

Gender equitable and inclusive climate action planning

Toolkit *for cities and local Governments*



GLOBAL COVENANT
of MAYORS for
CLIMATE & ENERGY



CONTENTS

A MESSAGE FROM MAYOR CAROLINA BASUALDO	3
Executive summary	4
PART ONE – CONTEXT AND UNDERSTANDING	6
Introduction	6
Climate change and social inequality	6
Why gender and inclusion matter in climate action	6
Intersectionality.....	8
Cities as catalysts for transformative change	8
Advancing inclusive climate action at the local level	9
PART TWO – EMBEDDING GENDER EQUALITY AND INCLUSION IN EVERY STEP OF THE CITY JOURNEY.....	12
Step 1: Make a commitment to gender equality and inclusion	11
Step 2: Map the gaps in power and participation	12
Step 3: Empower through inclusive community engagement	13
Step 4: Translate stories into tangible actions	14
Step 5: Develop an inclusive climate action plan	15
Step 6: Adopt gender equitable and inclusive climate finance	16
Step 7: Implement gender and inclusive climate actions	17
Step 8: Adopt gender equitable and inclusive procurement	18
Step 9: Embed monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL)	19
GLOSSARY OF TERMS	20
Reference list	24
Acknowledgments	28

A MESSAGE FROM MAYOR CAROLINA BASUALDO



**Mayor
Carolina Basualdo**
Despeñaderos, Argentina

The climate crisis is one of the most urgent challenges of our time. Its impacts are already being felt around the world, disrupting ecosystems, damaging communities, and threatening progress on human rights and sustainable development. But these impacts are not felt equally. Climate change exacerbates existing social and gender inequalities, posing disproportionate risks to groups who face systemic discrimination based on intersecting identities such as age, gender, disability, socioeconomic status, and indigeneity.

Research and lived experience increasingly show the deep connections between climate change and social inequality. Women, girls, and marginalized groups are among the most vulnerable to climate-related shocks and stresses. Their access to safe housing, secure livelihoods, public services, and even personal safety is often more precarious in the face of climate impacts.

At the same time, these groups are at the forefront of sustainable climate action. Across the world, they are driving transformative solutions, whether through local leadership, community-based adaptation, or sustainable innovation.

Yet their voices remain underrepresented in policy, planning, and investment decisions. This must urgently change.

Cities have a key role and responsibility in addressing the twin crises of climate change and social injustice. As engines of innovation and growth they are uniquely placed to translate global goals into practical, people-centered action. But this requires system-wide change. We must confront and dismantle structural inequalities, and we must place gender equality and social justice at the heart of everything we do.

As a city leader, I am committed to paving the way forward. Our work must be driven by inclusive values and shaped by those who reflect the diversity of the communities we serve.

Mayor Carolina Basualdo

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Climate change is not neutral. It amplifies existing inequalities. Women, girls, and marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by climate impacts, yet they are also powerful agents of change. Cities, as the level of government closest to people, are uniquely positioned to lead inclusive and transformative climate action.

This toolkit is a practical guide to help cities and local governments embed gender equity and inclusion into climate action planning. It addresses the urgent need for strategies that cut emissions while tackling systemic inequalities that increase climate risks for marginalized groups, especially women and girls.

Importantly, the toolkit recognizes that not all actions will be immediately transformative. Change often begins with small, intentional steps. These inclusive actions, when sustained over time, build the foundation for long-term, systemic transformation. The guidance is designed to be flexible and scalable, supporting cities at any point in their climate journey.

Why gender and inclusion?

Integrating gender and inclusion into climate action is essential to address the disproportionate risks faced by marginalized communities. Gender inequality remains one of the most persistent and widespread forms of exclusion, intersecting with other social barriers to deepen vulnerability. Prioritizing inclusive approaches strengthens climate strategies, making them more effective and equitable. This leads to resilient cities that support all residents fairly and sustainably.

Why cities?

Cities and local governments are on the frontlines of both climate impacts and innovation. They concentrate risk, but also opportunity. With the right tools, cities can translate global climate goals into locally grounded, inclusive action that benefits all residents. As hubs of governance and creativity, they hold the power to shape equitable futures at scale.

The role of the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy

As a global alliance of cities committed to ambitious climate action, the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (GCoM) supports local governments to develop and implement strategies that are not only effective in reducing emissions but are also equitable and inclusive. With 13,700 cities and local governments across six continents and 147 countries, collectively representing more than 1 billion people, GCoM’s mission is to ensure that climate action benefits all communities, especially those most vulnerable to climate impacts.

Aligned with the Global Covenant of Mayors’ Global Research and Action Agenda (GRAA), which emphasizes locally grounded, inclusive climate action, this toolkit highlights the importance of centering equity and inclusion in climate strategies. To support this, the toolkit is grounded in three core principles:

- 1

Do no harm - Programs that address basic needs and vulnerabilities of women and marginalized groups.
- 2

Empowerment - Programs that build assets, capabilities, and opportunities for women and marginalized groups.
- 3

Transformative change - Programs that address unequal power relationships and seek legal, institutional, and societal change.

About this toolkit

This toolkit supports GCoM signatory cities and local governments in advancing gender and inclusion ambition within their climate action efforts. It provides practical guidance, evidence, and illustrative examples to support equitable and locally relevant climate responses.

Building on GCoM’s Common Reporting Framework (CRF) and its accompanying Guidance Note, it offers a set of non-binding, practical guiding actions that center the lived experiences of women, girls, and marginalized groups in decision-making. The goal is to ensure that those most affected by climate change are directly involved in shaping, and benefiting from, more inclusive climate outcomes.

