VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Options for National Assessments under the Belém Gender Action Plan

This information note was prepared by an informal group of experts engaged in implementation of the UNFCCC's Gender Action Plan (GAP) with key inputs from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations University Institute for Global Health (UNU Global Health), UN Women, PHF Science, Wellcome Trust, alongside the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) and other key stakeholders. It does not represent official guidance from the UNFCCC. Please contact claudia@wedo.org for more information.

OCTOBER 2026

1. Why violence against women and girls matters for national assessments on A.3.9?

This technical note is intended to present options that may support Parties, relevant organizations, civil society, researchers, national gender and climate change focal points, and other stakeholders preparing submissions under Deliverable A.3.9 of the Belém Gender Action Plan (Decision 7/CP.30). This deliverable invites submissions by March 2027 on the findings of national assessments of relevant issues, such as health, **violence against women and girls (VAWG)**, and care work in the context of gender and climate change. This technical note on VAWG represents one of three technical notes, including those on health and care.

"Without urgent action, climate change could be linked to one in every ten cases of intimate partner violence by the end of the century." [1]

2. Violence Against Women and Girls and Climate Change

The climate crisis is a human rights and gender equality crisis. Under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), violence against women and girls (VAWG) is understood as a manifestation of structural discrimination, unequal gender power relations, and the social, political, and economic structures that perpetuate the subordinate position of women. In its General Recommendation No. 37 on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in a changing climate, the CEDAW Committee recognizes that pre-existing gender inequalities shape women's and girls' exposure and vulnerability to climate-related risks and that disasters and

[1] https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/publications/colliding-crises-how-climate-crisis-fuels-gender-based-violence

the degradation and destruction of natural resources can exacerbate VAWG. It consequently calls on States to address both existing and emerging risk factors for violence within climate change and disaster-risk reduction policies and programmes. This human rights imperative is equally anchored in humanitarian standards, including the IASC Guidelines on Integrating GBV in Humanitarian Action, which treat GBV prevention and mitigation as an immediate, life-saving intervention in climate-induced emergencies. Similarly, the Agreed Conclusions of the sixty-sixth session of the Committee on the Status of Women (CSW66) recognize that the adverse impacts of climate change and environmental challenges increase and exacerbate the vulnerability of women and girls to discrimination and all forms of violence. It emphasizes that legal, policy and programme frameworks and all decision-making processes regarding disaster risk management should provide a cohesive basis for gender-responsive governance that respects, protects and fulfils all human rights and recognizes women and girls as agents and beneficiaries of change.

Climate-related shocks and stresses, including extreme weather events, slow-onset changes, rising temperatures and resource scarcity, can drive economic instability, food and water insecurity, health risks and displacement. These pressures interact with existing inequalities and harmful gender norms, creating or intensifying pathways to different forms of VAWG, including intimate partner violence, sexual violence, trafficking and forced marriage. At the same time, climate shocks can damage infrastructure and disrupt health and social services, communications, justice systems and policing, isolating survivors and restricting access to shelters, referral pathways and other forms of support. For example, following a rapid-onset flood, an adolescent girl may be displaced with her family to an overcrowded temporary shelter. With schools closed and household income lost, she may be required to travel farther to collect water or fuel, exposing her to harassment or sexual violence, while financial stress may increase violence within the household. At the same time, damaged roads,

health facilities, and communication networks can leave her unable to access confidential health care or safe VAWG referral pathways.[2] Although these impacts are not limited to humanitarian settings and affect countries across all regions and income levels, addressing GBV at the climate intersection also requires mainstreaming GBV risk mitigation directly into emergency preparedness, Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs), and early-action/anticipatory climate funding mechanisms.

Emerging projections reinforce the scale of this relationship. Early evidence suggests that each 1°C increase in temperature is associated with a 4.7 percent rise in IPV, while a 2°C warming scenario is projected to result in an additional 40 million women and girls experiencing IPV each year by 2090. Under a worst-case scenario in which temperatures rise by more than 4°C by the end of the century and socioeconomic development stalls, the number of women and girls experiencing IPV in sub-Saharan Africa is projected to almost triple, from 48 million in 2015 to 140 million in 2060. Risks can be particularly acute for women and girls facing intersecting forms of discrimination and exclusion, including Indigenous women, rural women, women with disabilities, displaced women and girls, and women environmental human rights defenders.

