



# A GREEN GENDER ANALYSIS ON “WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY DOCUMENT AND ACTION PLAN (2024-2028)” OF TURKIYE

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## Abstract

This research examines the “Environment and Climate Change” policy area of the Women’s Empowerment Strategy Document and Action Plan (2024-2028) of Türkiye in terms of gender perspective.

Conducted according to qualitative research methods and techniques, this research includes six themes: The existence of an approach that limits women to motherhood”, “Avoiding the use of the term gender”, “Special emphasis on gender-based data production”, “Women’s empowerment in the private sphere”, “Environment and women” and “Green intersectionality”.

Within the scope of the themes generated, while claiming to be inclusive, the document notably equates the concept of “woman” solely with motherhood and the responsibility of raising future generations and excludes women who are not mothers. It includes statements and activities aimed at empowering women within the private sphere. Furthermore, the strategic plans referred to in the document include activities related to the production of gender-based data, but the concept of gender is avoided. This suggests that the document was prepared with an attitude that accepts or defends the existence of gender inequality. The document also emphasizes that women are more affected by adverse environmental conditions than men, while their carbon footprint is lower. Moreover, when we examine the activities that have been implemented or are planned, the inclusion of statements focused on educating women – who already tend to have a lower carbon footprint—about climate change or raising their awareness appears to contradict the gender-based foundation of the document.

**Keywords:** Gender, climate change, environment, Türkiye, Women’s Empowerment Strategy Document and Action Plan (2024-2028)

## Introduction

Climate change, often referred to as the climate crisis or climate emergency, highlights the shifts in the world’s climate system due to global warming. It has become a key topic on many local, national, and international platforms. In addition to the geographical, physical and environmental impacts, climate change affects humanity globally, posing numerous threats, including health, poverty, food and water shortages, increased floods, extreme heat, more diseases, economic burden, etc. The threat to humanity has reached such levels that the World Health Organization (WHO) has classified climate change as the greatest risk to global health in the 21st century (WHO, 2015).

The risk posed by all these impacts is unequally distributed but is generally more significant for disadvantaged and vulnerable people in developing and developed countries (Kara, 2021;

The list of publications can be downloaded on the following website: <https://www.ijhsdr.com/>

IPCC, 2014; UN, 2019; CEE, 2009). From a sociological perspective, this unequal distribution is also evident between genders, as the impacts of climate change are gender-specific rather than gender-neutral. These effects can exacerbate the existing disadvantages faced by women, who often have fewer resources to cope with its consequences (WMO, 2024; Denton, 2002; Alston, 2013; UN, 2019; Kronsell, 2017).

## A Gendered Lens on Climate Change

It has been documented that women are more concerned about environmental issues and have higher risk perceptions than men (Aguilar, 2009; McCright and Dunlap, 2011; Xiao and McCright, 2012). It has also been underlined that women’s limited access to educational opportunities, compared to men, and the male-dominated nature of public spheres like political and social decision-making processes make women more exposed and vulnerable to the consequences of climate change (UNFPA and WEDO, 2009).

Current literature states that climate change affects men’s and women’s health differently. In terms of mortality, women are 14 times more likely to die than men during natural disasters (SIA, 2008). Women are more likely than men to experience psychological illnesses, infectious diseases, and a higher risk of malnutrition (Enarson and Chakrabarti, 2009). Infections during pregnancy and subsequent anemia in the mother stemming from climate change are among the factors that lead to low birth weight, poor child development and increased child mortality (Charbit 2018: 319). In terms of violence, women are the victims of domestic and sexual violence in case of emergency conditions and disasters more than men (Sanz-Barbero et al., 2018; UN Women, 2020).