The toolkit explains the connection between climate change and social inequality and provides actionable, evidence-based steps for integrating gender equality and inclusion into local climate strategies.

Each action is designed to be practical and adaptable across a range of contexts, acknowledging common challenges such as limited capacity and resources.

Actions are flexible and process-oriented, allowing cities to engage with the entire framework or focus on the sections most relevant to their priorities, entry points, and current stage of progress.

The toolkit is structured in two parts:

- 1

Part One explores the context and explains why inclusive approaches are essential in the face of intersecting climate and social challenges.
- 2

Part Two sets out a nine-step approach for embedding gender and inclusion into climate action planning:

1.

Make a commitment to gender equality and inclusion.

2.

Map the gaps in power and participation.

3.

Empower through inclusive community engagement.

4.

Translate stories into tangible actions.

5.

Develop an inclusive climate action plan.

6.

Adopt gender equitable and inclusive climate finance.

7.

Implement gender and inclusive climate actions.

8.

Adopt gender equitable and inclusive procurement.

9.

Embed monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) to track progress and adapt over time.

To support implementation, each step includes illustrative examples and links to additional resources.

Supporting case studies and practical tools are provided in a supplementary document available on the GCoM website.

PART ONE – CONTEXT AND UNDERSTANDING

Introduction

The climate crisis is one of the most urgent and defining challenges of our time, disrupting ecosystems, economies, and everyday life. However, these impacts are not felt equally.

Disparities in climate vulnerability are shaped by entrenched social, economic, and political dynamics. These determine who lives in high-risk areas, who has access to the resources needed to adapt or recover, and whose voices influence decision-making.

The unequal distribution of climate impacts is also evident at the global scale. The Global South, despite contributing the least to greenhouse gas emissions, bears some of the most severe consequences of climate change (World Bank, 2023). These regions often experience more frequent and intense climate-related disasters, such as extreme heat, flooding, droughts, and cyclones. Many also face compounding challenges, including limited infrastructure, financial constraints, and institutional capacity gaps that hinder effective prevention, adaptation, and recovery.

Rapid urbanization adds complexity but also offers an opportunity to re-imagine how cities are planned, governed, and designed with equity at the center. Inclusion must guide every climate solution, starting with those most affected.

Climate change and social inequality

Traditionally, climate mitigation strategies and plans often overlook the importance of embedding social equity in their design and implementation.

Those already experiencing systemic discrimination and exclusion are often the hardest hit by climate change (IPCC, 2022). This includes people living in

informal settlements, those with disabilities, older adults, racial and ethnic minorities, and others who are frequently excluded from services and planning processes (World Bank, 2009; UN-Habitat, 2020). In urban areas, their vulnerabilities are intensified by unequal access to infrastructure, healthcare, education, and safety (OECD, 2018; UN-Habitat, 2020).

Addressing these inequities is essential if cities are to deliver climate responses that are both inclusive and effective (C40 Cities & GCoM, 2022).

Why gender and inclusion matter in climate action

While many social groups face heightened climate risks, placing emphasis on gender is essential. Women and girls remain the largest and most excluded group worldwide. Gender inequality is one of the most persistent and cross-cutting forms of exclusion. It compounds social, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities, making women and girls more likely to experience the greatest impacts of climate-related events (UN Women, 2023).

Globally, women represent 80% of those displaced by climate-related disasters (UNESCO, n.d.), and women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die during such events (UNDP & Global Gender and Climate Alliance, 2016).

After disasters, women often face increased caregiving responsibilities, heightened risks of violence, and the loss of informal livelihoods, including economic activities and jobs that are not regulated or protected by the state, such as street vending or home-based work (ILO, 2018). Their participation in the informal economy also increases vulnerability to economic shocks and limits access to recovery resources and social protection.

Climate-related disruptions can further affect education, health, and mobility. For example, women and girls may be pressured to prioritize household

duties over schooling (Fry & Lei, 2021). While many also experience additional barriers due to disabilities, mobility challenges, or limited access to education, all of which can hinder effective disaster response (UNDP & Global Gender and Climate Alliance, 2016; World Bank, 2020).

Women and girls also face specific risks that vary by context and intersect with social, cultural, and economic factors. For example, they experience higher mortality rates during water-related disasters, partly because fewer girls globally are taught to swim (World Health Organization, 2022). In Indigenous communities, these challenges are exacerbated as they are often located in hazard-prone areas and suffer more due to exclusion from climate adaptation and resilience initiatives (Dieleman, 2024).

These vulnerabilities are not inherent; they result from deep-rooted systems of inequality. Climate change exacerbates risks, such as stillbirth, heat stress, malnutrition, and gender-based violence especially in countries where women already face high rates of maternal mortality, adolescent births, and child marriage (UNFPA, 2024). Displacement compounds these challenges by increasing unpaid care burdens, heightening reproductive health risks, and further exposing women and girls to gender-based violence (UNHCR, 2021).

Despite this, women, girls and marginalized groups remain largely absent from city-level climate governance, relief, and rebuilding efforts, creating critical gaps in policy and implementation (UNDP & Chao, 2025; World Bank, 2010).

For example, as of 2023, only 23 of 120 Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) globally include gender progress indicators, 18 commit to gender-responsive budgeting, and 21 address gender in climate finance strategies (UNDP, 2023).

Following the 2023 Lahaina wildfire in Hawaii, calls to Maui’s 24/7 domestic violence hotline more than doubled. Local services reported increased incidents of domestic violence, sexual assault, and emotional trauma linked to housing instability, stress, and financial strain (FEMA, 2023). Similarly, in Vanuatu, cases of domestic violence increased by 300% after two tropical cyclones in 2011 (IUCN, 2020). Comparable risks have been observed across parts of East and Southern Africa following major climate shocks, though data is often lacking at the local level.



