A Wen Briefing:

Why Women and Climate Change?

April 2026

Wen.

WOMEN'S ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK

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Foreword

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Climate change is often described in universal terms: rising temperatures, extreme weather, nature loss. But its impacts are never experienced equally. They fall hardest on those already navigating injustice. And as this powerful briefing makes clear, climate change is not gender-neutral.

For decades, Wen (Women's Environmental Network) has been making the case that environmental harm, gender inequality, health injustice and economic marginalisation are deeply interconnected.

Long before "feminist climate justice" became part of mainstream discourse, Wen was articulating, and acting on, the understanding that climate policy must confront structural inequality if it is to be effective. This means taking a holistic, intersectional approach, recognising that environmental harm is inseparable from racial and social injustice, and that solutions must address the overlapping systems that shape people's lives. It also means centring women, particularly racialised and marginalised women, not simply as those most affected, but as leaders, organisers and experts whose knowledge and experience are essential to building just and lasting climate solutions.

This briefing is both timely and necessary. At a moment when climate commitments risk being diluted and when equality language can too easily become rhetorical, Wen brings us back to first principles. Climate impacts intersect with gendered inequalities in housing, income, care, health, safety and political power. Ignoring these realities does not make climate policy neutral, it makes it unjust.

The climate and nature crises demand systemic change. That change will only succeed if it is rooted in justice. This briefing is an essential contribution to the debate. I hope it ensures that everyone moves beyond gender-neutral approaches and embraces the bold, intersectional feminist action that this moment requires.

Caroline Lucas

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This report was first developed in 2016. We acknowledge the work, thinking and collaboration that shaped the original version, and the collective effort that has continued to inform and strengthen it over time.

We are grateful to the many women, communities and partners whose knowledge, experience and leadership continue to shape Wen's work and the wider movement for climate justice.

About Wen (Women's Environmental Network)

We are an environmental charity working on issues that connect women, health, equity and environmental justice. We take an intersectional feminist approach to tackling the climate and nature emergencies.

We support women and communities to take climate action, amplifying racialised and marginalised women's voices, and advocate for systemic change. We cultivate grassroots projects, connect women to nature, create blueprints for just food systems and put gender and intersectional equality at the heart of the green economy.

We were the first charity to connect gender, health, equity and environmental justice. Since our radical beginnings in 1988, Wen's groundbreaking campaigns have tackled issues from air pollution and plastic packaging to toxic chemicals in menstrual products and cosmetics.

Our vision is a world where women, communities and the planet flourish because our society is equitable, collaborative and caring.

For more information visit wen.org.uk and follow us on social media:

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1 Introduction

Climate change is not gender-neutral.

It amplifies existing inequalities and impacts people in different ways. For women, especially racialised and marginalised women, already experiencing structural disadvantage, the climate and nature emergencies are not just environmental issues, but also issues of justice, health, equity, and human rights.

The link between women and climate change is not because of inherent vulnerability, but because climate impacts intersect with gendered inequalities embedded in housing, health, care, income, safety, and political representation.

These structural issues go hand in hand with the disproportionate physical impact of climate change and toxic exposure on women's bodies pre and post birth, as well as trans-generational effects.

Climate change intensifies existing gender injustices and so effective climate policy therefore requires an intersectional feminist response. And it is this intersectional ecofeminist lens that inspired Wen's founders and still guides Wen's work today.

Wen was among the first UK charities to connect gender, health, equity and environmental justice. Since our founding in 1988, awareness of the links between climate justice and gender inequality has grown significantly.

Climate advocacy increasingly engages with women's rights, and women's rights organisations are increasingly engaging with climate issues. We welcome this shift. However, as concepts such as "feminist climate justice" become more widely used, there is a risk they become buzzwords rather than tools for meaningful change.

This briefing responds to and aims to answer a question we are still frequently asked: *why women and climate change?*

"Wen (Women's Environmental Network) has never treated climate change as a siloed environmental issue. For nearly four decades, Wen has shown that if we want climate solutions that truly work, we must confront inequality, value care, and centre the leadership of racialised and marginalised women. This report is not just an analysis, it is a roadmap for building climate policy that is fairer, braver and rooted in justice." - **Caroline Lucas, 2026**

2 About This Briefing

This briefing sets out why climate change is a gender issue, what this means in practice, and why an intersectional feminist response is essential to building climate solutions that are fair, effective and transformative.

It draws on Wen's unique approach, developed over more than three decades, connecting gender, health, equity and environmental justice through an intersectional feminist lens.

This briefing is for policymakers, civil servants, local authorities, funders, campaigners and organisations working across climate, gender, health and social justice in the UK. It is designed as a resource for those seeking to understand:

- How climate change intersects with existing inequalities
- The disproportionate impacts of the climate crisis on women
- The underrepresentation of women in climate policy and decision-making spaces
- Why an intersectional feminist approach is essential to ensuring climate policies are fair and effective

It also sets out Wen's approach to intersectional feminist climate justice and provides key policy recommendations.

A note on inclusive language: We have used the word 'women' throughout this briefing, but Wen views issues from a gender and intersectional perspective and is inclusive of gender non-binary, trans and gender non-conforming people.

3 Key Messages

This briefing makes the case that climate change is inseparable from gender justice.

