



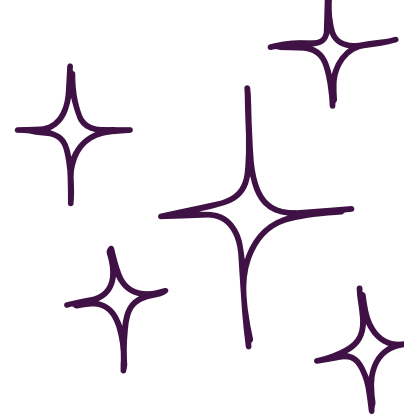
Transforming Narratives and Driving Climate Action:

MENA Women's & Girls' Demands for COP28 and Beyond

INTRODUCTION

For the second consecutive year, the United Nations climate negotiations, known as COP28, will be hosted in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Seizing the opportunity to capitalize on this climate action momentum, women's rights and feminist advocates from across the MENA region have leveraged the potential of COP28 to continue advancing progress at the nexus of climate and gender justice. Building on their ongoing collective organizing efforts over the past year, a clear message has emerged: women in the region are at the forefront of climate action, spearheading transformative change in local and international structures and systems to achieve climate justice, gender equality, and sustainable peace.

This collective mobilization has culminated in a set of demands aimed at driving meaningful climate action, both within the region and beyond. These demands reflect the challenges, priorities, and needs of the MENA region, with a particular focus on the diverse experiences of women and girls. They have been formulated by a collaborative group of women's rights and feminist climate advocates who have been instrumental in advancing climate action through a range of priority issues, including inclusive participation and engagement of women and marginalized communities; just climate finance; adaptation and resilience; equitable access to education, information, and technology; and feminist green economies and energy transition.



SOLIDARITY WITH ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS ACROSS THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA FACING DISASTERS AND CONFLICT, WAR, AND OPPRESSION

In light of the recent devastating natural disasters, wars, and violence, in the region and around the world, our thoughts and hearts are with the affected people of these nations who have endured unimaginable challenges.

These tragic events serve as a stark reminder of the urgent need for significant investments in Disaster Risk Reduction and Preparedness (DRRP) initiatives as well as peace and decolonization efforts in the MENA region. As the impacts of climate change continue to unfold, the frequency and severity of extreme weather events are predicted to rise. They are also anticipated to aggravate already fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Therefore, it is imperative to immediately prioritize ceasefires, peacebuilding, and the development of resilience strategies to mitigate the destructive consequences of climate-induced disasters.

In solidarity, women and girls from MENA and around the world together are leading the way towards a climate just and gender-transformed world.



CONTEXT

Each year, research consistently reaffirms that human-induced climate change is continuously accelerating, posing an escalating and significant threat to both human well-being and environmental health and security. The impacts of climate change are becoming increasingly clear, impacting all aspects of life, with more frequent and extreme disasters in nature, consequently affecting the lives of billions of people across the world. Those with the least capacity to adapt and cope with the climate crisis are impacted most.¹ While all countries and individuals of the world will be affected by climate change, several variables shape the vulnerability to its severe impacts. Fragile and conflict-affected, politically and economically unstable, low resilience countries—and those whose economies are heavily reliant on natural resources—experience the most severe impacts on livelihoods, food security, safety, and access to basic resources such as water.

Climate change exacerbates inequalities and vulnerabilities, including the challenges women and girls across the world face. Women are exposed to more risks resulting from having to carry heavier burdens from the intersecting impacts of climate change, including existing structural inequalities and patriarchy, conflict, displacement, and persisting poverty. In response to this, women and girls are leading innovative and local, gender-just climate solutions. Just some of these include [green projects](#) in Lebanon, driving just transition with women and girls in the lead; [ecosystem restoration](#) efforts led by women and youth in Jordan; [effective participation of women in land governance](#) for a just climate response in Morocco; and the [Shamsina Solar](#) project securing energy for those most marginalized across Egypt. These are only a few examples among a wealth of solutions, which are documented by the [Women and Gender Constituency](#), that underscore the invaluable visionary leadership of women in fighting climate change and leading their communities and the world more broadly out of crisis.

