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MedWE Programme

CLIMATE, WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

BUILDING INCLUSIVE PATHWAYS OR RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABLE PEACE



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The **MedWE (Mediterranean Women Empowerment)** Programme is a joint initiative of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed). The primary objective of this program is to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Within the framework of MedWE, a series of joint activities focusing on gender issues will be organised, including seminars and conferences that will bring together researchers, policymakers, and civil society members. The goal of these gatherings is to generate fruitful dialogue and exchange knowledge and experiences to promote gender equality in the region.

In this context, **Policy Studies** will be regularly published, dedicated to disseminating research findings generated during these activities. These studies will be published once a year and aim to strengthen the connection between research and public policies. The documents will provide reflections and recommendations aimed at researchers, policymakers, and civil society members working to promote women's empowerment in the Mediterranean.

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The **European Institute of the Mediterranean** (IEMed), founded in 1989, is a think and do tank specialised in Euro-Mediterranean relations. It provides policy-oriented and evidence-based research underpinned by a genuine Euromed multidimensional and inclusive approach.

The aim of the IEMed, in accordance with the principles of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), is to stimulate reflection and action that contribute to mutual understanding, exchange and cooperation between the different Mediterranean countries, societies and cultures, and to promote the progressive construction of a space of peace and stability, shared prosperity and dialogue between cultures and civilisations in the Mediterranean.

The IEMed is a consortium comprising the Catalan Government, the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, the European Union and Barcelona City Council. It also incorporates civil society through its Board of Trustees and its Advisory Council.



The **Union for the Mediterranean** (UfM) is an intergovernmental organisation that brings together 43 countries to strengthen regional cooperation and dialogue through specific projects and initiatives that address inclusive and sustainable development, stability and integration in the Euro-Mediterranean area. As a direct continuation of the Barcelona Process, the launch of the UfM in 2008 was the reflection of its member states' shared political commitment to enhance the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

The Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean, based in Barcelona is the first permanent structure dedicated to the intergovernmental Mediterranean partnership. It ensures operational follow-up of the regional priorities identified and in partnership with key international actors promotes region-wide cooperation projects and initiatives that address the root causes of the current regional security and socio-economic challenges.

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The Climate WPS Nexus:

Building a Shared Euro-Mediterranean Approach

Gemma Aubarell
Director of the Culture, Gender and Civil Society Department, IEMed

Anna Dorangricchia
Programme Manager, Gender Equality, Social and Civil Affairs Division, UfM

This third policy study in the MedWE series builds on the UfM Network on Climate, Women, Peace and Security (WPS), launched in Amman in November 2025 (UfM, 2025), and on the development of its related Knowledge Hub, supported by the IEMed as an associated think tank. The Network provides a regional space for dialogue among public institutions, civil society, researchers and international partners. The Hub is intended to connect their knowledge and experience through comparative country analyses, policy briefs, monitoring tools and an expert network, hence fostering common methodologies, shared indicators and evidence-based policy recommendations, while facilitating regular dialogue among relevant stakeholders.

The study also continues the discussion opened by the second MedWE volume, Climate Crisis and Gender Equality in the Euro-Mediterranean Region: Emerging Security Risks (IEMed and UfM, 2025). That publication examined differentiated climate impacts, displacement and regional instability, while questioning representations of women solely as vulnerable populations. The present volume develops these concerns through a more explicit WPS perspective. It asks how institutions can respond to interconnected risks while addressing the inequalities that shape them, and how women's knowledge and leadership can influence decisions about resources, adaptation, conflict prevention and recovery.

In this context, this MedWe Policy Study addresses two interrelated objectives for the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. The first is substantive: to deepen the regional analysis of the Climate-WPS and its implications for human security. The second concerns governance: to analyse current gaps and identify mechanisms to strengthen inter-institutional cooperation and policy areas that too often operate separately. Together, these objectives connect a better understanding of interrelated risks with the institutional conditions needed to address them.

The MedWE Policy Study and the forthcoming UfM Regional Policy Report are distinct but complementary publications. This policy study contributes to the wider regional process through four cross-cutting priorities: strengthening regional evidence and knowledge systems; improving policy coherence; recognising women’s and young people's agency and leadership; and developing monitoring and accountability mechanisms. Through its diverse contributions, this policy study seeks to bridge the gap between evidence and policy action, fostering more integrated and coordinated action across the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Why does a Euro-Mediterranean perspective on the Climate-WPS nexus matter?

Climate change, gender inequality, and conflict and insecurity are interconnected challenges, yet the relevant global agendas have largely developed in parallel. The Climate WPS agenda is still emerging, and its full implications are not consistently reflected in policy and practice. A nexus

perspective helps explain how climate pressure and conflict interact with social and political conditions, and how their effects are shaped by existing inequalities, and why women may face disproportionate risks. These connections are neither automatic nor uniform. Analysis must therefore identify the relationships that connect a particular hazard to particular experiences of insecurity. The key challenge is to move from parallel agendas to a genuinely integrated nexus. Equally, armed conflict can damage infrastructure, restrict access to resources, and weaken the institutions needed for adaptation. Understanding these relationships requires attention to both directions of the climate-security interaction.

From a **Euro-Mediterranean perspective**, climate pressures interact with conflict, displacement resource scarcity, fragile livelihoods and persistent inequalities, creating mutually reinforcing risks. Water, food, energy, mobility and security dynamics increasingly cross borders, while policies and institutional responses remain largely organised through separate sectors and national frameworks. Policies designed in isolation may therefore overlook shared risks or undermine one another.

The Euro-Mediterranean dimension adds particular value because it combines shared environmental pressures with pronounced differences in vulnerability, resources and political conditions. Societies on both shores are connected through economic relations, energy systems and patterns of mobility, but they do not face equivalent risks or possess equal capacities to respond. Regional cooperation should make these asymmetries visible. It must also consider how decisions taken in one setting distribute costs and opportunities elsewhere, including through energy transitions, investment and natural-resource use. Shared challenges do not imply identical responsibilities or interchangeable policy solutions.

Exploring the nexus at the Euro-Mediterranean level can therefore support **transnational cooperation and policy learning** that go beyond bilateral approaches. It provides a space to connect experiences and knowledge across the region, recognise common challenges while accounting for differentiated vulnerabilities, and explore how cooperation around climate-related risks can also contribute to resilience, conflict prevention and peace-building. The added value of a regional nexus approach thus lies not only in bringing different policy agendas together, but also in creating connections between actors and initiatives across borders. It can help bridge the gap between national policies and regional challenges, and provide a framework in which evidence, experiences and innovative practices can be shared, tested and translated into more coherent regional action.

What does regional evidence reveal about gaps, particularly in the Southern Mediterranean?

The study points to some interrelated operational priorities. These should not be treated as separate themes, but as mutually reinforcing components of a regional Climate-WPS approach.

A meaningful Climate-WPS strategy needs to combine stronger and more diverse evidence, greater policy coherence, enhanced agency and leadership, and mechanisms to monitor progress and ensure accountability. These dimensions are mutually reinforcing: better evidence should inform policy and decision-making; greater coherence should translate high-level recognition of the nexus into concrete measures within national climate policies and sectoral strategies, including energy and water; stronger leadership should ensure that women and youth, particularly those working at grassroots level, are recognised as knowledge holders and actors shaping the response; and shared monitoring mechanisms should enable learning, accountability and continuous policy improvement.

These priorities inform the four proposed thematic working groups (TWGs) of the UfM Climate-WPS Network, linked to the corresponding thematic clusters in the Knowledge Hub:

TWG1 on Climate Stress, Displacement and Security responds to the evidence and lived-experience gap around climate-induced mobility, bringing together quantitative data, community-level knowledge and experiences of affected populations.

TWG2 on Natural Resources, Land Rights and Conflict Prevention addresses the disconnect between resource governance, climate pressures and WPS, with a particular focus on translating the nexus into concrete policy measures and sectoral strategies and strengthening policy coherence across these domains.

TWG3 on Women and Youth Leadership directly challenges the prevailing victimhood narrative by placing agency, leadership and intergenerational dialogue at the centre, while supporting the capacity, resources and institutional pathways needed for women and young people to influence decision-making.

Finally, **TWG4 on Monitoring and Data Accountability** responds to the evidence and accountability gap by developing shared, gender-responsive indicators that combine quantitative measures with qualitative and community-level evidence.

Taken together, the four TWGs should therefore be understood not as four parallel workstreams, but as **interconnected components of one regional framework**: generating evidence, translating it into policy, strengthening the agency of those most affected, and monitoring the progress. The purpose is to move from a diagnosis of fragmentation towards a coherent and actionable strategy.

What can European experience teach us about policy coherence?

The policy study looks to European experience, particularly the debate on **Just Transition**, as a reference for understanding the possibilities and limits of policy coherence. By bringing decarbonisation, social justice and inclusion into a common framework, Just Transition provides an important example of how different policy objectives can be pursued together, while exposing the tensions and trade-offs that may arise between them.

At the same time, European experiences demonstrate that policy coherence is not simply a technical exercise of aligning policies and institutions. It is shaped by political choices, competing interests and different understandings of justice. Moreover, most European transition processes have unfolded in relatively stable political contexts. Their lessons therefore need to be critically adapted to Mediterranean settings where climate change, gender inequality, fragility and conflict may be deeply intertwined.

The relevance of this experience for the Euro-Mediterranean nexus lies precisely in this tension: **how can integrated policies address interconnected risks while also tackling the structural inequalities that shape vulnerability and resilience?** The European experience suggests that coherence must go beyond institutional alignment to address distributional questions, participation, power and justice.

Why are women's agency and decision-making power central to the Climate-WPS nexus?

A nexus perspective also opens a space to rethink the relationship between climate action and peace-building. Environmental degradation, competition over land and natural resources, displacement and livelihood insecurity can intensify existing grievances and inequalities. At the

same time, cooperation around natural resources, green livelihoods and community resilience can create opportunities for prevention and peace-building.

Women are central to these dynamics. Their roles in natural-resource management, community resilience, mediation and peace-building demonstrate their potential as agents of change. Their contributions should be recognised without assuming that women are inherently peaceful, resilient or responsible for compensating for inadequate public provision. Participation is a right and a question of power. Its significance for WPS must be considered alongside protection, prevention, and relief and recovery, including the safety, livelihoods and services that enable women to engage in public life. A gender-responsive Nexus approach must therefore move beyond recognising women's vulnerability towards strengthening their **agency, leadership and participation in governance and peace-building**.

This dimension is reflected directly in **TWG2 and TWG3**: while the former explores how natural-resource governance can contribute to conflict prevention and more equitable access to resources, the latter focuses on strengthening women's and young people's leadership as a core component of resilience and peace-building. Together, they shift the focus from women as beneficiaries or victims towards women as **actors shaping climate, security and peace-building responses**.

This policy study also provides key elements for a **feminist intersectional definition** of the Climate-WPS nexus. According to this global approach, climate-related insecurity should thus encompass not only the possibility of violent conflict but also should direct attention toward everyday risks, social reproductive labour, and hidden power relations. Integrate climate and WPS frameworks through shared transformative outcomes means to provide this necessary agency in an integrated manner. Joint indicators across Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans (NAPs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Action Plans (NAPs), and disaster risk reduction frameworks should track changes in substantive conditions.

How can the regional Knowledge Hub support the Climate–WPS nexus?

The findings point to the need for a regional architecture that connects existing evidence, actors and policies that already exist but do not interact sufficiently. The four TWGs provide a practical entry point for addressing the principal gaps identified along the policy study articles: **evidence and lived experience; policy coherence; women's and youth agency and leadership; and monitoring, data and accountability**.

Within this architecture, a **regional Knowledge Hub** can play a particularly important role. It can connect the work of the TWGs, bring together existing knowledge and data, capture lived experiences, facilitate peer learning and policy experimentation, and translate evidence into policy recommendations and regional advocacy. In this respect, the Knowledge Hub should not be conceived simply as a repository of information, but as a **space for connecting knowledge, actors and action**.

The objective is therefore not to create another parallel policy framework, but to connect and strengthen the actors, knowledge and initiatives already present in the region. The added value of a regional Climate–WPS architecture lies in its capacity to **connect evidence with policy, policy with practice, and regional cooperation with the realities experienced by communities on the ground**.

What governance framework is needed for the Climate-WPS nexus?

The growing recognition of the interconnections between climate change, gender equality, peace and security has generated important policy developments across international, regional and national levels. However, institutional progress has not been matched by equivalent advances in governance arrangements capable of addressing these challenges in an integrated manner. While the Climate-WPS nexus increasingly features within policy discussions, implementation continues to be characterised by a high degree of sectoral fragmentation. Climate action, gender equality, peace-building, disaster risk reduction and development cooperation remain largely governed through separate institutional structures, policy frameworks and funding mechanisms. As a consequence, responses often fail to address the multidimensional nature of contemporary risks and vulnerabilities.

This challenge is particularly evident in the Euro-Mediterranean region, where climate-related pressures intersect with pre-existing socio-economic inequalities, governance deficits, displacement dynamics, and conflict risks. Climate change does not operate as an isolated environmental phenomenon but rather interacts with broader political, economic and social processes. Consequently, addressing the Climate-WPS nexus requires governance approaches capable of navigating complexity across sectors, scales and stakeholders.

The findings of regional consultations, stakeholder surveys and policy analyses point to a persistent gap between policy commitments and institutional practice. Although many countries have adopted national climate strategies, gender equality frameworks and, increasingly, National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security, these instruments are rarely designed or implemented through integrated governance processes. Responsibilities are often dispersed across ministries and agencies with limited opportunities for strategic coordination. Institutional mandates remain compartmentalised, resulting in parallel interventions that overlook opportunities for synergy and mutual reinforcement.

The governance challenge therefore extends beyond the coordination of individual policies. It concerns the capacity of institutions to develop shared understandings of risk, establish common priorities, and create mechanisms that enable collective decision-making across traditionally separate policy domains. In this context, governance should be understood not merely as the management of administrative procedures but as the set of formal and informal arrangements through which public authorities, civil society, international organisations, academic institutions and local communities negotiate priorities, allocate resources and exercise accountability.

From this perspective, the development of a Climate-WPS governance framework represents a strategic necessity rather than an institutional innovation. Such a framework would provide the structures required to promote policy coherence across climate, security and gender agendas while enabling more effective responses to interconnected challenges. At its core, the framework should seek to bridge three persistent divides: the divide between sectors, the divide between levels of governance, and the divide between policy design and implementation.

First, governance arrangements **must promote horizontal integration across sectors**. Existing institutional structures frequently separate environmental governance from peace-building and security institutions, while gender equality mechanisms often operate independently from both. A Climate-WPS governance framework should facilitate systematic interaction among these actors through formal coordination platforms, joint planning processes and common accountability mechanisms. Such arrangements are essential to ensure that climate adaptation strategies consider gender and security implications, while WPS frameworks adequately address environmental and climate-related risks.

Second, effective governance requires **stronger vertical integration across governance levels**. The impacts of climate insecurity are often experienced most acutely at local level, yet

policy responses are predominantly designed at national or international levels. Municipal authorities, local governments and community-based organisations frequently serve as first responders to climate-related crises, displacement situations and social tensions. Nevertheless, they remain insufficiently represented within policy formulation processes. A governance framework for the Climate-WPS nexus should therefore institutionalise mechanisms that enable local experiences and knowledge to inform regional and national decision-making. Such an approach would not only improve policy relevance but also strengthen implementation capacities.

Third, governance frameworks must **address the persistent implementation gap** that characterises many policy commitments. A recurring finding across the region is the existence of ambitious strategies that are not accompanied by adequate resources, monitoring systems or institutional incentives. Governance arrangements should therefore incorporate robust accountability mechanisms, including clearly defined mandates, measurable targets and reporting procedures. Monitoring systems should move beyond sector-specific indicators and seek to capture the interconnections between climate resilience, women's participation, social cohesion, and conflict prevention. Developing common indicators would also facilitate comparative learning and support evidence-based policy-making across the region.

A critical dimension of the governance agenda concerns **participation and representation**. The Climate-WPS nexus has frequently emphasised the disproportionate impacts of climate change and insecurity on women and girls. While this remains important, governance discussions must move beyond narratives of vulnerability and place greater emphasis on agency, leadership and decision-making power. Women are not only affected by climate and security risks; they are also central actors in adaptation, natural resource management, mediation, peace-building and community resilience. Their meaningful participation should therefore be considered a governance imperative rather than a social inclusion objective. In this regard, governance frameworks should institutionalise inclusive participation mechanisms that ensure the effective engagement of women's organisations, youth networks, academia, local authorities and civil society actors. Evidence from both climate governance and peace-building processes demonstrates that more inclusive decision-making structures contribute to greater legitimacy, improved policy outcomes and enhanced sustainability of interventions. The challenge is therefore not solely to increase representation but to create conditions under which participation translates into influence over priorities, resource allocation and policy outcomes.

The regional consultations further highlighted the importance of establishing dedicated structures capable of sustaining **cross-sectoral dialogue and knowledge exchange**. The proposed Regional Climate-WPS Network and its thematic working groups constitute one possible entry point for operationalising such an approach. By bringing together policy-makers, practitioners, researchers and civil society representatives around shared thematic priorities, these structures can facilitate the production of evidence, the identification of policy gaps and the diffusion of good practices across the region. Importantly, their value lies not in creating additional layers of bureaucracy but in serving as bridging mechanisms between otherwise disconnected institutional communities.