The following key messages summarise the core arguments and implications for policy and action:

- Climate change is not gender-neutral. It intensifies existing inequalities and disproportionately impacts women, particularly those marginalised by race, income, disability and immigration status.
- The link between women and climate change is structural. Climate impacts intersect with gendered inequalities in housing, health, care, income, safety and political representation.
- Women are not only disproportionately affected by the climate crisis; they are leading solutions in communities, households, food systems and climate movements in the UK and globally.
- Gender-neutral climate policy risks reproducing inequality. Effective climate action must be intersectional, feminist and rooted in justice.
- A just transition requires redistributing power and resources, valuing care, and centring the leadership of racialised and marginalised women.

4 The Feminist Climate Justice Movement

As an organisation working on feminist climate justice Wen does not stand alone. We are part of a wider feminist climate justice movement, and our efforts are only possible because of all the work done by the feminists, particularly Black and Brown women, before us.

Women are active agents of change. It is key to recognise that we are not part of this movement to 'save' women, but to emphasise that women are leaders in shaping climate-just solutions.

Many of the theoretical frameworks we draw on have been created by Black and Brown women leading the movement across the globe. The work done by women of colour has strengthened the feminist climate justice movement and has not shied away from identifying where it needed to become more inclusive and accountable.

Intersectional feminism, a framework coined by *Kimberlé Crenshaw* and further developed by Black women, to name and analyse the interconnected systems of oppression shaping lived experience, underpins our approach to feminist climate justice. Decolonial feminism has its roots in Latin America as both a political struggle and a theoretical framework which called out the need to decolonise feminism[1]. Finally, the reproductive justice framework that we use is a rights-based framework and an intersectional feminist activist movement developed by women of colour in the USA[2].

In a system that encourages competition, it is all the more important that we stand together and seek collaboration within this sector. The tasks ahead of us are enormous, and it is imperative that we recognise where we can work alongside other organisations and support the work led by grassroots networks. We are stronger together. We cannot lead on all areas; instead, we believe in supporting other networks that bring expertise across different areas.

From Women's Environment & Development Organisation (WEDO), The Global Alliance of Green and Gender Action (GAGGA), Women Engage for a Common Future, and The Women's Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN) on a global level, to the Women's Budget Group, Friends of the Earth, New Philanthropy Capital (NPC), Impatience Earth, and the The Ubele Initiative within the UK, to countless grassroots networks doing incredible work in communities. This is just a snapshot of the wider movement. We encourage people to collaborate, engage with local groups, and centre indigenous knowledge-this list is by no means exhaustive.

5 Why Climate Change Is A Gender Issue

In the UK, climate change is already being felt through increasingly frequent and extreme weather events such as heatwaves, flooding, wildfires, cold weather, storms and drought[3]. The Climate Change Committee warns that these changes will present a range of risks, including threats to food production, disruption of key infrastructure, rising flood risk for properties (25% by 2050), overheating in urban buildings, health impacts on vulnerable people, and challenges to economic prosperity (with unchecked climate change potentially reducing UK economic output by up to 7%)[4].

However, not everyone will be affected in the same way. Women are more likely to experience poverty, live in lower-quality housing, take on unpaid caring responsibilities, and work in frontline public services, all of which increase exposure to climate risks and reduce capacity to recover. At the same time, women are underrepresented in climate decision-making spaces, meaning the policies designed to respond to climate change often fail to reflect their lived experience.

Globally, high-income countries are least vulnerable to climate change while being the highest carbon contributors[5]**.** A similar pattern exists within the UK, where poorer households are more vulnerable to climate shocks because they have fewer resources to recover from extreme weather[6].

6 A Framework For Feminist Climate Justice

Feminist climate justice recognises that the climate crisis is not only an environmental issue, but also a social, economic and political one. It brings an intersectional gender lens to the climate and nature emergencies, acknowledging that the drivers of environmental breakdown are deeply intertwined with the drivers of gender, racial and social inequalities[7]. This crisis is rooted in interlocking systems of patriarchy, colonialism and extractive capitalism that prioritise profit, growth and control over people and planet.

As a rights-based framework, feminist climate justice centres those most affected by climate harms, often the communities who have contributed least to causing them. Feminist climate justice understands social, racial and environmental injustices as an intrinsically connected, holistic, intersectional approach[8].

An Intersectional and Decolonial Lens

Intersectionality[9] and Decoloniality are key to understanding the disproportionate impacts of the climate crisis. An intersectional lens recognises that gender intersects with race, class, disability, age, migration status, faith and other markers of inequality, operating simultaneously; each system of power operating simultaneously and shaping one another[10].

An intersectional approach also requires attention to class, disability, migration status, sexuality and gender identity. Low-income communities have fewer financial buffers against climate shocks; disabled people may face heightened risks during heatwaves, flooding or service disruption; migrants and those with insecure immigration status can be excluded from support systems; and LGBTQIA+ people, particularly trans and non-binary people, may encounter additional barriers in housing, healthcare and emergency accommodation.

These inequalities intersect with gender to shape exposure to climate risks and access to protection, resources and decision-making power. Without an intersectional lens, women risk being treated as a single, homogenous group, and in doing so obscuring the realities of many marginalised women, which leads to climate responses that fail to reach those who need it most.

A decolonial lens recognises how colonial legacies and ongoing extractive economic systems continue to shape who causes the climate crisis and who suffers its worst impacts, while reframing climate justice by centring the voices, leadership and knowledge of those most affected[11], particularly communities in the global majority and Indigenous communities.

Challenging ‘Gender-Neutral’ Climate Policy

Feminist climate justice challenges the assumption that climate policy is gender-neutral. Green policies that focus narrowly on technological solutions or market-based approaches can unintentionally reproduce inequality if they do not account for different living conditions, caring responsibilities, income levels and access to power[12].