Despite the overwhelming value of women's and girls' leadership, many countries in the MENA region and around the world still undermine the necessity of ensuring women's, girls', and their local communities' participation in the design and decision-making of policy processes. Women's and girls' meaningful inclusion and participation across all social, economic, and political life at all levels remains a critical pillar that cannot be overstated in achieving social and gender equality, eradication of poverty, and effective adaptation and resilience to climate change.

Despite being among the most affected by and vulnerable to climate change, historically the Middle East and North Africa has contributed some of the lowest GHG emissions, at only about 2.6% from 1900-1999.² The region is witnessing an above-average rapid rise

1 [IPCC. \(2023\). Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report.](#)

2 [Bigio, A.G. \(2003\). Cities and Climate Change.](#)

in temperature, which is expected to increase by three degrees by 2050.³ In addition to this, there will be an increase in the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, including intense heat waves, flooding, and sand and dust storms, the impacts of which will be intensified due to the limited infrastructure that is adequately prepared to withstand these shocks. Presently, 90% of children in MENA live in areas of high water stress, and the region is predicted to experience even more severe water scarcity.⁴ With abnormal precipitation patterns combined with salinization, increased droughts, desertification, land degradation, and inefficient water management, MENA is vulnerable to food insecurity and increased water stress in a region where 70% of agriculture is rain-fed.⁵ Without true mitigation to maintain increases in temperature below a 1.5°C increase, and effective adaptation to the climate crisis, the impacts will be devastating.

According to the Global Gender Gap report, gender inequality is highest in the MENA region, with 62.8% progress toward parity.⁶ While the region is diverse, unequal pay, high unemployment, and record gender-based violence (GBV) is a shared commonality across the area. Furthermore, women's engagement in education, labor, and decision-making is limited by social norms. For example, more than 50% of agricultural labor is carried out by women, but they own less than 10% of the land.⁷ Yet, women are still excluded from agricultural decision-making and innovation such as the designing, planning, and implementation of water management strategies and access to modern irrigation techniques. This effectively marginalizes them from owning assets and securing access to credit, social security, and decision-making influence. With agriculture and water expected to be the most impacted by climate change, women are more likely to feel the brunt of the threats to livelihoods, food security, energy poverty, and security risks.

According to the World Bank,⁸ the MENA region has one of the world's highest levels of forced displacement, which may grow even more with the increasing water insecurity, leading to aggravated climate-induced conflicts that also disproportionately affect women and girls. Research has shown that in war and conflict, violence against women escalates, from the use of sexual violence as a tool of war to increased domestic violence in times of insecurity as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Syria, for example, over 70% of refugees are women and children.⁹ Despite these stark realities at the nexus of climate and

3 [Bergh, S. I. \(2022, November\). Towards an Improved Governance of Heatwaves in the MENA Region. *Alternative Policy Solutions*.](#)

4 [UNICEF. \(2021, August\). *Running dry: The impact of water scarcity on children in the Middle East and North Africa*.](#)

5 [Borghesi, S., & Ticci, E. \(2019\). Climate change in the MENA region: Environmental risks, socioeconomic effects and policy challenges for the future. *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook*.](#)

6 [World Economic Forum. \(2023, June\). *Global gender gap report 2023*.](#)

7 [The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation. \(2022, October\). *Feminist movements and climate justice in Middle East and North Africa*.](#)

8 [World Bank. \(2021, August\). *Ebb and Flow: Water, Migration, and Development*.](#)

9 [UNFPA. \(2015, February\). *Women and girls in the Syria crisis: UNFPA response*.](#)

gender, women in the MENA region have and continue to be excluded from decision-making processes, advocacy, and policy on all levels from local to global. Realizing gender equality and justice in itself is a mitigation and adaptation strategy; therefore, gender-transformative approaches are not only just, but key to fighting climate change.