Women and girls already face more limited access to social, political, and economic resources and hence have fewer resources with which to anticipate, withstand and recover from climate impacts. These impacts can therefore also undermine women's health, economic security, mobility, access to resources and ability to participate safely and meaningfully in climate-related decision-making. Violence and threats of violence can particularly constrain the participation and leadership of women environmental human rights defenders and other women

[2] In acute humanitarian settings, such as the described flood, climate-driven famines, or complex climate-conflict emergencies, the total breakdown of protection mechanisms, loss of livelihoods, and prolonged displacement in informal settlements drastically heighten risks of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), transactional sex for survival, and early/forced marriage as a negative coping strategy.

working to shape climate responses. Evidence increasingly recognizes that these barriers weaken collective capacity to respond effectively to the climate crisis.

At the same time, women and girls should not be framed simply as vulnerable populations. CEDAW General Recommendation No. 37 emphasizes their agency, participation and leadership as essential to effective disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation and mitigation. This framing is also reflected within the international climate regime. The Paris Agreement recognizes human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women in its preamble and establishes that adaptation should follow a gender-responsive, participatory and transparent approach. These commitments build on successive decisions under the UNFCCC recognizing the importance of women's participation and gender-responsive climate policy and action. Addressing and preventing violence against women and girls is therefore both a human rights imperative and an enabling condition for equitable and effective climate action. Preventing violence, protecting women's health, rights and livelihoods, ensuring continuity of survivor-centred services, and enabling women and girls to participate safely and meaningfully in adaptation, mitigation and climate decision-making strengthen the human and social foundations of resilience.

VAWG prevention and response should therefore be understood as an integral component of gender-responsive climate adaptation and resilience-building: reducing vulnerability, protecting agency and capabilities, strengthening social resilience, and enabling women and girls to participate in and lead climate action.

3. What is Violence Against Women and Girls?

Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) is defined as any act of violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately and that constitutes a violation of their human rights. Such

violence results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. According to the World Health Organisation, almost 1 in 3 women (approximately 840 million women), have been subjected to intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both at least once in their lifetime. Examples of VAWG can include, but are not limited to:

> **Intimate partner violence (IPV)**, such as assaultive or coercive behaviours including physical, sexual and psychological attacks as well as economic coercion by a current or former intimate partner.[3]

> **Physical violence**, such as the intentional use of physical force with the potential for causing death (including femicide), injury or harm.

> **Sexual violence, exploitation and/or abuse,** such as sexual acts or attemps to obtain sexual acts, unwanted sexual comments or acts to traffic, that are directed against a woman or a girl.[4]

> **Psychological violence and/or abuse**, such as threats of physical or sexual violence, intimidation, humiliation, forced isolation, stalking, harassment, remarks, destruction of cherished things, etc.[5]

> **Economic violence**, such as denying a woman access to and control over resources such as, but not limited to land, housing, inheritance, property rights and access to productive resources.

> **Harmful practices (HP)**, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

[3] Measuring Prevalence of Violence Against Women: Key terminology

[4] Harmful Practices — OHCHR and women's human rights and gender equality

[5] GBVIMS GBV Classification Tool

> **Technology-facilitated gender-based violence**, such as violence perpetrated by the use of information/communication technologies and digital media (sextortion, hacking, hate speech etc.).[6]

> **Reproductive violence**, such as forced pregnancy (including through sexual violence), forced birth control, sterilization campaigns, or the destruction of health facilities in conflict zones.[7]

4. Key Messages

1. **Climate change and environmental degradation increase and intensify women's and girls' risk of violence,** including through resource scarcity, livelihood loss, food insecurity, displacement, service disruption, social instability, health and psychosocial stressors, and the breakdown of protection systems during and after disasters. This adds to women being disproportionately impacted by climate change as a result of comparatively less access to social, political, and economic resources, driven by structural inequalities and patriarchal systems.