A just transition requires more than decarbonisation. It requires valuing care, recognising the essential role of public services, and addressing the unequal distribution of unpaid labour.

Wen’s Feminist Green New Deal programme applies this analysis in practice. It combines substantive gender equality with feminist ecological economics to demonstrate how climate policy can prioritise wellbeing over extraction, redistribute resources, and build a green caring economy.

Women’s Exclusion from Decision Making Spaces

Feminist climate justice also demands a transformation of power. Despite being on the frontlines of climate impacts and environmental harm and playing critical roles in households, communities and movements, women, particularly racialised and marginalised women, remain underrepresented in climate decision-making at local, national and international levels.

Meaningful participation is not achieved simply by increasing representation. It requires shifting who sets agendas, who controls resources, and whose knowledge counts. Evidence shows that greater female representation in national parliaments is associated with stronger climate policy and lower carbon emissions.

A feminist climate justice approach therefore calls for democratic transformation: embedding accountability, amplifying marginalised voices, and ensuring that those most affected by climate change shape the solutions.

The case for centring women's leadership in climate decision-making is clear:

- Women are more likely to be affected by climate-related disasters, due to unequal gendered roles, responsibilities and access to resources[13].
- Women contribute less to global emissions yet bear the brunt of climate impacts[14].
- Women are powerful agents of change through their roles in households, communities, movements and food systems[15].
- Female representation in national parliaments leads to more stringent climate change policies across countries, and by doing so, it results in lower carbon dioxide emissions[16].

7 Impacts Of Climate Change

Climate change is already being felt in people's everyday lives across the UK, and this will only increase in the future. The impacts of climate change do not occur in isolation, but they intersect with existing inequalities and disproportionately impact women, particularly those from racialised and marginalised backgrounds. We set out the evidence below:

Health Impacts

Heatwaves

A UK heatwave is defined as at least three consecutive days where maximum temperatures meet or exceed a local threshold, which varies across counties between 25 and 28°C[17]. Climate projections show that heatwaves in the UK will become more frequent, more intense and longer lasting. During the 2022 heatwave, some neighbourhoods experienced average maximum temperatures of 38°C over a 72 hour period, around 10°C above the Met Office threshold.[18] What is considered extreme heat today is rapidly becoming the new normal.

Analysis of the early summer heatwave of 2025 suggests that climate change increased the number of heat deaths by about 1,500 in 12 European cities, 171 of which were estimated excess heat deaths in London[19]. Friends of the Earth has identified 4,715 high heat neighbourhoods in England, including thousands of care homes, hospitals and nurseries, where extreme temperatures intersect with poverty, poor housing, disability, racial inequality and high air pollution, making targeted adaptation an urgent equality issue[20].

Disproportionate impact of heatwaves:

- Women are more vulnerable to extreme heat and heatwaves. During the UK's 2022 heatwaves there were almost twice as many excess deaths among females (2,159) compared to males (1,115)[21]. This reflects both biological and social factors.
- Extreme heat also has a significant impact on reproductive health, more on this in our briefing on Reproductive Justice and the Climate Emergency in the UK. Pregnant women are more prone to heat exhaustion, heat stroke, dehydration and kidney failure, as well as risk of pregnancy and birth outcomes, with higher temperatures and heat waves linked to higher rates of premature birth, low birth weight, stillbirth and pregnancy loss[22][23]. Risks of such outcomes have been found to be higher for the most disadvantaged mothers, for women of colour, and for women on low incomes[24].
- Mortality among infants under one can rise during extremely hot days, with the first week of life pinpointed as the "most critical window of susceptibility to heat" in infants[25].
- Women going through perimenopause and menopause may be less able to thermoregulate and adapt to the heat[26].
- Heat vulnerability is not only physiological, but structural. Poor-quality or overcrowded housing, lack of access to green space, and limited ability to afford cooling measures or home adaptations all increase exposure to heat. Low income households are less able to afford cooling (e.g. through fans, ventilation and air conditioning) or travel to cooler spaces, and while green spaces can significantly cool neighbourhoods while also providing shade and respite, access to them is unevenly distributed[27][28].
- Women are more likely to work in low-paid and poorly regulated sectors with long hours in overheated buildings or outdoor settings. Moreover, rising temperatures disproportionately reduce women's paid working hours and incomes.[29]
- The average proportion of people of colour in high-risk neighbourhoods for heat is 28% compared to a national average of 9.5%[30]
- The advice to leave a ground floor window open at night (paired with an open upstairs window) goes hand in hand with safety concerns[31].

Air Pollution

Air pollution is a major environmental determinant of health, linked to respiratory and cardiovascular illness. Exposure to air pollution increases the risk of asthma, heart attack, stroke and lung disease, and is particularly harmful to infants and young children.

In the UK, up to 30,000 premature deaths each year are associated with air pollution[32].

Disproportionate impact of air pollution:

- Air pollution has a disproportionate impact on women's health[33], including a greater risk of breast cancer for those living and working in areas with high levels of fine-particle air pollution[34] and increased risk of heart disease of women[35]
- Air pollution has significant reproductive health impacts. It is linked to increased risks of infertility in both women and men, maternal health impacts and a higher risk of complications such as miscarriage, pre-term birth and stillbirth[36]. Further detail is outlined in our briefing on Reproductive Justice and the Climate Emergency in the UK.
- Neighbourhoods with higher populations of racially marginalised communities are disproportionately exposed to unsafe air, compounding existing health inequalities. Women of colour are disproportionately exposed to high levels of air pollution, facing compounded health risks[37].
- Low-income and more deprived areas experience higher levels of air pollution, reflecting patterns of planning, transport infrastructure and industrial siting[38][39].

