



AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE BELEM GAP THROUGH LGBTIQ+ LENSES

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WOMEN * GENDER
CONSTITUENCY

ABBREVIATIONS

ACE	Action for Climate Empowerment
CGEF	Climate Gender Equity Fund
CEC	Commission for Environmental Cooperation
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (Policy)
GGA	Global Goal on Adaptation
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IACtHR	Inter-American Court of Human Rights
IADB	Inter-American Development Bank
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ITLOS	International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer and other diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, expressions and sex characteristics (see note below)
LWPG	Lima Work Programme on Gender
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEMARNAT	Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (Mexico's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources)
SGM	Sexual and Gender Minorities
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
WEHRDs	Women Environmental Human Rights Defenders
WGC	Women and Gender Constituency

A note on Terminology

Throughout this paper the authors use the acronym LGBTIQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer, with the “+” denoting the many additional identities and experiences not captured by these initials). The authors’ intention is to be as inclusive and universal as possible. The authors recognise that other abbreviations and terms for specific communities are used depending on the geographical and cultural context – including LGBTI (the abbreviation used in official United Nations practice), 2SLGBTIQ+ in North American contexts, SGM (sexual and gender minorities), and many others – all of which are equally valid and valuable. Where this paper quotes directly from another source, the authors retain the terminology used in the original.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Belém Gender Action Plan (GAP), adopted at COP30 under the UNFCCC, is an important milestone for gender-responsive climate governance. Building on the Lima Work Programme on Gender, it establishes a nine-year framework for integrating gender considerations across climate policy, implementation, finance, participation, and monitoring. The negotiations, however, also exposed growing political resistance to intersectional and rights-based approaches – part of a coordinated effort to dilute human rights language and to reframe gender in strictly binary terms.

This paper examines the Belém GAP through an intersectional LGBTIQ+ lens, drawing on feminist climate justice scholarship, queer ecology, and recent international legal developments. Its central argument is that climate policies which fail to address overlapping forms of discrimination risk entrenching inequality and weakening climate action itself.

Key findings

- * LGBTIQ+ communities face heightened vulnerability to climate impacts through structural discrimination, exclusion from disaster response, housing insecurity, and barriers to healthcare and protection.
- * “Queer resilience” – the long-standing capacity of LGBTIQ+ communities to build networks of care, mutual aid, and collective resistance – is a vital but undervalued resource for climate adaptation, often operating outside discriminatory state mechanisms.
- * International law is shifting decisively: recent advisory opinions of the ICJ and the IACtHR frame intersectionality, equity, and human rights as central to states’ climate obligations.

Gaps identified

- * The Belém GAP introduces the language of “multidimensional factors” but stops short of an explicit intersectional framework, leaving gender diversity and the lived realities of marginalised communities insufficiently recognised.
- * Without a robust analytical framework and SOGIESC-disaggregated data, “multidimensional factors” risks becoming a statistical buzzword rather than a tool for transformative action.

Promising practice

- ✱ Mexico's NDC 3.0 explicitly recognises the challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ people and sets out action lines for legal recognition and data collection.
- ✱ Bangladesh's National Adaptation Plan includes hijra and non-binary persons and prioritises their voices in policymaking.

Demands

- ✱ Recognise and include climate activists and environmental defenders working on LGBTIQ+ issues.
- ✱ Institutionalise intersectional analysis across all GAP priority areas, using the 11 references to “multidimensional factors” as entry point for SOGIESC-, race-, and class-disaggregated analysis.
- ✱ Align GAP implementation with emerging international legal standards (ICJ, ITLOS, IACtHR, and UNGA Resolution A/80/L.65).
- ✱ Call on Parties to operationalise intersectionality in their NDCs and National Adaptation Plans through SGM-transformative approaches.
- ✱ Call on climate finance institutions to adopt the Adaptation Fund's intersectional data-disaggregation standard.

INTRODUCTION

The 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), held in Belém, Brazil, marked a turning point in how climate solutions and sustainability are understood and practised.

The connection between gender and climate change has been built over more than three decades of advocacy. Since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, advocates have worked to raise awareness of this connection (Flavell, 2023, p. 69). According to Flavell (2023), this effort responded to three needs: to represent the most vulnerable women and children living in poverty; to engage the ostensibly neutral language of modern science and technological development; and to organise the diverse coalition of feminist and environmental movements.

This advocacy produced a steady institutional progression. At COP20 in 2014, the Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG) was established to advance gender balance and integrate gender considerations throughout the UNFCCC process; it was extended for three years at COP22 in 2016. Parties adopted the first Gender Action Plan (GAP) at COP23 in 2017, followed by the enhanced LWPG and its gender action plan, for a five-year period, at COP25 in 2019. At COP30 in 2025, Parties adopted the Belém GAP.