Last but not least, the Women’s Environment & Development Organization, WEDO (2009), summarizes the effects of climate change on women by highlighting direct and indirect impacts as follows:

Issue	Direct and Indirect Impacts on Women
Natural resources: food, water, fuel, land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased household work burden and time spent on gathering water, food and fuel such as firewood (sometimes leading to lower school enrolment rates, decreased literacy rates, or early marriage)</li> <li>Increased hunger and calorie reduction</li> <li>Exposure to contaminated water sources</li> <li>In regions with restricted land rights, women are potentially forced off/without access to fertile land</li> <li>Loss of traditional land tenure</li> </ul>
Natural disasters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of access to education/information about weather</li> <li>Restricted ability to respond (e.g., women are often unable to leave the house without a male companion)</li> <li>Lack of survival skills regularly taught to boys, such as swimming or tree climbing</li> <li>Women are regularly excluded from disaster recovery decision-making</li> </ul>
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pregnant and lactating women, along with the very young and very old, are most vulnerable to health threats</li> <li>Increased lack of healthcare services, immunizations, family planning, reproductive health care in disaster zones</li> <li>Potential increase in maternal and infant mortality rates due to lack of care</li> <li>Lack of services and hygienic supplies in relief shelters for pregnant, lactating or menstruating women</li> </ul>

Population growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competition for increasingly scarce government and natural resources</li> <li>Most vulnerable populations (e.g., women) continue to be under threat</li> <li>High fertility rates impact women’s health</li> </ul>
Urbanization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Settlements – sometimes informal – may be unhealthy and dangerous, lack water and sanitation and be built on vulnerable land</li> <li>Urban formal markets tend to benefit men</li> <li>Poor urban women lack health services</li> <li>Urban poverty projected to increase</li> </ul>
Migration & displacement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Women comprise at least half of the world’s migrant populations, but their needs are not prioritized in migration policies</li> <li>Women often lack resources to move but may lack resources to cope at home after disasters</li> <li>Forced migration could exacerbate women’s vulnerability and lack of access to resources and livelihood options</li> </ul>
Household composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rise in female-headed households (FHH)</li> <li>Limited resources for FHH in recovery/insurance programmes or funds that prioritize access for men</li> <li>Lack of land rights jeopardizing women’s food and livelihood security</li> <li>Gendered divisions of labour reinforced</li> <li>Decreased numbers of women in some households due to female disaster mortality</li> </ul>
Conflict & violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conflict amplifies existing gender inequalities</li> <li>While men are more likely to be killed or injured in fighting, women suffer significantly from other consequences of conflict, such as rape, violence, anxiety and depression</li> <li>Higher levels of violence at home and in post-disaster relief shelters</li> </ul>

Figure 1: Consequences of Climate Change, Resource: WEDO (2009)

## The Case of Türkiye

On an international level, following the Millennium Development Goals (2015), the Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015) also address numerous challenges faced by people and the planet.. Out of the 17 goals, the 13th focuses on Climate Action and the 5th on Gender Equality, and these two goals intersect with one another. Furthermore, some progress is also made under the scope of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). During the Conference of the Parties, COP 23, a gender action plan was created to support the implementation of gender-related decisions (UNFCCC, 2017).

Touching on the historical transformation relevant to our subject, the first international document to highlight the relationship between climate change and gender inequality is the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, with the Paris Agreement being one of its key implementation tools. The preamble of the Paris Agreement, which was signed by Türkiye in 2016, statements to pay attention to gender equality and women’s empowerment in the studies to be carried out on climate change (Paris Agreement, 2015).

Moreover, Article 10/c of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants prepared by the United Nations Environment Programme - UNEP, which includes regulations on the use of substances that adversely affect the environment and human health, also signed by Türkiye, states the following: “Develop and implement education and public awareness programmes on persistent organic pollutants, their effects on

health and the environment and their alternatives, especially for women, children and the least educated" (Stockholm Convention, 2004). Additionally, the Minamata Convention on Mercury, also developed by the United Nations Environment Programme - UNEP in 2013 in response to mercury's harmful effects on both the environment and human health and signed by Türkiye in 2014, also highlights the connection between women and the environment as follows in its preamble: "Being aware of the health concerns arising from the exposure of vulnerable populations, especially women, children and, through them, future generations to mercury, especially in developing countries" (Minamata Convention, 2013). Türkiye has been following these international decisions and goals when tackling the climate crisis with the National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan (2024-2030) and National Climate Change Mitigation Strategy and Action Plan (2024-2030) (Directorate of Climate Change, 2024).

Specifically, as documented above, the changes and issues that occur due to climate change also impact Türkiye, and Türkiye started to take action against its hazardous effects. It is predicted that the annual average temperature increase in Türkiye will be between 1°C - 2°C for the period of 2016-2040, between 1.5°C - 4°C for the period of 2041-2070, and between 1.5°C - 5°C for the last period of 2071-2099 (Demircan et al. 2017:2-3).