2. **VAWG prevention and response should be integral to gender-responsive climate mitigation, adaptation, disaster risk reduction, anticipatory action and resilience, as they are both a human rights imperative and an essential prerequisite for sustainable development outcomes. VAWG is a material climate risk and not a peripheral "social risk,"** as it undermines women's and girls' health, rights, livelihoods, mobility, productivity, participation and capacity to anticipate, withstand and recover from climate impacts — ultimately weakening the resilience of entire communities.

[6] Technology-facilitated Gender-based Violence: A Growing Threat

[7] Shining a Light on Reproductive Violence

3. **VAWG is a public health emergency that is further exacerbated in humanitarian settings.** Therefore, VAWG, care, and health need to be analysed as interconnected and mutually reinforcing dimensions of climate risk, to identify how impacts in one area can compound risks and inequalities across others. Preventing and responding to VAWG is a material climate risk and an immediate, life-saving humanitarian action, not a secondary social concern. Unaddressed violence severely weakens women's capacity to withstand, recover from, and adapt to climate shocks, eroding total community resilience.

4. **Ensure that evidence generation and policy development are survivor-centred, ethical, and grounded in the Leave No One Behind and Do No Harm principles.** Climate policies, infrastructure and finance can reduce VAWG risks or unintentionally create, reinforce, or shift them, depending on how they are designed, implemented and monitored.

5. **Conversely, Building Climate-Resilient, Crisis-Ready VAWG Protection Systems** is essential to prevent the worst impacts. While climate policy must address VAWG; humanitarian and national VAWG prevention and response systems (shelters, safe spaces, clinical management of rape, referral pathways etc.) must be made climate-resilient and -informed to ensure uninterrupted care during extreme weather events and mass displacement.

6. **National assessments should make VAWG visible in evidence, policy, and finance** by assessing how different acute hazards and slow-onset change impact different forms of VAWG for different demographic groups, while assessing existing responses, service and system readiness, institutional capacities, and implementation and financing gaps to inform actionable priorities.

7. **Climate finance, Loss and Damage funds, and emergency response budgets** must allocate dedicated, flexible funding to VAWG prevention and response, prioritizing local, women-led organizations operating on the front lines of climate-driven emergencies.

8. **Adolescent girls, older women, and women with disabilities constitute distinct yet frequently overlooked exposure groups,** facing intersecting climate risks that can increase VAWG, disrupt education and health services, intensify unpaid care burdens, and restrict mobility, participation, and access to protection.

9. **Women environmental human rights defenders (WEHRD) and women climate leaders face specific, heightened VAWG risks,** including targeted offline and online violence, harassment, intimidation, criminalization, and smear campaigns intended to restrict their participation in environmental governance and climate action.[8] Protecting WEHRDs is therefore a vital prerequisite for inclusive, effective, and sustainable climate justice.

5. Key Findings and Evidence to Consider

VAWG-related evidence already exists across global and regional bodies, national systems, civil society research, local government records, academic studies, community sources, and Indigenous knowledge. National assessments should identify not only climate-related risks for VAWG, but also existing protective factors and evidence-based prevention interventions that strengthen resilience, gender equality, women's leadership, and social cohesion. Examples include:

[8] These threats are often strategic tactics by corporate, state, or private actors to silence dissent, weaken community resistance, and remove obstacles to environmentally destructive or extractive projects.

- GBV prevalence data in countries, regional and global organisations[9] (EU, IRC, PAHO, UNFPA, UN Women, WHO, etc.)
- Operational crisis data, including IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) records, Global Protection Cluster monitoring, and GBV AoR Safety Audits in camp and non-camp settings
- Administrative data systems including service level data
- Climate-risk data on heat, floods, droughts, storms, sea-level rise, food and water insecurity, and displacement
- Multi-Sector Needs Assessments (MSNAs), Rapid Gender Analyses (RGAs), and humanitarian post-disaster needs assessments (PDNAs) capturing real-time protection risks during acute shocks
- Academic studies and systematic reviews such as Mulambo et al., 2025, Allen et al., 2023, or Van Daalen et al., 2022
- Data on disruptions to critical infrastructures, such as schools, health and social services, emergency shelters, safe spaces, clinical management of rape (CMR) services, disability support, water, sanitation, energy, transport, and social protection
- Public expenditure, climate finance, and emergency tracking data (e.g., CERF, HRPs) indicating if VAWG and GBV prevention/response are funded
- Quantitative modeling studies[10] such as from the UN Spotlight Initiative or UNFPA