Toxic Chemicals

Toxic chemicals are present throughout everyday environments, including food systems, consumer products and housing materials. Over 99% of man-made chemicals, including pesticides, are derived from fossil fuels[40], linking chemical exposure directly to climate breakdown.

People in the UK are exposed to toxic chemicals through food, water, air, workplace exposure, and household products and materials, often without their knowledge.

However, exposure and harm from chemical pollution are not experienced equally. Women facing poverty, insecure housing, or precarious employment often have higher exposure and fewer resources to reduce it[41], while racialised and marginalised communities may live in environments with higher chemical contamination[42].

Women and workers in low-paid, less well-regulated sectors often experience disproportionate exposure to toxic chemicals, a burden that is further intensified by climate change.

Occupations such as nail technicians, hairdressers, factory workers, and firefighters involve regular contact with hazardous substances, including solvents, flame retardants, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), and other endocrine-disrupting chemicals.

These occupational exposures are compounded by domestic and ambient environmental exposures, particularly in communities already facing higher levels of pollution. This cumulative burden has been described as a form of “triple jeopardy,” referring to exposure across the home, workplace, and broader environment. When intersectional factors such as gender, race, migration status, and socioeconomic inequality are considered, this layered risk can amount to a “quadruple burden” of chemical exposure and disproportionate health effects in a changing climate.

Disproportionate impact of toxic chemicals

- Exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals is linked to adverse reproductive, developmental and hormonal health outcomes, with impacts intensified by climate change and unequal exposure patterns[43].
- Endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs), also known as hormone disruptors, are linked with a range of diseases including cancer, birth effects, developmental, neurological and immune disorders[44][45]. Reduced fertility due to chemical exposure impacts both men[46] and women[47] , but women face specific risks such as: menstrual irregularities, endometriosis, premature onset of puberty, infertility, pregnancy complications and impacts on foetal and infant health[48][49].
- Women with higher PFAS levels have been found to have a 40% lower chance of conceiving within a year[50], alongside increased risk of conditions such as polycystic ovarian syndrome[51] and pregnancy-induced hypertension[52]. Further detail is outlined in our briefing on Reproductive Justice and the Climate Emergency in the UK.
- Babies and infants are particularly vulnerable, with harmful chemicals present in furniture, toys, clothing and cleaning products[53], and exposure is highest for households facing financial hardship or insecure living conditions[54][55].

Housing and Infrastructure

Housing and Energy

Energy affordability and housing quality are central to climate resilience, shaping people's ability to stay warm in winter, cool in summer, and avoid health-harming living conditions. Poor-quality, insecure and unaffordable housing increases vulnerability to both extreme heat and cold, as well as to energy price shocks, which are becoming more frequent and severe due to climate change and rising energy costs.

In the UK, 4.5 million households are estimated to be in fuel poverty in October 2025[56], meaning they cannot afford to heat their homes adequately. Many of these households are in poorly insulated or overcrowded homes, with higher risks of overheating in summer and cold-related illnesses in winter.

Living in cold homes due to fuel poverty can cause or worsen serious physical and mental health conditions[57], contribute to unsafe energy rationing, and lead to unsustainable debt.

It also disproportionately affects children, limiting their ability to learn, thrive and spend time safely with their families[58].

Disproportionate impact of housing and energy:

- Women are more likely to live in fuel poverty, particularly lone parents, older women and migrant women. The risk of energy poverty is higher in single-parent families and 80% of them are made up of women[59].
- Women are more likely to absorb the health and caring burdens of unsafe and unaffordable housing, including caring for children, older relatives or disabled household members if they get ill from damp, mould, indoor and outdoor air pollution[60].
- Low-income households, renters, and residents of poorly insulated or energy-inefficient homes face higher exposure to extreme temperatures and rising energy costs[61].
- People of colour, migrants and disabled people are overrepresented in these high-risk housing situations, compounding the inequalities women already face[62].
- 3.2 million of those in fuel poverty are pensioner households, with 964,000 pensioner households in deep fuel poverty, meaning they spend more than 20% of their income on energy[63]. Meanwhile, women make up more than two thirds of pensioners living in poverty[64].

For more on housing, read the Feminist Green New Deal Policy Paper on Rethinking Housing Supply and Design.

Flooding

Flooding can damage homes, disrupt employment, contaminate water supplies, and force temporary or permanent displacement. Climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of both river and surface water flooding in the UK, with tens of thousands of properties at risk in the coming decades[65]. Flooding can lead to loss of income, disruption to services, long-term mental health impacts, and financial instability for affected households.

Disproportionate impact of flooding:

- Women are more likely to take on unpaid caring responsibilities during and after climate-related emergencies such as floods, including looking after children, older relatives, or neighbours[66][67].
- Marginalised communities often face slower recovery and reduced access to financial, social, and mental health support[68].
- More deprived neighbourhoods face a disproportionately higher flood risk than less deprived areas[69].
- Low-income families may be less likely to have sufficient available financial resources to cover them during an emergency[70]; they are also often less able to carry on with their jobs if they are temporarily displaced from their homes. They are also less likely to be insured and therefore less likely to be able to recover all their lost assets or rebuild their damaged homes, especially given the consequent physical and psychological stresses involved[71].
- Flood-related displacement and damage can exacerbate pre-existing inequalities[72], including gendered and racial disparities in housing, employment, and access to public services[73].