The Belém GAP sets out actions for the next nine years to support the implementation of Parties' nationally determined climate action. At its core, however, the negotiations revealed clear pushback from multiple countries and non-state actors against the concept of intersectionality, particularly its links to efforts to address entrenched systemic inequalities. As Mary Robinson has emphasised, climate justice rests on the foundations of human rights and development (Gearty, 2014).

The Belém GAP therefore underscores the urgency of an integrated framework that not only addresses entrenched gendered inequalities but also safeguards inter- and intragenerational equity. Despite the tensions, Belém calls for reframing justice through intra- and intergenerational lenses. The question after Belém is twofold: how can the GAP enable Parties — and, by extension, civil society — to raise their ambition and action on gender-responsive climate action that is financed, effective, and targeted to the most vulnerable communities? And how can it serve as the actionable framework for the commitment, set out in the preamble to the Paris Agreement, that Parties should, “when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity” (UNFCCC, 2015, preamble)?

The Belém GAP prioritises gender across five priority areas, with 27 activities as means of implementation within UNFCCC climate action, including at the national level. These priority areas span (i) capacity-building; (ii) gender-balanced participation and women’s leadership; (iii) coherence across UNFCCC workstreams; (iv) gender-responsive implementation; and (v) monitoring and reporting. Taken together, they risk positioning the Belém GAP as a technical checklist, with limited guarantee that the institutional framework for climate governance will apply a genuinely gender-responsive lens.

More should be expected of the Belém GAP: that it acts not only as a technical implementation framework but as a political document reflecting broader struggles over justice, representation, and accountability in international climate governance. To bridge the gap between this expectation and the risk of a narrow checklist, this paper foregrounds intersectionality through an LGBTIQ+ lens, focusing on perspectives that were heavily contested and ultimately excluded from the Belém GAP. It examines the extent to which the GAP advances or constrains intersectional approaches to climate policy, and analyses how its language, priority areas, and implementation mechanisms may shape future gender-responsive climate action under the UNFCCC. In doing so, the paper aims to contribute to ongoing discussions among Parties, civil society, feminist movements, and other stakeholders on how climate governance can move beyond formal inclusion towards more transformative and equitable climate justice.

INTERSECTIONALITY IN CLIMATE POLICY

Intersectionality is both a theoretical concept and an analytical framework that examines how different forms of inequality interact and reinforce one another. The term was first developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw to show how women of colour face unique forms of discrimination that are often dismissed by both feminist and anti-racist legal discourse (Crenshaw, 1989). In 1991, Crenshaw further developed the concept by identifying three dimensions of intersectionality: structural, political, and representational (Crenshaw, 1991).

Structural intersectionality highlights how people are marginalised by overlapping systems of oppression such as patriarchy, ableism, heteronormativity, and colonialism. Political intersectionality considers how policy and advocacy efforts focus on “allegedly universal, single-axis approaches” (Cho et al., 2013, 80) failing to address the needs of those who exist at the

intersection of multiple identities. Representational intersectionality focuses on how intersecting identities such as gender, ethnicity, disability, class, and sexuality are depicted in cultural and political narratives, and on how these depictions create or reinforce overlapping forms of marginalisation (Crenshaw, 1991).

Despite its relevance, intersectionality remains insufficiently integrated into mainstream climate policy. Inclusive approaches are increasingly recognised within the climate governance framework, most notably in the work derived from Article 6 of the Convention on Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) and on climate adaptation. As part of the decision on the Global Goal on Adaptation (2/CMA.5) adopted at COP28, Parties emphasised that “adaptation action should be [...] guided by [...] intersectional approaches.” In reality, however, current approaches continue to rely on siloed frameworks and one-size-fits-all solutions, overlooking the complex realities of marginalised communities (Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014; Nightingale, 2011). As a result, climate policies risk reproducing and exacerbating existing inequalities rather than addressing them. The absence of an intersectional lens can lead to non-inclusive interventions that fail to account for how overlapping identities shape vulnerability and access to resources.

This gap is particularly evident in the experiences of groups at the frontlines of climate change, including LGBTIQ+ communities, women of colour, older persons, and people with disabilities. Ignoring the intersections of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and other social dimensions not only widens disparities but also undermines the effectiveness and equity of climate action (Carthy & Landesman, 2023; Feng, 2024). During climate-induced disasters, for example, LGBTIQ+ individuals — especially those who also face intersecting marginalisation due to factors such as disability, migration status, ethnicity, or income — encounter barriers in accessing relief (Mann et al., 2024). These barriers often stem from the absence of explicit references to sexual orientation and gender identity in national policy frameworks, leaving no safeguards against discrimination in the implementation of emergency response measures. This reflects broader limitations at the international level, where existing climate policy guidance under the UNFCCC does not require the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity as categories for protection or data disaggregation, and where the operationalisation of intersectional approaches remains uneven and contested (Magnusdottir & Kronsell, 2024).