Ultimately, strengthening governance of the Climate-WPS nexus requires a transition **from fragmented interventions towards a coherent policy ecosystem**. The region does not suffer from a lack of relevant frameworks, strategies or commitments. Rather, the central challenge lies in creating institutional arrangements capable of connecting them. A dedicated governance framework can provide the architecture necessary to align climate adaptation, peace-building and gender equality objectives; facilitate cooperation across governance levels; strengthen accountability; and ensure that those most affected by climate and security challenges are meaningfully involved in shaping responses. In doing so, governance becomes not merely a

technical exercise of coordination but a fundamental condition for building resilience, sustaining peace and advancing gender-responsive climate action across the Euro-Mediterranean region.

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From Vulnerability to Agency:

Advancing the Climate-Women, Peace and Security Nexus

in the Arab Region

Salma Nims, Independent Expert; author of the upcoming UNDP Arab States Guidance Note on the Operationalization of the Gender-Climate-Conflict Nexus

Introduction

The Arab region stands at the intersection of three of the defining challenges of our time: climate change, conflict and insecurity, and persistent gender inequality. While each of these issues has traditionally been addressed through separate policy frameworks, their impacts are deeply interconnected. Climate shocks intensify competition over natural resources, exacerbate socio-economic vulnerabilities, and increase displacement. Conflict weakens institutions, undermines adaptive capacities, and limits access to essential services, and war and occupation degrade land, water and infrastructure. Fragile states are often the most exposed to both and the least able to manage either. Pre-existing gender inequalities, intersecting with age, disability, poverty and displacement, shape how women and men experience these risks, often exposing women and girls to disproportionate burdens while simultaneously limiting their participation in decision-making processes. The result is compounded, gender-differentiated human insecurity that cannot be effectively addressed through siloed interventions alone.

Increasingly, global and regional policy discussions have recognised the importance of the climate-security nexus and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. Yet, despite growing acknowledgment of the links between these domains and emerging frameworks that address the three dimensions − climate, security and gender equality −, the critical gap lies in achieving policy coherence through integrated national planning and implementation.

The forthcoming UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States Guidance Note on the Operationalization of the Gender-Climate-Conflict Nexus[1] offers an important opportunity to bridge these divides. The guidance note's conceptual framework, drawn from a mapping of global and regional literature, models how climate-related events, conflict dynamics, state fragility and gender inequality interact to produce gender-differentiated human insecurity. It highlights how climate change, conflict and gender inequality jointly affect livelihoods, gender roles and care burdens, mobility and displacement, access to services, political participation and personal safety. More importantly, it urges policy-makers to move beyond viewing women solely as victims of climate and conflict crises and instead recognise them as critical actors in peace-building, climate adaptation and resilience-building processes. The guidance note identifies the WPS agenda, climate policies and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) frameworks as possible entry points for operationalising integrated responses to climate change, conflict and gender inequality in the Arab region.

This article draws on the UNDP Guidance Note and focuses on the Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans as one strategic entry point for integrating climate and disaster risks. It

[1] The Guidance Note builds on regional online consultations organised by UNDP during September-October 2025, and the Regional Capacity Workshop and Stakeholder Dialogue on Climate, Women, Peace and Security organised by the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) with UNDP in Amman in November 2025.

examines the policy rationale for integrating climate and disaster risk into WPS frameworks, identifies key implementation gaps, and proposes pathways for advancing policy coherence through governance reform, women's leadership and inclusion, institutional capacity strengthening, improved data systems and sustainable financing.

Understanding the Climate-WPS nexus

The compounded impact of climate change, environmental degradation, disasters and conflict is not experienced equally in the Arab region. Existing gender inequalities influence exposure to these crises, vulnerability, coping strategies and adaptive capacity. Women frequently face unequal access to land, productive resources, technology and decision-making structures. In rural communities, women often shoulder disproportionate responsibilities related to water collection, food provision and care work, burdens that intensify during climate shocks and conflict. Latent tensions linked to unequal access to and control over natural resources and decision-making are intensified by climate pressures. The effects of armed conflict on natural resources and environmental degradation combined with weakened institutions, displacement and insecurity exacerbate gendered vulnerabilities.

The WPS agenda, established through UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions, provides a valuable framework for addressing these challenges. Traditionally focused on women's protection, participation, prevention and relief and recovery in conflict settings, the WPS agenda increasingly recognises that environmental and climate-related risks influence conflict dynamics and human security outcomes. Wider disaster risks have received less attention. Where WPS plans address disasters, the relief and recovery pillar tends to cast women as first responders and as participants in recovery planning, with less emphasis on risk assessment, preparedness, early warning and DRR governance.

This evolution reflects a broader understanding that peace and security cannot be separated from disaster risk preparedness and reduction, environmental sustainability and social inclusion. Climate and disaster-induced displacement, resource scarcity, loss of livelihoods and environmental degradation create conditions that heighten insecurity. At the same time, women play critical roles in managing natural resources, mediating community disputes, promoting social cohesion and leading local adaptation initiatives and disaster response. Their participation is therefore essential not only as a question of equal rights, but also for effective climate resilience and peace-building.

The Climate-WPS nexus thus represents more than a thematic overlap. It offers a framework for understanding how climate and disaster risks interact with conflict dynamics and gender inequality to shape human security, and how gender-responsive approaches can strengthen resilience, prevent conflict and promote sustainable development.

Human security as the connecting framework

One of the most significant contributions of the UNDP Arab States' conceptual framework for advancing the gender, climate and conflict nexus is its emphasis on human security as the central analytical lens. Rather than focusing solely on state security or environmental indicators, human security shifts the attention to how intersecting climate, conflict and gender-related risks shape people's everyday lives, rights, choices and well-being.

The framework identifies six dimensions of gender-differentiated human insecurity:

1. Livelihoods and sustenance insecurity
2. Gender roles related risks
3. Involuntary migration or displacement and (im)mobility
4. Disruption of access to basic and social services
5. Political insecurity
6. Personal safety insecurity

Across these dimensions, climate change and conflict interact in ways that often reinforce existing inequalities. Drought may undermine agricultural livelihoods, forcing migration and increasing unpaid care responsibilities for women. Displacement may reduce access to health and education services while increasing risks of gender-based violence. Environmental degradation may intensify competition over natural resources, affecting social cohesion and local governance structures.

Importantly, the framework also recognises women's agency. Women are not merely affected by these challenges; they are often frontline responders and innovators. Across the Arab region, women contribute to sustainable resource management, community resilience, disaster preparedness, conflict prevention and peace-building initiatives. Recognising and integrating these contributions into formal policy processes represents an essential step toward achieving both gender equality and sustainable peace.

Emerging Climate-WPS practice in the Arab region

Several countries in the Arab region have already begun creating connections between climate action and WPS frameworks, providing valuable lessons for future policy development.

Jordan's WPS National Action Plan governance has brought the Ministry of Environment and the Crisis Management Centre into the plan's steering and technical committees, with gender and climate focal points in its task forces. Its second plan includes an outcome on women's effective participation in decision-making on crisis prevention and response, climate change and emergencies, including natural disasters, epidemics and armed conflict. Lebanon’s second WPS National Action Plan covers disasters, including those caused by climate change, and commits to gender-responsive early warning systems developed with national women’s networks and the Disaster Risk Management Unit. It also provides for aligning the plan with national climate change and natural resource management frameworks. Iraq’s national strategy for women includes a dedicated pillar on climate change, and the government's women's directorate sits on the high-level committee responsible for implementing the NDC and the national adaptation plan. At regional level, the League of Arab States has updated its Regional Strategy on Women, Peace and Security to include climate change.

These examples demonstrate that policy integration is possible. However, they also reveal that efforts remain fragmented and often dependent on project-based interventions rather than systematic institutional arrangements. Most countries lack comprehensive mechanisms that simultaneously address climate change, conflict prevention, disaster risk reduction and gender equality.

The next challenge therefore lies in moving from isolated initiatives towards institutionalised policy coherence, in which WPS National Action Plans integrate climate and disaster risk, align with climate and DRR frameworks, and give women, women-led organisations and local communities meaningful influence over priorities.

Governance challenges and institutional fragmentation

A central obstacle to advancing the Climate-WPS nexus is fragmented governance.

Climate policies, WPS agendas, disaster risk reduction strategies and development planning processes are frequently managed by separate ministries, agencies and coordination mechanisms. Each operates according to distinct mandates, reporting cycles and funding structures. As a result, opportunities for integration are often missed.

Coordination mechanisms, where they exist, frequently rely on ad hoc arrangements and individual leadership rather than institutional mandates. For WPS National Action Plans, this would mean a governance structure led by the national women's machinery, in which environment ministries, disaster risk management authorities and water and agriculture bodies are absent or peripheral. Stakeholder consultations are often conducted without granting participants meaningful influence over policy priorities, resource allocation or implementation decisions. Women's organisations and civil society groups may be consulted, but their participation often remains symbolic.

Participants in regional consultations repeatedly emphasised the absence of shared accountability structures, weak horizontal coordination among ministries and insufficient vertical coordination between national and local levels. Even when environmental, gender and peace-building actors participate in policy discussions, implementation remains constrained by fragmented institutional arrangements.

Addressing these challenges requires high-level governance mechanisms with formal mandates, anchored in executive or legal instruments, to oversee policy coherence across planning, budgeting, monitoring and reporting. Such mechanisms should include national women machineries, ministries responsible for environment, water, agriculture, planning and finance, disaster risk management authorities and security and crisis management institutions, while also ensuring representation of civil society and women's organisations. Governance arrangements must extend beyond consultation and ensure meaningful participation in decision-making, budgeting and monitoring processes. Aligned reporting cycles and parliamentary oversight can strengthen accountability and give these mechanisms greater institutional weight. For WPS National Action Plans, existing steering and technical committees provide a practical entry point for integrating these functions.

Inclusion, women's leadership and local knowledge. Addressing the governance challenge requires institutionalising women's leadership and grassroots contributions. Participation alone is insufficient. Women must be represented in leadership positions where strategic decisions about climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, peace-building priorities and resource allocation are made. Grassroots local knowledge and experience in risk forecasting, natural resources management and climate adaptation is critical for effective policy responses. This shift from participation to substantive influence is essential if integrated policies are to reflect the realities and priorities of affected communities.

Building institutional and technical capacities

Governance reforms alone will not be sufficient without corresponding investments in institutional and technical capacities.

Regional consultations highlighted significant gaps in expertise related to integrated analysis and policy design. While many countries have developed training programmes on either gender

equality or climate adaptation, these topics are often treated separately. Policy-makers, technical experts and frontline practitioners rarely receive training that explicitly addresses the interactions between climate risks, conflict dynamics and gender inequality.

Furthermore, knowledge often remains concentrated among individual experts rather than embedded within institutions. Staff turnover can therefore result in the loss of expertise and institutional memory. Many institutions lack dedicated structures responsible for advancing nexus approaches, while existing gender and climate focal points frequently operate with limited authority and resources.

Strengthening capacities requires action at multiple levels. Governments need technical expertise in gender analysis, climate and disaster risk assessment, conflict sensitivity and integrated planning methodologies. WPS National Action Plan teams, usually anchored in national women's machineries, need access to climate and disaster risk expertise in-house, seconded or through partners. Planning and finance institutions require skills for costing and budgeting priorities coherently across WPS, climate action and DRR frameworks. Civil society organizations need support to translate local knowledge and lived experiences into policy-relevant evidence.

The institutionalisation of knowledge through suitable architecture, capacity development plans, performance systems and cross-sectoral learning platforms is particularly important. Such measures can help ensure that integrated approaches become standard practice rather than isolated initiatives dependent on individual champions.

Data, evidence and the visibility gap

One of the most persistent barriers to advancing the Climate-WPS nexus is the lack of integrated data and evidence.

Although sex-disaggregated data availability has improved in recent years, significant gaps remain. Data is rarely disaggregated by factors such as age, disability, geographic location, socio-economic status or conflict exposure. Different sectors use separate methodologies and reporting systems, making it difficult to conduct integrated analyses or monitor cross-sectoral impacts, especially gender-differentiated ones.

Regional consultations revealed widespread concern about the limited availability of evidence regarding the gendered effects of climate change and conflict. Participants emphasised challenges in measuring climate-related displacement, documenting impacts on livelihoods, and obtaining protection and conflict-related data. They also highlighted the lack of shared terminology and systematic, standardised indicators capable of capturing the multidimensional nature of human insecurity.

Another significant challenge concerns the exclusion of community-generated evidence. Women's organisations, local communities and civil society actors often generate valuable information on environmental risks, conflict dynamics and adaptation practices. Yet this evidence rarely enters official planning and monitoring systems.

Addressing these gaps requires interoperable data systems, shared indicators and integrated monitoring frameworks. National statistical offices, climate authorities, women's machineries and disaster risk management and security institutions should collaborate to develop a shared glossary, common methodologies and reporting standards. Monitoring systems should be organised around the six dimensions of gender-differentiated human insecurity and aligned across WPS, climate and disaster risk reduction frameworks to facilitate evidence-based decision-making.

At the same time, policy processes must recognise local and indigenous knowledge as valid sources of evidence. Incorporating community-generated data can strengthen understanding of emerging risks while enhancing accountability and local ownership.

Financing the Climate-WPS nexus

A major challenge identified throughout regional discussions concerns financing.

Policy commitments on gender equality, climate resilience and peace-building need to be matched by corresponding budget allocations. Integrated planning for the Climate-WPS nexus is still nascent and the adoption of gender responsive budgeting in the region is limited. Financing mechanisms remain fragmented, donor-driven and disconnected from broader governance, planning and budgeting processes. Costing and resource mobilisation frequently occur after policy priorities have already been established, limiting opportunities for integrated planning. Despite that some climate financing mechanisms require gender equality integration, funding that targets climate, peace and security with gender equality as a principal objective amounted to only 0.035% of official development assistance, according to the Secretary-General's 2024 report on WPS.

The transition towards effective Climate-WPS implementation requires more than additional funding. It requires gender and climate-responsive budgets and financing systems specifically designed to support integrated approaches.

Ministries of Finance can play a critical role by introducing budget-tagging systems that track investments across climate, gender, disaster risk reduction and peace-building priorities. Integrated financing frameworks should also encourage coordination between public budgets, climate finance mechanisms, development assistance and private sector investments.

Particular attention must be given to ensuring that funding reaches local actors. Women's organisations, community groups and local governments often play leading roles in adaptation and peace-building initiatives but face significant barriers in accessing finance. Expanding access to localised and inclusive financing mechanisms can strengthen resilience while promoting ownership and sustainability

Conclusion: from policy coherence to transformative action

The Arab region illustrates with particular clarity why climate action, peace-building and gender equality can no longer be pursued as separate policy agendas. Climate change interacts with conflict, displacement and existing inequalities to create complex patterns of gender-differentiated human insecurity that demand integrated responses. Women are often among those most affected, yet they also serve as essential agents of resilience, mediation, mitigation, adaptation and recovery.

The WPS agenda provides a powerful entry point for advancing gender-equitable human security, provided that WPS National Action Plans integrate climate and disaster risk and align with climate policies and DRR strategies. However, realising this potential requires moving beyond rhetorical commitments toward concrete institutional reforms. Governance mechanisms must foster coordination and accountability. Inclusion mechanisms must give women-led and grassroots organisations meaningful influence. Capacity-building efforts must support integrated analysis and implementation. Data systems must generate evidence that reflects lived realities. Financing arrangements must reward policy coherence and support local leadership

Ultimately, the Climate-WPS nexus is not only about managing risks. It is about overcoming structural barriers and transforming development pathways. By placing human security at the centre, recognising women as leaders and grassroots knowledge as critical, policy-makers can build more resilient, peaceful and inclusive societies capable of addressing the interconnected challenges of the 21st century. The opportunity now is to translate emerging political commitments into aligned policy frameworks and sustained action that delivers tangible improvements in the lives of women and communities across the Arab region.

Reconsidering the Climate-WPS Nexus:

Towards a Feminist Intersectional Approach

Susana Galán, Tutku Ayhan and Mariana Walter. Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals (IBEI)

From centring gender to addressing the climate-WPS nexus

Research on climate change in the Euro-Mediterranean region has become increasingly sophisticated in its consideration of the differentiated impact that extreme weather events have on specific populations (Waha et al., 2017; Graus et al., 2024; Ech-charfi & El Abbassi, 2026). In particular, gender has emerged as a central category of analysis, as experts have extensively documented how gender inequalities render women in the region more vulnerable to climate-related crises while, in turn, these exacerbate gender inequalities and vulnerabilities (CARE, 2020; International Organization for Migration, 2024). More recent studies have called attention to the climate-gender-security nexus, illuminating the connection between climate change, conflict, and gender inequality (IEMed, 2025).

These advances have, to some extent, translated into policy. At the national level, references to gender inclusivity or gender mainstreaming increasingly appear in Euro-Mediterranean countries' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), although in many cases these remain at the discursive level and are not properly operationalised, measured, and evaluated (Abou Dagher, 2025; Moneer, 2025). At the regional level, in November 2025 the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) launched the UfM Network of Climate, Women, Peace and Security (WPS), an initiative specifically addressing the climate-WPS nexus.

National and regional efforts to address these questions are, however, undermined by limitations in the existing frameworks, which prioritise women-centred over intersectional approaches, adopt narrow definitions of women's leadership and empowerment, build upon a narrow security frame, and uncritically promote green and blue economies as a win-win solution. These approaches ultimately eschew structural analyses of, and responses to, the power inequalities shaping the climate-WPS nexus.