Economic and Social System

Food Security

Climate change is already affecting food production, supply chains and prices, contributing to rising food insecurity in the UK[74]. Extreme weather, crop failures and global supply disruptions drive price volatility, while the current food system remains deeply extractive, fuelling climate breakdown and biodiversity loss while harming workers' rights, public health and community wellbeing.

As climate impacts intensify, food insecurity is likely to increase unless structural inequalities within the food system are addressed.

Disproportionate impact of food security:

- Women and girls are more likely to experience food insecurity in the UK, with racialised and marginalised women facing particularly high risks[75].
- Women are more likely to manage household food provision and to reduce their own intake in times of scarcity, with significant implications for physical health, mental wellbeing and reproductive health[76][77][78].
- Women carry a triple burden within the food system: they undertake the majority of unpaid food and care labour in households, are disproportionately represented in low-paid and insecure food-sector jobs, and are more likely to experience food insecurity themselves[79].
- During food crises, women are also more likely to eat 'last and least' in order to protect other household members, reflecting deeply embedded gender norms around care and sacrifice[80]. Food insecurity is also higher among marginalised groups providing unpaid care, including people from racialised communities (34% compared to 22% of non-carers) and LGBTQIA+ carers (47% compared to 29% of non-carers). Clear gender disparities persist within racialised communities, where 29% of women experience food insecurity compared to 19% of men[81].
- Food insecurity is shaped by overlapping socio-economic pressures and structural inequalities. The cost of living, inadequate housing, gender, ethnicity, disability, parenthood and caring responsibilities all increase vulnerability, and these factors often intersect, compounding the risk of hunger and inability to afford basic essentials[82].
- Intersecting racial and gender inequalities are reflected in the higher rates of food insecurity among ethnic minority women, at 27%, compared to 14% among white women[83].
- Among racialised communities, unpaid carers face particularly high levels of food insecurity, at 34% compared to 22% among those who are not carers. Within these communities there is also a gender gap, with 29% of women experiencing food insecurity compared to 19% of men[84].

Transport and Access to Services

Transport systems shape access to work, healthcare, education, green space and community life. They are also central to climate mitigation, as transport remains one of the highest emitting sectors in the UK[85]. Decarbonising transport requires more than technological transition. It requires rethinking who transport systems are designed for, and whose mobility is prioritised.

Current transport systems are shaped by car-centric planning and peak-hour commuting models that prioritise long-distance journeys into city centres. This model reflects and reinforces existing inequalities, while failing to account for care work, safety, accessibility and income disparities. Without an intersectional approach, transport decarbonisation risks reproducing exclusion rather than delivering climate justice.

Disproportionate impact of transport and access to services:

- Women are more likely to rely on public transport, particularly buses[86], due to lower average incomes and lower rates of car ownership. Bus deregulation and service cuts have therefore disproportionately affected women[87].
- Women's travel patterns are often more complex, involving trip-chaining and multiple short journeys linked to unpaid care and household responsibilities. Transport systems designed around peak-hour commuting frequently fail to accommodate these patterns, increasing time, cost and stress burdens[88][89].
- Women, people of colour, disabled people and low-income households are less likely to own a car, limiting their access to employment, healthcare and social participation[90][91].
- Safety concerns shape mobility. Everyday harassment restricts women and girls' use of public space and public transport, while racial profiling and hate crime can deter people of colour from travelling freely[92].

For more on transport, read the Feminist Green New Deal Policy Paper on Gender-Inclusive and Sustainable Transport Systems.

Poverty and Unpaid Labour

Climate change compounds existing socio economic inequalities, making poverty both a driver and a consequence of vulnerability. Rising energy costs, food insecurity, water scarcity, and climate related damage to housing and infrastructure disproportionately affect low income households, reducing resilience and intensifying the pressures of daily life.

These climate driven pressures increase the time, energy and resources required to meet basic needs, and push unpaid labour further onto those already responsible for care and household work. Women continue to undertake the majority of unpaid care, meaning climate impacts often translate directly into increased domestic and emotional labour.

Climate change also affects people through their paid work. Women are overrepresented in low paid and frontline sectors such as care, retail, cleaning, food and health, where exposure to extreme heat, pollution and unsafe working conditions is more likely. At the same time, women remain underrepresented in higher paid green industries and in decision making roles shaping the transition. Without deliberate intervention, the shift to a low carbon economy risks reproducing existing labour market inequalities rather than addressing them.

Disproportionate impact from poverty and unpaid labour:

- Women carry the burden of unpaid care and household work[93], and make up a majority of those in poverty worldwide[94][95]. Climate impacts on food prices, energy costs and water scarcity increase this workload[96], deepening inequality.
- Women are overrepresented among people living in poverty. Rising energy prices, food costs, and housing insecurity caused or worsened by climate change disproportionately affect women, forcing trade-offs between basic needs and care responsibilities.
- Intersectional inequalities compound the burden: women of colour, migrant and refugee women, older women, lone parents, and disabled women are more likely to experience poverty, have heavier unpaid labour responsibilities, and face reduced access to social protections and resources[97].
- Unpaid labour limits women's time for paid work, education, political participation, and engagement in climate action, creating cycles of economic dependency and reducing adaptive capacity to climate shocks.