[9] Low prevalence estimates in a given context can sometimes reflect underreporting or disclosure barriers rather than actually lower violence.

[10] While the directional relationship between climate stressors and VAWG risk is well-supported by qualitative and programmatic evidence, quantitative causal estimates remain an emerging area of research.

- Mechanism-specific evidence, such as on the intersections with food security or health
- Testimonies, case studies, and participatory assessments from frontline workers, civil society organisations, local populations, WEHRD, women's rights organizations, Indigenous Peoples, disabled persons' organizations, youth, and frontline communities.[11]

Where relevant and available, data should be disaggregated by sex, age, disability, displacement status, and location — while ensuring survivor safety and confidentiality — to help identify high-impact areas, target inequalities, and inform responsive policies and services.

6. Policy Directions

1 **Adopt an anticipatory due-diligence approach that operationalizes States' obligations to prevent, investigate, prosecute and punish VAWG,**[12] and ensure effective remedies and reparations for survivors, including where risks are caused or intensified by climate change and disasters. Foreseeable climate-related risks of VAWG should therefore be systematically integrated into climate, disaster-risk reduction, Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs), anticipatory action protocols, health, just transition, social protection and GBV policies, plans and financing, as well as loss and damage frameworks. This should include integrating GBV service continuity into climate adaptation and resilient infrastructure planning, ensuring that health facilities, social services, safe spaces,

[11] Respecting data sovereignty in these contexts is crucial, particularly given that substantial data is gathered and utilized for technology development and artificial intelligence.

[12] CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women (2017), CEDAW General Recommendation No. 37 on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change (2018)

shelters, and GBV response systems remain accessible, secure, confidential, and operational during climate shocks, displacement, and service disruptions, with investments prioritizing climate-vulnerable and underserved communities.

2. **National assessments should translate evidence into funded cross prevention and risk-mitigation measures,** continuity of survivor-centred services, accessible reporting and remedy mechanisms, clear institutional responsibilities, and measurable accountability, rather than merely documenting impacts after violence has occurred. Cross-sectoral coordination is central here among climate/environment, disaster management, health, social protection, and VAWG actors.

3. **Climate finance instruments and emergency funding mechanisms (e.g., CERF, Loss and Damage Fund, pooled humanitarian funds) should earmark funds for GBV prevention and response:** Resources should support climate-resilient services, survivor-centred referral systems, women-led organizations, risk mitigation, and service continuity before, during, and after climate shocks, with clear allocation, tracking, and accountability mechanisms.

4. **Integrate GBV risk mitigation directly into Climate Early Warning Systems (EWS) and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR):** Ensure that disaster hazard warnings trigger non-food item (NFI) distribution protocols, safe shelter preparations, and protection messaging to mitigate risks of violence, trafficking, and exploitation prior to landfalling or acute climate shocks.

5. **Recognize frontline and community-based VAWG service providers, health and social workers as essential members of the climate-resilience workforce** and ensure their inclusion in just transition policies

and investments. Just transition strategies should strengthen climate-resilient, survivor-centred and accessible systems for preventing and responding to VAWG, alongside investments in health care, social services, education and community-based care, while ensuring that investments in renewable energy, transport, housing and ecosystem restoration are gender-responsive and do no harm. Establish inclusive decision-making mechanisms that guarantee women, girls, and local Women-Led Organizations (WLOs), particularly in humanitarian, displaced, and climate-vulnerable settings, lead the design of protection and climate responses. This requires operationalizing humanitarian localization commitments by directly funding frontline WLOs before, during, and after climate-induced crises.