Gender equality is not only a human right, but also fundamental to sustainable development (Cities Alliance, 2022). Addressing gender inequality does not negate the importance of other identities; it strengthens broader equity outcomes and is vital for achieving sustainable development, as recognized in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015).

This is underscored by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5, ‘Gender Equality’, and the extended Lima Work Programme on Gender (UNFCCC, 2024). However, progress remains slow and is hindered by significant data gaps. Less than half of the data needed to effectively monitor gender equality is currently collected, despite the availability of best-practice tools (UN Women, 2022; The Commonwealth, 2022).

As the transition to low-carbon economies risks excluding women, who are currently projected to hold only 25% of green jobs (Soubeyran and Choudhary, 2023). Unless targeted policies ensure equitable access to training, hiring, and workplace conditions, existing inequalities may be perpetuated in these emerging sectors.

These examples highlight why cities need to understand and address the intersections of gender, inclusion, and climate risk. Centering the experiences of women and marginalized communities in climate policy and disaster planning is essential for creating effective and equitable solutions.

Intersectionality

Climate vulnerabilities are intensified when multiple aspects of identity, such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, disability, age, or migration status intersect. This is known as intersectionality; a framework that recognizes how overlapping systems of inequality compound the impacts faced by people (Crenshaw, 1989). For example, an Indigenous woman living in poverty may face intersecting forms of discrimination, both as a woman and as an Indigenous person, compounded by structural inequalities (Dieleman, 2024).

Understanding these layered experiences is essential to designing climate strategies that respond to lived realities. This toolkit calls on cities to adopt inclusive and participatory climate action planning to address these disparities.

Cities as catalysts for transformative change



Cities are hotspots of global climate emissions and risk, but they are also hubs for innovation, action and resilience.

The Summary for Urban Policymakers of the IPCC’s Sixth Assessment Report, 2022

Cities are particularly vulnerable to climate change because they concentrate people, infrastructure, and economic activity in dense urban areas. The specific risks they face depend on their geographic location (IPCC, 2022): warmer cities may experience extreme heat and disease outbreaks; coastal and low-lying cities are exposed to flooding and storms; and arid cities face water shortages. Recognizing these place-based threats is essential for inclusive and resilient urban planning.

Often these hazards coincide making it even harder for cities to respond (UN-Habitat, 2020). The cost of inaction for cities is substantial, affecting their economic functions, wider society and the communities living there (GCoM, 2024). Cities must take transformative and decisive action to address this, by investing in resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive urban planning, enhancing social protections, and supporting community-led adaptation efforts (The Summary for Urban Policymakers of the IPCC’s Sixth Assessment Report, 2022).

Cities such as Cape Town (South Africa), Chennai (India), and São Paulo (Brazil), have faced severe water shortages in recent years (Global Covenant of Mayors, 2019; UNEP, 2022). Smaller cities like Kisumu (Kenya), Santa Ana (El Salvador), and Hubli-Dharwad (India) face similar challenges.

Within these urban areas, the poorest residents, many of whom live in informal settlements, bear the greatest burden. These settlements are often located in areas prone to floods, landslides, or pollution and may lack access to basic services like clean water, sanitation, green spaces, and critical sources of ecosystem services that enhance urban resilience, support wellbeing, and help mitigate the impacts of climate change (World Bank, 2014). This means that low-and middle-income countries experience the highest urban death rates from extreme weather events (WHO, 2021).

The scale of projected urban growth adds further urgency. According to UN-Habitat (2018), nearly 2.5 billion more people will live in cities by 2050. Over 90% of this growth is expected in low-and middle-income countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South/Southeast Asia. This presents a narrow but critical window for cities to shape safe, sustainable and inclusive futures.

The decisions cities make today, about urban planning, mobility, housing, energy, and public space will shape their resilience, emissions trajectories, and social outcomes for decades to come. Without inclusive, gender-responsive approaches, climate action may reinforce the same inequalities that contribute to increased vulnerability in the first place.

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Advancing inclusive climate action at the local level

Advancing inclusive climate action needs deliberate efforts to ensure that all community members, especially marginalized groups, are meaningfully engaged and benefit equally from climate solutions. Key levers to advance inclusive climate action include:

- Leadership and commitment from city officials can inspire collective action and foster inclusive approaches.
- Adoption of policies and strategies that centre inclusion and co-production.
- Financial and procurement strategies can unlock resources to enable equitable climate resilience.
- Engagement with communities and valuing lived experiences to ensure policies address real challenges.
- Embracing monitoring, evaluation, and learning to ensure continuous improvement in response to the evolving needs of local communities.



Start small but be intentional. Even modest initiatives can create significant impact when they actively include underrepresented groups.

Nisporeni, Moldova

The advice is: do not be afraid to break with traditional models.

Salvador, Brazil

PART TWO - EMBEDDING GENDER EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE PRINCIPLES IN THE CITY JOURNEY



STEP 1

Make a commitment to gender equality and inclusion

Setting an ambition to deliver gender equitable and inclusive climate action is most effective when it begins at the earliest stages of the city journey. This starts with recognizing the deep connection between climate change and social inequality.

City leaders, including elected officials, such as mayors, as well as heads of departments and other key decision-makers, play a critical role in setting this ambition. Their support creates the conditions for teams to center gender equality and inclusion by building internal knowledge, capacity, and resources to turn principles into practice. Research also shows that a 1% increase in women's leadership within companies correlates to a 0.5% reduction in emissions (Kothari, 2025).

Actions

Set the intent - At the beginning of the city journey, set an ambition to embed gender equitable and inclusive principles in your climate action planning.

