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Mapping the Climate–Care Nexus in the WANA Region

A Scoping Review

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Introduction

The accelerating climate crisis is not only an environmental emergency but a profound social and economic challenge that reshapes how communities sustain life, livelihoods, and relationships¹. Across the West Asia and North Africa (WANA) region, climate change interacts with long-standing political instability, economic precarity, and social inequality, producing overlapping crises that threaten human security and deepen existing gendered vulnerabilities². Within these intersecting crises, women's care labor, both paid and unpaid, becomes an essential yet invisible form of adaptation and survival.

As climate-related droughts, earthquakes, floods, food and water insecurity, and displacement intensify in countries across WANA, women face growing unpaid care burdens that strain their time, health, and livelihoods. Studies show that they shoulder increased responsibilities for household survival while experiencing greater exposure to gender-based violence and economic insecurity³.

Girls are often withdrawn from school to help with domestic work, which ultimately reinforces cycles of inequality⁴. In many rural areas, increased water scarcity forces girls to spend more hours collecting water, sometimes walking several kilometers each day, further reducing their schooling time and increasing their exposure to physical and safety risks⁵.

Care practices, from household adjustments to community-based initiatives, often function as quiet forms of resistance to environmental degradation and state neglect. By organizing shared resources, supporting one another, and compensating for collapsing services, caregivers create alternative systems of survival that challenge the structural failures producing vulnerability in the first place. Yet these same practices can also expose women to added strain and layered vulnerabilities, especially when they are left to compensate for collapsing public services or worsening ecological conditions.

This tension makes clear that care is both a resource for survival and a site where structural inequalities deepen, especially as leaving care to women's unpaid labor exposes children, older persons, people with disabilities, and the ill to heightened vulnerability in the face of climate impacts.

Despite women's crucial role in sustaining families and communities amid climate stress, unpaid care work remains largely absent from national climate and adaptation policies^{6,7,8}. This omission reflects broader epistemic and structural biases in climate governance. Mainstream climate action, which is often dominated by technocratic and market-oriented paradigms⁹, tends to prioritize mitigation targets and green transitions¹⁰ over social reproduction and care infrastructures. Such approaches reinforce the historical devaluation of reproductive labor and perpetuate the gendered separation between "productive" and "reproductive" spheres¹¹.

¹Adom, P. K. (2024). The socioeconomic impact of climate change in developing countries over the next decades: A literature survey. *Heliyon*, (15)10, e35134.

²Arkeh, J., & Hamzawy, A. (2024). Climate change in the Middle East and North Africa: Mitigating vulnerabilities and designing effective policies. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

³Women Development Organization. (2024). Women and climate change: The Status of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in OIC Member States.

⁴UNICEF & Karama. (2023). Climate change: Impact on adolescent girls [Advocacy brief].

⁵Sustainability Directory. (2024). How does water scarcity affect women differently?

⁶MacGregor, S., Arora-Jonsson, S., & Cohen, M. (2023). Caring in a changing climate: Women, climate resilience and feminist policy responses. Oxfam.

⁷Floro, M. (2024). Effects of climate change on the organisation of care provisioning. In I. Valodia (Ed.), *Perspectives on the care-climate nexus* (pp. 23–15). Southern Centre for Inequality Studies.

⁸Grown, C., De Henau, J., Martinez, L., & Ilkcaracan, I. (2025). Integrating care and climate adaptation into a holistic fiscal framework at the country level. The Brookings Institution.

⁹Amorim-Maia, A. T., Anguelovski, I., Chu, E., & Connolly, J. (2022). Intersectional climate justice: A conceptual pathway for bridging adaptation planning, transformative action, and social equity. *Urban Climate*, 101053, 41.

¹⁰IMF, OECD, UNCTAD, World Bank, & WTO. (2024). Working together for better climate action: Carbon pricing, policy spillovers, and global climate goals.

¹¹Marques, L. S., & Kremer, M. M. (2023). The (un)productivity of reproductive work and the woman's exhaustion in contemporary times. *Revista de Administração Contemporânea*, (5)27.

Feminist scholarship on care ^{12,13} has long challenged this hierarchy by positioning care as the foundation of economic and social life, an indispensable system that sustains people and the planet. Simultaneously, feminist and decolonial environmental thinkers have called for an intersectional understanding of climate justice that recognizes how gender, class, colonial histories, and ecological degradation are interlinked^{14,15,16,17}. Bringing these two bodies of thought into dialogue reveals that the climate crisis and the crisis of care are not parallel problems but mutually constitutive expressions of the same extractive and patriarchal global order.

This study adopts a feminist approach that links care and climate justice through a regional perspective. Rather than treating gender as an “add-on” to environmental or adaptation policy, it maps and synthesizes how social reproduction, ecological precarity, and distributive justice are intertwined in regional research and policy practice.

The paper also reflects the Asfari Institute’s broader and long-standing commitment to advancing regional debates on care, gender justice, and social protection. Through its research programs, convenings, and partnerships with feminist organizations and civil society actors, the Asfari Institute has consistently positioned care as a structural political concern rather than a private or household issue. Its recent work has highlighted how care deficits intersect with conflict, displacement, economic crises, and the erosion of public services across the region. Situating the present study within this institutional trajectory highlights the urgency of examining care as a central component of climate justice.