APPLYING QUEER LENS IN CLIMATE POLICY ANALYSIS

LGBTIQ+ people around the world are among the populations most affected by the climate crisis. Pre-existing disparities and inequalities — the result of a long history of discrimination and violence against LGBTIQ+ communities, and especially against LGBTIQ+ people of colour — can be exacerbated by the climate crisis. As they confront its impacts, LGBTIQ+ people also face specific challenges that public policy fails to address, which increases their vulnerability. A queer perspective on climate policy therefore highlights that the climate crisis does not affect everyone equally: it is shaped by intersecting forms of inequality, and it brings into view dimensions and specificities that have so far been largely overlooked in climate policy and research. This perspective critically challenges the boundaries among territory, body, and normativity focusing on the coexistence of multiple forms of life that broadens the debate on climate justice.

There remains significant gaps in current research regarding the harmful effects of climate change on LGBTIQ+ people, which contributes to their absence from climate policy. Nevertheless, a small body of disaster literature has, over the years, documented the experiences of these communities during climate-related disasters (Dominey-Howes et al., 2014; Goldsmith et al., 2022; Mann et al., 2024), describing, for example, disaster planning and relief as cis-heteronormative and discriminatory. As Mann, McKay, and Gonzales summarise it, “Like other marginalized groups, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people will, on average, have more exposure to climate change-related disasters, be more susceptible to the adverse impacts of climate change-related disasters, and have fewer resources to recover from climate harms” (Mann et al., 2024, p. 1).

Importantly, the evidentiary base is no longer limited to academic literature. Civil society and community-led research efforts have documented the differentiated impacts of climate change on LGBTIQ+ people at local, national, and regional levels: from Malawi, Kenya, Uganda, and Fiji to the Caribbean, Asia-Pacific, and North America (Youth for Change and Development, 2023; Innovators 4 Climate Action, 2024; Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum, 2025; Dwyer & Woolf, 2018; Devakula et al., 2018; Knight et al., 2024; Commission for Environmental Cooperation, 2024). Some of these efforts have also been supported by regional and multilateral institutions, including IOM, UN Women, and the Commission for Environmental Cooperation. Taken together, this evidence shows that vulnerability is produced not only by exposure to climate hazards, but also by discrimination in relief distribution, evacuation, shelter, WASH, climate mobility, access to green finance, and participation in climate and humanitarian decision-making.

These efforts have begun to translate into policy and legislation. In California, SB 990 requires the Governor's Office of Emergency Services to update the State Emergency Plan to include policies and best practices for local governments and nongovernmental entities to equitably serve LGBTIQ+ communities during emergencies and natural disasters (California State Legislature, 2024). Mexico's long-term climate strategy and NDC 3.0 offer another example of how evidence can move into climate policy: the updated National Climate Change Strategy and NDC 3.0 recognise LGBTIQ+ people as a priority population and include action lines on the legal recognition of gender identity, sexual orientation, and diverse family structures, as well as the generation and use of disaggregated data (SEMARNAT, 2025a; SEMARNAT, 2025b). Significant work is also underway to advance methodologies for implementing intersectional and human rights-based approaches, including IISD's principles for applying intersectionality across the adaptation cycle and Madrigal-Borloz's APSIRE framework for integrating sexual orientation and gender identity into the global climate architecture (Dazé & Christoffersen, 2025; Madrigal-Borloz, 2026). Yet, despite this progress, much remains to be done: implementation will require inclusive climate finance that does not rely on constrained civil society resources alone, but is also mobilised through climate events, public and philanthropic channels, and multilateral institutions, with flexible, non-debt, direct-access funding that recognises LGBTIQ+ people as rights-holders and agents of climate action (Out for Sustainability et al., 2026).

Marginalisation manifests itself in various ways and at different levels. LGBTIQ+ people are statistically more likely to experience physical and mental health problems (Alibudbud, 2023; Goldsmith & Bel, 2022; Mann et al., 2024), and they often face disparities in accessing healthcare. Because many chronic conditions — such as cardiovascular disease, kidney disease, allergies, asthma, and mental health conditions — are exacerbated by climate change, this vicious cycle of ill

health is disproportionately severe for LGBTIQ+ people. On mental health specifically, studies in the United States show that LGBTIQ+ youth report higher levels of climate-change worry than their heterosexual and cisgender peers (The Trevor Project, 2024).

Extrinsic determinants of health also feed this cycle of vulnerability. As Goldsmith and Bel (2022) observe: “Social determinants of health such as housing conditions, economic opportunities, and access to health care may negatively and disproportionately affect the LGBTIQ+ population and reduce their capacity to respond to environmental harm (e.g., obtaining necessary medical care)” (Goldsmith & Bel, 2022).

