

When Equality Is Not Enough: Gendered Realities of Climate Governance

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Extended Abstract

Aim and contribution of the research. The transition toward a climate-neutral society is increasingly framed as a question of fairness and inclusion, yet formal commitments to gender equality do not automatically translate into equal experiences of climate governance in everyday life. While policy discourse often assumes that equal legal rights and participation frameworks are sufficient to ensure inclusive climate action, lived realities suggest a more complex picture shaped by care responsibilities, housing costs, energy vulnerability, and socio-economic pressures. In this context, gender equality cannot be understood in isolation from broader structural conditions that shape both perceptions of fairness and willingness to engage in climate-related behaviour. The aim of this research is to examine how structural and socio-economic factors shape gendered perceptions of inequality, experiences of energy vulnerability, and climate-related behavioural intentions within a single integrated analytical framework. Rather than analysing labour market inequality, unpaid care, energy poverty, and climate attitudes as separate domains, the study conceptualises them as interconnected dimensions of everyday climate governance. By doing so, it seeks to identify the drivers of variation in how individuals perceive gender equality, experience economic and energy-related pressures, and respond to the demands of the green transition. The contribution of the paper lies in bridging gender inequality research with energy and climate governance debates, demonstrating that equality in formal rules does not necessarily ensure equality in lived participation, adaptation capacity, or support for climate policies.

Data and methodology. The analysis is based on original survey data collected through a structured questionnaire designed to capture multiple dimensions of gender inequality and climate-related experiences. A representative survey of the Lithuanian population aged 18 and over was conducted in the end of 2025 using a probabilistic sampling strategy to ensure proportional representation by gender, age, and place of residence. The dataset contains a broad set of perception-based and behavioural indicators covering labour market equality, unpaid care constraints, participation in climate decision-making, energy limitation and expenditure patterns, and willingness to adopt climate-mitigating behaviours. To explain variation in these outcomes, the study incorporates a comprehensive set of explanatory variables reflecting demographic characteristics, socio-economic status, family structure, regional context, and structural support conditions. These include gender, age

group, education level, employment status, household income, marital status, presence of children, urban or non-urban residence, unpaid working hours, perceived availability of public services, housing cost burden, and digital access or ability. Together, these factors capture the key structural drivers that may influence both perceptions of equality and practical capacity to engage in the energy transition. Given that the outcome variables are measured on ordinal scales, such as levels of agreement, frequency of limitations, or expenditure brackets, the empirical analysis employs ordered logit models. This approach is appropriate because the responses are ranked but not continuous, meaning that the distance between categories cannot be assumed equal. The ordered logit framework allows estimation of how different structural and socio-economic factors shift the probability of respondents falling into higher or lower categories of perceptions, constraints, and behavioural intentions, while fully respecting the ordinal nature of the data. By applying a consistent modelling strategy across all dimensions, the analysis enables systematic comparison of how similar structural drivers operate differently across labour market inequality, unpaid care, energy vulnerability, and climate behaviour.

Results. The empirical findings reveal that gender inequality is most clearly expressed in the labour market and unpaid care domains. Women are consistently more critical of the existence of equal pay and career opportunities and are significantly more likely to report experiences of gender-based discrimination. These patterns remain robust after controlling for education, income, employment status, and family characteristics, indicating that perceived labour market inequality is strongly gendered rather than merely socio-economically driven. Unpaid care responsibilities emerge as a central structural constraint linking gender inequality to participation in economic and civic life. Women and households with children are substantially more likely to report that caregiving duties restrict their ability to work, study, or engage socially. Higher volumes of unpaid working hours strongly intensify these limitations, pointing to time scarcity as a key mechanism through which gender inequality is reproduced. At the same time, better availability of public services and stronger digital access are associated with fewer reported constraints, suggesting that institutional support and technological resources can partially alleviate care-related barriers to participation. In contrast, energy poverty and vulnerability are shaped primarily by socio-economic and housing-related conditions rather than gender alone. Housing cost burden emerges as the most powerful predictor of limiting heating or electricity use, while higher education significantly reduces the likelihood of such energy deprivation. Urban residents are more likely to report restricting energy consumption, reflecting higher living costs and housing characteristics. Once these structural conditions are accounted for, gender itself shows no robust direct effect on energy limitation, although gendered care roles indirectly influence household energy use through greater domestic engagement and time spent at home. Energy expenditure patterns further underline the structural nature of vulnerability. Respondents in stable partnerships, households with children, and those with higher unpaid working hours tend to report higher energy spending, consistent with larger household size and more intensive domestic routines. However, individuals facing higher housing cost burdens report lower overall energy expenditure, indicating constrained or under-consumption among financially pressured households. This suggests that some households cope with rising energy costs not through efficiency improvements but by reducing consumption below comfortable levels. Perceptions of participation in climate governance display a more nuanced pattern. Women are more likely than men to believe that women have equal opportunities to participate in climate-related decision-making, signalling a general perception of procedural inclusion. Nevertheless, this perception declines significantly among respondents experiencing higher housing cost burdens, implying that economic pressure weakens the sense of political inclusion. Conversely, better perceived availability of public services strongly increases confidence in equal participation, highlighting the importance of institutional capacity in shaping inclusive governance experiences. Climate-related behavioural intentions are influenced mainly by education, household engagement, and structural context rather than gender alone. Higher

education consistently increases willingness to reduce household energy consumption and to pay more for renewable electricity. Respondents with greater unpaid working hours also show stronger readiness to adapt household routines and support renewable energy, suggesting the presence of a highly engaged household actor who, despite heavier domestic responsibilities, remains willing to contribute to mitigation efforts. In contrast, weaker perceived public service provision reduces willingness to accept higher costs for renewable energy, indicating that trust in institutions shapes acceptance of transition measures. A particularly important finding is the emergence of a vulnerability paradox. Households facing higher housing cost burdens are more likely to limit energy use and report lower energy expenditure, signalling material deprivation. Yet these same households can simultaneously express more optimistic views about labour market equality or greater willingness to support renewable energy. This coexistence of objective vulnerability and supportive attitudes points to adaptive coping strategies, pragmatic acceptance of the transition, or expectations of future structural improvement, rather than simple resistance to climate policies.

Conclusions and implications. Overall, the study demonstrates that gendered realities of climate governance are shaped by an interplay of care responsibilities, housing costs, institutional support, education, and digital access. Formal equality in rules and representation does not guarantee equal capacity to participate in or adapt to the low-carbon transition. Gender inequality is most visible in labour market perceptions and unpaid care burdens, while energy vulnerability is largely driven by socio-economic and housing conditions. At the same time, education and digital resources act as enabling factors that both reduce vulnerability and strengthen pro-climate behavioural intentions. These findings highlight that effective and just climate governance requires moving beyond a narrow focus on formal gender equality toward a broader understanding of structural inequalities embedded in everyday life. Policies addressing housing affordability, care infrastructure, public service provision, and digital inclusion may be as important for inclusive climate transitions as measures explicitly labelled as gender equality policies. Recognising these interdependencies is crucial for designing climate strategies that are not only environmentally effective but also socially sustainable and genuinely inclusive.

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