In line with the two interconnected themes of this research paper—gender and climate change—there are two "Women's Empowerment Strategy Document and Action Plan": one covering the 2018-2023 period and the other for 2024-2028. The former addresses gender and climate change indirectly, while the latter directly approaches these issues.

### Looking at the Former Document: Women's Empowerment Strategy Document and Action Plan (2018-2023)

The Women's Empowerment Strategy Document and Action Plan (2018-2023), prepared under the coordination of the Ministry of Family and Social Services - Directorate General on the Status of Women, is the first action plan prepared at the national level. It aims to strengthen women's participation in both social and economic life by reflecting gender equality in practices and policies and to ensure that they benefit equally from rights, opportunities and possibilities.

The Strategy Document and Action Plan includes activities to be carried out by relevant public/private organizations to promote women's empowerment. While preparing this Strategy Document and Action Plan, Article 5 "Gender Equality" of the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), which Turkey officially adopted on 25 September 2015, can be said to be Article 5 of the UN SDGs. It includes strategies and activities in the context of five main policies: education, health, economy, participation in decision-making mechanisms and media.

In this respect, the 2018-2023 Women's Empowerment Strategy Document and Action Plan only mentions gender equality as an umbrella term, and no article is directly related to gender and climate change. On the other hand, although an indirectly related article, in the health sub-dimension of the Strategy Document and Action Plan, "Women living in rural areas

and working as seasonal agricultural labourers in Turkey women have disadvantages in terms of health services", there are indirect statements indicating that climatic conditions can negatively affect women.

### An Overall Evaluation of the Current Women's Empowerment Strategy Document and Action Plan (2024-2028)

With the expiry of the first action plan in 2023, the Women's Empowerment Strategy Document and Action Plan (2024-2028) was prepared under the coordination of the Ministry of Family and Social Services - Directorate General on the Status of Women. In addition to the UN SDGs, the main objective of the 12th Development Plan is stated as the following: "To ensure that women, who are indispensable elements of the family and society and who have a central role in raising future generations, receive the superior value they deserve and accelerate our development; benefit equally from rights, opportunities in all areas of life, especially in education and employment; live free from all forms of violence and discrimination; and increase representation and participation rates in all fields and levels". The 12th Development Plan is the last development plan covering the 2024-2028 period, prepared with the main objective of "a stable, strong and prosperous Türkiye that is sensitive to the environment, resistant to disasters, produces high added value based on advanced technology, shares income fairly and is stable" (12th Development Plan, 2024).

The 2024-2028 Strategy Document and Action Plan was prepared on five main policy axes: education, health, economy, leadership and participation in decision-making mechanisms, environment and climate change. Considering the 2018-2023 Strategy Document and Action Plan, the new plan emphasizes "Environment and Climate Change" differently. This focus, which aligns with the objectives of "climate action" in Article 13 and "accessible and sustainable water management" in Article 6 of the UN SDGs, forms the central theme of this study.

Based on this information, this research aims to examine the "Environment and Climate Change" policy area of the Women's Empowerment Strategy Document and Action Plan (2024-2028) of Türkiye in terms of gender perspective.

### Methodology

This research was conducted through the methods and techniques of the qualitative research paradigm, which focuses on analyzing non-numerical data such as a document, video or audio in order to reveal the concepts, opinions or experiences (Martin, 2010). As to the research design, the study used content analysis, a scientific approach to investigating social reality by classifying the message into verbal, written, and other materials and converting them into numbers or making inferences (Dey, 1995).

### Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data were collected through the document analysis method, which can be defined as the analysis of written materials

containing the phenomena or facts intended to be investigated (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016).

The study used qualitative data analysis, which consisted of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2015). During data reduction, the data to be analyzed was read, and the analysis unit was determined under the codes of “women”, “gender”, “climate”, “climate change” and “environment”. As the text is in the Turkish language, these codes are “kadın”, “cinsiyet”, “toplumsal cinsiyet”, “iklim”, “iklim değişikliği” and “çevre”. The identification of these codes was supported by the word cloud method in the MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software. The word cloud, as shown below, refers to the process of visualizing the most frequently used words in the examined sections of the strategy document. The visual indicates that the frequency of word usage increases with the size of the text.