Housing instability and poverty place LGBTIQ+ communities among those at greatest risk during a disaster. LGBTIQ+ individuals are overrepresented in homeless populations, especially young people, who are often forced to leave home because of family conflict over their identities. In the United States, for instance, LGBTIQ+ youth make up around 40% of the homeless youth population.¹ In adulthood, discrimination in the labour and housing markets is a major driver of housing instability: transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals frequently face hiring bias or are denied rental housing on the basis of their gender identity. The need to mitigate harassment by neighbours and landlords often pushes LGBTIQ+ populations into segregated urban enclaves, which frequently overlap with high-risk environmental zones, leaving residents highly exposed to pollution, flooding, poor air quality, mosquito-borne diseases, and extreme heat (Mann et al., 2024). As Mann, McKay, and Gonzales (2024) observe in the United States, this geographic vulnerability takes multiple forms:

“For instance, in coastal cities, historic LGBTIQ+ enclaves (so-called ‘gayborhoods’) like Christopher Street in New York City are at high risk of severe flooding during storm surges. [...] Other groups, including lesbians and transgender people, often live in areas that are less likely to be recognized as gay neighborhoods but are still at high risk of loss. For instance, following Hurricane Katrina, MidCity New Orleans, an area with an historically high proportion of lesbians and queer people of color, experienced more devastating losses compared to other neighborhoods” (Mann et al., 2024).

Consequently, the very spaces carved out for community protection can expose LGBTIQ+ populations to severe, long-term health crises and a heightened risk of devastation during disasters. A case in point: 2022 data from the U.S. Census Bureau show that, in the case of hurricanes, floods, or other disasters, LGBTIQ+ people in the United States had much higher evacuation rates than heterosexual and cisgender people (Frank, 2023).²

LGBTIQ+ people also tend to be excluded from disaster relief and from warning and information systems. Official disaster response and evacuation procedures are frequently structured around cis-heteronormative assumptions and the traditional nuclear family; and because gender-based violence increases significantly after climate-related disasters, LGBTIQ+ people are at greater risk of harassment and violence, including physical violence. During the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, sexual and gender minorities were denied access to emergency housing and disaster relief services (Goldsmith et al., 2022); they were blamed by religious leaders for causing the earthquake and

¹ See also The Trevor Project’s report on homelessness and housing instability among LGBTIQ+ youth in the United States (The Trevor Project, 2022).

² Approximately 4 percent of LGBTIQ+ people evacuated, compared with 1.2 percent of heterosexual and cisgender people.

were targeted with physical, sexual, and verbal assaults. In India, following the 2004 tsunami, Aravanis (who identify as neither male nor female) were excluded from temporary shelters, did not receive immediate relief such as food and clothing, and saw their losses omitted from damage assessments (Pincha & Krishna, 2008). Already living in poverty and stigmatised in Indian society, they found their vulnerability deepened by the social and economic upheaval the tsunami caused. Even when LGBTIQ+ people can access shelters, these can be sites of further violence: in 2005, following Hurricane Katrina in the United States, two trans Black women were arrested and incarcerated for using the women's bathroom at an emergency shelter (Haskell, 2014).

Because systemic inequalities amplify the effects of climate change, LGBTIQ+ people are more likely to be forced to flee their homes in order to survive — and the discrimination they face then exposes them to additional risk. In the context of climate-induced displacement, as in any other migration context, LGBTIQ+ individuals encounter violence and discrimination (OHCHR, 2022), and their situations rarely receive adequate protection or recognition, particularly from transit and host countries in cases of cross-border migration.

Yet the historical resilience of queer communities — built through networks of care, support, and collective resistance in the face of social exclusion — can strengthen collective strategies for adapting and responding to climate risks and disasters. There is much to learn from knowledge-transfer practices within LGBTIQ+ chosen families in times of crisis. Older adults who survived previous structural crises, such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic, hold critical, lived expertise in community survival and informal caregiving (Perone et al., 2025). These perspectives not only broaden collective understanding of climate inequalities but also offer important references for developing more just climate policies. By acting on the systemic drivers of marginalisation set out in this section, policymakers can ensure that LGBTIQ+ people and communities are not only better protected but also empowered to face the climate crisis.

INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE BELÉM GAP

The negotiations leading up to the Belém Gender Action Plan took place in an increasingly hostile political environment, much as the negotiations of the Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender had done, reflecting broader global resistance to movements challenging rigid gender roles and divisions of labour. As noted by the WGC in a press release on gender backtracking across the negotiations at COP30, within the multilateral space, this manifested as coordinated attempts, using various tactics, to diminish previously agreed-upon human rights language and dismiss progressive language on gender (WGC, November 2025)

This deliberate pushback occurred across multiple negotiation spaces, including Just Transition, Loss and Damage, and other thematic areas. It took many forms: some Parties repeatedly sought to replace references to “equality” with binary formulations such as “women and men”, or to remove gender language altogether — and, with it, the multidimensional experiences of people in the climate crisis.