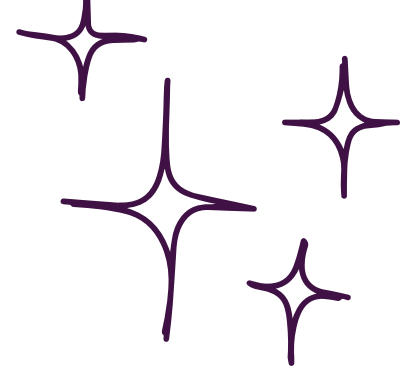
It has been repeatedly recognized that the current and historical international systems, including financial structures, and a prolonged foreign and imperialist intervention have been key drivers of climate change, as well as state fragility and vulnerability. This is why investment in long-term transformation to address structural inequalities and cultivate an enabling environment for marginalized populations to effectively adapt to climate change and mitigate its impacts is fundamental. Climate justice must take center stage in the climate discourse, and the unique experiences and vulnerabilities of women must be at the forefront of climate policy.



Left photo courtesy of MENACW staff
Right photo by Abdullah Gumaan



TOWARDS A CLIMATE JUST AND GENDER-TRANSFORMED WORLD: MENA WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' DEMANDS FOR COP28 AND BEYOND



Our collective demands for climate and gender justice are encapsulated in the following thematic issues as follows:

Inclusive Climate Engagement and Ambition:

MENA women and girls demand to lead the development and operationalization of gender-just climate strategies across all levels. Women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, people with disabilities, and rural and local communities—and their climate solutions and knowledge—must be meaningfully engaged and included in local, national, and global decision-making structures and UNFCCC processes. National development and climate action plans need to be built on: systematic gender analysis, sex-disaggregated data, gender-justice indicators, and practical tools. Therefore, we call for higher accountability and transparency in implementing gender-transformative climate policy. More specifically, we as feminists, demand:

1

Gender parity and equity in national delegations, within and across the UNFCCC ecosystem and leadership roles, to support the advancement of gender-transformative climate policy across all policy and diplomacy levels. This must be accompanied by:

- Removal of barriers to women's civic participation to enable inclusion, effective engagement, and influence in climate decision-making.
- Including gender-transformative approaches to shifting social norms.
- Investment in knowledge, skills, capacities, and development opportunities to promote inclusive engagement in national delegations and national and global policy processes.

2

Mainstreaming gender, the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, and intersecting vulnerability considerations in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and all climate and Disaster Risk Reduction and Preparedness (DRRP) policies, programs, and budgets and financing on national, regional, and global levels.

3

Collaboration on and adherence with other international treaties and governance systems such as the Convention on Biodiversity, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Generation Equality Forum Feminist Action for Climate Justice, the Women, Security, and Peace agenda, as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

4

Prioritization of investment in financing, implementing, and monitoring of the Gender Action Plan (GAP), including establishing and supporting National Gender Climate Change Focal Points. This is especially critical in MENA as only three countries have National Gender Climate Change Focal Points. The region is lagging behind in mainstreaming gender in climate change policies.

Transformative Climate Finance:

MENA women and girls demand rights-based, gender-responsive, flexible, affordable, and localized climate finance. We call for increased transparency and accountability from developed countries in fulfilling their climate finance pledges. This must be combined with the meaningful engagement and participation of women and girls in climate budgeting and decision-making. Climate finance is a matter of justice and equity, and it is also fundamental to strong climate action and to limiting global temperature increase by 1.5°C. More specifically, we as, feminists demand:

5

Reassessment of the annual climate pledge of \$100bn to a New Quantified Goal (NQG) that represents the true yearly needs of the Global South, noting that the estimated yearly needs of the MENA region alone are \$186 billion. Fulfillment in full of the current annual \$100bn and projected NQG, recognizing the climate reparations due by developed countries for their historical and ongoing contributions to climate change.

6

Reformation of multilateral development and financial institutions as well as funding structures to meet Global South needs with a shift towards and prioritization of flexible, gender-transformative, localized mechanisms that directly benefit impacted communities—as opposed to through multilateral organizations or the private sector. Climate finance institutions must also prioritize gender-parity and gender-transformative approaches to finance.

7

Dramatic scale and increase of adaptation finance, prioritizing grants over loans, and the fulfillment of the promise of an accountable, robust, and debt-free Loss and Damage Fund. This should include funding and support directed towards communities for post-disaster recovery and resilience.