Blindspots and limitations of the current frameworks

A literature review conducted by Djoudi et al. (2016) on the interaction between climate change and gender concluded that an intersectional analysis had "not yet entered the field." A decade later, not much has changed. While many studies formally adopt a gender lens, the focus is generally on women, often presented as victims of unequal cultural and social structures (Arora-Jonsson, 2011). As a more recent corrective to this focus on vulnerability, women are increasingly celebrated as 'resilient' and called upon as 'agents of change' (Abou Dagher, 2025; Moneer, 2025). This shift is double-edged: First, it represents women as a homogeneous group, erasing how other axes of subordination (class, ethnicity, rurality, etc.) may mitigate or compound their vulnerability (Arora-Jonsson, 2011). Second, it places the burden of responsibility upon individual women instead of addressing the structural factors that create these vulnerabilities in the first place (Arora-Jonsson, 2011).

This is the logic that often animates policies toward women's leadership and empowerment. On the one hand, measures to increase the number of women in decision-making positions ultimately lead to the promotion of particular women (usually upper-class, urban) without necessarily improving the influence of those communities most affected by climate change (usually lower-

class, rural) (Moneer, 2025). On the other hand, women's economic empowerment programmes are often reduced to entrepreneurship initiatives and microcredit schemes, thus placing the burden of income generation and climate mitigation upon women without challenging the unjust political and economic paradigms that perpetuate climate vulnerability (Arora-Jonsson, 2011).

Discussions about the climate-WPS nexus, moreover, rarely interrogate the meaning of security itself. Climate security debates often invoke the idea of climate change as a 'threat multiplier' in relation to armed conflict, political instability, state fragility, resource competition, and cross-border migration. Such language implies a linear relationship in which climatic pressures produce scarcity, displacement, instability, and ultimately conflict. Yet research on the Euro-Mediterranean region demonstrates that these connections are neither automatic nor politically neutral (Selby et al., 2017; Daoudy, 2021).

How security is defined determines which harms become politically visible, whose security is prioritised, and which institutions are authorised to respond. Feminist security scholarship has long questioned approaches that privilege territorial integrity, state stability, and organised political violence while relegating the insecurities experienced in everyday life to the margins. Broadening the notion of security thus requires asking not only what constitutes a threat, but who defines it, from which location, and towards what political purpose (Wibben, 2016, 2018). Cohn and Duncanson's (2023) critique of climate securitisation argues that framing climate primarily through instability, borders and conflict privileges the security concerns of powerful states while shifting attention away from extractive economic systems, historically unequal responsibility for emissions, and the everyday insecurity of populations experiencing ecological loss. Similarly, feminist critiques of WPS have warned that this agenda – originally rooted in feminist peace activism – can become contained within the institutional and militarised conception of security of the UN Security Council (Otto, 2017).

An interrelated matter concerns how green and blue economy initiatives are usually folded into climate-WPS policy frameworks, often presented as win-win pathways to sustainable economic growth, decarbonisation, job creation and, more recently, as an opportunity for women. Current mitigation and adaptation policies tend to reproduce unequal access to, and control over, land and resources, reinforcing an unjust distribution of power and socio-environmental burdens at the intersection of gender, race, class, indigeneity, ethnicity, and age (Hamouchene & Sandwell, 2023).

Herrero (2013, 2015) has criticised green capitalism for reproducing the same structural blindnesses that underpin the dominant economic model: ignorance for humanity's ecodependence (the fact that human economies are embedded in, and bound by, the biophysical limits of a finite planet) and ignorance for interdependence (the fact that all economic activity ultimately relies on unpaid care work sustaining human life). For Herrero, market-based responses to the ecological crisis merely reformulate the same productivist and growth-oriented logic in a decarbonised register, continuing to treat nature as an inexhaustible input and care as a costless externality. What she terms the 'ecosocial crisis' is therefore not simply an environmental or energy crisis, but a crisis of the model of life itself, one that, in her view, cannot be resolved by substituting fossil fuels with renewables while leaving intact the underlying extractive relationship with both ecosystems and reproductive labour (Herrero, 2013). Along similar lines, Pérez Orozco (2014) calls for reorganising the economy around the 'sustainability of life' rather than capital accumulation.

Crucially, more than two-thirds (69%) of extractive projects related to metals and minerals deemed critical for the energy transition are located on or near the lands of indigenous peoples or peasant communities, many of them in the Euro-Mediterranean region (Owen et al., 2022). As Zografos and Robbins (2020) note, the Green New Deal puts severe pressures on lands held by Indigenous and marginalised communities, reshaping their ecologies into 'green sacrifice zones.' Such cost

shifting risks reproducing a form of climate colonialism in the name of a just transition (Hamouchene & Sandwell, 2023).

According to the Environmental Justice Atlas, the extraction of metals and minerals is among the most contentious human activities globally (Scheidel et al., 2020). Pressures to secure access to an unprecedented volume of metals and minerals to supply green growth, decarbonisation, and national security agendas are exacerbating socio-ecological impacts, resistance, and violence (Walter et al., 2025). Conflicts related to the extraction of 'critical' metals and minerals are documented across the Euro-Mediterranean region (Noever Castelos, 2023; Hamouchene, 2023). In these conflicts, local communities and organisations – many led by women, racialised and indigenous groups – mobilise over the unfair distribution of environmental goods (i.e., clean water, clean air, access to fertile land) and environmental burdens (i.e., exposure to pollution), as well as risks and threats to health, livelihoods, territories, and identities (Martínez Alier & O'Connor, 1996; Scheidel et al., 2020).

Toward a redefinition of the Climate-WPS nexus

A feminist intersectional definition of climate-related insecurity should thus encompass not only the possibility of violent conflict but also the erosion of access to water, food, housing, and healthcare; loss of land and livelihoods; increased unpaid care work; deteriorating labour conditions; gender-based violence; forced or constrained mobility; and dispossession associated with environmental and adaptation projects. Such an approach should direct attention toward everyday risks, social reproductive labour, and hidden power relations (Ide et al., 2021). This is the case of Daoudy's (2021) human-environmental-climate security framework, which centres people and locally grounded understandings of security while locating climatic vulnerability within domestic and international structures of inequality. An analysis of the climate-WPS nexus must therefore ask: who controls land and water, who performs additional care work when public services falter, who can afford to migrate, whose mobility is restricted, who works under dangerous conditions, and whose claims to protection are recognised. Climate hazards become insecurity through social and political relations.

As Cohn and Duncanson (2020) argue, climate breakdown forces us to return to the question that initially animated the WPS agenda – how to build a gender just and sustainable peace –, as the sustainability of peace and the sustainability of the planet can no longer be treated as separate objectives. Thus, for them, meaningful implementation of WPS and confrontation of the ecological crisis demand the same transformations in social, political and, especially, economic structures. Echoing ecofeminist approaches, they call for a feminist green transformation that reorients economic activity towards the provisioning of human needs, ecological sustainability, interdependence, and care. Connecting policy silos is insufficient when cooperation remains concentrated among states and elites. Instead, more transformative approaches should centre relationships among communities, gendered subjects, and ecosystems (Hudson, 2025).

From policy integration to structural transformation

A feminist intersectional analysis of the climate-WPS nexus should thus be guided by the integration of feminist security and environmental justice perspectives, along the following lines:

- Broaden the referent of climate security from states to people, communities, and ecosystems, complementing assessments of conflict, instability, and fragility with indicators of everyday security, including food and water access, health, housing, livelihood security,

unpaid care burdens, labour exploitation, gender-based violence, environmental degradation, land and resource dispossession, and mobility.

- Replace generic 'threat multiplier' claims with contextual security pathways. Assessments should identify the intervening institutions and power relations that transform climatic hazards into insecurity, including water and agricultural governance, socioeconomic inequality, labour regimes, conflict histories, displacement policies, and access to public services.
- Integrate climate and WPS frameworks through shared transformative outcomes. Joint indicators across WPS National Action Plans, NDCs, NAPs, and disaster risk reduction frameworks should track changes in substantive conditions, including resource ownership, livelihood security, freedom from violence, time poverty and unpaid care, access to adaptation resources, and influence over environmental decision-making.
- Move from representation to power redistribution. Participation should be understood as a redistribution of authority rather than numerical inclusion. Rural women, displaced and refugee women, women workers, indigenous and minoritised communities, young people, people with disabilities, environmental defenders, and grassroots organisations should participate not simply as beneficiaries or consultees, but in defining which problems constitute insecurity, determining policy priorities, and monitoring their consequences.
- Apply a feminist political economy and environmental justice test to climate interventions themselves. Before labelling an investment, adaptation project, renewable energy scheme or blue economy initiative a climate solution, policy-makers should assess who controls resources, who bears environmental and social costs, whose livelihoods are displaced, which forms of paid and unpaid labour sustain it, and whether benefits remain locally accessible.

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Climate Stress, Livelihood Fragility and Mobility in Conflict-Affected Settings

Sara Rabie, Climate, Peace and Security Specialist, CGIAR

Across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), rising temperatures, increasingly erratic rainfall and declining river flows are placing sustained pressure on rain-fed agriculture, water supply and energy systems. In stable contexts, these pressures are significant but can be managed through public investment, social protection and functioning institutions. In settings affected by protracted conflict, however, they interact with damaged infrastructure, depleted household assets and weakened social cohesion, and their consequences are correspondingly more severe.

This chapter analyses the climate–conflict nexus in fragile settings in the MENA region, using Syria as an illustrative case of how climate stress interacts with food insecurity, livelihood systems and social stability. Syria is emerging from more than a decade of armed conflict while experiencing one of the most severe droughts in its recorded history and receiving large numbers of returning refugees and internally displaced persons. Agricultural recovery is therefore central to the country's broader stabilization (Schapendonk et al., 2025). Southern Iraq is referred to briefly as a point of comparison. The chapter examines climate-induced livelihood stress, mobility pathways, climate stress as a threat multiplier, and the amplification of security risks. It then draws lessons from climate security initiatives and local resilience responses, including innovative agri-food systems and access to climate finance, before setting out policy implications for climate resilience, livelihood protection and peace-support interventions.

Since women and men occupy different roles in agricultural production, water collection, care work and household decision-making, and consequently experience climate shocks in different ways, the analysis integrates a gender perspective throughout. These differences shape who absorbs economic losses, who migrates and who remains, and whose knowledge informs policy responses.

The climate–conflict nexus in fragile MENA settings: climate stress as a threat multiplier

The relationship between climate change and conflict is indirect and context-dependent: climatic shocks seldom generate violence in isolation, but erode the economic, institutional and social buffers that ordinarily prevent grievances from escalating. In fragile MENA settings, four recurrent pathways are relevant (Doumergue and Spencer, 2023):

1. **Livelihood erosion.** Drought and extreme heat reduce crop and livestock yields, lowering rural incomes and raising food prices.
2. **Competition over natural resources.** Declining water availability and degraded pasture intensify disputes between communities, between upstream and downstream users, and between farmers and pastoralists.
3. **Mobility as a coping strategy.** Where local adaptation fails, households send members to urban centers or abroad, placing pressure on host areas and altering household structures.
4. **Erosion of state legitimacy.** Authorities unable to ensure access to water, bread or fuel lose public confidence, creating space for armed groups and criminal networks.

Each of these pathways can be observed in the region's fragile and conflict-affected states: in Yemen, ongoing conflict has reduced communities' adaptive capacity and worsened the mismanagement of natural resources, while climate pressures have been linked to local conflicts over access to them; in Iraq, protesters took to the streets of Baghdad in July 2023 to denounce water and electricity shortages (Doumergue and Spencer, 2023). In southern Iraq, irrigation shortages have also contributed to tribal disputes, with one local estimate attributing approximately 10% of ongoing tribal disputes to water scarcity (Al Hasan, 2020). In Libya, the collapse of two ageing dams during Storm Daniel in September 2023 devastated the city of Derna, exposing both climate vulnerability and the consequences of poor governance and mismanagement by two rival administrations; the divided response also partially excluded refugees and migrants from government support (Iversen et al., 2024). In each case, the severity of climate impacts reflects the condition of the institutions that mediate them.

The role of the 2006–2010 drought in the lead-up to Syria's 2011 uprising remains contested. Anthropogenic warming increased the likelihood of that drought, and the resulting agricultural decline and rural-to-urban migration have been linked to the grievances underlying the uprising (Kelley et al., 2015). The evidence for a direct causal link is nonetheless weak, and state repression, water mismanagement and the withdrawal of agricultural subsidies played at least as significant a role (Selby et al., 2017).

For policy purposes, climate stress is best treated as one factor among several, whose effects are mediated by governance. This chapter therefore examines climate, livelihoods, mobility and security as interconnected rather than separate domains.

Climate-induced livelihood stress: the case of Syria

In 2025, Syria experienced one of its worst droughts in nearly 40 years. Wheat production was estimated at between 0.9 and 1.1 million tonnes, implying a shortfall of 2.73 million tonnes that could leave more than 16 million people facing difficulties in accessing food (FAO Syria, 2025).

Pressures on agricultural livelihoods

The drought struck a sector that had long sustained Syria's rural population but had already been severely weakened. Before the war, 42.6% of Syrians lived in rural areas, agri-food value chains supported just under half of the population, and the sector accounted for around a third of the country's exports (Schapendonk et al., 2025).

Irrigation networks, bakeries and storage facilities were damaged, farming households were displaced, and seed and livestock reserves were depleted. The discontinuation of fuel subsidies in formerly government-held areas after December 2024 further increased the cost of groundwater pumping. A drought that would have been damaging under any circumstances therefore affected agricultural systems with very limited remaining capacity to absorb shocks (Schapendonk et al., 2025).

These pressures have coincided with a contraction of humanitarian support: in May 2026, with 7.2 million people in acute food insecurity, the World Food Programme (WFP) reduced emergency food assistance from 1.3 million to 650,000 beneficiaries and suspended bread support nationwide (Enab Baladi, 2026b).

Gendered impacts

The burden of livelihood loss falls unevenly between women and men. During the 2021–2022 drought, the worst in seventy years in northeast Syria, the collapse of agricultural employment and rising prices obliged entire families to seek income. Nearly 60% of the women interviewed in rural Al-Hassakeh and Ar-Raqqa reported working longer hours than before the drought, while men did not take on a corresponding share of domestic work: among 264 people interviewed, no man reported helping with cooking and only 1% with cleaning. Water scarcity added further to women's workload at home, reducing household hygiene and contributing to skin disease among children, and women faced both increased harassment at work and rising, at times violent, tension within the household over water use. Widows and women whose male relatives had migrated, been detained or gone missing were the most exposed, and those without support were often obliged to bring young children with them to work (Laughlin and Barnes, 2022).

These pressures rest on long-standing structural inequalities. Women continue to carry a significant share of care and domestic responsibilities, while final decisions over land and productive resources are typically taken by men. Limited representation in agricultural cooperatives and water-user associations, and barriers to credit, restrict women’s capacity to invest in recovery or adapt their farming practices (ACTED, 2026; Kaltenpoth et al., 2026).

Implications for social stability

Livelihood loss affects social stability through several channels, of which the first is competition over water and land. In Douma, Rural Damascus, over 95% of the farming households assessed suffered crop losses during the 2025–2026 drought and 98% saw their incomes fall. Over a third experienced increased community tensions, particularly over access to water, with a small but significant number of families considering relocation (Syria Community Consortium, 2026).

Large-scale return constitutes a second channel, placing strain on services and host communities: by July 2026, more than 3.5 million Syrians had returned since December 2024, and 91% of surveyed returnees found essential services missing on arrival (Alloush and Azeez, 2026). Where water, housing and employment are scarce, returnees and residents compete for the same limited resources.

Perceptions of fairness in resource governance also matter: the agricultural stability zones introduced in 1975 are now widely seen as inequitable, and young people and women remain largely excluded from recovery discussions (Kaltenpoth et al., 2026). Where recovery is perceived as unequal, it risks reproducing the grievances it seeks to address.

Mobility pathways

Since December 2024, the dominant direction of mobility in Syria has shifted towards return. By March 2026, more than 1.5 million refugees and 1.8 million internally displaced persons had returned, while 5.5 million people remained internally displaced and 15.6 million required humanitarian assistance (UNHCR, 2026). These returns are taking place within a fragile system with limited capacity to absorb them.

Southern Iraq offers a comparison of how slow-onset climate displacement can become entrenched: as of 14 November 2021, drought conditions had left 3,031 families displaced across five southern governorates. Of the 122 recorded displacement locations, 73% were urban (IOM, 2021).

Three mobility pathways are of particular relevance for policy:

- **Distress migration.** Young men typically migrate first, leaving women to assume additional responsibility for agricultural work, household finances and decision-making, often without secure land tenure or access to credit. In the Iraqi marshes, women are left to shoulder greater responsibilities when men leave for urban employment (Al-Bahbahanee, 2021).
- **Return into climate stress.** A significant proportion of Syrian returnees are returning to farmland and water systems that can no longer sustain previous livelihoods. In the absence of water and employment, return may prove temporary and lead to secondary displacement.
- **Immobility.** The poorest households may lack the resources to move at all and remain in place while progressively depleting their assets. These trapped populations are rarely captured in mobility data.

The outcome of each pathway is also shaped by gender. A 2025 assessment reported that female-headed households accounted for almost one third of Syrian households and were particularly likely to struggle to meet nutritional needs. It also highlighted the absence of clear mechanisms for displaced persons to reclaim housing, land and property (Schapendonk et al., 2025). Access to land frequently determines whether return is sustainable. Climate-sensitive return and reintegration planning should therefore address women's land rights and access to agricultural inputs as integral components.

