

## Gender gap: could a Feminist Green New Deal enable environmental and social justice?

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*This Policy Spotlight summarises insights from an MSc dissertation focusing on a possible Feminist Green New Deal and its implications for environmental and social justice. While the study focuses on an Austrian context, the findings are relevant for Scotland and other countries where policy-makers are considering how to achieve a just transition for all.*



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### Key Takeaways

- Multiple feminist voices and organisations raised concerns about gender blindness in the European Green Deal, published by the European Commission in 2019.
- A possible Feminist Green New Deal (FGND) is intersectional, inclusive and aims for fundamental transformation.
- In addition to acknowledging the gendered dimension of the climate crisis the FGND could explore the potential of the care sector. It could advocate for research on the specific effects that climate change has on women from a diverse range of backgrounds.
- The FGND focuses on the triangle of good policy making – with gender, social, and environmental matters considered together to create progressive policies.
- In order to achieve a just transition, implementing feminist perspectives into policy making should be addressed by at every political level.

### Introduction

After the European Commission published the [European Green Deal](#) (EGD) in 2019, many feminist voices and organisations raised concerns about the gender blindness in the framework. More specifically, concerns were raised about the choice not to recognise the difference between genders in the report; doing so would have reflected existing gender discrimination in society. In doing this, it showed an ignorance of the gendered dimension of climate change and its consequences and drivers.

For example, many feminist scholars have vocalised the gendered differences of the energy crisis and poverty which is affecting women and girls more severely than men. For example, typical male dietary (heavier meat consumption) and mobility (private vehicle usage) behaviour have a more negative impact on the climate than typical female behaviour. Data suggests that women tend to use public transportation more (European Environmental Bureau, 2021).

### The energy crisis and poverty

The EGD relies heavily on a sustainable energy transition from which women fundamentally benefit less than men. Firstly, this is because in the EU only 34% of STEM graduates are women (Brett, 2022).

## The energy crisis and poverty (cont.)

This has an impact on decision-making processes and creates even more barriers as there are few flexible working opportunities for women.

A lack of data and research is driving energy injustice, especially energy poverty, amongst women. Data from Austria shows that twice as many women-led households are unable to keep their houses warm than men-led households (Berger and Maninger, 2021). This has two intertwined consequences as women normally spend more time at home carrying out unpaid labour and it can lead to serious health issues caused by mould and humidity in poorly heated houses.



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## Case study: The situation in Austria and its relevance for Scottish policy

This dissertation research explored the expert opinions of Austrian professionals from economic, academic, political and environmental backgrounds on feminist perspectives in environmental policy making, including its possibilities and challenges. The dominant narrative which emerged was that there needs to be a shift away from GDP thinking and more focus on the social wellbeing of a society.

The experts advocated for intersectional thinking and a networked way of acting including implementing the triangle of good policy making. For feminist approaches in policy making more generally, they agree that the real challenges lay within political parties and the political constellation of the parliament in each country.

## Care-Sector: Moving away from GDP growth as an indicator

One of the EGD's key pillars is sustainable economic expansion and growth. However, research shows that such growth is not feasible on a global or long-term basis (Hickel and Kallis, 2020). Resources on this planet are finite and therefore the goal of permanent expansion, production, and consumption, which is measured in GDP, must be questioned and replaced. Other valuable areas of society are thereby placed outside of the market including care work, social reproduction, and education.

Results from this dissertation reveal that professionals and experts advocate for a reorganisation of societal measures to bring the focus onto the care sector to then invest in and expand it. This can be seen as a major opportunity to allow feminist perspectives into policy making. Such a feminist economic system connects economies to wellbeing while undervalued work predominately undertaken by lower class women is considered and valued.

Implementing feminist perspectives into environmental policy making and furthermore creating a Feminist Green New Deal is a unique and real political issue, which relies on government intervention. Interviewed experts argue that it needs continuous political will from political figures in the government to implement feminist ideas.

Implementing feminist perspectives into policies is also relevant for other countries including Scotland which is seeking to make progress with its new policies that aim to tackle gender injustice. However, it is important to connect them to each other, thus tying gender, social, and environmental matters together to try and create better, intersectional, and inclusive policies.

## How can feminist theories and ideas be implemented?

*There are many ways to gradually yet effectively implement feminist ideas into policy making and into the environmental policy making agenda more specifically. The next few sections will take a closer look at the possibilities that emerged from this dissertation.*

### Intersectionality

Intersectional thinking (i.e. understanding how a person's multiple identities, including gender, ethnicity, etc. affect their experiences and access to opportunities) is necessary to enable feminist perspectives to get into policy making, in this case with particular emphasis on the EGD. It is crucial to acknowledge that we need women of all ages, nationalities, sexualities, classes, and abilities to effectively be inclusive and intersectional. Research proposes enhanced collaboration between policy areas such as social, family, women and environment to promote connections and create a just transition.

### Inclusive representation

Ensuring people from diverse backgrounds are involved in the decision-making process is crucial for an inclusive and just policy framework. Women from diverse backgrounds hold potential to be enablers of fundamental change as they bring new ideas to the table. To enable this to happen, safe spaces must be created for them and active recruitment is encouraged. The adoption of tokenistic-practices is one of the major challenges which needs to be tackled to allow inclusive representation. Capacity-building training for organisations should be mandatory.

### Gender mainstreaming

The approach of gender mainstreaming is promising. This means that gender is being considered in every policy area and in every phase of developing policies and making decisions. However, data indicates that it must not replace independent gender areas and should also not stop investment and funding into the consideration of gender on its own (Tummers and Wankiewicz, 2020).

***“Women from a diverse range of backgrounds hold much potential to be enablers of fundamental change.”***

### Redefining green jobs – social jobs are green jobs

To ensure a FGND it is crucial to redefine 'green' jobs. Social jobs, care work and social reproduction work are all green jobs. There needs to be a shift in acknowledging and including non-technical jobs and solutions as they are components to address the climate crisis. Investing into these non-technical jobs will support women from various backgrounds because they make up the majority of individuals working in these areas.

## Policy recommendations:

**Policymakers must engage in more networked and intersectional thinking. There should be a focus on the triangle of better policy making which considers social, gender, and environmental justice together.**

**Gender and inclusive representation must be mainstreamed into policy making. Inclusion of diverse backgrounds in policy making must be prioritised, but tokenistic practices will be a challenge to overcome.**

**The just transition must be considered through feminist approaches to policy making including a shift away from traditional GDP led growth and towards a focus on the wellbeing economy.**

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