low-incomes and migrants. Climate justice requires us to understand how various structures of inequality intersect with one another and can be exacerbated by external events. When talking about climate change, it's important to think about how it impacts people differently and to discuss solutions that address those inequalities rather than having a 'one size fits all' answer.

For example, we need investment in green jobs, but if we don't also improve our care system and workplace flexibility these will be barred to many women; if we don't end the UK's hostile environment which prevents asylum seekers from working, those jobs won't be accessible to many migrant women; and if we don't work with disabled people's organisations to improve accessible hiring and employment practices, those jobs will remain out of reach to some of the most marginalised among us.

## Thinking about gender-inclusive climate policy

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Once we start to think about it, we see the relevance of gender to almost every area of climate action. But many of the changes being proposed could reinforce inequality if they are not actively designed with and for women and other marginalised groups. For this project, **Wen** ran workshops with grassroots women's organisations who said they felt shut out of the conversations around climate policy. The following examples of how things need to change to address both climate change and gender inequality are based on their ideas and wider research.

# TRANSPORT



## What women said

*“Free transport would be really good because if you get free buses to a park or green area it would encourage more of the youth or even the elderly to explore more of the area. And it will be public transport as well so they won’t use their cars.”*

*“I want to be able to use a bike to get around but I haven’t got one and it doesn’t feel safe, it’s seen as weird to cycle around.”*

## The evidence

**27% of the UK’s greenhouse gas emissions come from transport**, with almost two-thirds coming from private cars. Switching to electric cars is one option, but these still use a lot of energy to make, take up space that could be better used, and are prohibitively expensive. **Women, ethnic minorities and disabled people are less likely to own a car** and this option will be out of reach for most.

Investing in public transport is key, but when transport systems are designed around a default white, able-bodied, middle class male user, they can exacerbate inequality. **Women in England make a third more bus journeys than men**, so they disproportionately suffer when commuting train journeys, which are taken by more men, are prioritised over buses. Having fewer bus routes available or having to wait longer for a bus exposes women and girls to greater risk of street harassment, **which 86% of UK women have experienced in public spaces**. Disabled and older people also disproportionately use buses, so limited bus routes can increase their isolation and make it harder for them to access essential services. Driving or taking a taxi might feel safer or more convenient, but women and other marginalised groups on low incomes do not usually have this option.

Investing in walking and cycling infrastructure is important, but it must be done in a way that addresses inequalities rather than just benefiting existing users. Fear of street harassment and inaccessible cycling infrastructure can exacerbate concerns about road safety and deter underrepresented groups from cycling. In UK cities, **men are over twice as likely to cycle as women**, with ethnic minority women least likely to cycle.

## The solution

An inclusive green transport system would invest massively in widespread, accessible and affordable, if not free, public transport. Crucially, we need an expanded, more frequent, and electrified bus network. Public ownership can improve public transport routes, service reliability, affordability and accessibility. Active travel design must involve underserved communities to ensure that infrastructure is fairly distributed

It should be accompanied by education, outreach and peer support to promote cycling among underrepresented groups. For example, the [city of Bogota's cycling policy](#) is working with feminist organisations, women's cycling campaigners and local women to make cycling safer and more inclusive. It must be adapted for disabled people as much as possible and must not obstruct or stigmatise disabled people who need to drive or be driven.

## WORK



### What women said

*“Everyone could work a reduced working week at the same pay to help address the unequal burdens of unpaid caring work on women.”*

*“There’s an idea that new jobs are in the STEM sector... [We need to make] sure jobs go to diverse people, not just white men.”*

### The evidence

The conversation around ‘green jobs’ usually focuses on the need for more of the well-paid jobs in green technology sectors which employ many more men than women. For example, in the UK, **women make up just 19% of offshore wind employees** and **20% in transport**. On the other hand, women are over-represented in jobs in health, education and care, which are socially vital and do not produce a lot of greenhouse gas emissions. These tend to be low-paid and are often insecure: for example, around a quarter of care workers are on zero-hours contracts.

Rethinking *how* we work is also crucial. Across all UK jobs, **women earn over 15% less than men** and perform the lion’s share of care and domestic work. Shorter working hours could lower gender gaps in paid and unpaid work and in wages and improve wellbeing by allowing more women into the workforce and men to spend more time on domestic work and care. Shorter working weeks are **associated with lower levels of greenhouse gas emissions** as people spend less time travelling and consuming and more time on low-carbon activities like spending time with family and friends, home cooking, exercise or volunteering.

### The solution

Of course, we need more jobs in renewable energy, energy efficiency technology and low-carbon infrastructure, and these must be made accessible to all. But we also need a wider definition of green jobs to include low-carbon health, care and education. Creating many more of these jobs and paying them properly would address gender inequality in these sectors and beyond and lead to better outcomes for everyone by making sure we are better cared for and educated. It would provide opportunities for workers leaving precarious work elsewhere and industries that need to shrink or wind down altogether because of their climate impact.

