

Climate crisis is ‘not gender neutral’: UN calls for more policy focus on women

Only a third of countries with climate crisis plans include access to sexual, maternal and newborn health services, UNFPA report finds

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- New mothers bring their babies for a checkup at a UNFPA clinic in Mozambique. Access to maternal health services was badly hit by Cyclone Idai. Photograph: K Prinsloo/Arete/UNCDF

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Only a third of countries include sexual and reproductive health in their national plans to tackle the climate crisis, the UN has warned.

Of the 119 countries that have published plans, only 38 include access to contraception, maternal and newborn health services and just 15 make any reference to violence against women, according to a report published by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and Queen Mary University of London on Tuesday.

The report is the first to examine whether climate plans refer to sexual and reproductive health.

It calls on more countries to recognise the disproportionate impact of the climate crisis on women and girls, and for more action.

Rising temperatures have been **linked to poorer maternal health and complications during pregnancy**, such as gestational diabetes. Extreme heat has been associated with **triggering earlier deliveries** and an increase in **stillbirths**.

The report said the climate crisis exacerbated existing inequalities. In east and southern **Africa**, for example, tropical cyclones have damaged health facilities, disrupting access to maternal health services and helping spread waterborne diseases such as cholera.

Hurricanes and droughts increase the risks of gender-based violence and child marriage, it added, as **families under stress are less able to support daughters** and seek to marry them off.

Angela Baschieri, an adviser on population and development for UNFPA and one of the report's authors, said: "If we look at the plan of action for women and girls, national plans show there is more work that could be done.

"We know climate change disproportionately affects women and is not gender neutral so there is a need to address those gaps and impacts."



Cop26: Women must be heard on climate, say rights groups

The report highlighted the countries that are taking action.

Paraguay, **Seychelles** and Benin have specified the need to build climate-resilient health systems allowing women to give birth safely and access health services.

Nine countries, including El Salvador, **Sierra Leone** and Guinea, have included policies or interventions to address gender-based violence.

Only **Dominica** has mentioned the need for contraception, despite evidence of disruptions to family-planning services during climate-related disasters.

Vietnam is the only country to acknowledge that child marriage occurs more often during times of crises as families seek to reduce their economic burden (for example, marriages of girls aged 11 to 14 **increased by half in Bangladesh** in years with a heatwave lasting a month).

“Climate is setting us back on the fight to gender equality. Our point would be to make sure that climate policy recognises the differential impact on women and takes it into account in the design of policy,” said Baschieri.