

CAN-UK Policy Briefing

Gender Action Plan

June 2025



While the global climate crisis intensifies year-on-year, not everyone is affected equally. Women and girls of all ages, gender-diverse people, older people, people with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, and other marginalised groups in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) experience the impacts of climate change disproportionately and in different ways, due to systemic disadvantages caused by colonial histories, patriarchy, and profit-driven systems. These systems are the root of both climate injustices and gender injustices, deeply interconnected and compounded by other intersecting and systemic inequalities.

Over the last year, the world has witnessed the consolidation of a gradual but profound change in geopolitics, with the rise of governments rolling back action on climate change and gender equality, and pulling back from global cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and international development.

At COP29, in the context of the extension of the Lima Work Programme on gender for 10 years, Parties agreed to develop a new Gender Action Plan, a process which will be initiated this month at SB62. It is crucial now more than ever that the new Gender Action Plan provides a robust framework to deliver gender-just and gender-transformative climate action, to ensure that the rights of women, girls, older people, gender-diverse people, people with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, and other marginalised groups are protected and their rights secured throughout UNFCCC processes and global climate action.

We call on the UK government to play an active and constructive role in achieving a strong and effective GAP at COP30, fulfilling the UK's commitments to leave no-one behind, promote gender equality, and secure more effective and inclusive climate change policy globally and in the UK.

Rollback on rights

We are concerned about the growth of the anti-rights movement, and the impact this is having, through rollbacks and attacks on gender equality and human rights. These dynamics are visible in the gender negotiations at the UNFCCC, where several Parties have pushed to backtrack on language and agreements that support gender equality and human rights.¹ There is a risk that the Gender Action Plan will be diluted as a result of these concerted attacks, limiting the rights of women and girls across the world, including those most affected by climate change.

As well as these efforts to undermine gender equality and human rights in UN spaces, many governments have cut Official Development Assistance (ODA) and are reducing resources that support gender equality and the organisations needed to resist these rollbacks. This includes the UK, where ODA has been cut further, and where the Minister has indicated these cuts will fall disproportionately on gender-focused spending. This is a great concern as it risks further eroding the rights of women and girls of all ages worldwide. For example, the 'What Works' programme, that aims to support one million women and girls at risk of violence globally, is at risk of closure under the Government's plan. This is despite this Labour government's manifesto commitment to uphold human rights, particularly of all women and girls, and its mission to halve violence against women and girls, with all departments tasked with playing their part.

Instead, we urge the UK to redouble efforts to champion the values of gender equality, inclusion, and human rights in international and domestic processes - needed now more than ever to prevent devastating rollbacks.

The UK's International Women and Girls' strategy affirms that responding to this backlash is a priority, stating: "We will stand up and speak out for women's and girls' rights and freedoms on the global stage and in our bilateral relationships. We will build agile networks of established allies and include middle ground powers, with the aim of building international consensus to stop those intent on rolling back on rights and putting hard-won progress into reverse."ⁱⁱ This is supported by the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office's Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy that states the UK has a "strong political commitment to universal human rights and democratic freedoms" and will use its "reputation as a global leader on disability to uphold and advance their universal rights and freedoms through our diplomatic influencing, strategic partnerships and programmatic work."ⁱⁱⁱ

In the context of negotiating a new Gender Action Plan in 2025, we call on the government to put its commitments into practice by:

- Working with like-minded Parties to publicly call for strong outcomes on gender and intersections with other aspects of social inclusion in the negotiations.
- Publicly highlighting high-level political prioritisation of the Gender Action Plan as a crucial outcome needed from COP30 by Ministers, the Special Representative for Climate, the Special Representative for Nature, the Special Envoy for Women and Girls, and senior government officials.
- Using all opportunities to establish common ground and creating dialogue with other Parties, including working with Parties where there is scope for consensus.
- Leading by example by fostering genuine engagement with women and girls in all their diversity.
- Across government, sharing and reflecting on learnings from other UN and multilateral negotiations on issues relating to gender, inclusion, and human rights, and developing joint strategies and actions.

CAN-UK asks for the new Gender Action Plan

The existing Gender Action Plan has played an important role in building visibility and awareness of the gender-specific implications of climate change. However, notable gaps remain, including on implementation and impact. The new Gender Action Plan to be agreed at COP30 is a crucial opportunity to strengthen action.