Security risk amplification

Contested water infrastructure

Control over water infrastructure has become a source of strategic leverage, particularly along the Euphrates. In December 2024 and January 2025, Turkish-backed factions and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) fought for control of the Tishreen dam near Manbij, a major source of hydroelectric power for surrounding communities (The New Arab, 2025).

The Alouk water station, the principal source of drinking water for al-Hasakah governorate, illustrates how conflict compounds water insecurity. It was entirely out of service from June 2021, owing to security disputes, power outages and damage to conveyance lines, and resumed operation only in July 2026. Approximately one million people were exposed to water shortages and households had to purchase water from private tankers (Enab Baladi, 2026a).

Livelihood loss and recruitment

Research published in 2016 identified loss of income, the need to regain a sense of purpose and dignity, and a perceived duty to protect or avenge as factors drawing young Syrians into armed and extremist groups (International Alert, 2016).

Repeated climate shocks and agricultural collapse add to economic precarity, pushing young people towards informal work, migration and, in some areas, armed groups (Kaltenpoth et al., 2026).

Alternative sources of income, access to positive social groups and institutions, and avenues for non-violent civic engagement can reduce young people's involvement with armed groups (International Alert, 2016).

Negative coping strategies and their gendered costs

Where income declines and migration is not feasible, households adopt coping strategies that compromise their future resilience. In Douma, Rural Damascus, households have resorted to selling assets and cutting essential spending, while many farmers have abandoned cultivation because of water scarcity and inputs costs (Syria Community Consortium, 2026).

Coping strategies also carry gendered costs. Early marriage has in some cases been used as a coping or protection strategy during periods of heightened vulnerability. Women, children and persons with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to nutritional stress as households reduce food consumption (ACTED, 2026).

Return, land and property disputes

Unresolved housing, land and property claims can undermine sustainable return (Syria HLP Technical Working Group, 2026). Women face systematic barriers, including lack of documentation, exclusion from inheritance and weak enforcement of existing protections, which deprive them of secure tenure and, consequently, of the ability to farm (Schapendonk et al., 2025).

Lessons from climate security initiatives and local resilience responses

International and local responses in Syria are gradually shifting from emergency relief towards recovery and adaptation, and current experience yields four sets of lessons.

Climate security initiatives

A climate–peace nexus programme in Deir ez-Zor and Hassakeh, planned for October 2023-October 2026 with a budget of approximately EUR 4 million, was implemented to combine water-system rehabilitation, community agricultural committees and climate-smart agriculture and solar-powered irrigation with Do No Harm training and dialogue sessions on conflict analysis (World Vision, 2026). A further lesson is that programming should also assess whether short-term responses, such as the proliferation of solar-powered wells, create longer-term groundwater pressures (Kaltenpoth et al., 2026).

Innovative agri-food systems

Recovery depends on rebuilding the knowledge systems that support farmers. Drought-resistant seeds, Farmer Field Schools and Farmer Business Schools and early warning systems offer ways to rebuild this capacity. Targeted support is needed so that wealthier farmers do not gain a first-mover advantage while poorer smallholders are left behind (Schapendonk et al., 2025).

Under the Syria Resilience Initiative, replacing diesel pumps with solar irrigation released women farmers from watching engines throughout the growing season, reducing the time and cost of irrigation and allowing them to devote more time to their families. Its experience indicates that such benefits can reach women when they are targeted directly rather than through male heads of household (CARE International UK, 2024).

Accessible climate finance

A Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) analysis covering 2015-2021 found markedly unequal access to adaptation assistance: small island developing states received over USD 100 per person annually, whereas many conflict-affected countries received less than USD 1 (Meijer and Ahmad, 2024). The approval of Syria's first Green Climate Fund project in July 2026 is therefore significant. The USD 27.7 million WATER-RES project, implemented by ACTED with the Ministry of Local Administration and Environment, targets the Barada and Awaj basins that supply Damascus and surrounding agricultural communities. It aims to reach approximately 198,620 people directly and 1.5 million indirectly, and is accompanied by a gender assessment and gender action plan (Green Climate Fund, 2026).

Diaspora capital is a further, largely untapped resource: globally, only around 5% of an estimated USD 450 billion in annual remittances is used for agricultural purposes in rural areas, which points to considerable potential for mobilising Syria's diaspora in support of agricultural recovery (Schapendonk et al., 2025).

Local resilience responses

In Raqqa and Al-Hasakah, the French-funded SABIR resilience project links water and electricity infrastructure, support to farmers and microenterprises, and women's economic and social empowerment (Expertise France, 2024). At basin level, Water Basin Management Committees existed in Syria before the conflict but in practice often remained inactive (Schapendonk et al., 2025); reconstituting them would help promote sustainable collective water use.

Channelling resources through local structures can strengthen both resilience and social cohesion, provided that assistance does not favour particular groups, and deliberate measures are needed to include those most often excluded. Female-headed households, herders and rain-fed farming communities face particularly the steepest barriers to recovery (Kaltenpoth et al., 2026).

Policy implications

Agricultural recovery can generate rapid peace dividends through food security, employment and economic revitalisation, provided that land, water and ecosystem rehabilitation are approached through equitable, gender-transformative and nature-positive solutions (Schapendonk et al., 2025).

Women's participation and WPS commitments

Syria has no published UNSCR 1325 national action plan, and the current transition therefore presents an opportunity to develop Women, Peace and Security (WPS) commitments in conjunction with climate and recovery policy, rather than integrating them retrospectively.

The transition has so far offered limited grounds for confidence: ambiguous provisions in the March 2025 constitutional declaration could be used to restrict women's freedoms on grounds of “public order and morality”, and the first transitional cabinet included only one woman (Asad, 2025). In the new People's Assembly, women hold 21 or 22 seats, approximately 10% of the total, compared with a peak of 13.2% in 2016 (Alabi, 2026). At the local level, women in Eastern Ghouta manage water within households but remain under-represented in formal water governance; irrigation scheduling and allocation decisions are predominantly made by men (ACTED, 2026).

Gaps in the evidence

The principal challenge in Syria is a mismatch between what is measured and what is relevant to women's livelihoods and mobility. Substantial data exist on harvests, river levels and returns, but considerably less is known about who is affected.

Published return figures provide limited information on how many returnees resume agricultural activity, how many returning households are headed by women, or whether these women can reclaim their land. Qualitative evidence of women's experience should be collected systematically and incorporated into policy design (ACTED, 2026; Schapendonk et al., 2025).

Climate resilience

1. Treat climate resilience as a precondition for sustainable return, prioritising water, irrigation and farm recovery in areas receiving large numbers of returnees.
2. Reconstitute basin water management committees, enforce restrictions on illegal well drilling and assess the long-term groundwater impact of solar-powered irrigation.
3. Close the per-person climate finance gap for conflict-affected settings by simplifying access, accepting local and non-state implementing partners, and blending humanitarian, development and climate funding. Syria's first GCF project should be documented as a learning case.
4. Collect sex-disaggregated data on water access, harvests and returns, and fund systematic qualitative evidence from affected communities.

Livelihood protection

5. Use drought early warning to trigger anticipatory cash, seed and fodder support before harvests fail.
6. Rebuild agricultural extension services and Farmer Field Schools, and target credit for climate-smart technologies at smallholders.
7. Reach women farmers directly with inputs, solar irrigation and credit, and track the share of adaptation finance that reaches them.
8. Protect women's housing, land and property rights so that female-headed households can return to farming.
9. Develop mechanisms that reduce the risk of diaspora investment in agriculture and rural enterprises.

Peace-support interventions

10. Treat water infrastructure as critical civilian infrastructure in ceasefire monitoring, mediation and humanitarian negotiations.
11. Include water, land and grazing rights in mediation and local dispute resolution, and train women mediators to work on these conflicts.

12. Develop a climate–peace–security assessment for Syria during the transition.
13. Design climate projects to be conflict-sensitive, mapping who controls water and land before investing and using inclusive water committees to prevent new disputes.
14. Support a first Syrian 1325 national action plan that addresses water, land, livelihoods and return.

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Conflicts in a Warming World: Women's Role

to Conflict Mediation and Economic Security, and Sustaining Peace

Nayera Cherif, Nouran Mahran and Nour El Kouny

Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding (CCCPA)

Natural resources have long been both a source of livelihoods and economic development and a driver of instability in conflict-affected settings. Competition over land, water, forests, minerals, and energy resources has increasingly become intertwined with climate change, environmental degradation, weak governance, and insecurity. Where climate change intensifies resource scarcity through prolonged droughts, desertification, declining agricultural productivity, and water stress, it can exacerbate existing social, political, and economic grievances and increase the risk of violence. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) 2009 assessment reported that more than 40% of intrastate conflicts in the preceding six decades had been associated with the exploitation or control of natural resources, while countries experiencing resource-related conflicts are significantly more likely to relapse into conflicts within five years of signing a peace agreement (Matthew et al., 2009; Rustad and Binningsbø, 2012). At the same time, the International Committee of the Red cross (ICRC) reported in 2020 that 12 of the world's 20 countries most vulnerable to climate change were also affected by armed conflict, illustrating the overlapping nature of climate insecurity and violent conflict (ICRC, 2020, p. 10).

These dynamics are particularly evident across the Mediterranean region, where climate change is accelerating environmental stress in one of the world's fastest warming regions. Rising temperatures, declining rainfall, prolonged droughts, desertification, and increasing water scarcity are placing unprecedented pressure on already fragile ecosystems and livelihoods. The southern and eastern Mediterranean are especially vulnerable, with several countries simultaneously facing protracted conflicts, political instability, economic crises, and severe climate impacts. In contexts such as Syria, Libya, and Iraq, competition over water resources, agricultural land, and strategic infrastructure has increasingly intersected with existing governance challenges and social grievances, contributing to displacement, local tensions, and weakened community resilience. While climate change rarely acts as the sole driver of conflict, it functions as a "threat multiplier" that intensifies existing vulnerabilities and places additional strain on already fragile institutions responsible for managing natural resources.

These impacts are not experienced equally. Women and girls often bear a disproportionate share of the consequences because pre-existing gender inequalities shape both their exposure to insecurity and their capacity to cope with environmental and economic shocks. Across many conflict-affected communities, women are primarily responsible for securing water, collecting fuelwood, producing food, and sustaining household livelihoods. As natural resources become scarcer due to climate change or become inaccessible because of conflict, these responsibilities become increasingly difficult and dangerous. Women are often forced to travel longer distances to access water, firewood, or grazing areas, exposing them to greater risks of violence, exploitation, and insecurity while simultaneously reducing opportunities for education, income generation, and participation in public life (UNEP et al., 2013).

Natural resource-based conflicts also reinforce structural inequalities related to land ownership and resource governance. In many societies, women's access to land is mediated through male relatives or customary tenure arrangements rather than legally protected ownership. Armed conflict frequently disrupts these systems through displacement, the death or disappearance of male household members, or the collapse of local governance institutions. Consequently, many women lose access to productive land and other natural resources precisely when they become solely responsible for supporting their families (UNEP et al., 2013).

One of the most severe consequences of natural resource-related conflict is the increased prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV), including conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). Competition over natural resources frequently coincides with weakened rule of law, displacement,

militarisation, and the proliferation of armed actors, creating environments in which violence against women and girls becomes widespread. Sexual violence is often deliberately employed as a tactic of war to terrorise communities, force displacement, punish perceived opponents, or consolidate control over strategically important territories and resources (UN Secretary-General, 2025).

Resource scarcity itself can expose women to additional protection risks. The need to travel farther to collect water, fuelwood, or agricultural products can force women and girls to move through isolated or contested areas where they may encounter armed groups or criminal actors. Humanitarian organisations have consistently documented increased incidents of sexual violence associated with journeys to access essential natural resources, particularly in displacement settings. Recent United Nations reporting continues to document thousands of verified cases of conflict-related sexual violence annually, while recognizing that actual numbers remain significantly underreported.

Displacement represents another major consequence of natural resource-based conflicts with profound gender implications. Environmental degradation, declining livelihoods, and violent competition over scarce resources can combine to force communities to migrate within and across national borders. Women and girls often experience displacement differently from men due to unequal access to financial resources, legal documentation, productive assets, and decision-making power. Displaced women frequently assume primary responsibility for sustaining households while simultaneously facing heightened risks of exploitation, trafficking, early marriage, and gender-based violence UNHCR, 2025).

The interaction between resource scarcity and insecurity also creates favourable conditions for the expansion of criminal networks and armed groups. In many fragile settings, weak governance over natural resources enables militias, extremist organisations, and transnational criminal networks to exploit valuable commodities to finance their activities. Women and girls experience the consequences of this criminalisation in multiple ways, including forced labour, trafficking, sexual violence, and exclusion from natural resource governance and livelihood opportunities (Matthew et al., 2009).

These gender-related impacts demonstrate that natural resource-related conflicts are not solely environmental or security challenges but also governance and development challenges requiring gender-responsive approaches. Traditional conflict prevention and natural resource management strategies have often overlooked how gender norms shape access to resources, exposure to violence, and resilience to climate-related shocks. Recognsing these interlinkages has become increasingly important within international policy frameworks. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2020) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and subsequent resolutions emphasise the importance of women's meaningful participation in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and post-conflict recovery (UN Security Council, 2020). More recently, growing attention to the Climate, Peace and Security agenda, including the COP27 Presidency's Climate Responses for Sustaining Peace (CRSP) Initiative, has underscored the need to address climate adaptation, natural resource governance, and peacebuilding through integrated and gender-responsive approaches.

While women and girls often bear the heaviest consequences of natural resource scarcity, environmental degradation, and conflict, they should not be viewed solely through the lens of vulnerability. Across the Mediterranean and beyond, women have consistently demonstrated leadership in managing natural resources, mediating community disputes, preserving traditional environmental knowledge, and strengthening resilience despite operating in highly constrained environments. Yet these contributions remain insufficiently recognised within formal peace processes and natural resource governance institutions. Advancing durable peace in climate-affected settings therefore requires moving beyond protection-oriented responses towards approaches that recognise women as leaders, mediators, and agents of change.

Women's agency and environmental peacebuilding

The field of environmental peacebuilding offers an approach to addressing the climate, peace and security nexus. This area of peacebuilding examines the environmental impact of armed conflicts, the role of natural resources in triggering violence, and the potential for peacemaking provided by cooperation over mutual interests in governing natural resources (Ide et al., 2021). The evolution of this field stemmed from a lack of provisions and approaches in peacebuilding efforts that specifically address issues pertaining to natural resource management. This is further compounded by a lack of gender-sensitive programming in this regard, especially disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration programming linked to livelihoods that often exclude provisions for the reintegration of female ex-combatants (UNEP et al., 2013). Evidence from the field has, on the other hand, showcased how women have played a vital role in natural resource management and peace negotiations in this context. Gendered dynamics in conflict settings can give women a larger role in natural resource management, which can support their empowerment and strengthen their intrinsic role in post-conflict recovery. Their participation can also support more equitable and inclusive in access to natural resources. Yet, they are far from realising their full potential as they continue to be excluded from peace processes to this day, where reports highlight that nine out of ten peace negotiations are male-only, while two-thirds of peace mediation efforts do not include any woman (UN News, 2025). Such exclusion perpetuates harmful gender structures and restricts women's leadership in peacebuilding and natural resource management (Ensor et al., 2022).

Women mediators in conflict-affected settings that are also subject to climate-related risks are essential for durable peace. Their meaningful participation can support inclusive decision-making processes in natural resource management and ensure inclusive and holistic approaches that effectively address root causes of disputes and conflicts (Papastavrou, 2025). Zooming in on the Mediterranean region, research shows how women play a central role in natural resource management and conserving biodiversity, particularly in the southern and eastern regions. Examples from Algeria and Lebanon showcase women's unique traditional knowledge of a diverse array of crops, including wild plants, and their use in medicinal, culinary, and aromatic purposes (Sisto and Furst, 2019). They have also demonstrated the ability to address security issues and mediate conflicts over water access, as was the case with the Syrian Centre for Women's Empowerment when they organised a campaign against the proliferation of small arms in a camp for internally displaced people when violence broke out over access to water resources (de Silva et al. 2018).

The CCCPA training experience

These experiences underscore the importance of integrating gender-responsive and community-based approaches into broader peace and security frameworks, particularly in contexts affected by climate change. Building on this recognition, the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding (CCCPA) has progressively integrated climate, peace, and security into its capacity-building, convening and research programmes. Through these efforts, the Center supports governments, regional organisations, and practitioners in better understanding and responding to the complex ways in which climate change affects peace and security. Its approach emphasises integrated, context-specific solutions that strengthen resilience, enhance conflict prevention, and support nationally owned responses to climate-related risks.

A key focus of CCCPA's work has been strengthening the capacity of national governments and practitioners to better assess and respond to climate change and its multifaceted consequences

in an early and preventive manner to mitigate climate-related risks and build the resilience of affected communities and peace, development and humanitarian actors. Through its national an regional training programmes, the Center equips participants with gender-sensitive risk and resilience analysis tools to analyse the complexity and interconnectedness of climate change and its associated implications, while accounting for the specific needs and experiences of the full spectrum of society. The programmes cover the science of climate change, the links between climate, peace, and security, and approaches to conducting conflict-sensitive and gender-responsive climate risk and resilience assessments.