8

Strengthened capacity on, increased financial investment in, and prioritization of localized gender-transformative budgeting and financing. This includes making funding available for National Gender Climate Change Focal Points.

9

Cancellation of debt for nations in the MENA region and in the Global South that are struggling to balance debt obligations and climate adaptation efforts, recognizing the ecological debt owed by developed countries. Climate finance must recognize the financial burden posed by debt servicing on countries facing climate vulnerabilities, and that flexible funding would enable these nations to redirect financial resources to strengthened gender-just climate action.

Conflict-Affected Countries, Militarization, and Peacebuilding:

MENA women and girls demand a conflict-sensitive approach to climate change. This is necessary to prevent the escalation and eruption of violence, specifically over waning and transboundary resources, and in areas with existing active conflict or tensions. Research has repeatedly highlighted the increased likelihood of gender-based violence (GBV) and vulnerability to exploitation for women and girls during conflict, food insecurity, and water scarcity. This is compounded further with the unavailability of social services such as sexual and reproductive health (SRHR) facilities and services in times of crisis. Therefore, we as feminists demand:

10

Adoption of a gender-transformative approach addressing the intersection between conflict and climate change, including the impact on refugees, migrants, and internally displaced persons. This conflict-sensitive approach to climate change should integrate feminist climate justice and the Women, Peace, and Security and the Youth, Peace, and Security frameworks in the peace agenda. Accordingly, there must be equal representation of women and youth in all conflict and peace-related decision-making processes.

11

Gender-transformative policies that address the root causes of GBV in the context of climate-induced disasters. This includes the development and implementation of intentional, long-term policies that create social transformation as well as the establishment of safe spaces, support and protection services, and legal mechanisms to protect women and girls from GBV during and after climate-related emergencies.

12

Enhanced climate action to prevent conflict by promoting transboundary agreements over shared resources and incorporating climate priorities in current political settlements and peace agreements such as water management and resolution of land disputes.

13

Transparency in reporting military-induced GHG emissions, recognizing the world's military combined accounts for 5.5% of total emissions.¹⁰ MENA women call for demilitarization, decrease in military spending, and reinvestment of resources directly towards peace efforts and climate finance for adaptation, resilience, and mitigation through the integrated frameworks of the Women, Peace, and Security and the Youth, Peace, and Security agendas.

Climate Adaptation, Resilience, and Disaster Risk Reduction and Preparedness (DRRP):

MENA women and girls demand integration of gender, SRHR, and climate indicators in vulnerability assessments for preparedness, adaptation, disaster response, recovery, and resilience-building. Women, youth, people with disabilities, rural, and Indigenous people must be in the decision- and policy-making, budgeting, and program design and implementation processes at all levels. We call for climate policies towards mitigation that rely first on nature-based solutions (NBS) and second on just and accessible technological solutions that preserve the environment. NAPs, NDCs, and DRRPs must be holistic, intersectional, and gender-transformative with specific considerations made to SRHR resilience. More specifically, we as feminists demand:

14

Prioritization of and investment in national adaptation plans (NAPs) and the strengthening of climate resilience, including health, heat, and infrastructure resilience. Adaptation policies, programs, and plans need to be local and gender-transformative. They must address all impacts related to climate justice, from access to technology, information, and energy to urban resilience through greening public spaces and infrastructure. They must also respect, engage, and integrate traditional, local, and Indigenous methods and knowledge, recognizing their vital role in adaptation, resilience, DRRP, and mitigation.

15

Building and strengthening disaster risk reduction and preparedness (DRRP) capacity to increase community resilience, mitigate effects of increased extreme weather events, prevent the loss of life, and reduce the impact on human wellbeing. DRRP programs and policies must protect the rights of and be responsive to the particular needs of people with disabilities, women, youth, climate migrants, displaced persons, and other vulnerable communities. Safe migration pathways and support services for those displaced by climate-related events are also pillars of DRRP and adaptation plans.