Allocate resources - Delivering this ambition does not necessarily mean higher costs. But it does require strong commitment, knowledge and capacity.

Build knowledge and capacity - Where possible, involve gender and inclusion experts early. If this expertise is not available, a team member could become a gender and inclusion champion.

Adopt a collaborative approach - Think about setting up an internal, cross-departmental working group to drive this agenda. This can include planning, housing, finance and procurement. Consider involving experts on gender and inclusion from academia, Non-Governmental Organizations, and community organizations where you have an Advisory Group.

A gender and inclusion champion is a dedicated team member ensuring that gender equity and inclusion are considered throughout all stages. Where such a role is to be developed, this toolkit provides the resources available to begin that journey (C40 Women4Climate (n.d.), UN CC (n.d.)). To be effective, champions should be provided with appropriate time, support, and resources.

City leadership driving gender equality and inclusion: Across the world, city leaders are prioritizing gender and inclusion, from Bogotá (Colombia) to Salvador (Brazil) and Strasen (Moldova). In Glasgow (Scotland), a locally elected representative championed a motion to adopt a feminist city approach in 2022. This commitment led to the assessment of city operations from a gendered perspective and the creation of a cross-departmental feminist urbanism working group, with resources for strategy development, project delivery, and internal capacity building. The members of the working group act as gender champions, who embed gender equality across the Council's work, from gender budgeting and procurement to urban planning and climate action. This organizational shift will ensure that every strategy and decision reflect a strong commitment to advancing gender equality.



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STEP 2

Map the gaps in power and participation

Use data to understand who is most vulnerable to climate change and whose voices may have been excluded.

The Common Reporting Framework (CRF) (GCoM 2023) under the Risk and Vulnerability Assessment section recommends collecting data on vulnerable groups. Use the CRF and its Guidance Note to see what data can support your work. This step builds on the CRF by offering further guidance on how to collect robust inclusive data. Strengthening data quality is an important step in understanding who is most impacted, and in turn, helps ensure that the voices of those most affected are centered in decision-making.

Actions

Understand disproportionate burdens - Leverage the understanding from Part 1 of this Toolkit and the resources highlighted to understand who is likely to face the greatest risks and is least resilient to climate impacts. Look at how intersectional factors, such as gender, race, age, disability, income, and housing status interact with structural inequalities increasing exposure and vulnerability. Where relevant, consider using ethical data protocols, such as the [CARE \(GIDA n.d\) Principles for Indigenous Data Governance](#) which emphasize intersectional and justice-oriented approaches to data collection and use.

Gather local, intersectional data - Understand your local context by collecting and analyzing disaggregated local data. Derive insights around intersectional factors such as gender, age, income, disability, and housing type.

Learn from past events - Combine quantitative data (e.g., hospital admissions, fatalities, job losses) with qualitative insights (e.g., testimonies from community groups, research studies and reports) to understand who has been most affected by climate-related hazards and consequences.

Fill data gaps - Recognize that many marginalized groups (e.g., undocumented migrants, unhoused people, informal workers) are often absent from official data. Source missing data by using alternatives like the [Migration Data Portal](#) and engage frontline organizations.

Map intersections of exclusion and risk - Produced maps that show the relationships between excluded people and the risks they face. Consider overlaying data on demographics, geographical context, economic and climate hazards, to identify priority groups and engagement focus areas.

Integrating quantitative and socio-economic data to map climate vulnerability: In preparing their Climate Action Plan the city of Durban, South Africa, has combined quantitative data such as hospital admissions related to heat stress and respiratory illness, alongside socio-economic indicators like income, housing quality, and age, to map vulnerability to climate impacts. By layering this data with geospatial climate risk maps, such as flood-prone zones and heat islands, the analysis showed that informal settlements and elderly populations in flood-prone areas face the greatest health risks from climate events. While this quantitative approach did not fully capture their lived experiences, it helped the city identify who is most affected and where they live, guiding strategy for further community outreach.

STEP 3

Empower through inclusive community engagement

Having mapped people affected in your local context, the next step is to actively centre their leadership, knowledge, and lived experience in decision-making. You should set out how to involve women, girls, and marginalized communities as equal partners in climate action planning. This can be achieved through participatory engagement, co-creating solutions, and building long-term, trust-based relationships that recognize and value local expertise.

Actions

Develop an inclusive engagement strategy - Define how you will involve participants fairly. Plan how you can remove barriers to involvement such as caregiving responsibilities, lack of time and potential cost, encouraging all voices to be heard and play a central role throughout the project lifecycle.

Collaborate with communities - Collaborate with communities to adapt to their preferred ways of engagement. Leverage local leadership, for example, Indigenous chiefs or local councillors, to foster authentic collaboration that respects communication styles and cultural practices.

Use participatory methods - Engage communities through approaches like exploratory walks, focus groups, and community research (We Made That, 2024). Feminist and inclusive methodologies can support this work (C40 Cities and Arup, 2019; Cities Alliance, 2022).

Ethical engagement - Foster safe and transparent spaces by maintaining clear communication, respecting privacy, and obtaining informed consent. It is essential to clearly explain how data will be used, particularly when working with vulnerable groups, such as undocumented migrants. Be aware of potential power imbalances and actively work to mitigate them. Demonstrate respect for cultural norms and practices, avoiding assumptions and stereotypes.

Ensure accountability - Build trust by establishing clear feedback loops where communities can actively participate, review, challenge, and validate decisions or findings. Act on their feedback transparently and keep communities regularly informed throughout the process. [Adopt a Grievance Redress Mechanism \(GRM\)](#) (The World Bank n.d.) as a locally based, formalized way to accept, assess, and resolve community feedback or complaints.