Moreover, recognising that climate change affects women and men differently, and that women are often at the forefront of managing natural resources, resolving community disputes, and building resilience, CCCPA has placed a particular emphasis on strengthening the role of women in climate-related peacebuilding. One of its key initiatives in this area was a regional training programme held on 1-3 October 2023, titled ***"Women Mediating Access to Resources in Climate-Affected Contexts,"*** organised in partnership with the Secretariat of the League of Arab States (LAS), Department of Social Affairs, with the support of the UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States (ROAS). The programme builds on the long-standing collaboration between CCCPA and LAS to strengthen the Arab Women Mediators Network (AWMN) and support the meaningful participation of women in mediation and peace processes across the region (CCCPA, 2023).

The training was developed in response to the growing recognition that climate change is placing increasing pressure on land, water, and other natural resources, creating new sources of tension while deepening existing vulnerabilities. It aimed to equip members of the Arab Women Mediators Network with the needed skills and knowledge to enable them to advance gender and climate sensitive approaches to resource-based conflict mediation towards sustainable peace and development.

Designed around interactive discussions, practical exercises, and regional case studies, the programme explored how climate change and environmental degradation can fuel conflict, examined the gender dimensions of climate insecurity, and introduced participants to approaches for mediating disputes over natural resources. Through scenario-based exercises, participants applied conflict analysis and mediation tools to real-world climate-security challenges, aiming to strengthen their ability to facilitate dialogue and support peaceful solutions in climate-affected communities.

Beyond its focus on individual skills, the programme is intended to contribute to broader regional efforts to advance the WPS agenda and strengthen climate, peace and security efforts. It aims to support the implementation of UNSCR 1325 by promoting women's meaningful participation in mediation and peacebuilding, while also contributing to the implementation of the COP27 Presidency's CRSP initiative, particularly its focus on strengthening capacities to address the links between climate change and conflict.

Policy implications

increasing pressure on water, land, and other natural resources can heighten competition over natural resources, displacement and conflict risks, particularly where conflict and fragile institutions constrain responses. Pre-existing inequalities shape women’s exposure and capacity to cope (Ngcamu, 2023). Policies should therefore move beyond viewing women solely through the lens of vulnerability and instead recognise them as key agents in managing natural resources, mediating local disputes, and building peace and resilience.

Looking ahead, climate, peace, and security need to be addressed in a more integrated way across national policies and planning processes. Bringing these issues into climate adaptation strategies, peacebuilding efforts, and National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security

(WPS) can help governments anticipate risks, strengthen resilience, and prevent crises before they escalate (Ryan and Martín de Almagro, 2024).

Governments should integrate gender-responsive climate security considerations into National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) as well as National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). This includes recognising how unequal access to land, water, livelihoods, finance, and decision-making can increase vulnerability while also identifying the capacities and contributions of women in building resilience. Paying particular attention to women facing multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage, such as displaced women, female-headed households, Indigenous women, and women with disabilities, would support more equitable and context-responsive policies (Dazé and Hunter, 2024).

At the same time, stronger coordination across government institutions is essential. Climate-related challenges cut across the responsibilities of ministries responsible for water, environment, agriculture, migration, gender, and security, yet responses often remain fragmented. Better coordination would help ensure that policies are mutually reinforcing and that adaptation measures contribute to social cohesion rather than unintentionally increasing competition over scarce resources (IPCC, 2022).

There is also a strong case for investing in women's leadership. Creating more opportunities for women to participate in natural resource governance, climate planning, and local mediation processes would not only advance gender equality but also improve the quality and sustainability of these efforts. The goal should not simply be to increase women's representation, but to ensure they have a meaningful voice and the support needed to influence outcomes.

Climate adaptation programmes should also adopt a stronger conflict-sensitive approach. Investments in water management, agriculture, or ecosystem restoration can improve resilience, but if they fail to consider local power dynamics and unequal access to resources, they may unintentionally create new grievances. Incorporating conflict and gender analysis into the design of climate programmes can help ensure that adaptation efforts reduce tensions while supporting more equitable access to resources.

Moreover, monitoring and evaluation frameworks should incorporate gender-sensitive indicators that capture not only environmental and adaptation outcomes but also the social and governance dimensions of resilience. In addition to tracking women's participation in decision-making, these frameworks should assess the quality and influence of that participation, as well as women's access to and control over natural resources, productive assets, climate finance, and livelihood opportunities. Indicators should also measure women's leadership in local governance and peacebuilding processes, perceptions of safety and security, and the equitable distribution of adaptation benefits across different social groups. Strengthening gender-responsive monitoring systems would generate a more robust evidence base for evaluating whether climate policies are effectively reducing inequalities, enhancing resilience, and supporting inclusive and sustainable peace (Gumucio et al., 2022).

Finally, continued investment in capacity building remains critical. Governments, local authorities, civil society organisations, and community leaders need practical tools to understand how climate change interacts with conflict, governance, and gender inequality. Strengthening capacities in climate-security risk analysis, natural resource mediation, and gender-responsive policymaking will help institutions anticipate emerging risks and develop more integrated responses (Wong, 2023).

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From Local Knowledge to Regional Influence:

Women and Youth Shaping the Climate–Peace–Security Nexus

Shirine Jurdi, Core Group Member, MENA Feminist Task Force; MENA Women and Gender Constituency (WGC); Co-Lead Peace and Demilitzarization Working Group (WGC); WPS–Climate Nexus Initiative, Elbarlament NGO

Women and youth in selected Southern Mediterranean contexts and neighbouring areas are already leading work that connects climate action with peace, security, justice and human security, although they do not necessarily call it climate peacebuilding. The work reported in this mapping covers water, food security, agriculture, environmental protection, livelihoods, renewable energy, disaster risk reduction, displacement, social cohesion, climate justice, peacebuilding and, in some cases, militarisation and disarmament.

The mapping treats climate peacebuilding as an analytical lens rather than a fixed category into which respondents must fit. Women and youth should not have to use Women, Peace and Security (WPS) or climate–peace terminology before their knowledge is recognised. Institutions also have a responsibility to translate lived experience into evidence, policy and financing.

The leading barriers reported by survey respondents were lack of funding (44), weak participation in decision-making (32) and lack of training (28). Their leading priorities for support from the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) were training and capacity building (43), funding and small grants (37), leadership and decision-making (17), green entrepreneurship (17), support to local initiatives (16), and water and food security (15).

The findings highlight existing leadership by women and youth in the contexts covered by the study. A central gap is the infrastructure that carries leadership from local action into evidence, policy influence, negotiation and decision-making.

Main objective

The objective of this mapping is to explore how women and youth across the Euro-Mediterranean region understand, contribute to and lead climate action and climate peacebuilding; identify the leadership roles, practices, barriers, partnerships and enabling factors shaping their engagement; and generate evidence-based policy recommendations to strengthen inclusive climate governance and decision-making within the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM).

Methodology and limitations

The study combines an exploratory survey of 67 respondents, 11 key informant interviews (KIIs) and a review of relevant regional and international research and policy material. The survey was conducted between 10 and 14 September 2026, and the KIIs between 5 and 14 September 2026.

The survey explored areas of work, understanding of climate–peace/security links, forms of leadership, barriers, partnerships and priorities for UfM support. The KIIs explored these themes in greater depth, including climate peacebuilding practices, influence on decision-making, challenges facing women peacebuilders and environmental defenders, and care work.

Survey respondents came from Syria, Libya, Egypt, Tunisia, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Morocco, Algeria and Western Sahara. The sample included 56 women, eight men and three respondents who preferred not to answer. The survey is not statistically representative, with 34 responses from Syria. Six respondents were aged 18–24, so evidence from this age group is more limited. The KIIs provide contextual depth but do not represent every country or organisation in the region.

The work exists before the terminology

The interviews caution against treating “climate peacebuilding” as a settled concept. Hala Kilani, with more than 15 years of experience, questioned the term itself and argued that deliberate conflict prevention linked to climate impacts remains rare in the Middle East. Yet her own work addresses climate-related conflict and migration through diplomacy, evidence, media, narratives and advocacy. She also stressed the practical side of participation: women and environmental defenders need preparation and safety guidance before entering hostile environments, and care and travel costs should be built into project budgets.

The survey reflects a lived understanding of the nexus. Respondents most often linked climate and peace/security to poverty and unemployment (27), water scarcity (25), food security (23), economic instability (21), displacement and migration (19), pollution (16), resource conflicts (13), and natural disasters (12)**.** Armed conflict was selected by seven.

Noura Abdelwahab describes the nexus through environmental degradation, resource scarcity, inequality, displacement and conflict, particularly around water, food and livelihoods. Her work includes gender-responsive approaches to climate vulnerability and adaptation, National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), displacement and the connection between environmental degradation and gender-based violence (GBV) in conflict-affected contexts. She also points to the need for protection to be treated structurally, through safer reporting, legal frameworks and gender-responsive climate and security policy.

Luna Almalla describes climate action in Syria through water, food, livelihoods and displacement, but also through cooperation, resilience and rebuilding trust. Cherifa Kheddar in Algeria frames climate peace as climate justice combined with human security, connecting water, agricultural land, energy, food security, fires and migration. In Libya, Ghmera Krekshi connects floods, rising temperatures and water scarcity with displacement and changing social and economic relations.

The lesson is simple: the experience comes first, the terminology second.

Leadership starts locally, but the evidence has to travel

The survey shows leadership concentrated in awareness raising, training, project implementation, community initiatives, advocacy and research. The examples below show that the local level is not the end of leadership. It is where much of the knowledge is produced.

Only two survey respondents reported negotiation or policy-position work.

In Lebanon, Imane Nasreddine Assaf describes Ahla Fawda through EcoHub, Green Heroes, EcoCurrency, women and youth programmes, and art and public-space initiatives, connecting environmental action with dignity, inclusion and resilience. Her partnerships include municipalities, universities, NGOs, UN agencies, the Agence Française de Développement (AFD), Alfanar, UN Women, the American University of Beirut (AUB), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the British Council and a business network around Green Heroes. These relationships create opportunities for training, mentorship and community action while allowing local experience to travel beyond the neighbourhood.

Nathaly Khoury works through participatory learning, stakeholder mapping and the climate-peace-security work of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), linking adaptation with finance, resource efficiency, youth participation and environmental justice. She stresses the importance of mapping actors outside traditional climate circles, connecting local actors with ministries and providing continuous coaching rather than one-off training. She also highlights the absence of a durable national mechanism for meaningful women’s and youth participation.

In Syria, Almalla works through Syrian Climate Pioneers, the Local Conference of Youth (LCOY) in Syria and the Regional Conference of Youth for the Middle East and North Africa (RCOY MENA), connecting youth climate action and environmental education with national and regional policy discussions. In Algeria, Kheddar and Djazairouna document wildfire impacts on women and connect them to water, climate-resilient seeds, energy justice and access to climate finance.

In Libya, Krekshi describes reactivating rural development centres in a conflict-affected setting, training women on climate change, water, agricultural finance and hydroponics, while linking livelihoods with peacebuilding. She also works with youth and NGOs on climate justice and reparations and argues that documentation is essential for climate-justice claims and future reparations.

The regional feminist space has already demonstrated what is possible

The regional feminist movement has created mechanisms for turning experience into collective political influence and this is evident in different spaces.

Fatima Khafagy works through the Arab Feminist Network Climate Justice Working Group and the MENA Women and Gender Constituency (WGC)**,** linking climate justice with peace, security and gender and bringing regional feminist perspectives into Conferences of the Parties (COPs) and international negotiations.

The MENA Feminist Taskforce helped turn this organising into a collective regional agenda. Its COP28 demands addressed participation, climate finance, adaptation, education and just transition, while the third priority area addressed conflict-affected countries, militarisation and peacebuilding (MENA Feminist Taskforce, 2023)**.** This brought realities usually treated as security issues into feminist climate policy.

Fatima Khafagy Co-Convenor of the Arab Feminist Network with its Climate Justice Working Group and the RCT in the MENA Women and Gender Constituency (WGC) linking climate justice with peace, security and gender and bring regional feminist perspectives into Conferences of the Parties (COPs) and international negotiations working and amplifying global agendas.

Hajar Al Baltaji illustrates how this infrastructure develops over time. Her trajectory runs from feminist and justice work through local and national networks into regional coordination and international climate negotiations. Her work on just transition with the WGC has included policy submissions, mobilisation, advocacy, capacity building, convening and direct engagement with negotiators. She also highlights a less visible constraint: policy work requires sustained funding and transparent access to opportunities so that participation is not concentrated among the same organisations.

Nada Albouhi reinforces another important distinction: participation is not the same as advocacy, formulation of demands or actual influence over decisions and negotiation texts. Her analysis connects climate-security questions to the climate finance and wider regional dynamics. The lesson is that political influence requires collective positions, evidence, networks and sustained access, not simply invitations to meetings.

The missing connection is also institutional and political

The interviews show a persistent gap between local knowledge and the institutions that make decisions. As evident with what Salma Nims identifies as silos between climate and security institutions and between climate institutions and women's and WPS organisations. Technical

language and narrow definitions of expertise can exclude women whose knowledge is practical rather than institutional. She calls for better data, recognised methodologies and clearer movement from local to national and regional levels. Her experience also demonstrates the value of bringing climate into women's policy processes and connecting climate, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), disaster risk reduction (DRR), governance and WPS rather than treating them separately.

The same institutional gap appears in Kilani's call for accessible information and practical outreach. People cannot influence spaces they cannot find, enter or understand. For Khoury**,** initiatives must become sustainable mechanisms rather than disappear with donor cycles; local ownership and continuity matter as much as the initial project.

The institutional gap is also connected to care. Abdelwahab describes the growing burden of collecting water, managing food and caring for displaced family members. Almalla notes that water scarcity in Syria can increase women's working hours while domestic responsibilities remain. Kheddar describes similar pressures during droughts, heatwaves and fires. These burdens are not simply household concerns: they directly affect women's ability to participate in governance, leadership and negotiations.

Care, protection and participation are therefore connected. The issue is not simply whether women are invited, but whether institutions can recognise knowledge, reduce structural burdens and turn local experience into influence**.**

Climate, WPS, peacebuilding and disarmament need to meet

Climate discussions in conflict-affected and militarised contexts cannot fully address human security while treating militarisation and disarmament as separate issues. While the third MENA Feminist Taskforce priority area connected conflict, militarisation and peacebuilding to climate advocacy (MENA Feminist Taskforce, 2023), Hajar Al Baltaji explicitly links climate justice with militarisation. Disarmament matters because security priorities shape the conditions for climate action. Militarisation can affect resources, environmental conditions, livelihoods, displacement and access to services. Armed conflict can destroy infrastructure and ecosystems while increasing the cost of adaptation and recovery. Disarmament should therefore be treated as an integral part of climate justice, prevention and human security discussions where these issues intersect.

This does not mean turning every climate programme into a disarmament programme. It means recognising that climate vulnerability, militarisation, resource allocation and human security can be connected and should be examined together where relevant. The aim is not to merge every agenda, but to stop treating them as unrelated when communities experience them together. These connections are explicit in the work of MENA WGC and the Arab Feminist Network and the Peace and Demilitarization Working Group.

What the evidence says women need

The survey is direct. Funding is the biggest constraint: 44 respondents selected it. Weak participation in decision-making followed at 32, and lack of training at 28. Training and capacity building were the leading UfM priority at 43, followed by funding and small grants at 37.

The KIIs explain these figures as well. NaserDin Assaf calls for direct funding, mentorship and locally led projects. Almalla calls for flexible funding and stronger routes from local evidence to regional policy. Abdelwahab calls for long-term grants, meaningful participation, protection and care-sensitive finance.

Al Baltaji highlights the cost of sustained policy engagement itself: research, preparation, coalition building and negotiation require organisational capacity. Nims calls for stronger data and institutional coordination. Kilani emphasises local ownership and funding aligned with people's priorities rather than driven by donors. Across the KIIs, training is understood not simply as climate literacy, but as evidence-building, negotiation, institutional engagement and the ability to sustain leadership.

The evidence points to a pathway linking knowledge, capacity, resources and networks with policy access, negotiation and influence.

Policy recommendations: from participation to influence

UfM is well placed to connect local, national and regional levels. Its role should be less about creating parallel structures and more about **connecting existing feminist, youth, climate, peacebuilding and knowledge networks, financing their policy work, and ensuring locally generated evidence reaches decision-making spaces.**

UfM's added value should not be another regional programme that simply asks women and youth to participate. It should strengthen the infrastructure through which their knowledge can influence decisions.

1- Create a Mediterranean women and youth climate–peace leadership facility

Establish flexible funding for women- and youth-led organisations working across climate, human security, peacebuilding, justice and resilience. Support should include small grants, organisational costs, policy and research work, travel, mentoring, communications and protection**,** with accessible entry points for smaller organisations.

2- Build a local-to-policy evidence and influence pipeline

Create a route from local observation to documentation to evidence to policy recommendations to regional dialogue to negotiation and decision-making.

Through the proposed Knowledge Hub, UfM could support a Mediterranean evidence platform on water, food security, displacement, livelihoods, environmental degradation, care and social cohesion, while helping women and youth turn local knowledge into policy (UfM, 2025).

3- Move from participation to measurable influence

UfM initiatives should distinguish between being present, being consulted, advocating, shaping demands, negotiating and influencing decisions. Monitoring should ask whose evidence entered policy language, who shaped recommendations and what changed as a result.

4- Institutionalise the climate–WPS–peace–disarmament nexus

UfM should connect climate policy, WPS, peacebuilding, human security and disarmament, particularly in conflict-affected and militarised settings. Entry points include NDCs, National Adaptation Plans, WPS National Action Plans, disaster-risk reduction, water and food governance, climate finance, peacebuilding frameworks and relevant disarmament processes**.**

5- Make care, protection and human security part of climate policy design

Programmes should assess care burdens, safety, protection risks, displacement, livelihoods and mobility, and budget for dependent care, safe travel, accessibility, communications and protection.