This hostility reached its peak with the introduction of footnotes, through which several Parties added their national definitions of “gender” and, in doing so, attacked multilateral, consensus-led

processes at the global level — ignoring the voluntary, country-driven nature of a process that is already guided by national circumstances.

These pushbacks did not occur in isolation in the climate space; rather, they reflect a continuing pattern visible across international policy arenas, including at the recent 70th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). There, an unprecedented proposal sought to formally reframe gender in binary terms, illustrating the coordinated push to limit recognition of gender diversity and intersectional approaches across policy landscapes.

Resistance to gender-transformative and inclusive language that genuinely represents people's lived experiences should not be read as a set of isolated technical disagreements, but as part of a wider political effort to constrain the scope of rights-based and inclusive policy frameworks. It was against this backdrop that the Belém GAP was born.

To counter discrimination at all stages, there is a need for clear recognition at the UN level of an intersectional approach, which can then shape policy at the level of each state. Anti-discrimination policies work much like resource-distribution policies: when adopted and implemented at the highest level, they make it possible to address inequality at its roots and achieve far better results.

As a result, one of the strongest demands from civil society for this GAP was the integration of an intersectionality framework. The submission of the Women and Gender Constituency (WGC), drafted through a collective and consultative process, stated that “an ambitious iteration of the GAP should thoroughly assess and report on the impacts, needs, and experiences of people with intersecting identities such as, but not limited to, race, disability, ethnicity, class, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual expression and characteristics, education, and Indigeneity” (WGC, March 2025). Naming and operationalising an intersectional framework would have opened the door to gender-transformative climate action centred on those who have been structurally excluded.

This demand did not materialise. Intersectionality is not mentioned in the Belém GAP. Instead, Parties landed on the alternative language of “multidimensional factors”, which appears 11 times across the decision text — in all priority areas and in the preamble:

“Acknowledging that differentiated impacts of climate change and opportunities for all women and girls, including Indigenous women, women from local communities, migrant women, women with disabilities, women smallholder farmers and women from rural and remote communities, are shaped by multidimensional factors”

Civil society has now taken up the task of ensuring that “multidimensional factors” carries a broader, deeper framework. That means understanding which specific activities name “multidimensional factors” and identifying the avenues they open for anchoring intersectionality. For example:

WGC continues to see value in gender-responsive and other cross-cutting indicators under the IAC/dimensional targets, as they can be relevant across thematic targets.

- ★ **Deliverable A.5.3** specifically calls for “submissions on the evidence base on gender and climate change, including multidimensional factors”. This submission will allow Parties and other relevant stakeholders to expand the current understanding of what gender and

climate change mean, and of how our compounding identities shape both our risks and our agency.

- ✳ **Activity B.4** seeks to “enhance safety, protection mechanisms and support for women, especially for women environmental defenders and women engaging in climate action, taking into account multidimensional factors”. This activity holds particular potential because its workshop deliverables also reference multidimensional factors and include the development of guidance. With a deeper intersectional framework, interested stakeholders could advocate for a comprehensive protection mechanism that genuinely considers who is most at risk, and why, and takes concrete steps to address it.
- ✳ **Deliverable E.1.6** calls for the “inclusion of additional data collection on multidimensional factors in registration processes for delegations and [to] track progress over time”. Historically, UNFCCC participation tracking has been limited to sex, with the possibility of self-identification as non-binary added over the last four COPs. This deliverable would build a fuller picture of who attends negotiations, who is notably absent, and how this shapes or limits the process over time.

One of civil society’s major concerns, as GAP implementation begins, is that — without a deeper intersectional framework — the words “multidimensional factors” risk becoming a statistical buzzword in this policy instrument rather than an analytical tool applied to all gender-responsive climate action. There is also a risk that Parties and observers will assume intersectionality is covered simply because the text includes the words “multidimensional factors”.