Avoid consultation fatigue - Share insights across other relevant departments. This demonstrates that participant time and inputs are valued.

Community-led data collection in informal settlements: In informal settlements, where official maps and data are often absent or inaccurate, community-led documentation is often the only legitimate way to understand local realities. Residents know the social, spatial, and infrastructural boundaries better than any external researcher or official, whose outsider status can limit both access and trust. Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI), active in cities across India, Kenya, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, trains and financially compensates residents to lead enumerations, mapping, and settlement profiling. In Harare, Zimbabwe, for example, residents of the Magada informal settlement worked with SDI to map their community, producing data that led to the upgrading plan in the country, including improvements to roads, water, and sanitation based on residents' priorities.



STEP 4

Translate stories into tangible actions

Use data from Step 2 and lived experience and stories from Step 3 to identify potential targeted and actionable climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience strategies. These strategies should address identified vulnerabilities and promote gender equality and inclusion.

Actions

Use insights to inform key assessments - The knowledge and stories shared by engaged women, girls and marginalized groups should be used to gain a picture of the real-life climate change impacts on marginalized communities. This will help inform the [Risk and Vulnerability Assessments and Energy Access and Poverty Assessments \(GCoM 2023\)](#).

Integrate lived experiences into your strategy - Use insights, stories and case studies to identify potential actions for your climate action plan. Consider using a simple matrix (Figure 1) to overlay this data and begin mapping potential actions.

Leverage local climate adaptations - Recognize the vital role of community-led adaptation practices. These practices should be recognized as valid adaptation measures and actively integrated into your climate action and energy access plans.

Identify cross-sectoral actions - In analyzing the collected evidence, you may find that key mitigation and adaptation actions fall outside of your immediate remit (e.g. governance, housing, employment, financial solutions). Log them in your action matrix and raise them with your working groups, such as the Advisory Board.

Create a baseline - Combine data and lived experiences from previous steps to understand the level of exposure women, girls and other groups currently experience. Use this to measure and track improvements over time.

Figure 1: Example of a matrix

Engaged group / area	Climate impact	Exposure	Vulnerability	Adaptive capacity	Potential actions / notes
Informal workers (e.g. street vendors) in urban slums	Record heatwaves lead to health risks, income loss, and food spoilage	Congested informal settlements; tin-roofed housing; outdoor work with no protection or sanitation	Middle-aged women in informal work, undergoing menopause, with caregiving responsibilities, low-income household	Very limited: daily wages lost, no cooling, poor healthcare, no work protection	Prioritize heat adaptation: shaded markets, cooling shelters, access to safe and managed public sanitary facilities, heat alert systems; menopause-specific health outreach; climate insurance; improve housing conditions

Inclusive urban planning with Her City Toolbox: In the Mahate neighborhood of Pemba, Cabo Delgado Province, Mozambique, UN-Habitat is working with the city administration to empower displaced communities in shaping a locally owned Action Plan. This participatory process ensures that community voices are integrated into the design and delivery of neighborhood infrastructure. Over 100 stakeholders have contributed to the planning of a site set to benefit 5,000 residents, with special focus on women and girls. To facilitate this engagement, the [Her City toolbox](#) was used, that equips municipal professionals, urban actors, and local decision-makers with practical tools to mainstream youth, gender, and socio-economic inclusion in urban development.

STEP 5

Develop an inclusive climate action plan

After identifying potential actions, create opportunities to validate these with already engaged communities. Involve them in co-creating solutions that will shape your climate action plan. Proposed mitigation and adaptation measures which are grounded in the lived experiences of the most vulnerable communities, recognizing and building on their existing local knowledge and adaptive strategies as valid forms of resilience.

Actions

Co-create actions through inclusive engagement - Validate proposed mitigation and adaptation measures with already engaged communities, particularly women, girls, and other marginalized groups. Use participatory methods to co-create actions that reflect local knowledge and critically assesses unintended negative consequences E.g. Infrastructure improvements or even greening initiatives can sometimes lead to gentrification and displacement of low-income residents (World Habitat, 2015).

Ground strategy in local realities - Include a social profile of the city that identifies who is most vulnerable to climate risks, based on intersectional factors. Clearly outline how the proposed actions directly respond to these vulnerabilities.

Centre gender equality and inclusion - Highlight the importance of inclusive practices by developing a dedicated chapter on the intersection of climate change, gender, and social equality. Ensure this theme is woven throughout all other stages of the plan.

Translate insight into action - Identify tangible measures that respond to the needs of women, girls, and marginalized communities across all themes like energy, water, waste, mobility, and nature-based solutions. Prioritize actions that are measurable and include mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL). Include community stories and case studies to illustrate challenges and solutions from a lived experience perspective.

Keep it simple and focused - Simple, targeted, and community-led solutions are often the most effective. Be open to innovation and design with people.

Embedding social equity in Turku's circular economy roadmap: The City of Turku, Finland, developed a Circular Economy Roadmap as part of its climate neutrality strategy using a socially inclusive and participatory process involving over 200 stakeholders. It was the first roadmap of its kind to systematically embed social equity, conducting risk assessments to identify potential impacts on different population groups. The city applied [ICLEI's Equitable Transitions Guide Book](#) (ICLEI 2022) to ensure each initiative improved access, participation, and opportunity. This led to tangible outcomes like inclusive circular food systems, upskilling programs, and repurposed spaces for community use.



STEP 6

Adopt gender equitable and inclusive climate finance

Equitable climate finance ensures that resources reach those most affected by climate change, prioritizing gender equality and inclusion in climate action. Financial products, services, and investments should be accessible to, and benefit, everyone, including marginalized groups.