10

[Cottrell, L. and Parkinson, S. \(2022, November\). Estimating the Military's Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions. *Scientists for Global Responsibility and Conflict and Environment Observatory*.](#)

16

Protection and preservation of natural habitats, oceans, and coastal ecosystems by developing effective adaptation and mitigation measures. This includes addressing land degradation, sea level rise, ocean warming, and ocean acidification. Preserving biodiversity is crucial for ecosystem health, resilience, and climate mitigation as well as for respecting the rights and livelihoods of those directly dependent on local ecosystems.

17

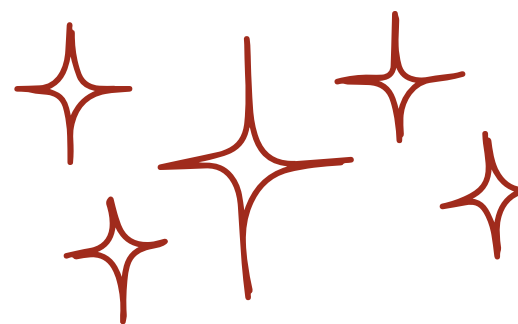
Protection of the rights of rural women, women farmers and food producers, smallholder farmers and fisheries, and Indigenous Peoples from losses and damages caused by climate change. This must include respect for and protection of communities' rights to full control over their local and Indigenous seed and food systems, as well as traditional farmers' rights as outlined in the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

18

Women's increased access to, ownership of, and control over land, and its productive resources. The structural barriers that marginalize women from the formal agricultural labor sector, access to education and training, and technology need to be addressed. Women's exclusion from land rights limits access to decision-making and capital, and severely inhibits their ability to strengthen their capacities to adapt to and mitigate climate shocks (for example, women without secure land rights are impeded when it comes to being able to purchase water and food in crisis).

19

Protection of water sources, the right to water, and enhanced water management to ensure water security for all communities and reduce the gendered burdens of water collection and management on women and girls. Currently, the average irrigation efficiency in the MENA region is around 51%, and we are depleting our resources at a faster rate than its renewal.¹¹ Therefore, MENA feminists demand enhanced sustainable water management planning, practice, behavior, and systems to address the increasing water scarcity challenge and prevent its compounding impact on food security, climate-induced conflict, and health.



11

[Kandeel, A. \(2019, February 12\). Climate change: The Middle East faces a water crisis. Middle East Institute.](#)

Climate Education, Capacity-Strengthening, and Knowledge Transfer:

MENA women and girls demand climate and gender-transformative education, both of which are crucial strategies in achieving gender equality and fighting climate change. We call for active engagement and participation of women and girls in the design and planning of climate research projects, ensuring representation and inclusion of all vulnerable groups' perspectives and priorities in research. In particular, we as feminists demand:

20

Investment in quality, gender-transformative education with climate change and environment mainstreamed across all levels of formal and informal education. Climate education must target a transformation of social norms, including consumption behaviors, socializing circularity and green economy skills, and capacity-strengthening. It must also integrate, support, and protect the knowledge of women, youth, local, and Indigenous communities, recognizing their role as key stewards of natural resources and protectors of biodiversity, as well as adhering to principles of climate justice.

21

Protection of the right to quality education, particularly during times of climate crisis and for girls and rural communities who are vulnerable to exclusion, by ensuring equitable, free, and inclusive access. This includes investment in greener and more resilient education infrastructure and systems, and the integration of the education sector in climate policy and decision-making.

22

Equitable access to and decentralization of information, technology, training, and other resources, including green skills, for women and youth. Strong investment in capacity-strengthening and research for climate adaptation, resilience, DRRP, and mitigation strategies and solutions, and the promotion of women's participation in STEM and energy sectors.

23

Investment in, including financially, gender-sensitive climate research and its widespread dissemination. The MENA region lacks research on the specific gendered impacts of climate change. Therefore, MENA feminists demand prioritization of climate research, including gender disaggregated data collection and analysis, contextual and local best practices, and assessments of needs, priorities, and challenges to make better informed decisions and progress measurements. We also call for increased transparency in climate-related data and the availability of resources for research and knowledge-sharing across the region.