Shorter and more flexible working hours could redistribute paid and unpaid work more equally but would need to be implemented alongside improved and expanded childcare and care provision, reformed parental leave, greater job security and higher minimum wages.

# FOOD



## What women said

*“From a woman’s perspective, preparing good and nutritious food takes time and money.*

*Women are exhausted when they are responsible for working, cooking and cleaning. This adds further pressure.”*

*“We need to be able to eat well and just live.”*

## The evidence

Our food system is broken, with over **2.1m people relying on food banks** while **9.5 million tonnes of food is wasted every year**. Food jobs are among the lowest-paid and most precarious in our economy and are disproportionately occupied by women and migrants. What and how we eat is also harming the planet. In countries that eat a lot of meat and dairy, like the UK, **shifting to plant-based diets could cut diet-related emissions by 73% and would require 70-80% less farmland**. Producing more food within the UK would reduce emissions from the food we import, and eating more local and sustainably-produced food would be better for our environment and our health. But these diets can **cost three times as much** as high-sugar and fat diets, and are out of reach for women who do not have the money or time to prepare it, or who may not live anywhere near a shop where they can buy these products.

## The solution

We need to value the natural resources and people who produce food, while reducing its environmental impact and improving public health. A **Right to Food** would ensure everyone has access to nutritious food, for example through universal free, healthy school meals and subsidies for local and sustainably produced food. Along with shorter working hours, support for local food preparation and communal dining projects would ensure women weren’t disproportionately burdened by the extra work involved in preparing this food.

Food production should be designed around need instead of profit, with support for public and community-owned farms and help for farmers to move towards more nature-friendly farming. Moving away from synthetic fertilisers, pesticides and fossil fuels, and using more land for crops for human consumption would create green jobs, particularly in rural areas. Offering meaningful work and decent pay and conditions could attract younger workers as well as more women into agriculture jobs.

## Helpful facts and figures

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- Women face greater barriers to financial security than men and are therefore hit hardest by crises. In the UK, about **a third of women** felt unable to cope with the 2022 spike in energy bills, compared to a quarter of men.
- Crises affect different people in different ways. As Covid-19 has shown, **disabled people are often most at risk in an emergency**, with higher rates of morbidity and mortality, and are among those least able to access emergency support.
- On average, health and care jobs – disproportionately performed by women – produce **1500 times fewer greenhouse gas emissions** than jobs in oil and gas.
- Investing in the care sector could create **2.7 times as many jobs as the same investment in construction and produce 30% less greenhouse gas emissions**.
- Women and children are disproportionately impacted by poorly insulated, cold and damp housing, because they spend more time at home. They would therefore highly benefit from energy efficiency measures like insulation.
- **Rates of gender-based violence increase** after extreme weather events like heatwaves, floods and hurricanes, which are happening more frequently because of climate change.
- Globally, **women do three times more unpaid care and domestic work than men**. In the UK, **57% of women provide unpaid care compared to 43% of men**.
- Women are consistently shut out of and underrepresented in decision-making spaces that affect them. They hold 35% of seats in the UK parliament (25% globally) and 33% of decision-making roles under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process.
- The average person in Britain is responsible **for more carbon emissions in the first two weeks of the year** than the annual emissions of the average person in Rwanda, Malawi, Ethiopia, Uganda, Madagascar, Guinea and Burkina Faso put together.

## Current debates

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### ***Climate policy is too expensive. We can't afford all these investments in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis.***

The cost-of-living crisis, most acutely felt by women, is driven by several factors, including rising energy prices. But it's also because low wages and years of austerity have left people less able to cope. Investing in social infrastructure would ensure everyone has access to the services they need, making it easier to weather future crises, and would also create good, green jobs. Investing in areas like renewable energy and home insulation would make us less reliant on oil and gas and protect us from rising prices. Investing in public transport and nature-friendly farming will help mitigate the impacts of climate change, which we know will be felt most by women, the poor, and other marginalised groups. The money to do this is there: we need to properly tax the record profits of oil and gas companies and take the profit incentive out of public goods and services, so that we can reinvest that money in a liveable and equal future. We can't afford *not* to.

### ***The climate crisis is urgent – we can address gender inequality later.***

The climate crisis and gender inequality are both products of an economic system that puts profit above everything else. Women and girls, mainly in poor countries least responsible for the crisis, **are already bearing the biggest burden**. Responses that do not address the root of the problem risk entrenching that inequality further. They are also less likely to work: for example, public transport designed around men's transport patterns will not help women to stop driving. Instead, women must help plan efforts to mitigate and adapt to a climate changed world, putting care at the centre of a new system which values all life, natural resources and the labour that sustains them. Gender equality is not something we can add on at the end, but is fundamental to creating a fairer, safer, greener world for current and future generations.