While several activities and deliverables name specific groups — such as Indigenous women, local communities, people with disabilities, migrants, youth and the elderly, and Women Environmental Human Rights Defenders (WEHRDs) — recognition remains uneven and largely framed through siloed categories rather than an explicitly intersectional approach, particularly with regard to gender diversity. Intersecting identities appear in While several activities and deliverables name specific groups — such as Indigenous women, local communities, people with disabilities, migrants, youth and the elderly, and Women Environmental Human Rights Defenders (WEHRDs) — recognition remains uneven and largely framed through siloed categories rather than an explicitly intersectional approach, particularly with regard to gender diversity. Intersecting identities appear in isolation rather than as part of an integrated analytical framework. Even so, the GAP already builds a basis for intersectional frameworks:

- ✳ **Activity A.3** emphasises the differentiated impacts of climate change on women, especially Indigenous women and women from local communities, while also referring to the role of men and boys as agents and beneficiaries of change.
- ✳ **Deliverable A.3.5**, on the evidence base on gender and climate change including multidimensional factors, addresses differentiated impacts and gendered roles, but continues to frame gender primarily through women and girls, men and boys, without explicitly recognising gender-diverse people, including non-binary, trans, and gender-non-conforming individuals.

This near-total absence of explicit recognition of gender diversity, together with the limited articulation of intersecting identities beyond narrowly defined categories, reinforces a binary understanding of gender. The treatment of intersectionality reflects a compromise that allows a pretence of inclusivity without requiring meaningful recognition of diverse gender identities, of intersecting forms of marginalisation, or of the lived experiences they entail. This methodological vagueness risks reinforcing forms of erasure: the weakening of human rights language and the recognition of human diversity limits the Belém GAP's capacity to address overlapping forms of discrimination and to support meaningful, effective, and inclusive implementation.

The GAP does, however, include specific entry points for civil society — such as the language of multidimensional factors and the collection of disaggregated data — that can advance intersectional approaches during implementation. While these provisions do not explicitly mandate intersectional methodologies, they establish procedural spaces in which Parties, observers, and civil society actors can advocate for frameworks that recognise intersecting identities and that incorporate the provisions the WGC set out in its submission for the GAP (WGC, 2025). This creates a critical opportunity for mobilisation, and it could support civil society, constituted bodies, and Parties in playing a central role in the inclusive interpretation and application of the GAP.

EXPANDING INTERSECTIONALITY IN CLIMATE POLICY

The landscape of international climate law has shifted decisively towards recognising intersectionality as central to climate accountability. The recent United Nations General Assembly resolution (A/80/L.65) adopted the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), underscoring states' responsibilities regarding climate change. In its landmark Advisory Opinion of 23 July 2025, the ICJ established that states' obligations under the Paris Agreement and international human rights law extend beyond the mere preparation and maintenance of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). The Court held that “it is not sufficient to establish due diligence merely by preparing, communicating, and maintaining NDCs. The words of the Paris Agreement require a progression of a State's NDC commitments that reflect the State's highest ambition” (ICJ, 2025, para. 224). The Court further clarified that due diligence is a demanding, context-specific standard, to be assessed “based on what is reasonable under the concrete and specific circumstances of a State” (ICJ, 2025, para. 234). Crucially, it affirmed that climate change impairs a range of human rights — including the rights to life, health, and an adequate standard of living, and the rights of women, children, and Indigenous Peoples — thereby requiring states to take all necessary measures to protect the climate system in a manner that is equitable and inclusive (ICJ, 2025, paras. 371, 377–382, 152–157, 301–308).

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR), in Advisory Opinion OC-32/25 (29 May 2025), advanced this legal framework by explicitly naming intersectionality as a core principle of climate justice. The IACtHR declared that “the world is facing a genuine climate emergency” (IACtHR, 2025, para. 3) and found that “climate change creates extraordinary and increasingly serious risks to the human rights of certain population groups whose situation of vulnerability is increased by the confluence of intersectional and structural factors of discrimination” (IACtHR,

2025, para. 594). The Court held that “differentiated protection is necessary to guarantee real equality in the enjoyment of rights in the context of the climate emergency” (IACtHR, 2025, para. 595), and developed the standard of “enhanced due diligence as a binding framework for State action” (IACtHR, 2025, para. 224). This requires states to act “with enhanced care” (IACtHR, 2025, para. 233), including comprehensive risk assessments using data disaggregated by territory, population group, gender, age, and other factors shaping vulnerability (IACtHR, 2025, para. 236). The Court further affirmed that “the principle of equality and non-discrimination is a fundamental pillar of the Inter-American system and must guide all State actions in the context of the climate emergency” (IACtHR, 2025, para. 211). Notably, it explicitly addressed LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse persons, requiring states to ensure their access to healthcare and protection from discrimination in climate-related emergencies (IACtHR, 2025, paras. 317, 616), and to design mitigation and adaptation measures that are gender-responsive and do not reinforce structural discrimination (IACtHR, 2025, para. 594). The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) has similarly contributed to this new era of climate accountability — collectively signalling that intersectionality is now a legal standard, not a policy option.

