

Briefing for journalists:

Climate Change and Social Inequalities



Climate Change is a fact.

Though nobody can escape the impact of climate change, it [disproportionately affects](#) the most vulnerable people and systems¹. Climate change involves complex interactions of several factors such as existing inequities, distribution of resources, societal norms, unequal power relations, and demographic patterns².

The effects of climate change are layered onto a complex social landscape, where groups have unequal access to resources, leading to environmental and resource heterogeneity globally and within regions and countries³. At the same time, responsibility for causing climate change also varies widely both between and within countries.



What is the Story for the Media?

As UNESCO's [handbook](#) for journalists puts it nicely: "climate change is not just a story; it is the context in which so many other stories will unfold... **Coverage of climate change means several things: At the local level, it can save lives, formulate plans, change policies, and empower people to make informed choices**"⁴. Furthermore, [actions](#) implemented in the next decade determine the extent to which medium and long-term pathways will deliver higher or lower climate-resilient developments.

Media reporting that delves into the underlying factors of climate change and its impact on various regions of the country is vital in many ways. These stories can shed light on how climate change affects the diverse social groups as well as ecosystems in Georgia, providing insights into how the changing climate influences daily lives and the resources Georgian society relies on.

¹ IPCC, 2022: Summary for Policymakers. Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change pp. 3–33, doi:10.1017/9781009325844.001.

² Michael, Kavya, 2015 Class Inequality and Climate Change Resilience: Exploring the Nexus in Liberalised India, doi - 10.2139/ssrn.2572619

³ Hamann, 2018 Annual Review of Environment and Resources Volume 43, pp 61-83

⁴ Getting the Message Across Reporting on Climate Change and Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific: A Handbook for Journalists+

What is missing from the media coverage of Climate Change in Georgia?

- **Climate Risks for Georgia:** Stories that explain the causes of climate change and its consequences for different regions of Georgia and the livelihoods of its citizens and habitats.
- Reporting on specific aspects of climate change. How does climate change **affect people living in poverty; why and how does climate change impact women, queer communities, the elderly, children, ethnic minorities, IDPs, eco migrants, or people with disabilities?** Are their vulnerabilities and needs addressed in State policies and adaptation plans? Are these groups involved in developing strategies for mitigating climate change?
- Reporting on how the **Georgian state enacts policies** at national, regional, and global levels to deal with climate change. Monitoring and reporting on the National Adaptation Programmes of Action and the National Adaptation Plans.
- What are the links between climate change and its impact on the **political, economic, and social** fragility of Georgia and the South Caucasus?
- **Telling local stories with global impact** – whether it is new research findings, policy shifts, or odd weather patterns, media can make these far-off happenings relevant to their audiences by highlighting the local implications of global problems.

What are we talking about when we talk about Climate Change Inequalities?

Climate conditions tend to drive inequality. [The report](#) prepared by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) provides strong evidence of the differentiated impacts of climate change on the most vulnerable communities across regions.

Climate change has already affected **global economic inequality**. The gap between the economic output of the world's richest and poorest countries is 25 percent larger today than it would have been without global warming.⁵ **Developing Countries suffer the most from the negative impacts of climate change.**⁶ On the one hand, they have naturally warmer climates than those in the developed world; on the other hand, developing countries also rely more heavily on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture, forestry, and tourism.⁷ In addition, they lack the financing and the institutional capacity to implement the necessary climate change adaptation programs.⁸ The lack of climate literacy at all levels and the limited availability of information and data pose further constraints to adapting and implementing plans.⁹

⁵ Noah S. Diffenbaugh^{a,b,1} and Marshall Burke^{a,c,d}. Department of Earth System Science, Stanford University

⁶ Poverty and climate change: reducing the vulnerability of the poor through adaptation (English). Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.

⁷ K. Wade, M. Jennings Climate change & the global economy: Regional effects

<https://www.schroders.com/de/bm/asset-management/insights/economic-views/climate-change--the-global-economy-regional-effects/>

⁸ K.Georgieva, V. Gaspar, C. Pazarbasioglu Poor and Vulnerable Countries Need Support to Adapt to Climate Change,

<https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2022/03/23/blog032322-poor-and-vulnerable-countris-need-support-to-adapt-to-climate-change>

⁹ IPCC, 2022: Summary for Policymakers. Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change pp. 3–33, doi:10.1017/9781009325844.001

Climate change inequalities within countries are even more complex, multifaceted, and context-specific. The poorest and most marginalized people are more vulnerable¹⁰ to the consequences of climate change. An initial inequality makes disadvantaged groups suffer disproportionately from the effects of climate change resulting in greater subsequent inequality.¹¹ The reason why different people experience different levels of harm from similar levels of physical change is mainly due to social factors, not physical ones.¹² Latest research suggests that inequalities in causing climate change - in per-person emissions - now vary more widely within countries than between countries.¹³

Climate Change disproportionately affects poor communities

According to the [International Monetary Fund](#) (IMF), unmanaged climate change hurts global economic growth by “damaging poverty eradication efforts and disproportionately affecting the poorest regions and people”. Climate change can generate a vicious cycle of increasing poverty and vulnerability, worsening inequality, and the already precarious situation of many disadvantaged.¹⁴

Poor individuals or social groups have a greater propensity to be harmed by climate change.