### ***Climate change will mostly affect men's jobs. The just transition should focus on them.***

Sectors like oil and gas, which employ a disproportionate number of men, need to be urgently phased out, and those workers must be supported with compensation and training for other roles. But these industries are often deeply embedded in local economies, meaning any major change will have a much wider impact. For example, Aberdeen's economy is strongly tied to its oil and gas industry, whose contract workers are supported by thousands of jobs in food and hospitality, which disproportionately employ women. Jobs in retail, mainly held by women and already

impacted by the pandemic, are also likely to take a hit. A transition away from polluting industries must address current inequalities in pay, conditions and job security and must ensure good, green jobs for everyone.

***The climate and ecological crises are driven by overpopulation. There are simply too many people for the earth to sustain.***

Climate change and ecological degradation are products of an economic system that is locked into fossil fuel energy and the over-exploitation of natural resources. The unfair distribution of these resources is the problem. The richest **10% of the global population cause more than half of all polluting gases, while the poorest 50% contribute about 7%** of the problem. We need to reprogramme our economic system, reducing consumption, energy use and waste. There is enough to go around, but we need to share it more equally. Focusing on population growth shifts the blame to the people least responsible for the crisis and plays into racist attitudes. Everyone should have access to full sexual and reproductive health and rights. This includes making their own decisions about whether to have children, when and how many.

## How to talk about climate change

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We know that people care about the warming climate. In **the biggest ever poll** on climate change, two-thirds of respondents said it was a 'global emergency'. In the UK, **three-quarters of people are worried** about it, with women more likely to be worried than men. We've drawn on research by **NEON and PIRC** and the **Britain talks climate** project to give you some tips on how to frame your messages:

### • **Be hopeful, emphasising action**

Research shows that communications that focus only on the crisis overwhelms people with the enormity of what needs to change and can make them feel helpless and switch off. Instead, emphasise that action is urgent, and point to examples of where it's already happening. Using hopeful messaging that encourages the idea that things can change is more likely to motivate people to get involved.

### • **Be specific**

Using relevant examples can help people better understand climate change and gender inequality and how it might affect them and their communities. Make links between local and global issues: for example, **underpaid garment workers in Leicester**, disproportionately women and ethnic minorities, and those working **in dangerous factories in Bangladesh** are connected by the supply chain of 'fast fashion' and by their shared experience of exploitation. Bangladesh is also at the frontline of the climate crisis. We know that **consuming fast fashion is harming the planet**, but any solution must centre these workers, ensuring they have alternative, decent and dignified livelihoods.

### • **Connect issues to the wider system**

Identifying the problem as the economic system we all live in, rather than as an accident of human nature, can help people see that the system can be changed. The inequality and climate crises are products of a system in which a few people control power and resources. For example, burning oil and gas is heating our planet with grave implications for human survival. Women are on the frontline of this crisis, and while rich countries are consuming more energy than ever, over 750 million people globally don't have electricity.

But fossil fuel companies are well connected to governments, with a 'revolving door' of former ministers on their boards and among their shareholders. Oil and gas CEOs help write the rules that grant them new licences and tax breaks, while government fails to invest in renewable energy. Meanwhile, those companies are **making billions in profits** and passing the costs onto bill payers, pushing those already struggling - disproportionately women - further into poverty. But redesigning the system around

wellbeing rather than profit is possible. Emphasise that inequality is written into the system, and it can be written out.

- **Amplify voices of affected communities**

Marginalised people are often excluded from the spaces where climate policy is discussed. **A recent study** found that of 100 highly cited climate science papers, less than a quarter of authors were women and only 1% were African. A similar disparity is seen in the media. Privileging the same old voices can obscure the experiences and solutions of the people most vulnerable to the climate crisis. In many parts of the world, communities living on the frontline of the climate crisis have been coping in ways that are often undermined by richer countries. For example, **indigenous people protect 80% of the world's biodiversity**, yet are under threat from continued mining and fossil fuel projects *and* by climate 'solutions' that aim to use their land to grow biofuels or offset carbon emissions. Make sure you are arguing for affected communities to have a say in the decisions that impact them.

- **Use straightforward, relatable messages**

Avoid jargon and complicated language that might alienate people and push them away. For many in the UK, climate change can seem abstract and not immediately relevant. Talking about how it is a problem here and now helps it feel less hypothetical. For example, talk about how global changes to the climate are making extreme weather events like floods and heatwaves more frequent and serious in the UK. Bringing in personal experiences can also help people better understand and remember the message.

## Resources

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- Feminist Green New Deal by **Women's Budget Group** and **Wen**
- **Britain Talks Climate**
- **Towards Reparative Climate Justice: From Crises to Liberations (Common Wealth)**
- **Beyond Covid-19: A Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice (UN Women)**