Conclusion

This mapping does not show a region waiting for women and youth to become climate leaders. It shows women and young people already organising communities, producing knowledge, protecting livelihoods, responding to environmental pressures, building resilience and entering policy spaces. The challenge is what happens to that knowledge afterwards.

The survey identifies funding, decision-making access and training as the leading gaps. The interviews show what lies beneath them: institutional silos, short-term financing, weak local-to-national pathways, protection risks and increasing care burdens.

These accounts also point to existing political infrastructure in the region. Ahla Fawda and EcoHub show locally rooted climate leadership. Syrian Climate Pioneers and LCOY/RCOY show youth moving between community and regional spaces. Djazairouna connects environmental impacts to justice and stability. Libya's rural development work links climate, livelihoods and peacebuilding. The Arab Feminist Network, MENA WGC and WILPF Lebanon show how feminist organising can support international policy engagement. Khafagy, Kilani, Al Baltaji, Al Bouhi and Nims demonstrate different routes from participation to influence, while Abdelwahab and Khoury highlight protection, care, communication and continuity.

The next stage is not another layer of activity. It is to connect what already exists, finance it properly, strengthen political and negotiation capacity, protect those doing the work, and make local knowledge count where decisions are made.

Women and youth do not necessarily need another lesson in the language of climate peacebuilding. They need the resources and political pathways to make the knowledge they already hold count.

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Governing the gender-climate-conflict nexus in the Euro-Mediterranean region through policy coherence: Lessons from Just Transitions in Europe

Alexia Faus Onbargi, Programme Manager, Sustainable Development and Regional Integration Department, European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed)

Gender inequality, climate change, and conflict are deeply interconnected challenges whose governance cannot be addressed through isolated policy responses. Across the Euro-Mediterranean region, increasing attention is being directed towards strengthening alignment between Women, Peace and Security (WPS) National Action Plans, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and broader strategies on climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction. In this context, policy coherence—understood as maximising synergies and reducing trade-offs across policy areas—has emerged as a central governance challenge. In practice, this means ensuring that policies reinforce rather than undermine one another.

While efforts to govern the gender–climate–conflict nexus in the Euro-Mediterranean region are still evolving, valuable lessons can be drawn from policy domains where governments have sought to cohere multiple policy priorities. Just Transition provides one such example. By explicitly seeking to reconcile decarbonisation with social justice and inclusion, it offers a compelling lens to analyse the politics and limits of policy coherence.

Against this backdrop, this contribution asks: what lessons emerge from existing case studies on Just Transitions in Europe and how can they help inform the governance of the gender-climate-conflict nexus in the Euro-Mediterranean region? In answering these questions, the paper draws extensively from recent doctoral work and related publications on both Just Transitions and policy coherence.

Policy coherence and Just Transitions: a brief overview

The governance of the gender–climate–conflict nexus, much like the Women–Peace–Security, Humanitarian–Development–Peace, and Water–Energy–Food nexuses, requires policy coherence to address challenges that cut across traditionally separate policy domains. These approaches emphasise the deliberate alignment of policy objectives, instruments, and implementation mechanisms to maximise synergies and reduce trade-offs (Nilsson et al., 2012; Hoff and Kasparek, 2016). Coherence—or lack thereof—has increasingly been understood not as a fixed outcome of optimal policymaking, but as an ongoing governance process shaped by actors, institutions, and political choices (Righettini and Lizzi, 2022). It has been extensively studied in relation to the governance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (coherence has its own standalone target, 17.14).

In the climate domain, Just Transition has emerged as an ambitious approach to reconciling decarbonisation with social justice. Originating in the US labour–environmental movement of the 1980s, Just Transition features in the preamble to the Paris Agreement, which refers to “the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs” to meet global climate targets (UNFCCC, 2015). Since then, policy and academic attention to the governance of Just Transitions – and the role of policy coherence within them – has been gaining momentum (e.g., Gather et al., 2025; see Stevis, 2023).

This growing emphasis on coherence is reflected across international policy frameworks. The International Labour Organization (ILO), in its foundational *Guidelines for a Just Transition* (2015), highlighted the importance of "policy coherence and institutional arrangements for a just transition for all" (ILO, 2015, p. 8). Similar calls for greater integration and policy coherence have since been advanced by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022), the ILO (2023) and UN-ESCAP et al. (2025). Climate policy practitioners likewise recognise coherence as central to effective Just Transitions, as reflected in our survey-based study conducted at COP28 in Dubai, where Just Transition featured prominently under the UAE Presidency (Faus Onbargi and Malerba, 2026).

Despite this momentum, dedicated governance frameworks remain relatively limited, even in the EU, which has championed the concept through the Just Transition Mechanism and its associated fund. According to Mandelli (2025), only Czechia, Germany, Greece, Spain, Ireland and the Netherlands have adopted comprehensive Just Transition frameworks that combine strategies, policy instruments and governance mechanisms. Even among these countries, most frameworks remain centred on decarbonising the energy sector, particularly coal-dependent regions in Czechia, Germany and Greece. Spain, Ireland and the Netherlands have adopted broader approaches that more explicitly integrate social objectives into climate policy, with Spain standing out as "the only country with a stand-alone Just Transition strategy" in Europe, alongside relatively strong participatory governance through the Just Transition Institute and Just Transition Agreements (Mandelli, 2025, pp. 246-248).

Although policy coherence and Just Transitions have evolved within different policy communities—with policy coherence initially championed by the EU and now by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and Just Transition by the ILO—they ultimately address a common governance challenge: how to manage complex processes of societal change in ways that are both effective and socially equitable. Policy coherence has frequently been invoked to advance the principle of "leaving no one behind" that underpins the 2030 Agenda (Browne et al., 2026; Browne et al., 2023; Theeuwes et al., 2025). Similarly, Just Transition seeks to address the multidimensional inequalities that can generate injustice during periods of structural transformation (Faus Onbargi, 2026). For example, pursuing procedural justice – i.e. fairness in decision-making – is fundamentally an exercise in addressing inequalities in meaningful access to decision-making processes, the ability to influence decision-makers, and to be adequately represented (Faus Onbargi and Dombrowsky, 2025).

This shared concern around inequality is why both Just Transition and policy coherence are particularly relevant for governing the gender-climate-conflict nexus. In each case, the challenge is not only to align policy content, instruments and implementation mechanisms, but to ensure that integrated approaches address inequality and injustice in their many dimensions. With women around the world especially impacted by the cumulative effects of climate change and conflict, the question for governing the gender-climate-conflict nexus is how to design and implement integrated policies that not only respond to interconnected risks, but also transform the structural inequalities that shape women's vulnerability and resilience in the face of such shocks. Indeed, recognising the importance of coherence does not resolve how it can be achieved in practice. European experiences demonstrate that coherence is rarely a straightforward or technocratic exercise. Instead, it is shaped by political contestation over competing priorities, interests and understandings of justice.

The politics and limits of coherence

Although integrated approaches can generate important synergies, the ways in which transitions are framed, whose interests they prioritise, and whose voices shape their trajectory ultimately determine whether they advance justice or, conversely, generate new forms of injustice (Faus Onbargi, 2026). Policy coherence in such contexts is therefore deeply political. Rather than emerging automatically from better policy design, it is shaped by ideas, interests, institutions, competing priorities, power relations and institutional dynamics (Brand et al., 2021; Dzebo et al., 2025; Shawoo et al., 2023).

The German *Energiewende*—the country's long-term energy transition—illustrates the politics and limits of coherence well. Long presented as a global climate champion, Germany has sought to reconcile climate goals, economic restructuring aims and social objectives within its

Energiewende policies. While overall successful at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the *Energiewende* has also been characterised by numerous trade-offs, political compromises and periods of policy incoherence driven by competing short-term priorities. For example, the influence of coal-dependent regions and industry actors contributed to a delayed coal phase-out, with the Coal Commission of 2020 recommending a national exit by 2038 (Faus Onbargi and Dombrowsky, 2025), although recent developments have accelerated phase-out timelines in some regions.

Similarly, societal contestation over renewable energy expansion and perceptions that rural communities were bearing a disproportionate share of its costs, has shaped planning decisions, including through the introduction of stringent minimum setback requirements—such as the widely criticised 1,000-metre rule—between wind turbines and residential areas (ibid.). These examples demonstrate that what constitutes a 'coherent' transition pathway is not politically neutral but is continuously negotiated among actors with different interests and understandings of justice.

Evidence from Germany and other European transition and sustainable development contexts also finds that coherence is socially and contextually constructed: measures perceived as mutually reinforcing by one group may be viewed as conflicting or unjust by another, as per evidence from Sweden's transport transition (Gottenhuber, 2026), the implementation of the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) in Germany (Gerstenberg et al., 2026) and that of the SDGs in the Netherlands (Yunita et al., 2022). Political actors may also pursue competing objectives simultaneously, with priorities shifting in response to changing circumstances and external shocks, as illustrated by the evolving positions of German political parties—including the Greens—following the energy security challenges triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Faus Onbargi and Dombrowsky, 2026). In addition, coherence is affected by time: relationships between policy objectives may change depending on the timeframe through which transitions are assessed, meaning that synergies and trade-offs are not fixed, as found in the *Energiewende* (Faus Onbargi and Iacobuta, forthcoming) and Norway's agro-forestry transition (Gulbrandsen, 2024).

In addition, policy coherence may not always deliver on its intended aims. While evidence suggests that coherence can contribute to reducing inequalities —as demonstrated in our recent comparative study of sustainability and transition processes across Germany, Sweden, Kenya, South Africa, the Philippines, Colombia, Fiji, Australia and Sri Lanka (Browne et al., 2026)—the findings also highlight that coherence is not inherently equitable. In some cases, policy coherence can reinforce existing inequalities, while policy incoherence may, under certain conditions, generate more equitable outcomes (Browne et al., 2023).

The big lesson from these findings is that while coherence may appear necessary for enabling Just Transitions, it is certainly not sufficient (Faus Onbargi, 2026). For the governance of the gender-climate-conflict nexus in the Euro-Mediterranean, this carries several implications. First, coherence should be understood not as a technocratic exercise of aligning policies across sectors, but as a political process through which competing priorities, interests and understandings of justice are negotiated. Decisions about which objectives to prioritise, which trade-offs are considered acceptable, and whose knowledge and experiences are recognised inevitably reflect existing power relations and need to be tackled head on.

Second, integrated governance should be assessed not only by the degree to which policies are mutually reinforcing, but also by their distributive and procedural consequences. Policies that appear coherent from an institutional or policy perspective may nevertheless reproduce or exacerbate gender inequalities, reinforce conflict dynamics, or marginalise groups already vulnerable to climate change if questions of justice – in its multiple dimensions - are not explicitly

addressed. In this sense, justice should be treated as a criterion for evaluating coherence in the gender-climate-conflict nexus, rather than assumed to follow from it.

Other lessons from Just Transition experiences in Europe

Beyond demonstrating that policy coherence is political rather than purely technocratic, European Just Transition experiences also reveal two important blind spots that governance of the gender–climate–conflict nexus should avoid replicating.

The first concerns the sectoral framing of Just Transition. Across Europe, Just Transition policies and frameworks have largely been conceived through the lens of energy transitions—particularly electricity decarbonisation and coal phase-outs (the EU Just Transition Mechanism is a case in point). This emphasis is mirrored internationally. Initiatives such as the World Bank's Just Transition programmes and the Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs) have centred on accelerating coal transitions, in countries including South Africa, Senegal and Vietnam. Although these priorities respond to pressing decarbonisation challenges (and, crucially, carbon pricing), they have also narrowed the concept of Just Transition into what is; in practice, largely a just energy transition.

This narrowing has important implications for gender equality. The energy sector remains overwhelmingly male dominated, particularly in technical, managerial and leadership positions (IEA, 2025). Consequently, when Just Transition is framed primarily around the transformation of energy systems, it tends to privilege the experiences and livelihoods of groups already well represented within those sectors. In Germany, for example, the social justice aspects of *Energiewende* have focused on older male workers employed in coal regions such as Lusatia and the Rhineland. Research from Spain similarly finds that just energy transition policies risk reproducing gender inequalities by limiting women's access to emerging green jobs, particularly in skilled manual occupations and senior positions (Santero-Sánchez et al., 2025). In short, gender has remained a peripheral concern in both the governance and scholarship of European Just Transitions, leaving relatively little guidance on how transition policies can address structural gender inequalities beyond labour market participation.

For governance of the gender–climate–conflict nexus in the Euro-Mediterranean, experiences in Europe illustrate the risks of allowing one policy objective or sector to dominate what should otherwise be an integrated agenda. A governance framework that prioritises decarbonisation without adequately considering gender inequalities may inadvertently reproduce existing patterns of exclusion, even when advancing other forms of justice.

The second blind spot concerns conflict sensitivity. Despite the ongoing war in Ukraine and its profound implications for Europe's energy transition, conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding have rarely been treated as an explicit dimension of Just Transition governance. Although this omission is understandable given that most European transitions are unfolding within relatively stable political contexts, it nevertheless limits the relevance of existing Just Transition frameworks for regions where climate change, gender inequality and conflict are deeply intertwined. This gap is equally apparent in the academic literature, where comparatively little attention has been devoted to what Just Transition should entail in contexts affected by fragility and violent conflict (McCandless and Faus Onbargi, 2023).

Emerging evidence nevertheless suggests that Just Transition can contribute to peacebuilding when designed through a conflict-sensitive lens. At a minimum, transition policies can support peace by creating green livelihoods that provide alternatives to violence in fragile settings (ILO, 2026). A more ambitious question, however, is whether Just Transition can enable transformative resilience—not simply helping individuals, communities and societies recover from crises, but

using those crises as opportunities to transform systems towards greater sustainability, or to 'bounce forward' rather than merely 'bounce back' (see Benczur et al., 2026). This requires moving beyond employment-focused interventions towards a transformative approach that confronts unequal power relations within countries' political economy, North-South asymmetries, and carbon inequality alongside the immediate drivers of conflict and climate risk (McCandless and Faus Onbargi, 2023).

Taken together, these lessons offer important insights for governing the gender–climate–conflict nexus in the Euro-Mediterranean. The region is characterised by many of the same structural inequalities and asymmetries that have traditionally been understood through a Global North–Global South lens. European experience demonstrates that even governance frameworks explicitly grounded in justice can reproduce significant blind spots when they become narrowly sectoral or fail to engage with broader questions power.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the value of Just Transition for governing the gender–climate–conflict nexus lies less in providing a blueprint than in highlighting the governance conditions under which policy coherence may or may not lead to effective and equitable outcomes. European experiences show that policy coherence is neither politically neutral nor inherently just. Rather than treating coherence as an end when governing the gender-climate-conflict nexus in the Euro-Mediterranean region, policymakers should approach it as an ongoing process of negotiating competing priorities while explicitly addressing the structural inequalities that shape women's vulnerability and resilience to compounding stressors. This also means moving beyond focusing on policy alignment towards governance that is genuinely transformative—embedding gender equality, conflict sensitivity and climate action within coherent, participatory and justice-centred transitions capable of responding to increasingly interconnected risks on both sides of the Mediterranean basin.

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Shaping the Climate-WPS Ecosystem in the Southern Mediterranean: Findings from the UfM Stakeholder Mapping and Network Process

Noura Abdelwahab, Consultant, Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)

Anna Dorangricchia, Project Manager Gender Equality, Union for the Mediterranean

Giulia Ferraresi, Project Analyst, Human Development Division, Union for the Mediterranean

Introduction

The intersection of climate change, gender inequality, and peace and security represents one of the most analytically complex and policy-urgent challenges facing the Southern Mediterranean today. Despite growing scholarly and institutional attention to this nexus, the region lacks a consolidated evidence base that maps existing knowledge gaps, diagnoses structural fragmentation, and identifies the actors best positioned to drive coherent action. This article addresses that deficit and contributes to the analytical architecture of the UfM's first Regional Policy Report on Climate–WPS (2026). The objective of the article is to provide a rigorous literature review and stakeholder mapping that can anchor the cluster-based analytical approach. A defining and persistent structural reality across the region is **fragmentation**. Policies remain siloed, data is scarce and often non-comparable, and coordination among diverse actors is weak.

Stakeholder consultations conducted between July and September 2025 with 14 regional and international organisations and stakeholders active in Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and/or climate change reinforced this diagnosis. These included UNDRR, UN Women, ESCWA, OSCE, UNDP, FAO, IEMed, and the Green Climate Fund (UfM, 2026d).

The analysis also draws on the Regional Capacity Workshop and Stakeholder Dialogue on the Climate–WPS nexus, organised by the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in Amman, Jordan, on 19–20 November 2025. The event brought together government representatives, international and regional organisations, and civil society, and marked the launch of the UfM Climate–WPS Network. The Network aims to strengthen coordination and cooperation among public institutions, international and regional organisations, civil society, and other actors working on climate change, gender equality, and peace and security across the Mediterranean (UfM, 2025).

Across the stakeholder consultations and discussions at the Amman workshop, a recurring theme was the tendency to frame women solely as vulnerable victims of climate change, rather than as powerful agents of change and peacebuilding. The conceptual framework presented by UNDP explicitly noted that women's traditional knowledge in resource management and conflict mediation remains a vastly underutilized resource. While protection is critical, participants from the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding (CCCPA), the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and multiple CSOs emphasised the need to shift the narrative toward women's leadership in early warning systems, natural resource mediation, and community-led adaptation. The session on boosting women and youth leadership concluded that meaningful involvement requires inclusion from the initial planning and design phase of policies and projects, not as a final consultation (UfM, 2025; UfM, 2026d).