By adopting approaches, such as gender budgeting (UN Women, 2010) and participatory budgeting (Participatory Budget Project, n.d.) communities can directly influence how local budgets are spent, embedding inclusion into financial decision-making. Beyond managing their own budgets, cities can also act as enablers, connecting financial institutions with individuals, grassroots groups, and community organizations. They can directly empower these groups to access financial services and products, supporting scaling-up of locally-led, inclusive climate solutions.

+ Cuenca's climate budget - power to the people: In Cuenca, Ecuador, participatory budgeting has empowered communities to shape local investments since the early 2000s. Between 2017 and 2019, residents selected nearly 700 projects worth over US \$19 million, 89% focused on climate adaptation measures like drainage systems, flood protection, and green space improvements. The process was intentionally inclusive: funding prioritized the city's 21 poorest parishes and 60% of participants were women. Residents were involved throughout, from planning and voting to implementation and oversight, building trust and local ownership.

Actions

Budgeting and resource allocation - Where possible, allocate budgets for internal resources, such as gender and inclusion experts, training for internal teams, funding for a gender and inclusion working group and community engagement.

Secure funding for community-led solutions - Apply for national or international green funds to support delivery of community led solutions (e.g. green climate fund, cities climate finance gap fund).

Empower communities - Adopt [participatory](#) and gender budgeting processes. This will directly empower marginalized groups to make decisions that reflect their local priorities and lived experiences.

Access to and mobilization of finance - Act as a broker between communities and funders by supporting grassroots organizations who may lack formal access to climate funds.

Policy and partnership development - Support local businesses, NGOs, grassroots organizations, and community leaders working with marginalized groups to build their capacity to access and manage funding. Work with communities to raise awareness of financial options for climate mitigation, such as climate risk insurance ([CRI \(IRGPCE, 2025\)](#)).

Governance and accountability - Establish transparent monitoring systems that track how climate funds are allocated and who benefits. Use qualitative and quantitative data by gender, age, and other relevant factors. Make this data visible and accessible by publicly sharing it through real-time dashboards and other easy-to-understand visual tools.

STEP 7

Implement gender and inclusive climate actions

Take steps to ensure that the goal to achieve gender equality and inclusion is not sidelined or left as strategic intention. Gender equality and inclusion should remain central to delivery through dedicated leadership, clear processes across all actions, and accountability through ongoing monitoring, evaluation and learning.

+ From vulnerability to empowerment: Marias na Construção is a pioneering initiative by the City of Salvador, Brazil, focused on technical training and socio-productive inclusion of women, with special emphasis on survivors of gender-based violence. The program is a public-private partnership between the City of Salvador and the Bahia branch of the National Industrial Training Service and offers free courses in traditionally male-dominated sectors of the construction industry. Over 500 women have already been trained in construction-related technical courses, with a strong employment rate after completion. The project was created in response to community needs, prioritizing the inclusion of vulnerable groups to promote economic empowerment and support the local economy.

Actions

Clarify roles, responsibilities and reporting - Clear roles and responsibilities should be established for gender and inclusion across all stages of project delivery, from concept and procurement to implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Set monitoring frameworks such as [Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion \(GEDSI\)-based metrics](#) (OCEAN GEDSI, 2025) and indicators to track progress and outcomes against targets. Formalize this through written policies, reporting systems, and performance tracking.

Empower role of gender and inclusion expert(s) / champion(s) - Experts or champions should continue to oversee the implementation of strategic inclusion goals, ensuring that the principles established at the outset remain central to every action, project, and decision. They should supervise and monitor how each project delivers on its gender and inclusion-specific objectives.

Embed gender and inclusion into all projects and climate programs - All development and infrastructure projects should respond to the specific needs of women, girls, and marginalized groups, as identified in the local evidence base. Project proposals should include gender analysis and inclusive objectives. This is especially important for large infrastructure or public-private partnerships.

Participatory engagement - Continue to co-create projects through participatory engagement with women, girls, and marginalized communities. Their voices should shape the planning, design, development, and decision-making of all programs and projects.

Deliver solutions through community-led initiatives - to foster capacity building, income generation, and social inclusion, supporting sustainable climate adaptation and mitigation, while also sharing responsibility to provide tangible benefits to communities.





STEP 8

Adopt gender equitable and inclusive procurement

Public procurement can help address inequalities by creating economic opportunities for marginalized groups. For example, by prioritizing contracts for women-led, minority-owned, or local businesses, cities and local governments can support underrepresented suppliers and direly benefit local community. Including social value clauses, such as hiring from marginalized groups or offering training, ensures public spending delivers wider benefits such as capacity building and empowerment. Fair working conditions, equal pay, and inclusive policies can be required of suppliers. Simplifying the tender process and offering support can make procurement more accessible.

Actions

Develop project briefs based on community needs - Use data from previous engagement with local groups to draft socially responsive project briefs that reflect the lived experiences, needs, and priorities of marginalized communities. This helps ensure projects directly benefit those most affected. For smaller, targeted projects, consider innovative ways to involve the community in co-creating the brief.

Prioritize local and inclusive businesses - Design procurement processes to favor local small and medium-sized enterprises, especially those led by women or those employing marginalized community members. Embed ethical and sustainable practices by ensuring supply chain traceability and excluding suppliers linked to human rights or labor violations.

Provide capacity building and support - Offer workshops, training, and guidance to help marginalized suppliers understand and navigate procurement processes successfully.

Require equity-focused contractor plans - Contractors should submit detailed plans demonstrating how they will promote gender equality and inclusion, including hiring local labor from vulnerable groups and partnering with community organizations for ongoing engagement and co-management.

Monitor contractor accountability - Track and review contractors' performance on equity commitments throughout the project to ensure they are meeting inclusive hiring, community involvement, and equitable outcomes in alignment with their plans.