Safety and Security

Gender Based Violence

Climate change does not only affect infrastructure and livelihoods. It also reshapes social conditions, increasing stress, displacement and economic insecurity. Climate-related shocks and environmental pressures can destabilise communities, disrupt support systems and exacerbate existing inequalities. Climate shocks are linked to rising risks of gender-based violence, in contexts of wildfires, heat, drought and flooding[98]. Post-disaster environments can see rises in domestic abuse, sexual violence and exploitation, as social protections weaken and economic stress intensifies.

Disproportionate impact of gender based violence:

- During times of stress or emergencies, gender-based violence rises. Evidence from the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK showed a significant increase in domestic abuse during lockdowns, illustrating how crises, confinement, and economic stress can intensify GBV and restrict access to support[99].
- Women and girls in temporary accommodation, insecure housing, or high-risk flood or heat-prone neighbourhoods may face heightened risks of violence, exploitation, or harassment, with reduced access to protective services[100][101][102].
- Fear of harassment or violence can limit access to parks[103], rivers, streets, public transport, workplaces and essential services[104]. This restricts mobility, reduces social connection and makes it harder for women to use community spaces and services that support wellbeing and resilience during climate impacts[105].
- Economic stress, including loss of income following floods, heatwaves, or other extreme events, can increase women's dependence on abusive partners and reduce their ability to leave unsafe situations[106].
- Marginalised communities, including women of colour, disabled women, migrant and refugee women, and low-income women, face compounded barriers to support, legal protections, and safe mobility, reflecting the intersection of gender, racial, social, and economic inequalities[107].

Displacement and Disasters

The climate crisis continues to fuel conflict and migration globally, mostly affecting women, refugees, and other vulnerable groups. Within the UK, climate-related extreme events such as floods, storms, and heatwaves can force temporary or longer-term displacement, disrupting homes, livelihoods, and access to services. While the scale is smaller than international climate migration, the gendered and intersectional dynamics are similar: displacement disproportionately affects those already marginalised.

Disproportionate impact from displacement and disasters:

- Women and girls are more likely to take on caring responsibilities for children, older relatives, or disabled household members during displacement, increasing physical and emotional burdens[108][109].
- Women and girls in temporary accommodation, insecure housing, or high-risk flood or heat-prone neighbourhoods may face heightened risks of violence, exploitation, or harassment, with reduced access to protective services[110][111][112].
- Even temporary displacement can exacerbate pre-existing inequalities, including gendered, racial, and class disparities in housing, health, and economic stability[113][114].

Nature and Wellbeing

Access and Connection to Nature

Access to and engagement with nature brings significant physical, mental, and social health benefits, while also providing climate resilience, such as cooling urban heat, improving air quality, and supporting biodiversity.

Disproportionate impact:

- Access to nature is deeply unequal and shaped by gender, race, income, disability and safety[116][117].
- Women and girls often face structural barriers and safety concerns that limit their use of green spaces, including fear of harassment, poor lighting, lack of inclusive design, and the presence of groups of men[118].
- Girls report lower participation in outdoor activities: only a third take part as much as they would like, while 41% wish they could spend more time in nature. At the same time, safety in public space remains a significant barrier: only one in twenty girls and young women report feeling completely safe in public spaces, with one in six saying they do not feel safe at all[119].
- Marginalised groups, including families living in poverty, people of colour and disabled people, are more likely to live further from green spaces[120], face accessibility challenges, or experience discrimination, further restricting engagement.
- Many people feel they do not “belong” in public green spaces, which reduces opportunities for recreation and wellbeing[121].
- Limited access to nature has clear consequences for women’s physical and mental health, especially under climate change, when green spaces play a vital role in reducing heat, improving air quality, and supporting resilience to environmental stressors[122][123].

Connecting the Impacts

These climate impacts are deeply intertwined. The health impacts of heatwaves are shaped in part by the quality of housing, which also affects people's vulnerability to both extreme heat and flooding. Heatwaves and floods, in turn, disrupt food systems, increasing food insecurity and affecting the quality of food people can access.

Access to affordable, nutritious food is closely linked to exposure to toxic chemicals, while people are also exposed to harmful chemicals through a wide range of household products and everyday environments. These exposures can have significant impacts on reproductive health, which is itself affected by extreme heat and indoor and outdoor air pollution.

There is no simple way to describe the impacts of climate change, as they affect people's lives in multiple, overlapping ways. What is clear, however, is that across all these areas, women, people of colour and people living in poverty are more exposed to climate risks and have fewer resources to mitigate their impacts.

8 Feminist Climate Justice At Wen

At Wen, feminist climate justice shapes how our programmes are designed and whose knowledge is valued. We see that climate policies that fail to address structural inequality reproduce it, so we start from the understanding that those most affected by climate and environmental injustice must be at the centre of shaping solutions.

We prioritise lived experience as expertise, long-term relationship building, and community-led approaches. This means shifting resources towards grassroots leadership, compensating people for their time and knowledge, and designing projects that respond to structural inequality rather than treating climate change as a standalone environmental issue.

Our approach to climate justice is organised around five broader and interconnected themes, which reflect the complexity of women's lived experiences:

A Green Caring Economy

We advocate for an economy that values care, equity and sustainability over extractive growth. Through our Feminist Green New Deal work, we make the case for a transition that creates secure green jobs, invests in social infrastructure and reduces women's disproportionate unpaid labour burden. Climate justice requires economic transformation, not simply technological change.

Feminist Climate Leadership

We support women, particularly racialised and marginalised women to shape climate policy, influence decision-making and lead in their communities. Through leadership programmes and policy advocacy, we create pathways into climate policy and action at all levels that are too often closed. This is not about representation alone; it is about redistributing power so that climate strategies reflect the knowledge and priorities of those most affected.