This article makes two interrelated contributions. First, it provides a systematic literature review of the scholarly and policy knowledge on the Climate–WPS nexus, situating the Southern Mediterranean within global frameworks and identifying critical gaps in the existing evidence base. Second, it conducts a structured stakeholder (SH) mapping of the actor ecosystem — covering state actors, regional bodies, international partners, civil society, research institutions, and the private sector — to establish a diagnostic baseline for the MedWE3 Policy Study (2026).

The article is structured around three analytical questions: What does the existing scholarly and policy literature reveal about the Climate–WPS nexus, and where do critical knowledge gaps remain? Who are the key actors in the Southern Mediterranean Climate–WPS landscape, and what does the stakeholder mapping reveal about their mandates, capacities, and coordination failures? And what systemic gaps — in data, governance, financing, and policy coherence —

should the UfM Climate–WPS Network and the MedWE3 Policy Study prioritise in order to move from diagnosis to actionable recommendations?

Literature review

The intersection of climate change, armed conflict, and gender inequality has gained considerable traction in scholarly and policy literature over the past decade, yet it remains insufficiently operationalized at the regional level. Foundational frameworks such as the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) Practice Note on "The Implications of Climate Change for Mediation and Peace Processes" (DPPA, 2022a) establish that environmental stressors—including extreme weather events, resource scarcity, and sea-level rise—can exacerbate existing tensions in fragile states, underscoring the imperative for mediators to integrate climate considerations into peace processes. This nexus is further evidenced in the DPPA's "Weathering Two Storms: Gender and Climate in Peace and Security" (DPPA, 2022b), which provides structured guidance on how climate change and gender dynamics intersect across conflict prevention, peace-making, and peacebuilding strategies. Building on these insights, the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security's report "The Climate–Gender–Conflict Nexus: Amplifying Women's Contributions at the Grassroots" (Smith et al., 2021) demonstrates through case studies from Colombia, Sudan, and Nepal that women's roles in natural resource management and community-level peacebuilding are both indispensable and systematically overlooked, particularly when structural barriers to participation remain in place. In the Arab regional context, the report "Addressing the Triple Nexus: Gender, Climate and Security in the Arab World", from the Center for Climate Diplomacy at the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy (Chehab et al., 2023), highlights how the compounding effects of environmental stress, conflict, and gender inequality disproportionately affect women and girls—most intensely in countries such as Syria and Yemen—and calls for gender-sensitive climate and security policies that move beyond rhetorical commitments toward targeted institutional reform. Similarly, the ESCWA policy brief "Addressing Climate, Peace and Security in the Arab Region" (ESCWA, 2023) argues that without context-specific, inclusive governance frameworks, climate vulnerabilities will continue to fuel cycles of instability across the region.

The integration of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda with climate action has also been addressed through normative and policy-focused literature. UN Security Council Resolution 2242 (United Nations Security Council, 2015) recognised climate change as a cross-cutting concern within the WPS framework, recognising its relevance to the WPS agenda. Subsequent analysis, notably SIPRI's "Climate Change in Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans" (Smith, 2020), reveals that while a growing number of states reference climate change in their WPS National Action Plans (NAPs), concrete and measurable commitments remain rare—a finding directly relevant to the implementation gaps observed in the Southern Mediterranean. The Georgetown Institute's "Advancing Gender, Climate and Security in the UN Security Council: A Blueprint for Action" (Keller, 2025) extends this critique, identifying twelve priority areas for institutional action including mainstreaming climate in WPS thematic resolutions, developing shared analytical tools, and promoting women's meaningful participation in climate mediation and peacebuilding. On the financing dimension, the Georgetown Institute's "Inclusive Adaptation: A Benefit Multiplier for Climate Action and Women, Peace and Security" (Chiu et al., 2022) illustrates how climate interventions which simultaneously address economic empowerment, access to education, and women's decision-making roles can generate measurable co-benefits for both climate resilience and peace and security outcomes. Complementing these global frameworks, the IEMed and Union for the Mediterranean's "Climate Crisis and Gender Equality in the Euro-Mediterranean Region: Emerging Security Risks" (IEMed and UfM, 2025) provides regionally grounded analysis across thematic areas including water-energy-food nexus programming,

climate-related displacement, and women's participation in green transitions, offering a direct evidence base for strengthening policy coherence and cooperation on the Climat-WPS nexus.

Consultations methodology and stakeholders' reach

The evidence base underpinning this article is built through three complementary consultation streams across the Southern Mediterranean and beyond, with data collection extending to June 2026. Together, these streams provide a multi-layered picture of the Climate–WPS actor landscape, combining expert institutional perspectives, formal interest registrations, and active network member input.

Stream 1: stakeholder consultations (July–September 2025)

Between July and September 2025, targeted bilateral consultations were conducted with **14 regional and international organisations** active at the Climate–WPS nexus. These included UN agencies (UNDRR, UN Women, ESCWA, UNDP, FAO), intergovernmental and regional bodies (OSCE, IEMed, Green Climate Fund, Alliance for Biodiversity), and networks focused on youth, peace, and security (MENA Youth and Peace Coalition, Arab Reform Initiative). A total of **approximately 20 individuals** participated across these sessions, spanning gender advisors, climate policy specialists, peacebuilding practitioners, and finance experts. In terms of geographical reach, consulted organisations operate across the Mediterranean basin—covering both the southern shore (Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco) and northern and international actors based in or working on the Euro-Mediterranean region. By type of organisation, the consultations were deliberately designed to ensure institutional diversity: UN system agencies constituted the largest group, followed by intergovernmental and regional think tanks, and civil society and youth networks (UfM, 2026d).

Stream 2: expression of interest (EoI) for the UfM Climate–WPS Network (December 2025–April 2026)

Following the Network's launch at Amman Regional Workshop (November 2025), the UfM issued a formal call for Expressions of Interest (EoIs) to invite organisations and other interested stakeholders to join the UfM Climate–WPS Network. The call helped identify prospective members and their areas of expertise and interest. The call received **29 eligible responses** from across the region. In terms of geographical distribution, respondents came predominantly from southern Mediterranean countries, with Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, and Morocco being the most represented. The profile of respondents reflected a predominantly female participation (80%), with men accounting for 20%. By type of organisation, civil society organisations constituted the largest group, accounting for nearly half of all responses (48%). Government entities and national bodies made up 24% of respondents, followed by think tanks (12%), national women's machinery (8%), academia (4%), and the private sector (4%). This distribution underscores the central role that civil society plays in driving the Climate–WPS agenda at the regional level, while also pointing to the relative underrepresentation of research institutions and private sector actors—a gap the Network actively seeks to address (UfM, 2026a).

Stream 3: online survey for network members (June 2026)

An online survey was administered in June 2026 to confirmed Network members to capture their preferences on participation in proposed thematic working groups (TWGs), governance roles, and priority issues for the Network's first activities. The proposed TWGs would bring Network members together around shared Climate-WPS priorities. The survey received **30 responses** from confirmed members. Geographically, the survey responses were concentrated in the southern Mediterranean and Arab region, with Jordan accounting for the largest share of respondents (15 out of 30), followed by Lebanon (6 respondents) and Egypt (4 respondents). Morocco contributed 2 respondents, with single responses from Switzerland, Greece, and Libya, reflecting both the regional character of the Network and the presence of a small number of international partners. By type of organisation, respondents spanned a broad cross-section of the Climate–WPS actor landscape, including UN agencies (UNDP, FAO), national government ministries (Ministries of Energy, Environment, and Women Affairs), civil society organisations, national women's machineries, think tanks, and regional networks. This diversity confirms the Network's ambition to serve as a genuinely multi-stakeholder platform bridging international, national, and grassroots actors (UfM, 2026c).

Stakeholder mapping: the Climate–WPS actor ecosystem in the Southern Mediterranean

This section presents the results of the stakeholder (SH) mapping, drawing on 14 stakeholder consultations (July–September 2025), the 30 Expressions of Interest (EoI) process (December 2025–April 2026), the Amman Workshop proceedings (November 2025), and 30 members' responses to the online survey. The mapping identifies the typology, mandates, data capacities, and coordination roles of actors across the Southern Mediterranean Climate–WPS landscape. The overarching finding is structural fragmentation: while the landscape includes a diverse range of actors, they operate with distinct and often misaligned mandates, capacities, and levels of engagement.

Typology of Actors

- **State actors:** This group includes National Women's Machineries (e.g., National Council for Women, Egypt; JNCW, Jordan), Environment Ministries (e.g., Jordan, Morocco), and Ministries of Energy and Water (e.g., Lebanon, Jordan). At the Amman dialogues participants reported that nine of the 22 Arab League member states had adopted WPS National Action Plans (NAPs), while highlighting a significant implementation gap. Key national policies—WPS NAPs, National Climate Plans, and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are often developed in isolation, with weak coordination between gender, environment, and security sectors. The UfM and UNDP mapping exercises both found that inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms exist in several states but remain underutilized, lacking the mandate, resources, or technical capacity to enforce policy coherence across the gender–environment–security nexus (UfM, 2025; UfM, 2026d.).
- **Regional bodies:** Think tanks and institutions like the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding (CCCPA)—which serves as the secretariat for the Climate Responses for Sustaining Peace (CRSP) initiative—and the League of Arab States act as key conveners.
- **International partners:** UN agencies such as UN Women, UNDP, UNDRR, and FAO are active in supporting national governments. The Sendai Framework's Gender Action Plan (Sendai GAP), championed by UNDRR, offers a structured pathway to integrate gender equality into disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation. However, stakeholder consultations consistently found that these efforts remain project-based and lack

alignment under a common regional framework. Stakeholder consultations highlighted barriers to accessing the Green Climate Fund support for local, women-led resilience initiatives. ESCWA and OSCE are increasingly active in analysing NAP effectiveness and developing programs on gender and climate across the Mediterranean, as documented in the UfM stakeholder mapping (UfM, 2026d.).

- **Civil society organisations (CSOs):** This was the largest group in the EoI and members' responses (48%) and were also prominent among members responding the online survey. Organisations range from women-led peacebuilding groups (ABAAD in Lebanon, ARDD in Jordan, WILPF Lebanon) to youth climate networks (Arab Office for Youth and Environment, MENA youth Coalition) and community media platforms (Sawt Ajloun Radio in Jordan). The Amman workshop highlighted that CSOs are often treated as data sources rather than co-architects of solutions. One CSO representative stated that "data they collect is not recognised or valued by public institutions," and that most research remains inaccessible, being produced primarily in English" (UfM, 2025; UfM, 2026a, 2026c).
- **Research and knowledge actors:** Represent around 15% of EoI and members online survey that include the Arab Reform Initiative (ARI), WANA Institute and academia. The European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), a key partner, presented the vision for the Knowledge Hub at the Amman workshop, proposing an innovative cluster model over traditional thematic silos (UfM, 2025; UfM, 2026a, 2026c).
- **Private Sector:** Only 4% of EoI respondents are from the private sector (e.g., Scout, a digital marketplace supporting women-led enterprises). This represents a critical gap, as economic resilience and market access are fundamental to women's empowerment and community adaptation (UfM, 2026a).

Identified gaps in the ecosystem

Synthesizing the stakeholder consultations, Amman Workshop outcomes, the EoI analysis, and members responses to the online survey, six five critical gaps emerge that hinder effective Climate-WPS action in the Southern Mediterranean. These gaps were not only observed; they were repeatedly voiced by participants across all sectors.

- **Weak vertical and horizontal coordination.** A primary gap is the lack of coordination—both vertically (local–national–regional) and horizontally (across ministries). The Amman workshop's interactive dialogues exposed that environment ministries often work separately from women's machineries, leading to fragmented policies. One government participant noted that even when inter-ministerial committees exist, they lack the mandate, resources, or technical capacity to enforce coherence. The EoI priority "policy coherence/NAPs-NDCs" was selected by 12 respondents, indicating its importance among respondents. The UNDP-led session on the Conceptual Framework for the Arab region further diagnosed state-level fragility—weak governance, corruption, and debt—as a critical factor that reduces adaptive capacity and intensifies both climate vulnerability and conflict risk.
- **Persistent Data and Evidence Deficit.** Data and evidence emerged as a leading thematic priority in the EoIs and members' online survey responses. The Amman workshop dedicated an entire interactive dialogue to this issue, diagnosing not merely a "data gap" but a critical mismatch between quantitative data and the lived realities of women. Participants called for a fundamental shift toward qualitative, narrative evidence that

captures women's stories, perceptions, and community-level expertise as valid and crucial forms of knowledge.

- **Exclusion of Vulnerable Communities from Decision-Making.** Despite being disproportionately affected by climate change and conflict, rural and marginalised communities—including women, youth and displaced populations—remain largely absent from formal decision-making processes. Stakeholder consultations and members' responses to the survey form consistently highlighted that women and youth are critical agents of change in both peacebuilding and climate resilience, yet their leadership is rarely structurally supported. The climate-security nexus compounds this exclusion, as communities facing displacement and conflict encounter additional barriers to participation. Bridging this gap requires moving beyond tokenistic representation toward genuine, inclusive governance that centres the voices and expertise of those most at risk.

- **Inadequate digital tools and early warning systems.** Members' responses to the online survey highlight that access to digital tools and climate information remains deeply unequal across the region. Stakeholder consultations identified a significant digital divide that prevents rural communities and women entrepreneurs from accessing green energy resources, climate data, and early warning systems. Participants called for leveraging digital governance tools to connect local actors with relevant resources, while emphasizing the need for climate justice in digital access—ensuring that early warning systems and participatory platforms are equitable and inclusive. Strengthening digital infrastructure is also essential to systematically document gendered evidence on climate impacts, addressing the data deficit identified above.

- **Marginalisation of civil society and grassroots actors.** Despite the prominent representation of CSOs among interested Network members, participants reported persistent exclusion from formal policy dialogue. The Amman workshop's thematic discussions revealed that data collected by CSOs is frequently not recognized or valued by public institutions, creating a persistent barrier between grassroots knowledge and national policymaking. Participants advocated for mapping the existing ecosystem of actors and initiatives to break down silos and better connect community-level work with national frameworks. The dialogue on women's leadership powerfully highlighted that women and youth are often invited to the table too late, their inputs devalued and treated as symbolic inclusions rather than as essential agents of change. Despite this exclusion, participants showcased powerful examples of locally led action—from food production initiatives and women-led peace tables to regional feminist advocacy at COPs.

- **Near-total absence of the private sector.** The private sector is sparsely represented in the stakeholder consultations and mapping samples. This is a critical gap, as climate adaptation and women's economic security are intrinsically linked; without engaging businesses, digital marketplaces, and financial institutions, efforts to build women's resilience to climate-induced economic shocks will remain limited. The sole private sector respondent highlighted the need to connect women's market access with climate resilience—a perspective less prominent in the governance and CSO submission reviewed. The GCF consultation further highlighted participants' concerns that the scale and requirements of climate-finance instruments can limit access for women-led enterprises.

From evidence to architecture: how the literature review and SH mapping inform the design and governance of the UfM Climate - WPS network and Knowledge Hub

The literature review and stakeholder mapping presented in this article are not merely descriptive exercises; they are the analytical foundation on which the UfM Network and Knowledge Hub's cluster architecture shall capitalize on. Taken together, the evidence assembled establishes five structural gaps — in coordination, data, CSO inclusion, private sector engagement, and narrative framing — that must be addressed systematically across the four thematic clusters. This section explains how the gaps identified through the literature and the SH mapping directly correspond to the cluster-based design of the Network and the Knowledge Hub. The UfM Network's governance structure — including its two-tier model, Thematic Working Groups, and Knowledge Hub — is noted here insofar as it operationalises the evidence-based priorities emerging from this article's analysis.

Addressing gaps through the two-tier governance model

A proposed **Steering Committee** directly tackles the **coordination gap**. Designed to include balanced representation from governments, CSOs, international organizations, the private sector, and youth, it creates a formal, multi-stakeholder platform for strategic decision-making. Such a structure breaks down silos through structured dialogue across actor types (UfM, 2026b).

Based on stakeholders consultations, Amman workshop discussions, the EoI priorities and the members' online survey, four thematic working groups are proposed for the Network to operationalise the nexus:

- **TWG1 (Climate Stress, Displacement & Security)** addresses the data and lived-experience gap in climate-induced migration.
- **TWG2 (Natural Resources, Land Rights & Conflict Prevention)** targets the policy coherence gap between resource management and WPS.
- **TWG3 (Women & Youth Leadership)** directly challenges the 'victimhood' narrative by focusing on agency and leadership, building on the Amman session's call for intergenerational dialogue and mentorship.
- **TWG4 (Monitoring & Data Accountability)** is a direct response to the "Data & evidence" priority, with a proposed role in developing shared indicators for gender-responsive climate security data.

Under the proposed work arrangements, each TWG could have two co-chairs and address one priority issue per quarters, producing policy briefs for discussion in regional forums.

The Knowledge Hub as a tool to bridge gaps

The planned Knowledge Hub could serve as an active tool for gap remediation. The Hub shall have four thematic clusters corresponding to the Network's four TWGs. They are conceived as cross-cutting: the goal is integrated insight rather than siloed information. It could include short explainers, and case snapshots that translate academic research into actionable evidence for policymakers and practitioners (UfM, 2025, 2026b).