Green Economy, Just Energy Transition, and Fossil Fuels Phase-Out:

MENA women and girls demand a just, equitable, and inclusive transition to renewable energy with a commitment to fossil fuel phase-out and investment in the development of a circular, green economy based on socio-economic rights and justice. Specifically, we as feminists demand:

24

Developed countries to stop all new investments in fossil fuels and nuclear energy, with a clear and urgent shift from a fossil fuel-based economy to a circular, just, green economy.

25

Investment in a just energy transition to a circular, green economy that has positive socio-economic benefits and prioritizes the provision of social services, the creation of urgently needed jobs, and the strengthening of local economies, particularly for the most vulnerable populations in the Global South. This helps ensure accessible energy for women and reduces the burden of household and unpaid work, saves time, and improves well-being and engagement in the public and other educational and economic opportunities.

26

Active engagement and equitable access of women and youth to resources and leadership in the renewable energy sector, ensuring their meaningful inclusion in the energy transition. We call for funding mechanisms and business support programs specifically designed to help women entrepreneurs start and grow green businesses, driving innovation and job creation in the circular economy and renewable energy sectors.

27

Multidimensional support for the most vulnerable, poor, and fossil-fuel-dependent economies and livelihoods in the Global South and MENA region throughout the transition towards renewable energy and a circular, green economy.

28

Effective and sustainable waste management systems with strong enforcement mechanisms to ensure implementation of legislation and policies and protection of the health and well-being of humanity and the environment. Circularity must be mainstreamed and integrated across all sectors, and it is key to improving resource use and strengthening long-term food and water security. A recent study has shown that through a circular economy in the MENA region, it is possible to fulfill people's needs and wants with just 70% of the current use of materials.¹²

¹² [UN ESCWA. \(2023, May\). *Transitioning to a Circular Economy: Status and Enablers in the Arab Region*.](#)

ABOUT THE MENA FEMINIST TASKFORCE

The MENA Feminist Taskforce is a group of women's rights, feminist, and climate advocates and change-agents. The Taskforce serves as a bridge between local and regional groups and the international community, ensuring their needs, demands, and visions of MENA women and girls are centered in all national, regional, and global climate processes and decisions. The MENA Feminist Taskforce is the result of ongoing collective organizing throughout this past year, including active mobilization and amplification of women's leadership in international spaces such as SB58, the 2nd International Climate Justice Camp, and MENA Climate Week 2023. This movement mobilization has culminated in a set of demands to deliver meaningfully on climate action in the region and beyond.

Inclusivity is a pillar of the Taskforce and the WGC, and these demands are a reflection of a collaborative process to ensure accurate representation and capture of the region. They have been endorsed and identified by almost 180 feminists from across the Middle East and North Africa.



Left photo by Zukiswa White

Right photo by Ayskha Najib, sourced from Twitter via @AzalAlSalafi

GLOSSARY

MENA	An acronym referring to the geographical region encompassing countries in both the Middle East and North Africa.
COP	COP refers to the Conference of the Parties, which is the supreme decision-making body of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It is an annual meeting where countries that are parties to the UNFCCC come together to discuss and negotiate actions and commitments to address climate change. This year's COP is COP28, which will be hosted in Dubai, UAE.
Climate Weeks	Climate Week is a regional event organized by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to bring together governments, organizations, businesses, and civil society to discuss and showcase climate action and solutions.
UNFCCC	UNFCCC is an international treaty adopted in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. It serves as the foundational framework for global efforts to combat climate change. The UNFCCC sets out the principles and goals for addressing climate change, including the objective of stabilizing greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere to prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system. The annual COP meetings are part of the UNFCCC process, where Parties come together to negotiate and implement climate agreements and actions.
WGC	The Women & Gender Constituency (WGC) is a formal constituency under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It represents the interests and voices of women and gender advocates in the context of climate change negotiations and policy-making. The WGC plays a vital role in advocating for gender-responsive climate policies and actions, as well as promoting the inclusion of gender considerations in climate agreements and initiatives.
Resilience	Moving beyond coping with climate impacts, here we use the term Resilience to denote leadership, strength, and adaptation in the face of challenges and adversity imposed by structural and systemic barriers and climate change impacts.