Feminist Food Justice

We treat food as both a human right and climate infrastructure. Our work supports community-led food systems that increase local growing capacity, strengthen neighbourhood food hubs, and challenge the structural drivers of food insecurity. By connecting food access, land use, inequality and environmental sustainability, we demonstrate how a just transition must transform the food system.

Feminist Toxic Free Futures

We challenge the unequal burden of toxic exposure borne by women and racialised and marginalised communities. Through campaigns and research, we push for stronger regulation, safer alternatives and public awareness of the links between toxic chemicals, health and environmental injustice.

Nature for Health

We recognise access to nature as essential to collective resilience. Our programmes reconnect women, in particular racialised and marginalised women, with green spaces and growing, improving mental health, reducing isolation and strengthening community networks. In doing so, we demonstrate that climate adaptation and public health are deeply interconnected.

9 Policy Recommendations

Without structural change, climate policy will continue to reproduce the same racialised, gendered, social and economic inequalities that created the crisis.

A just transition is not only about cutting emissions. It is about reshaping our economy so that equity and justice are at the centre guiding investment, public services, labour markets and climate policy.

Affordable social care, healthcare, childcare, education, food, housing, transport, and access to green and blue spaces are not secondary concerns, they are core climate infrastructure.

The following shifts are essential:

Build a Green Caring Economy

The current economic model undervalues care, relies on women's unpaid labour, and treats growth as an end in itself. A just climate transition requires a shift from extractive growth to an economy organised around care, wellbeing, equality and sustainability.

This means:

- Recognising and investing in the care economy as core climate infrastructure.
- Reducing women's disproportionate unpaid labour burden through universal basic services and social protection.
- Ensuring climate transition policies create secure, unionised, well-paid green jobs accessible to women and racialised and marginalised communities.
- Recognising that care jobs are green jobs, valuing and investing in them and encouraging men and boys into these jobs.
- Aligning fiscal, social and climate policy around wellbeing rather than GDP growth.

A Feminist Green New Deal offers the framework for this transformation: one that centres gender, racial and economic justice in the design of a low carbon future. The full framework is outlined in our Feminist Green New Deal policy paper.

Redesign Climate Policy Around Feminist Climate Leadership

Climate policy must be shaped with women and racialised and marginalised communities, most affected by environmental injustice. This requires institutional change:

Government must:

- Require intersectional gender analysis across all climate and economic policy.
- Adopt and implement a Feminist Green New Deal framework.
- Integrate reproductive justice into environmental and public health policy.
- Provide long-term, core funding for women-led and grassroots climate leadership, not short-term project grants.

Without structural participation and resourcing, leadership remains symbolic. A feminist climate transition redistributes power, not just funding.

Transform the Food System as Climate Infrastructure

Food insecurity is a climate justice issue. Industrial food systems drive emissions, biodiversity loss and toxic exposure while entrenching poverty and ill health with women and racialised and marginalised communities particularly affected.

A just transition must:

- Treat food as essential infrastructure, embedding community food hubs, growing spaces and cooperative models into planning and local economic strategy.
- Deliver a shift to agroecological food production supported by public investment and procurement reform.
- Address the structural drivers of food insecurity - low incomes, insecure housing, rising energy costs and gender, racial and social inequality.
- Support women-led and community growing initiatives.
- Reduce the environmental and health harms of industrial food systems.

Climate policy that ignores food system inequality will fail both people and the planet.

End Toxic Chemical Exposure

Human health and environmental health are inseparable. Women, particularly marginalised and racialised women, face disproportionate exposure to harmful chemicals through housing, consumer products, workplaces and waste systems.

A feminist climate transition must:

- Strengthen UK chemicals regulation and apply the precautionary principle.
- Legislate for menstrual health, dignity and sustainability, recognising toxic exposure as public health and environmental justice issues.
- Protect low-income households from cumulative chemical burdens through housing standards and product regulation.
- Integrate toxic exposure reduction into climate resilience and public health strategy.
- Embed gender-disaggregated data collection in chemicals regulation and public health surveillance to ensure policy is evidence-based and responsive to unequal exposure patterns.

A climate-safe future that tolerates toxic inequality is not just.

Treat Nature as Essential Public Health Infrastructure

Access to green space is not a lifestyle choice, it is the core social infrastructure for climate resilience, mental health and physical wellbeing.

Government and local authorities must:

- Embed equitable and safe green space provision into planning reform and climate adaptation strategy.
- Prioritise investment in neighbourhoods facing the greatest health and climate risks.
- Fund nature-based health interventions, including green prescribing, community gardening and horticultural therapy.
- Protect community access to land from privatisation and speculative development.
- Prioritise women's and racialised and marginalised communities' safety in green space provision.
- Fund re-wilding initiatives and ban the use of toxic chemicals and pesticides in green spaces.

Climate resilience cannot be separated from public health.

10 Conclusion

The climate crisis is not only an environmental emergency, but a social justice issue that reflects and deepens existing inequalities. Women, particularly those marginalised by race, income, disability or immigration status, are disproportionately exposed to climate risks while being systematically excluded from the decision-making spaces tasked with addressing them.

This is why women and climate change are inseparable. Climate change exposes and intensifies the structural inequalities that shape women's lives: from unpaid care and low-paid work to housing insecurity, exposure to pollution, and vulnerability to violence.