CAN-UK outlines here a number of key recommendations to ensure a stronger Gender Action Plan is agreed in 2025. CAN-UK also recognises the work of the Women and Gender Constituency and the informal Disability Caucus.^{iv}

1. Finance

The lack of accessible funding for gender-responsive climate action undermines its implementation. Local actors, including women-, older-women-, youth-, and girl-led groups, including those with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples, face significant barriers to accessing finance despite their central role in community action. The Gender Action Plan must explicitly address how finance can be scaled up for gender-responsive climate action and the barriers to access removed.

- The Gender Action Plan should include measures to increase access to and availability of finance for gender-responsive climate action. This should include direct access mechanisms for women-, older-women-, youth-, and girl-led organisations, and calls to prioritise funding for care systems, education, sexual and reproductive health, gender-equitable learning and community organising.

- The Gender Action Plan should include activities that facilitate knowledge and best practice sharing on gender-responsive climate finance between Parties, UN Climate Funds, International Financial Institutions, and civil society organisations. This should include inviting financing institutions to host sessions on how they are implementing the Gender Action Plan, how to accelerate access to gender responsive finance, and sharing best practices.

2. Intersectionality and data

The existing Gender Action Plan does not explicitly reference the impacts, needs, or experiences of climate change based on people's intersecting identities. To be effective, it is essential that the Gender Action Plan is inclusive of women and girls in all their diversity. This means not only protecting existing language and agreements from rollbacks, but also building on it. It is also important that intersectionality is reflected in data requirements so that gaps are identified and accountability can be built in. The data collected currently does not capture the diverse experiences of women and girls, and is not disaggregated through varying intersectionalities. Doing so would allow Parties to better understand the diverse needs and priorities of different groups in communities, and design relevant activities responding to their unique needs and universal rights; strengthen the accountability of the Gender Action Plan; and improve mechanisms to help ensure meaningful results and sustained impact for women and girls in all their diversity.

- The Gender Action Plan should include explicit language that is inclusive of age (i.e. for girls and older women) and of disability. There should be explicit reference to girl-led, youth-led, Older People's Associations, and organisations that are led by women and girls with disabilities, particularly in the 'meaningful participation' section.
- The Gender Action Plan monitoring and evaluation framework and accountability mechanisms must include data disaggregated by sex, age, and disability.

3. Structural barriers to gender equality

The Gender Action Plan in its current form, does not go far enough to address aspects of gender inequality that can become further exacerbated during times of emergency following climate change related impacts. The primary and overarching goal of the Gender Action Plan must be to protect, promote, and advance the rights of women and girls in all their diversity, while also working to dismantle patriarchal structures, including through engaging men and boys. Addressing issues that affect women and girls, including those that affect specific groups of women and girls due to their intersecting identities, would help to fulfil women and girls' rights, improve their ability to adapt and to address loss and damage, and address some of the barriers faced to participation and leadership.

- The Gender Action Plan should include activities that increase the knowledge and expertise of Parties to address structural barriers to gender equality and integrate this into climate policy and plans.
- These activities should include training, published guidance, and workshops. Workshops should be organised with a range of participants, including women and girls' rights and women, older women- and girl-led organisations; organisations of people with disabilities; Parties; UN agencies, and academics, and could be the catalyst for the production of written guidance and monitoring frameworks for implementation of the Gender Action Plan, to assess progress, share learning, and further improve policy and practice.

- Topics covered by the workshops, trainings, and guidance must include gender-based violence; unpaid care work; sexual and reproductive health and rights; and inclusion of women and girls' voice, leadership, and meaningful and systematic participation.

4. Coherence across national and international climate policy

Greater coherence is needed between the Gender Action Plan and climate policy processes at the national and international level. Within the UNFCCC, gender discussions and issues have largely been confined to the Gender Action Plan, leading to a siloing of gender and limiting understanding of broader gender and inclusion dimensions across other negotiation tracks, as well as real world implementation. This has been similar at the national level, where the formulation and implementation of gender-responsive climate policy remains uneven. National focal points have highlighted a need for increased knowledge and expertise across national governments and not just of the focal points. Increasing knowledge and expertise is essential to ensure that gender is treated as a cross-cutting priority, and to translate the Gender Action Plan into action and impact.