Across the UN system, there has been a concerted effort to reinforce these legal standards by advocating for intersectional, inclusive, and equitable climate action. The January 2024 UN ECOSOC Partnership Forum SDG 13 session focused on the differentiated impact of climate change on vulnerable and marginalised communities, with particular emphasis on women and girls, Indigenous peoples, and LGBTIQ+ communities, highlighting the need for intersectional approaches in climate action (ECOSOC, 2024). The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) advanced this agenda in its 2024 annual panel discussion, which addressed livelihood resilience in the context of loss and damage and the full realisation of all human rights on the basis of equity and climate justice (OHCHR, 2024). These advocacy efforts are underpinned by the findings of the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report, which states that “vulnerability is exacerbated by inequity and marginalization linked to gender, ethnicity, and low income, especially for Indigenous Peoples and local communities (high confidence)”. The report further affirms that “vulnerabilities and climate risks are often reduced through laws, policies, and interventions that address inequities based on gender, ethnicity, disability, age, location, and income (high confidence)”, and that “redistributive policies across sectors and regions that shield the poor and vulnerable, social safety nets, equity, inclusion and just transitions, at all scales can enable deeper societal ambitions and resolve trade-offs with sustainable development goals (high confidence)” (IPCC, 2022). Collectively, these UN-led initiatives and scientific findings reinforce the imperative of intersectionality as a guiding principle in climate governance.

Despite this evolving legal architecture, the evidence reveals persistent gaps in the inclusivity of current climate plans. According to UNFPA’s global review, while 78% of NDCs now mention gender, only 16% integrate gender in both adaptation and mitigation sections, and **approximately a quarter** remain gender-blind (O’Sullivan et al., 2023). Even among those that reference gender, few address intersectionality or the compounded vulnerabilities faced by women, Indigenous peoples, LGBTIQ+ persons, and people with disabilities. The analysis by Goodwin and Goldsmith (2025) is starker still: of 198 UNFCCC member states, only 23 mention sexual and gender minorities (SGM) in their National Adaptation Plans, and of those, only 9% are “SGM-transformative” — meaning that they address the systemic drivers of exclusion rather than merely acknowledging

vulnerability. This exclusion is not a matter of oversight but reflects deeper systemic inequalities. As Madrigal-Borloz (2026) argues, “climate change is not experienced in a vacuum. The impacts of climate change are inseparable from the systemic social inequalities that shape vulnerability and resilience” (Madrigal-Borloz, 2026). The omission of LGBTIQ+ persons and other marginalised groups from climate frameworks exacerbates their vulnerability, undermining both the effectiveness and the legitimacy of climate action.

There are, nonetheless, positive examples that demonstrate the feasibility and value of operationalising intersectionality in climate policy. Mexico’s NDC 3.0 stands out as a leading case, notable for its intentionality and scope in recognising the lived realities of LGBTIQ+ persons, Indigenous Peoples, and women as part of its evidence base and consultation processes (SEMARNAT, 2025; Madrigal-Borloz, 2026). Mexico’s NDC establishes specific lines of action to promote legal recognition, data collection, and awareness of the challenges these groups face due to climate change. This represents a shift from discretionary, charity-based policy to a rights-based framework, showing that intersectionality can be embedded in national climate commitments. Similarly, Bangladesh’s National Adaptation Plan (NAP) includes gender-diverse populations such as hijra and non-binary persons, prioritising their voices in policymaking and establishing gender-responsive budgeting mechanisms. These examples show that operationalising intersectionality is not only feasible but also highly impactful.

Multilateral finance institutions have also begun to address intersectionality in climate finance, though progress remains uneven. The World Bank’s Gender Strategy 2024–2030 acknowledges that “vulnerabilities arising from the intersection of gender with poverty, ethnicity, disability, and other characteristics” must be addressed, and programmes such as the Climate Gender Equity Fund (CGEF) aim to amplify the voices of women and disadvantaged groups in climate action. The Bank recognises that “social inclusion and climate action cannot be addressed sequentially, nor in isolation” (World Bank Group, 2024). The Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), through its Climate Change Action Plan 2021–2025, commits to inclusive and sustainable finance and recognises social inequities in Latin America and the Caribbean, but its explicit engagement with intersectionality remains less developed than that of other institutions (Inter-American Development Bank, 2021). The Green Climate Fund (GCF) was the first climate finance mechanism to mainstream gender from the outset of its operations: its 2018 Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Policy explicitly states that “by adopting a gender-responsive approach, GCF will more effectively address gender equality, intersectionality and, more broadly, social inclusion” (Green Climate Fund, 2018, p. 3), and it uniquely requires Accredited Entities to submit a gender and social inclusion action plan at the project-preparation stage. The Adaptation Fund is the most progressive in this regard: its 2021 Updated Gender Policy and its 2022 study, *Intersectional approaches to gender mainstreaming in adaptation-relevant interventions*, explicitly incorporate intersectionality as an analytical lens. The 2022 study notes that “by exploring gender’s interactions with such other factors of social differentiation, intersectional approaches have illuminated these double discrimination circumstances... that would otherwise not be visible through a traditional gender mainstreaming lens” (Adaptation Fund, 2022, p. 6). The Fund’s Gender Guidance Document requires data disaggregated not only by sex but also by gender identity, age, ethnic origin, disability, social class/caste, or indigenous community (Adaptation Fund, 2021, 2022).