Here is why: On the one hand, they have fewer assets to recover from natural disasters and are less likely to be insured against such events. On the other hand, poor communities are more likely to live in areas with high exposure to climate change and, they have fewer or no alternative livelihood options.¹⁵ People with the lowest incomes are more dependent on climate-sensitive sectors. Furthermore, rising temperatures exacerbate preexisting disparities in access to clean water and affordable food.¹⁶

According to the EU4Climate, **Georgia is highly vulnerable** to the effects of climate change, facing threats that include increased frequency and severity of droughts, flooding, and landslides.

Georgia, with its location, terrain, hydrographic network, and environmental conditions, contains not only natural but also anthropogenic catastrophes (transport and industrial accidents). High anthropogenic pressure on natural resources also creates favorable conditions for provoking disasters¹⁷.

These will have serious implications for agriculture in particular, which is central to the Georgian economy¹⁸. Rural communities in Georgia rely on agriculture as their main source of income.

Georgia’s Climate Risk Country [profile](#) highlights the disproportional effects of climate change on the poorest groups of Georgian society. It is also likely to affect regional disparities in living standards. Poorer farmers and communities are least able to afford local water storage, irrigation infrastructure, and technologies for adaptation.¹⁹

¹⁰ Getting the Message Across Reporting on Climate Change and Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific: A Handbook for Journalists

¹¹ S. Nazrul Islam & John Winkel, 2017. "Climate Change and Social Inequality," Working Papers 152, United Nations, Department of Economics and Social Affairs

¹² Thomas K, Hardy RD, Lazrus H, Mendez M, Orlove B, Rivera-Collazo I, Roberts JT, Rockman M, Warner BP, Winthrop R. Explaining differential vulnerability to climate change: A social science review. Wiley Interdiscip Rev Clim Change. 2019 Mar-Apr; 10(2):e565. doi: 10.1002/wcc.565.

¹³ Chancel, L., Bothe, P., Voituriez, T. (2023) Climate Inequality Report 2023, World Inequality Lab Study 2023/1

¹⁴ S. Nazrul Islam & John Winkel, 2017. "[Climate Change and Social Inequality](#)," Working Papers 152, United Nations, Department of Economics and Social Affairs.

¹⁵ Leichenko, Robin & Silva, Julie. (2014). Climate change and poverty: Vulnerability, impacts, and alleviation strategies. Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change. 5. 10.1002/wcc.287.

¹⁶ Taconet, N., Méjean, A. & Guivarch, C. Influence of climate change impacts and mitigation costs on inequality between countries. Climatic Change 160, 15–34 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-019-02637-w>

¹⁷ Reducing the Risk of Climate-driven Disasters in Georgia, 2020
<https://www.undp.org/georgia/publications/reducing-risk-climate-driven-disasters-georgia>

¹⁸ EU4Climate GEORGIA 2022 https://eu4climate.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/2_EU4Climate-GEORGIA_2022_updated.pdf

¹⁹ Climate Risk Country Profile: Georgia (2021): The World Bank Group and the Asian Development Bank.

“The climate crisis is not Gender Neutral”

According to the UN Women and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) decisions, the climate crisis is not “gender neutral”. Women and girls experience the greatest impacts of climate change, which amplifies existing gender inequalities and poses unique threats to their livelihoods, health, and safety.²⁰

Firstly, women constitute the majority of the world’s poor population and are more dependent on natural resources threatened by climate change. Furthermore, they face social, economic, and political barriers that limit their coping capacities. Because of unequal access to resources and decision-making processes, climate change [disproportionately affects](#) women in rural areas.²¹ In terms of [health](#), the risk of contracting serious illnesses is aggravated by environmental hazards that will also increase women’s care work.²²

Research “[Gender Equality and Environmental Justice](#)” describes different reasons why women in Georgia are more vulnerable to environmental pollution and Climate Change. Among them is the lack of participation in decision-making processes on environmental matters, land ownership issues, and limited access to health care due to a lack of infrastructure, especially in Georgia’s poor peripheries.²³

By giving voice to communities that are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, good journalism can help to raise awareness of the unequal distribution of the impacts of climate change and challenge the assumption that climate change affects everyone equally. Moreover, by promoting solutions that address climate change inequalities, the media can help to inspire action and support the mitigation process.

²⁰ explainer: How gender inequality and climate change are interconnected <https://bit.ly/3WTkc6>

²¹ UN WomenWatch: www.un.org/womenwatch, Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change accessible at: <https://bit.ly/2GaExjS>

²² *ibid*

²³ N.Tabidze, M.Kochladze, 2021, “Gender Equality and Environmental Justice”, Women’s Fund in Georgia