Inclusive procurement for local empowerment: Avilés, a small city in northern Spain, has integrated social clauses into public procurement since 2009 to promote inclusive employment. The city requires contractors to hire from marginalized groups, such as people with disabilities, long-term unemployed individuals, older workers, and migrants. To support this, it provides training and technical assistance to both municipal staff and social enterprises, enabling them to participate in tenders. A dedicated team offers follow-up support to ensure people are successfully integrated into the workforce. This approach has led to the employment of over 500 people from disadvantaged backgrounds and is now considered a replicable good practice across Europe.

STEP 9

Embed monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL)

While the CRF sets out requirements for monitoring, cities may enhance this by tracking the social equity impacts of climate action plans and related projects. The MEAL approach is one of the most widely used frameworks for understanding the benefits of interventions, as well as for tracking and improving their implementation.

Caring for the carers: building women's power through circular economy: Caring Women - Hearts that Care in Despeñaderos, Argentina, is a program that empowers women caregivers of people with disabilities by supporting their personal growth, economic independence, and environmental awareness through textile recycling. Women are trained in reusing textile waste to produce and sell crafted items, helping them build self-esteem, income, and support networks. Given its ambitious and multi-dimensional goals, an agile monitoring and evaluation approach was adopted from the start to ensure goals were met and to learn and adapt as the project evolved. For example, regular input from a team of psychologists, social workers, and facilitators proved essential to supporting women's emotional and social wellbeing alongside their professional growth. This responsive and inclusive monitoring process has been key to strengthening the project's outcomes, ensuring its long-term success.

Actions

Set clear indicators to measure improvements - These should reflect the needs raised by marginalized communities through previous participatory engagement. Where possible, the process should be transformative, with goals and indicators that measure structural change. Such goals may include changes in policies, increased access to job opportunities, skills development, confidence building, and improved well-being. Setting and monitoring these indicators can involve diverse professionals, such as social workers and sociologists.

Monitor progress by collecting disaggregated data - Track the delivery of gender and inclusion goals, as well as improvements from your baseline, by collecting data disaggregated by multiple factors, such as sex, age, income level, disability, and other relevant factors.

Qualitative data for inclusive evaluations - Validate the effectiveness of climate actions by drawing on the lived experiences of those most affected. Assess whether your actions are genuinely reducing social and gender inequalities and contributing to shifts in power.

Strengthen accountability - Set up transparent mechanisms that allow affected communities to provide feedback or raise concerns.

Adapt and improve based on what you learn - Use the insights gathered from social indicators, disaggregated data, and community feedback to understand what is working, what is not, and why. Apply these insights to improve processes, including climate actions, implementation mechanisms, procurement procedures, and investment decisions. This will also help build credibility with communities by showing that their input leads to tangible change.

Facilitate cross-learning and knowledge sharing - Collect case studies and share learnings across teams to influence wider change.



Glossary of terms

Adaptive capacity

The ability of people, communities, or systems to reduce climate risks through planning, technology, education, and resources. It also includes the ability to seize new opportunities arising from climate change (e.g. shifting crops or improving housing conditions).

Adaptation practices

Adaptation practices are actions and strategies taken to adjust to current or expected impacts of climate change. These practices aim to reduce harm, build resilience, or take advantage of new opportunities resulting from climate-related changes. They can be implemented at different levels, including individual, community, and institutional, and may be proactive (planned) or reactive (in response to events).

Climate action

Stepped-up efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-induced impacts.

Climate adaptation

Means taking action to prepare for and adjust to the current and future impacts of climate change. The purpose of climate adaptation is to reduce vulnerability and increase resilience by addressing the effects of climate change, such as more frequent extreme weather events. Adaptation can take many forms, including changes to urban planning, infrastructure design, and agricultural practices to better cope with evolving environmental conditions.

Climate impacts

Refers to the physical effects of climate change (e.g. extreme heat, extreme cold, storms, or changes in precipitation) that influence the economy, environment, and society. The nature and severity of these impacts are shaped by geography, local context, and the resilience of human systems. While some effects may have varied outcomes, such as longer growing seasons in certain regions, many climate impacts pose significant risks to health, livelihoods, and infrastructure.

Climate justice

People centered understanding and approach to climate change. Climate Justice understands that action on climate change is linked to equality, equity and inclusion (RTPI, 2020).

Climate mitigation

Climate mitigation involves actions that limit greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions or reduce their levels in the atmosphere. This includes cutting emissions from energy use, land use, and enhancing carbon sinks that absorb CO2 naturally or artificially. The goal is to reduce human-caused emissions toward net zero to limit global warming, supporting a stable environment for people and ecosystems. Effective mitigation requires understanding emission sources and using technical, policy, and societal tools to reduce them. (IPCC, 2022).

Climate resilience

Planning climate resilient places means anticipating the impact of climate change in a highly local context and ensuring that cities are prepared to withstand the effects by proactively taking measures to reduce vulnerability to climate impacts and build capacity to adapt to changing conditions.

Ecosystem services

The benefits that people obtain from nature, such as clean air and water, climate regulation, and recreational space. In urban areas, these benefits are often provided by green and blue infrastructure like parks, trees, and wetlands.

Equality

This term means giving everyone the same resources or opportunities, assuming everyone starts from the same place.

Equity

Recognizes systemic disparities and aims to provide fair opportunities by addressing specific needs and removing barriers.

External advisory board

A panel of independent experts or stakeholders who provide guidance, oversight, and accountability for projects or initiatives, often to ensure inclusion, transparency, and impact.

Exposure

Describes the extent to which a territory or group is subject to climate impacts, influenced by location, terrain, and lifestyles. Different places or populations in the same area may face different risks depending on these factors.