6 **Prevent maladaptation and harm through participation and accountability:** Parties should assess whether climate policies, projects, and investments increase the risks for VAWG, particularly those in marginalized communities (e.g., for violence associated with mining for critical minerals used in renewable energy supply chains).

7 **Strengthen meaningful participation and leadership of women, girls, and women-led organizations in climate governance and policy processes:** Establish inclusive, participatory decision-making mechanisms that ensure women and girls, particularly from frontline communities (including frontline workers), Small Island Developing States, Indigenous populations, and other marginalized groups, are actively engaged in shaping, monitoring, and evaluating climate decisions. Adopt targeted measures, such as policy quotas, benchmarks, dedicated funding, and leadership representation, to support WLOs and ensure the

systematic integration of VAWG prevention and response across all stages of climate policy development, implementation, and evaluation.[13]

7. Conclusion

Addressing the intersection of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and climate change is a fundamental requirement for effective, sustainable, and equitable climate governance, resilience, and action. It is also a life-saving priority across humanitarian, development, and peace contexts in countries across all income levels. Climate hazards do not only escalate the risk of violence; they also disrupt the vital health, justice, social, care, and protection services upon which women and girls depend. Without intentional, gender-responsive measures that treat VAWG prevention and climate adaptation as interconnected priorities, existing inequalities will only deepen. Building true climate resilience requires integrated infrastructures that safeguard the health, rights, and physical safety of all women and girls — from rapid-onset disaster response to long-term adaptation — ensuring they are central to, rather than excluded from, climate solutions.

[13] CEDAW General Recommendation No. 37 explicitly defines women's participation not only as a fundamental right, but also as an essential precondition for impactful climate action, disaster risk reduction, and resilience-building

ANNEX

Key Resources to Consult

- Climate change and gender-based violence: international legal obligations and proactive strategies for protection
- UNFPA and Climate Change: https://www.unfpa.org/climate-change
- ICPD and Climate Change
- 2025 Global Symposium on Climate Justice and Impacted Populations & Brasilia Call to Action on Climate Justice, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Gender Equality, and Impacted Populations
- UNFPA (2025) Vulnerability assessment of the impact of climate change on gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence in South Sudan
- UNFPA (2025). Resilient Futures: Integrating Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Gender Equality and National Climate Action: Training Manual
- UNFPA SRHR and Climate Tracker
- "Taking Action" handbook for integrating SRHR and GBV into national climate policies
- Domestic violence in sub-Saharan Africa will triple by 2060 due to extreme heat epidemic and stalling development, new UNFPA research finds
- FAQ - UNFPA & the Climate Crisis
- UNFPA and QMU (2023). Taking stock: SRHR in climate commitments — a global review
- UNFPA Municipal Heat Protocol, Teresina Brazil
- Gender + Environment Data Alliance
- COLLIDING CRISES: How the climate crisis fuels gender-based violence — Spotlight
- Heat wave and the risk of intimate partner violence, 2018 (Madrid)
- Climate Change, Extreme Weather, and Intimate Partner Violence in East African Agrarian-Based Economies, 2023
- Drought, Extreme Heat, and Intimate Partner Violence in Low- and Middle-Income Countries, 2025
- IPCC Chapter 7: Health, Wellbeing and the Changing Structure of Communities | Climate Change 2022

- The Gender Equality and Climate Policy Scorecard: From monitoring to action, UN Women
- RESPECT Framework: https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240117020
- Do Gender-Based Violence Interventions Consider the Impacts of Climate Change? A Systematic Review
- Multilevel analysis of intimate partner violence and associated factors among reproductive-age women: Kenya demographic and health survey 2022 data
- GBVIMS: https://www.gbvims.com/gbvims-tools/classification-tool/
- Tackling violence against women and girls in the context of climate change, UN Women
- General recommendation No. 37 (2018) on the gender-related dimensions of DRR in the context of climate change, CEDAW
- Session Outcomes of the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women CSW66
- Addressing GBV For Better Climate and Environmental Outcomes: A How To Note