- The Gender Action Plan must reaffirm the importance of gender equality as a cross-cutting priority and outline how it must be integrated across all UNFCCC workstreams and agenda items. This should include specifically strengthening linkages to adaptation, loss and damage, climate finance, and just transition.
- The Gender Action Plan should call for the development and implementation of gender-responsive national climate strategies and plans, including full integration of gender and intersectional inclusion and rights in National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) strategies.
- Activities outlined above for workshops, training, and written guidance must prioritise national gender and climate focal points but also engage wider national government representatives responsible for climate policy, to ensure the meaningful involvement of women and girls in all their diversity.

Conclusion

The negotiations on the new Gender Action Plan in 2025 are a key opportunity to strengthen climate action and to meet the intensifying needs of women and girls around the world to be agents of change. We call on the UK to be a champion for women and girls in these critical negotiations, to fight back against rollbacks on rights and gender, and to stand firmly in solidarity with women and girls on the frontline of the climate crisis of all ages and in all their diversity.

Annex 1: Gender Action Plan suggested text changes

Gender Action Plan Activities	Suggested changes
A.1	Include reference to national loss and damage policies. Following language on 'mainstreaming gender', add 'with specific attention to intersecting identities/characteristics'.
A.2	Widen this to include building of expertise, knowledge and buy-in across national governments.
A.3	Add age- and disability-disaggregated data and gender analysis.
A.4	Strengthen the role of Parties to understand the implications of climate change on women and girls in all their diversity and in their specific context.
Priority area B	Include explicit reference to the leadership and participation of girls, older women, and girls and women with disabilities, and include activities to reduce barriers for participation for these groups.
Priority area C	Strengthen language across Priority Area C. It could be strengthened by including more specific outputs and indicators identified for tracking coherence across other UNFCCC negotiation tracks.
Priority area D	Add specific activities focused on: • Gender-based violence (GBV) • Understanding and mitigating against the impacts of climate change on gender-based violence. • Integrating gender-based violence into climate policies. • Activities to capture data on gender-based violence and climate change, which is disaggregated by sex, age and disability. • Care Work • Recognising the value of and promoting care work which is carried out mostly by women and girls of all ages, particularly in the context of a just transition. • Incorporating care work into climate policy making. • Ensuring gender, age and disability-responsive social protection is recognised as a key component of supporting the rights of women and girls in the context of the just transition and climate change adaptation, particularly in light of their disproportionate caring roles. • Organising a workshop on the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage to explore synergies and influence the development of a gender strategy for the Fund.
D.2	• Include girl-, youth- and women-led organisations, Older People's organisations, and organisations led by women and girls with disabilities. • Add an additional activity on tracking finance from a gender- and intersectional-perspective. • Include the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage among the contributors.
D.6	Strengthen this activity to be more directive of what national climate policies, plans and strategies need to contain to ensure they have adequately integrated gender.
D.7	Reinforce the language around 'the availability of sex disaggregated data for gender analysis, taking into account multidimensional factors', and add 'such as age and disability'.

Climate Action Network UK (CAN-UK) is the UK node of CAN, a global network of more than 1,900 civil society organisations in over 130 countries driving collective and sustainable action to fight the climate crisis and to achieve social and racial justice.

CAN-UK convenes international development and environment organisations in the UK working on the poverty-nature-climate agenda to advocate for climate justice and sustainable development for all.

References

ⁱ 'Petro-patriarchy and the pope: Saudis, Vatican lead women's rights backlash at COP29', Politico, November 18th 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/petro-patriarchy-pope-saudis-vatican-womens-rights-backlash-cop29-gender-equality-climate-change/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-women-and-girls-strategy-2023-to-2030>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fcdo-disability-inclusion-and-rights-strategy-2022-to-2030/fcdo-disability-inclusion-and-rights-strategy-2022-to-2030-building-an-inclusive-future-for-all-a-sustainable-rights-based-approach#rights-voice-choice-visibility>

^{iv} Women and Gender Constituency submission:

<https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/SubmissionsStaging/Documents/202404040413---WGC%20GAP%20Submission.pdf>

and submission made by some members of the informal Disability Caucus:

<https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/SubmissionsStaging/Documents/202504011130---Submission%20for%20SB62.pdf>