Gender and inclusion champion

An individual or group who actively promotes gender equality and broader inclusion, advocating for the integration of diverse gender perspectives and inclusive practices within their organization or field of work. This role can be fulfilled by one or multiple people or agencies and may include participation as part of an advisory board or dedicated working group. Gender and inclusion champions help drive cultural change, influence policy, and ensure that diverse voices are heard and considered in decision-making processes.

Gender mainstreaming

A strategy for integrating gender perspectives into all levels of policies, programs, and projects and enabling system change by empowering women to effect change from within systems, rather than replicating existing and inherent inequality.

Global North

Refers to economically developed countries, primarily in North America and Europe, that have historically contributed the most to greenhouse gas emissions and generally have more resources to adapt to climate impacts.

Global South

A term used to refer to countries mostly in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania that are historically less economically developed and are often more vulnerable to climate change, despite contributing less to global emissions.

Green jobs

This term generally refers to jobs in environmentally sustainable sectors, such as renewable energy or energy efficiency.

Inclusive

The practice of including relevant stakeholders and communities, particularly marginalized groups, in the policy-making and urban governance process, to ensure a fair policy process with equitable outcomes.

Inclusive climate action (ICA)

An approach that considers how different people and communities may be impacted by both climate change and climate actions, given their wellbeing, prosperity and location within a city.

Indigenous communities

A distinct group of people with a historical connection to a specific territory and who share a cultural identity, language, and social systems. They often have a strong link to the natural resources of their territory and may conflict with pervasive, incoming systems. Indigenous communities can be a vital source of local knowledge for climate adaptation.

Informal employment

Informal work that is not registered with the state. This work is often precarious and lacks legal protection, access to social security and labor rights. Women and marginalized groups are more likely to be operating in informal employment.

Informal settlement

A community or neighborhood where people live without secure land tenure or official recognition from the state. These settlements often lack reliable access to basic urban services like piped water, electricity, sanitation, and last-mile connectivity. Residents usually face challenges related to poor infrastructure, overcrowding, and limited legal protections.

Migration data portal

The migration data portal is a comprehensive online platform managed by the global migration data analysis centre (GMDAC) of the international organization for migration (IOM). It serves as a central hub for timely, reliable, and globally comparable migration data, providing insights into international migration trends, policies, and statistics.

Nationally determined contributions (NDCs)

National climate action plans submitted by countries under the Paris Agreement, outlining efforts to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. Gender progress indicators in NDCs measure how gender considerations are integrated into these plans.

Participatory budgeting

This form of budgeting allows communities to directly influence how local budgets are spent.

Qualitative data

Non-numerical data that provide depth and context, often gathered through interviews, focus groups, or case studies to understand experiences, motivations, and perspectives.

Quantitative data

Information that can be counted, measured or expressed numerically and analyzed as a set of facts. Quantitative data is often presented as objective. However, when considered in relation to gender mainstreaming it must be acknowledged that systemic inequality can skew data presented as objective reality.

Risk and vulnerability assessments and energy access and poverty assessments

These assessments refer to processes that identify who and what is most at risk from climate hazards, and evaluate how well low-income and vulnerable communities can access affordable, reliable energy. These assessments help guide targeted adaptation and equitable energy interventions, as outlined in the GCoM guidance note on climate risk and vulnerability assessments (CRVA) and energy access and poverty assessments.

Social justice

This term refers to the fair and equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges within a society, ensuring that all individuals and groups, especially those historically marginalized or disadvantaged, have equal access to rights, protections, and participation. It involves addressing systemic inequalities, power imbalances, and social structures that perpetuate discrimination and exclusion, with the goal of fostering inclusion, dignity, and fairness for all members of society.

Socially just climate transition

Transition to a low-carbon economy that ensures fairness and inclusion for everyone involved.

Vulnerability

A concept often used to describe groups more at risk during disasters and crises, such as women and girls, children, older people, people with disabilities, and those with chronic illness or trauma. However, vulnerability is not inherent to these groups. Framing women solely as vulnerable overlooks their diverse roles, including as leaders, protectors, and active agents in crisis response and recovery. Understanding vulnerability requires attention to structural inequalities and the capacities of individuals and communities to respond to risk (UNDP, 2014).

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About Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy

As a global alliance of cities committed to ambitious climate action, the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (GCoM) supports local governments to develop and implement strategies that are not only effective in reducing emissions but also equitable and inclusive. With 13,700 cities and local governments across six continents and 147 countries, collectively representing more than 1 billion people, GCoM's mission is to ensure that climate action benefits all communities, especially those most vulnerable to climate impacts.

Visit <https://www.globalcovenantofmayors.org/> to find out more.

About WSP

WSP is one of the world's leading professional services firms, uniting its engineering, advisory and science-based expertise to shape communities to advance humanity. From local beginnings to a globe-spanning presence today, WSP operates in over 50 countries and employs approximately 73,000 professionals, known as Visioneers. Together they pioneer solutions and deliver innovative projects in the transportation, infrastructure, environment, building, energy, water, and mining and metals sectors. WSP is publicly listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX:WSP).

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This toolkit has been collaboratively produced with leading global experts in gender and inclusion.

Authors

Asma Jhina
GCoM

Marina Milosev
Beyond the Red Line

Susan Leadbetter
WSP

Contributors

Benjamin Jance IV
GCoM

Charlotte Morphet
Leeds Beckett University

Elise Abbes
GCoM

Jenna Dutton
JD Consulting

Jennie Savage
Studio Jennie Savage

Jon Noble
WSP

Melanija Tacconi
GCoM

Safaa Charafi
Urban Inclusion



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