To address the **CSO exclusion gap**, the Hub could include a member directory, a thematic spotlight section, and features for uploading grassroots project snapshots. This "engagement layer" is designed to elevate local voices to a regional audience, making CSO knowledge visible to governments and donors. The Amman workshop specifically called for the Hub to act as a regional "dashboard" or safe space for sharing sensitive data and translating community evidence into policy frameworks (UfM, 2025).

The hub's value grows with the Network's engagement. Members could contribute in four ways: sharing their publications and tools; contributing quarterly member spotlights; providing input to policy briefs; and using the proposed directory to connect with other experts and facilitate regional peer-to-peer exchange.

Conclusions and policy recommendations

The mapping exercise reveals a Southern Mediterranean ecosystem rich in potential but hampered by structural fragmentation. The stakeholder consultations, the Amman Regional Workshop (November 2025), collectively provided a clear diagnosis: weak vertical and horizontal coordination, persistent data gaps, the systematic exclusion of CSOs and grassroots voices, the near-total absence of the private sector, and a dominant victimhood narrative that undermines women's agency and leadership. A particularly critical structural fault line identified across all consultation streams is the disconnect between National Women's Machineries and Environment Ministries: these two sets of actors operate in parallel silos, preventing the development of gender-sensitive National Action Plans (NAPs) that are coherent with Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and broader climate governance frameworks. The UfM Climate–WPS Network is uniquely positioned to bridge this gap. By leveraging its multi-stakeholder governance architecture, the Network four Thematic Working Groups, and the Knowledge Hub, can catalyse structured dialogue between women's machineries and environment ministries, support the co-production of gender-sensitive NAPs, and transform isolated national efforts into a coherent regional movement for climate–WPS action.

The following SMART recommendations are addressed to policy makers — including member state governments, national legislators, national women's machineries, environment and climate ministries, the UfM Secretariat, and international partners — drawing on the combined evidence of the stakeholder mapping, EoI analysis, members' responses to the online survey and the UNDP Conceptual Framework for the Arab region. Each recommendation specifies a responsible actor, a concrete action, and a timeframe, in line with the SMART framework (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound):

1. **Prioritize gender- and conflict-sensitive data collection:** The absence of such protocols is identified as a primary bottleneck to effective Climate–WPS policymaking. Thus, it is proposed that by end-2027, national statistics offices and environment ministries can be able, in coordination with national women's machineries, adopt and implement gender- and conflict-sensitive data collection protocols with UfM technical support channelled through TWG4.

2. **Expand Network membership to engage the private sector:** By the end of 2027, the UfM Secretariat shall identify and formally engage a number of private sector actors — spanning green finance, agribusiness, digital platforms, and financial institutions — as Network members or strategic partners. Engagement shall be structured with the objective of co-designing a climate–WPS financing instrument accessible to women-led enterprises by end-2027.

3. **Translate evidence into policy briefs and actionable recommendations:** By Q1 2027, each of the TWGs shall produce at one evidence-based policy brief grounded in the findings of the stakeholder mapping, and the Network members' feedback. Policy briefs shall be co-TWG members, peer-reviewed, and disseminated at regional or international forums. The Knowledge Hub shall serve as the primary distribution platform, ensuring accessibility to policymakers, UN agencies, and parliamentary actors across the region.

4. **Shift the narrative from victimhood to agency:** By the end of 2027, the UfM Secretariat and all Network TWGs shall adopt a narrative framework that positions women and youth as leaders, experts, and agents of change across all Network communication outputs, Knowledge Hub materials, and policy documents. At least 50% of Network events shall feature women and youth in substantive speaking and leadership roles.

5. **Bridge national women's machineries and environment ministries for gender-sensitive NAPs:** Policy makers shall be encouraged to mandate structured inter-ministerial coordination between National Women's Machineries and Environment/Climate Ministries in all member states by the end of 2027. The UfM Climate–WPS Network — through TWG2 and the Knowledge Hub — shall provide technical guidance, peer-learning, and a regional platform for sharing good practices. This recommendation responds directly to the structural disconnection between these two sets of actors identified across the EoI analysis, and the Amman Workshop (November 2025) and Members responses to the online survey.

6. **Leverage the UfM Climate–WPS Network as a structural enabler for regional policy coherence:** Policy makers and international partners to recognize the UfM Climate–WPS Network as a regional coordination mechanism and technical resource for gender-sensitive climate security governance. The network Steering Committee shall establish a dedicated liaison function between the Network and relevant inter-ministerial coordination bodies, ensuring that evidence produced by the TWGs and Knowledge Hub informs national and regional policymaking cycles in a systematic and time-bound manner.

By implementing these SMART recommendations, and by leveraging the momentum for the forthcoming Capacity Building Workshop on September 2026 and the structured connection between women's machineries and environment ministries, the UfM Climate–WPS Network can move decisively from diagnosis to action — catalysing an inclusive, gender-sensitive, and regionally coherent Climate–WPS framework for the Southern Mediterranean.

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Toward an improved understanding of the gender-climate-security nexus: Evidence gaps and implementation challenges

Gretchen Baldwin, Senior Researcher, SIPRI Peace Operations and Conflict Management Programme

Climate-related security risks are growing all over the world, and they are not gender neutral. Recently, work on the intersections of gender, climate and security—sometimes referred to as the gender-climate-security nexus—has been increasing, though much remains to be done from both a policy and practice standpoint. While the individual nodes of this nexus are fairly well understood and gender and climate, climate and security, and gender and security are commonly explored as pairs, policy rarely takes all three into consideration. This in turn limits the practical application of existing knowledge on the nexus, particularly the lived experiences of communities most vulnerable to climate-related security risks and academic work on this topic.

This chapter draws primarily from a 2025-26 SIPRI study, commissioned by the OSCE, on the gender-climate-security nexus in the OSCE region. The report shows how gendered and intersectional factors are largely invisible in data and policy frameworks and demonstrates 'growing consensus among stakeholders that [gender, climate and security] are deeply interconnected and should be addressed through integrated approaches' (Magalhães Teixeira and Baldwin, 2026, p. 12). This chapter will outline some of the challenges stemming from evidence and methodological gaps, mismatches between institutional frameworks and lived realities, indicators as one tool for institutional coherence and policy alignment, general challenges related to governance and implementation, and ways to strengthen evidence-based approaches to the nexus.

Evidence gaps and mismatch between institutional frameworks and lived realities

Expertise at the intersection of gender, climate and security remains limited, and the connections across all three are missing from most policies and strategies at a national or municipal level. Even in research and practice, interviewees for the SIPRI study observed that very few researchers or practitioners work across all three fields. As many interviewees themselves observed, few practitioners or researchers work across all three fields. Despite this, there is generally strong consensus that climate, gender and security challenges are deeply interconnected and should be addressed in an integrated manner.

The interlinkages between the different points of the nexus are diverse and dynamic across different contexts, with wide-ranging vulnerabilities—including ecological, climate, socio-political, and institutional—affecting both community experiences on the ground as well as how policies are developed and implemented. 'Understanding who is most affected by climate risks, how these risks are shaped by gender and other social identities, and how gender-responsive and intersectional approaches can be effective in addressing them is essential for promoting stability and security' globally (Magalhães Teixeira and Baldwin 2026, p.11).

'While the triple nexus of gender, climate and security explored in this report is often borne out organically at local, community levels, institutionalizing systemic change (notably by learning from those local experiences, practices or norms) is difficult if policies do not share language or central goals. In many cases, still, gender, climate and security policy documents are not integrated and do not speak to each other, which limits the effectiveness of the individual documents in the long term. Institutions that carry out these policies implement whatever actions are laid out in the documents. For example, if climate NAPs do not mainstream gender, or if WPS NAPs do not link climate as a key factor affecting modern human security concerns, these issues will remain siloed. Siloing risks the missing of crucial opportunities for integration between these inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing issues, given that "the realization of the WPS agenda requires transformations to social, political and, most importantly, economic structures that are precisely

the same as the transformations needed to ward off greater climate catastrophe" (Cohn and Duncanson, 2020).' (Magalhães Teixeira and Baldwin, 2026, p.41).

Further, the gap between rhetoric and implementation tends to be quite large. For example, the climate policies and gender policies examined in SIPRI's 2025 research, commissioned by the OSCE, call explicitly for 'meaningful civil society engagement both in decision making and in policy drafting and implementation, a component that is built into the international frameworks from which they originate. Interestingly, eight out of the nine state-level security policies analysed, which do not have any such international norms dictating that they engage outside of the security sector, also encourage engagement with civil society in some way' (Magalhães Teixeira and Baldwin, 2026, p. 50). While interviewees for this same project pointed to inconsistencies between policy and practice in this regard for all three policy types—meaning that even though states are rhetorically committed via policies to engaging with civil society, they often do not follow through on that commitment *or* are not equipped to do so. Nevertheless, particularly in the case of security policies, the rhetorical inclusion is a positive and necessary first step toward better state-population engagement on these issues.

Methodological challenges

In the SIPRI research process for the 2026 report, security policies were a weak point in the policy mapping analysis. This is because, compared against gender and climate policies, there is no international framework guiding national-level security policies (nor foreign policy decisions related to security). In contrast, gender policies often have their roots in the Beijing Declaration, broad gender equality principles, or the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, whereas climate policies follow from the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change (Magalhães Teixeira and Baldwin, 2026, p. 42).

Even when speaking to practitioners at the local level, there is a perennial challenge when asking questions about gender: gender is equated with 'women and girls', and despite the gendered risks faced by men, boys, and gender-diverse people, these groups are rarely raised as having gendered experiences unless explicitly prompted. This reflects a broader lack of disaggregated data on these dynamics and means that even when gender analysis is applied, it often has built-in blind spots from the start. More work is especially needed on whole-of-community needs and experiences of climate-related security risks, not only for women and girls.

On top of this, longstanding concerns about the securitization of the WPS agenda—referring to its being disproportionately applied to military institutions and solutions to conflict rather than focusing on disarmament and prevention goals—present another challenge for study as well as implementation. These (very justified) concerns can make it difficult for feminist civil society in particular to engage with security actors or institutions, though they are very much responsible for certain aspects of implementation. Security and defence institutions also play a significant role in rising emissions (especially from warfighting and weapons development and testing), for example, which in turn exacerbates existing climate-related security risks. This makes them essential stakeholders for engagement but also exacerbates the delicacy of these issues.

Indicators as tools for institutional coherence and policy alignment

For policy implementation, convincing narratives and clarity of terms are important. It is necessary to craft a narrative that speaks to defence actors, which interviewees agreed requires first and foremost a clear explanation of the operational effectiveness of these approaches. Likewise, as one interviewee pointed out, progress at the strategy and policy levels does not mean that long-

term impact will be achieved without resources, clearly defined outcomes, and indicators to measure those outcomes.

Often, women's participation by the numbers or gender parity targets more broadly are the main focus of public information sharing despite covering only one small aspect of gendered approaches to peace and security (particularly through the lens of the WPS agenda, which has three additional pillars that often go unmentioned). Gender-related activities are rarely tracked or reported on as a separate category. Supportive rhetoric, even when enshrined in policy documents, is not backed up by full implementation. Indicators related to gender within climate and security spaces are often limited to participation by the numbers—how many people total participated in a gender-related training, or how many women are represented in leadership roles or decision making fora, for example. Yet such indicators only show a very limited picture. More creativity is needed, developing indicators that track a fuller scope of social outcomes, including those linked to the other three pillars of the WPS agenda—protection, prevention and relief and recovery.

Monitoring tools and indicators developed by research institutions or multilateral organisations can often be adapted to specific contexts. These include the OECD-DAC Gender Equality Policy Markers, national-level indicators included in NDCs, WPS NAPs or climate NAPs, the UN Statistics Division Global Set of Climate Change Indicators, and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund's climate security and justice indicators. Indicators related to Sustainable Development Goals 5, 13 and 16 can also be useful.

Governance fragmentation and implementation challenges

Governance issues, such as weak enforcement of environmental legislation and the politicization of emergency responses, further hinder adaptation. In several cases, emergency resources were reported to be allocated unevenly along political lines, with responses shaped more by political interests rather than by objective assessments of need. This undermines public trust and leaves already marginalized communities particularly exposed to climate-related risks such as pollution, extreme heat, and energy insecurity.

Some interviewees for SIPRI's research on the nexus interpreted their governments' lack of investment in mitigation, adaptation, and disaster response as short-sightedness. In some cases, multinational business partnerships and corruption are prioritized over human security and social needs. In these situations, limited systematic responsiveness to climate security concerns leaves people on their own or over-reliant on international organisations to adjust or find solutions. And where governments *are* making concerted efforts to address climate security concerns, that is not always visible to the people.

Marginalised communities, including women, that are already under-represented in decision making and political processes are more prone to the risks created by poor governance and lack of institutional capacity. These are also often the first communities who feel the effects of biodiversity loss or other environmental damage resulting from practices like over-mining or other unregulated infrastructure expansion. They typically have less social and financial stability, are easier to displace due to a lack of political power, and often rely on agriculture for their livelihoods.

Grievances are also emerging at the intersection of climate change, environmental degradation, and resource governance. Interviewees described growing dissatisfaction among rural and low-income communities, who are often most affected by extractive activities and large-scale infrastructure development, even the ones connected to climate mitigation, yet the least included

in decisions about land, water, and development. These grievances are not only environmental or economic, but also deeply political, shaped by questions of power and inclusion.

Strengthening evidence-based approaches to the nexus

Efforts to un-silo and better integrate policy agendas are likely to face an uphill battle, but consistent political will behind these policies will help. Thematic advisor and focal point roles are extremely useful for moving these efforts forward, one notable example being ensuring that security policy spaces have both gender and climate advisors. Civil society consultations and other tools for contextualisation are also essential for bringing the lived realities of climate-related security risks to the state and international levels. The research conducted by SIPRI for the OSCE generated nineteen recommendations for governments (national and local), international organisations and donors, and civil society (Magalhães Teixeira and Baldwin, 2026, pp. 55–57). Selected recommendations, with relevance for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, follow:

Governments and multilateral institutions should strengthen data, evidence and localization

Develop, collect and analyze gender-disaggregated, context-specific data on climate impacts and related security risks, and conduct regular needs assessments at local and national levels to inform inclusive climate action and security planning. Ensure that this data is integrated into national and local climate strategies and monitoring frameworks, in order to enhance the effectiveness and equity of responses, grounding policies in local realities and knowledge available from under-represented groups.

Governments and multilateral institutions should integrate gender and age considerations into climate action and security policies

Develop gender, age, and other inclusivity criteria, and integrate them into climate action policies—including NDCs, climate NAPs and energy transition plans—and relevant security strategies. Involve civil society, women, youth and marginalized communities in decision-making bodies and ensure that their perspectives are integrated from the outset in the design, budgeting and implementation of climate-related infrastructure and development projects, including dedicated budget lines for gender-responsive measures in all activities.

Governments and multilateral institutions should establish gender-climate-security focal points

Designate focal points in relevant ministries and at the municipal level in order to co-ordinate better integration in policy and implementation. Provide a clear mandate, budget, and targeted training to maximise the focal points' impact.

Governments and multilateral institutions should localize gender-responsive and security-sensitive climate adaptation

Ensure that adaptation and resilience planning is grounded in local realities, through local adaptation plans and community action plans. Ensure that these plans are informed by comprehensive needs assessments and by improved disaggregated data collection at the local level. Integrate local knowledge—particularly from already under-represented groups such as women and youth—as well as gender analysis and equitable decision-making in adaptation planning. Accompany national legislation, such as NDCs or climate NAPs, with secondary legislation and implementation plans.

International organizations and donors should support research and analysis

Undertake or fund research to build a better understanding of gendered vulnerabilities, particularly through context-specific, gender-disaggregated and unbiased data collection, and support the communication and distribution of findings to relevant authorities.

International organizations and donors should support long-term capacity building

Help build the capacity of institutions to enable local ownership of climate responses. Reduce reliance on international actors for participation access, and facilitate rapid, inclusive stakeholder consultations. Consider developing a handbook for authorities that translates policy guidance on the gender-climate-security nexus into actionable steps.

International organizations and donors should enable dialogue and create inclusive platforms for exchange

Facilitate multi-stakeholder exchange and cooperation to strengthen the integration of gender and intersectionality in climate action and disaster risk reduction, building on international best practice.

International organizations and donors should facilitate community-based approaches

Work with institutions and civil society to facilitate consultations with populations that face extra challenges such as geographical remoteness, low education, unpaid care work and cultural limits on mobility.

Civil society should document and share good practices

Gather, document and disseminate evidence of success from grassroots adaptation and resilience initiatives to influence national and regional dialogue.

Civil society should build alliances for inclusive climate and security action

Support intergenerational and intersectional platforms that link youth, women, rural populations and other under-represented groups in order to enable them to collaborate on environmental protection, climate diplomacy and peacebuilding.

All key stakeholders should conduct regular context-specific needs assessments

Invest in commissioning, conducting or participating in needs assessments to identify intersectional vulnerabilities to climate-related security risks. Use findings to inform community action plans that address the most pressing needs for different members of the population, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach at the local level. Include regional and local universities in research and outreach activities.

All stakeholders should expand the understanding of 'gender'

More thoroughly include not only women's, but also men's, boys' and girls' needs and experiences, and those of individuals of diverse gender identities, into gender analysis of climate-related security risks, and use them to develop targeted initiatives that reflect their distinct vulnerabilities and capacities.

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