Figure 2: Word Cloud from MAXQDA

These coding processes were categorized, and the reduced data were checked by three field experts (one from Social Work, two from Sociology and Gender). In the second step, data display, the data set was transformed into a visual figure. Finally, in the conclusion drawing/verification step, findings were derived from the data set, leading to associations and interpretations among the categories.

## Document Analyzed

The Women’s Empowerment Strategy Document and Action Plan (2024-2028) is a 180-page document prepared under the coordination of the Ministry of Family and Social Services -Directorate General on the Status of Women.

This research examined the data in the sections between pages 4-36, which cover the introduction and general information of the document, and the section from pages 157-179, which focuses on the fifth policy area, “Environment and Climate Change.” (Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2018).

The fifth policy area, “Environment and Climate Change” consists of 27 articles under the title of “Current Situation”. The main objective of this title is defined as “to identify the effects of environment and climate change on women and girls and to ensure the activities are carried out within the framework of their needs.”

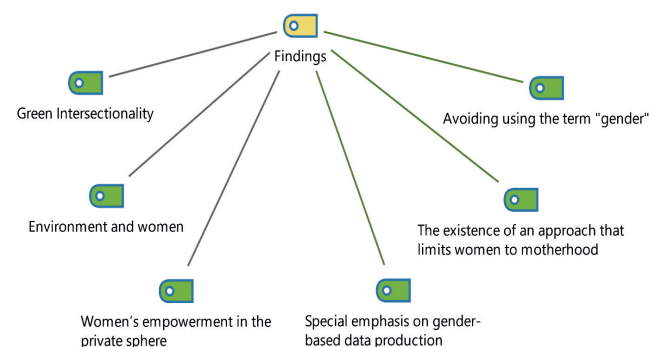
Three strategies have been identified in line with this objective, and activities for each strategy have been developed. The responsible institution, related institution, implementation schedule and performance indicators are presented for each activity. The three related strategies are as follows:

1. Generating gender-based data, research and data analysis of adaptation and risk, and encouraging scientific studies by relevant institutions to determine the impacts of environment and climate change on women.
2. Ensuring effective participation of women in gender-sensitive planning, budgeting and implementation of environment and climate change policies.
3. Raising public awareness on the impacts of environment and climate change on women and girls (Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2024).

## Results and discussion

The findings were categorized into six themes. As shown in Figure 3, these themes are; “The existence of an approach that limits women to motherhood”, “Avoiding the use of the term gender”, “Special emphasis on gender-based data production”, “Women’s empowerment in the private sphere”, “Environment and women” and “Green intersectionality”.

Figure 3: Findings



### 1. The existence of an approach that limits women to motherhood

The “Introduction” includes a citation from the 12th Development Plan, where a woman is described as “the indispensable member of family and society with a central role in raising future generations”. This approach limits women to motherhood by excluding all childless women (regardless of being married or not, as it is not mentioned), despite underlining that the plan is “inclusionary” (p.3).

These documents focus on the mission of raising moral generations, a vision that Turkish holds for women. Furthermore, they regard women as respectable primarily in their role as mothers, based on their fertility. This perspective aligns with Aktaş’s study (1984), which argues that women are viewed primarily as entities essential to the home, focusing on the home-child-spouse trio, and are often addressed primarily in terms of



their sexuality. This view also parallels Durakbaşı (1998), who highlights the pressure of moral codes, such as family honor and dignity, exert on women. In modern femininity, the man is regarded as the modern subject associated with reason, while the woman is positioned as the "other," linked to nature in contrast to the male identity.

## 2. Avoiding using the term "gender"

Gender refers to more than one's biological sex, male or female, but rather the roles, responsibilities and duties that society attributes to that individual because they are male or female (Yaşın-Dökmen, 2016; Bhasin, 2003). During the socialization process, individuals respond to these attributions and often become trapped by gender roles due to the pervasive influence of patriarchal culture (Illich, 1996).

In the document analyzed, under the title of "Current Situation", Article 2 states that "the existence of the structural differences between men and women due to their roles in work and family life results in both sexes being negatively and differently affected by the climate change" (p. 157). Although the term underlined in the document refers to the term gender (*toplumsal cinsiyet* in Turkish), the term cannot be found in the document.