A feminist climate justice approach recognises that climate impacts are interconnected and shaped by unequal social, economic and environmental conditions. Addressing heatwaves, pollution, food insecurity, toxic chemical exposure, housing, transport, energy and care cannot be done in isolation. Nor can it be done without acknowledging that these impacts are experienced differently across society.

Systemic change is required. Governments, corporations and institutions must be held accountable for their role in driving environmental harm and inequality. A just transition must centre care, equity and lived experience, redistributing power and resources to those most affected.

Only by embedding feminist and intersectional principles into climate policy can we build a world where women, communities and the planet flourish.

11 Take Action

Individual and collective action matters, but the burden of solving the climate crisis does not rest on individuals. Structural inequality limits people's choices, particularly for those already facing disadvantage. Meaningful change requires political action and institutional accountability.

Ways to take action:

- Share this briefing with your MP, councillor or community group and urge them to support gender-responsive climate policy.
- Follow and amplify Wen's campaigns via social media @wen_uk.
- Get involved in Wen's Environmenstrual and Green Baby campaigns and programmes like Climate Sisters.
- Support Wen and our mission and help build a world where women, communities and the planet flourish.

12 Resources

Wen resources:

- Decolonial feminism and Climate Justice briefing, Wen
- Reproductive Justice briefing, Wen
- A Green and Caring Economy - Final Report

UK resources:

- Impatience Earth: Invisible Women: Why women and marginalised groups should be central to UK funders' climate resilience strategies
- Friends of the Earth: Maps on pollution hotspots and extreme heat hotspots.

Global resources:

- WEDO's Gender Climate Tracker tracks gender-responsive climate action globally, particularly in relation to the implementation of the United Nations climate policy.
- WEDO: Policy Brief: Centering Climate in All G7 Discussions — A Call for a Gender-Just Climate Agenda
- GAGGA: Various reports on regional case studies with practical insights from their global network.
- WECAN: Why Women
- Women & Gender Constituency: Gender Just Climate Solutions

13 Appendix

Summary Table - Impacts of Climate Change			
Issue	**UK Climate Context**	**Impact on Women**	**Intersectional / Compounded Impact**
Heatwaves	Increasing frequency, intensity, and duration; extreme events already exceeding 38°C in some areas.	➢Higher mortality ➢Risks to reproductive health (premature birth, low birth weight) ➢Menopause/perimenopause challenges	➢Poor-quality housing, lack of green space, poverty, and racial inequality amplify vulnerability ➢Infants, older women, and women of colour are disproportionately affected
Housing and Energy	Poor insulation and overcrowding worsen heat/cold exposure.	➢Women more likely to live in fuel poverty ➢Absorb health/caring burdens; lone parents and older women particularly affected	➢People of colour, migrants, disabled people overrepresented in high-risk housing
Flooding	Increasing river and surface water flooding; tens of thousands of properties at risk.	➢Women take on unpaid caring responsibilities ➢Disrupted household routines	➢Low-income households, marginalised communities are at increased risk yet have slower recovery, reduced access to services, and financial instability
Air Pollution	Up to 30,000 premature deaths/year; linked to respiratory & cardiovascular disease.	➢Increased reproductive health risks ➢Higher risk of breast cancer and heart disease	➢Women of colour and low-income communities face higher exposure
Chemical Pollution	Toxic chemicals pervasive in homes, food, water, consumer products; linked to fossil fuels.	➢Reproductive health impacts: infertility, pregnancy complications, menstrual irregularities ➢Infants exposed via maternal pathways	➢Higher exposure for women in poverty, insecure housing, precarious employment ➢Racialised communities face greater environmental contamination

Food Justice	Climate impacts on production, supply chains, and prices increase food insecurity.	➢Women manage household food ➢Reduce own intake in scarcity ➢Triple burden of unpaid labour, low-paid food-sector jobs, and food insecurity	➢Ethnic minority women, unpaid carers, and low-income households face higher food insecurity ➢Intersection of gender, race, disability, and parent/caring roles
Transport and Access	Car-centric, peak-hour commuting systems	➢Women rely more on public transport ➢Complex trip-chaining for care responsibilities; increased cost, time, stress	➢Women, people of colour, disabled people, low-income households less likely to own a car ➢Safety concerns limit mobility
Gender Based Violence	Crises, floods, heatwaves, and economic stress increase GBV.	➢Increased domestic abuse, harassment, exploitation ➢Restricted access to services, green/blue spaces, transport	➢Women of colour, migrants, disabled women, low-income women face compounded barriers to support and safe mobility
Poverty and Unpaid Labour	Rising energy costs, food insecurity, climate-related housing damage.	➢Women carry the majority of unpaid care and domestic work ➢Overrepresented in poverty	➢Women of colour, migrants, older women, lone parents, disabled women face heavier burdens and reduced social protections
Access and Connection to Nature	Green spaces mitigate heat, improve air quality, and support wellbeing.	➢Women and girls face safety concerns, harassment, lack of inclusive design ➢Reduced outdoor activity → Reduced benefits of green and blue spaces	➢Families in poverty, racialised communities, and disabled people face reduced access, affordability, and belonging
Displace -ment and Disasters	Floods, storms, heatwaves can force temporary/longer-term displacement.	➢Increased caring responsibilities during displacement ➢Disruption to homes, livelihoods, services	➢Marginalised communities disproportionately affected ➢Slower recovery and greater financial insecurity

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About Wen

Wen is an environmental charity working on issues that connect women, health, equity and environmental justice. We support women and communities to take climate action, amplify marginalised voices, and campaign for systemic change.

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