Moving beyond critique, it is imperative that climate policy frameworks — at both national and international levels — shift from siloed, gender-sensitive language to genuinely intersectional approaches. This means recognising that the burden of climate-induced losses falls disproportionately on those facing multiple, compounding forms of discrimination, including but not limited to gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, age, and class. The Belém Gender Action Plan and the NDC processes should explicitly acknowledge these overlapping vulnerabilities and embed intersectional considerations in climate finance, data collection, and disaster risk planning. As Madrigal-Borloz (2026) emphasises, this shift transforms intersectionality from a discretionary concern into a rights-anchored mandate. Drawing on Goodwin and Goldsmith (2025), countries should move towards SGM-transformative approaches that address the systemic drivers of exclusion, rather than limiting action to acknowledgment or isolated interventions. The UNFPA review further recommends that NDCs adopt intersectional, rights-based approaches that ensure the meaningful participation of marginalised groups at every stage of policymaking, planning, and implementation (O’Sullivan et al., 2023). The duty of care articulated by both the ICJ and the IACtHR provides the legal foundation for this transformation; what is needed now is the political commitment to translate these obligations into practice.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING THE GAP

The Belém Gender Action Plan represents both a milestone and a missed opportunity. Adopted amid intensifying resistance to rights-based and gender-transformative approaches, it reflects the tensions of contemporary multilateral climate governance: meaningful advances coexist with strategic silences, and procedural openings are shadowed by conceptual retreats. The substitution of “intersectionality” with “multidimensional factors” is emblematic of this dynamic — a compromise that preserves rhetorical space while deferring the substantive commitments that genuine inclusion demands.

As this paper has shown, the stakes of that omission are not merely semantic. LGBTIQ+ communities, women of colour, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and others facing compounding forms of discrimination experience the climate crisis through the cumulative weight of structural exclusion — from disaster relief, healthcare, and housing, to the very policymaking processes that determine how climate risks are assessed and addressed. The absence of explicit intersectional and gender-diverse language therefore has practical consequences: it shapes who is counted in climate data, who is consulted in policy design, who can safely participate in negotiations, who can access finance, and whose losses are considered legitimate.

Strengthening the GAP is no longer a discretionary policy choice but a rights-anchored mandate. Informed by the recent advisory opinions of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR), states now bear a “duty of care” requiring climate measures attentive to intersecting vulnerabilities. The IACtHR (Advisory Opinion OC-32/25) specifically establishes “enhanced due diligence” as a binding standard, mandating differentiated protection for groups facing compounding risks, including gender-diverse persons. The challenge for the Belém GAP is to move from rhetorical commitment to operational reality — ensuring that those most affected by the climate crisis are not only recognised but empowered as rights-holders and agents of change.

With this in mind, the following recommendations are offered to strengthen the intersectional implementation of the Belém GAP and to advance a more just and inclusive climate governance architecture.

To the UNFCCC and GAP implementation

(i) Recognise and include climate activists and environmental defenders working on LGBTIQ+ issues. Their expertise and lived experience are essential to designing climate policies that reflect the full spectrum of intersecting vulnerabilities and “multidimensional factors”, and would significantly enrich the wider movement for climate and social justice.

(ii) Institutionalise intersectional analysis across all GAP priority areas, including climate finance, monitoring frameworks, and national and sub-national implementation. This includes using the 11 references to “multidimensional factors” as entry points for analysing how SOGIESC, race, and class converge to create specific climate risks, and applying tools such as an “inequality marker” to track impacts on the most marginalised.

(iii) Align Belém GAP implementation with emerging international legal standards, including the advisory opinions of the ICJ and ITLOS, the jurisprudence of the IACtHR, and UNGA Resolution A/80/L.65.

To Parties and national governments

(iv) Operationalise intersectionality in national climate commitments. States should move beyond the acknowledgment of gender towards SGM-transformative approaches in their NDCs and National Adaptation Plans — approaches that explicitly identify and address the systemic drivers of exclusion for LGBTIQ+ persons, racialised communities, persons with disabilities, and others facing compounding vulnerabilities.

To climate finance institutions

(v) Adopt the Adaptation Fund’s intersectional approach. Its requirement for data disaggregated by gender identity, ethnic origin, disability, and social class should become a baseline expectation across all multilateral climate finance mechanisms, and Accredited Entities should be held accountable for demonstrating meaningful engagement with communities facing compounding vulnerabilities.

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