Furthermore, although this document is intended to promote gender equality, it appears to be written from a perspective that defends the existence of inequality and influences the activities and decisions accordingly.

## 3. Special emphasis on gender-based data production

Within Article 1, under the title of Strategies, the document puts special emphasis on gender-based data production. It is important to focus on gender-based data production, starting with knowing the difference between sex and gender and the correct relationship between the field where the data is produced and considering its contribution to changing inequalities (Leduc, 2009; Decataldo and Ruspini, 2016). Therefore, as underlined in the former article, using the term "sex" instead of "gender" is a deficiency of this document, even though the term "gender sensitive" is used frequently throughout the document.

## 4. Empowering women within the private sphere

The concept of empowerment, as defined in the introduction of the strategy document, refers to working towards enabling individuals, organizations or societies to have control over their own lives (Duyan, 2016). However, the expressions in the document on the concept of empowerment show that women are empowered within the home and in the private sphere and underline that women's empowerment is the basis for "strengthening the family". Moreover, under the heading Environment and Climate Change - Current Situation, the document includes statements suggesting that women are responsible for household water consumption (p. 157, item 4), the primary users of natural resources (p. 158, item 5), responsible for the elimination of polluted water and human waste (p. 158, item 6) and their contribution to the environment and climate change process is higher than other household members (p. 160, item 14). From this point of view, the strategy document reflects an understanding that women belong to the "private sphere" representing the household. It also indicates that women who

are outside the "public sphere", as stated in Article 7 (p.158) of the document, face issues of unpaid labour due to gender inequality (Habermas, 1989; Karadağ, 2003). Therefore, although the strategy document aims to empower women to have control over their own lives, it appears to reflect an understanding that restricts this empowerment to the private sphere within the home and that society attributes to women.

## 5. Environment and women

The strategy document states that women are more affected by climate change and environmental pollution than men and have higher mortality rates due to air pollution (p.158). Furthermore, the document refers to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report on Gender and Sustainable Development and suggests that women have a lower carbon footprint and, therefore, should take the lead in environmental and climate change efforts (p. 160). However, the studies in the literature and this document reveal that training and awareness-raising activities on environment and climate change have been carried out for women (p. 160- 161), although the carbon footprint of women is lower than that of men (Medina & Bruno, 2016; Ergas & York, 2012; Osorio et al., 2024). The strategy document contains activities related to providing training to women on environmental and climate change with a similar perspective regarding the activities targeted to be realized in the future (p.176). Although it includes activities on leadership (p. 171), the document is dominated by an understanding that women are more responsible for domestic roles.

## 6. Green Intersectionality

An analysis of the data under the heading "cross-cutting policy areas" of the strategy document suggests that some groups are defined as "groups requiring special policies" (p.13). These groups are listed as girls, women with disabilities, elderly women, women living in rural areas, women under temporary protection (TP)/international protection (IP), women under detention and conviction, women victims of violence, and poor women (Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2024). At this point, acknowledging studies that demonstrate women and girls are disproportionately affected by climate and environmental events highlights the relevance of the concept of intersectionality. This concept emphasizes that various identities can coexist within individuals, leading to unique experiences (Daniel & Dolan, 2020; Kara, 2021; OECD, 2022). However, upon examining the identified groups, it is notable that there is a lack of clarity regarding groups that intersect based on their needs, particularly those with different identities, such as "women with children who have special needs."

## Final evaluation

The analysis of the "Environment and Climate Change" policy area of the Women's Empowerment Strategy Document and Action Plan 2024-2028 of Türkiye in terms of gender perspective revealed six themes: The existence of an approach that limits women to motherhood, "Avoiding the use of the term gender", "Special emphasis on gender-based data production", "Women's empowerment in the private sphere", "Environment and women" and "Green intersectionality".

In summary, while the text was anticipated to be grounded in gender equality, it is significant that it was written from a perspective that accepts gender inequality. This conclusion underscores the necessity for such documents to be revisited through a gender equality lens.

## Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

## Author contributions

The authors confirm being the sole contributor of this work and have approved it for publication.

## Peer-review

Externally peer-reviewed.

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## Conflict of interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author (s)

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