The present study also draws on the research agenda developed by and in collaboration with Dr. Deepta Chopra (2025)¹⁸, to identify priority gaps in the regional care economy. political-economic and environmental shifts.

Her analysis highlights the limited evidence on how climate change, conflict, and displacement reshape the social organization of care, and points to the need for feminist research that centers unpaid care work within broader political-economic and environmental shifts.

Methodologically, the paper adopts a scoping approach to systematically map the existing body of knowledge at the intersection of care and climate justice. It synthesizes knowledge from academic literature and grey literature to identify emerging concepts, policies, and knowledge gaps, and directions for future research and advocacy. It also investigates how, and to what extent, feminist researchers, practitioners, and organizations in the region are redirecting climate discourse toward life-sustaining economies, reciprocity, and solidarity.

The paper argues that feminist climate justice must begin from the ethics and economies of care, reorienting policy and adaptation strategies around interdependence, redistribution, and collective responsibility. Centering care provides a critical lens for understanding how gendered labor, social reproduction, and ecological vulnerability intersect across the WANA region. It positions care as both a political demand and a material practice, and highlights how comprehensive care systems form a core component of holistic responses to climate change¹⁹. Only through this lens can the region envision equitable and sustainable futures that value the labor, knowledge, and resilience of those who sustain life amid crisis.

¹²Fraser, N. (2016). Contradictions of capital and care. *New Left Review*, 117–99, 100.

¹³Federici, S. (2012). *Revolution at point zero: Housework, reproduction, and feminist struggle*. Oakland, CA: PM Press.

¹⁴Agarwal, B. (1992). The gender and environment debate: Lessons from India. *Feminist Studies*, 158–119, (1)18.

¹⁵Sovacool et al. (2022). Pluralizing energy justice: Incorporating feminist, anti-racist, Indigenous, and postcolonial perspectives. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 102365, 84.

¹⁶Reyes, E. (2021). Shaping the future of multilateralism: Feminist, decolonial economic solutions to address interconnected global crises. Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

¹⁷Ilkcaracan, I. (2013). “The Purple Economy: A Call for a New Economic Order beyond the Green Economy,” in LIFE e.V./GenaNet (ed). *Green Economy and Green Growth: Who Cares? Approaching the linkages between Care, Livelihood and the Green/Sustainable Economy*, Berlin: Life e.V./German Federal Ministry for the Environment, pp: 38-32.

¹⁸Chopra, D. (2025). Framing a research agenda on the care economy in the MENA region. The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship.

¹⁹Grown, C., De Henau, J., Martinez, L., & Ilkcaracan, I. (2025). Integrating care and climate adaptation into a holistic fiscal framework at the country level. The Brookings Institution.



Conceptual Framework

This paper examines the relationship between care and climate justice to show how feminist theory reveals the interdependence of sustaining human life and sustaining the planet. It approaches this through three interconnected areas of analysis: (1) the feminist political economy of care; (2) feminist ecological and climate justice approaches; and (3) care as infrastructure for climate justice. These pillars provide the conceptual basis for understanding care and climate justice as political, economic, and ethical questions rather than separate social or environmental concerns.

Feminist Political Economy of Care

Feminist political economy and social reproduction theory share a central argument: the production of economic value depends on unpaid, undervalued labor that sustains human life²⁰. Care work, whether performed in homes, communities, or informal economies, is indispensable to the functioning of societies and markets, yet it remains systematically invisible in policy and theory²¹.

Building on Nancy Fraser (2016), this framework understands capitalism as producing a “crisis of care,” wherein the drive for accumulation undermines the social and ecological conditions necessary for reproduction²². Tithi Bhattacharya (2017) expands this argument by situating care within social reproduction theory (SRT), which remaps class and power relations through the everyday labor that reproduces workers, families, and communities²³.

For Bhattacharya, social reproduction is not peripheral but central to capitalist stability; it is both the site of exploitation and of potential resistance.

Naila Kabeer’s (2016; 1994) relational approach to gender and power, grounded in her pioneering development of the Social Relations Framework (SRF) in the mid-1990s²⁴, complements SRT by emphasizing the structural and agentive dimensions of care work²⁵. While Kabeer’s early formulation established the foundations for analyzing how institutions shape gendered access to resources, recognition, and representation, subsequent scholars have expanded and refined this framework across diverse contexts. Seen through this lens, care is not only a site of burden but also one of negotiation, where agency, interdependence, and resistance coexist.

The feminist policy dimensions of care are elaborated in Ailynn Torres Santana’s “Care at the Core: A Feminist Proposal” (2023), which situates care as a collective right rather than a private duty²⁶. Building on Kabeer’s SRF, Santana argues that recognizing care as a public good requires redefining its role in social and economic policy, moving it from the margins of social protection frameworks to the center of democratic governance. Her proposal links the redistribution of care responsibilities among the state, market, community, and households with the broader goal of building equitable and sustainable societies.

By framing care as a social and ecological practice, she extends the political economy of care to include environmental and intergenerational dimensions, emphasizing that caring for people and caring for the planet are mutually reinforcing imperatives. This approach highlights the need for policies that not only recognize and value care work but also integrate it into climate, social protection, and economic planning.

²⁰Picchio, A. (1992). *Social reproduction: The political economy of the labour market*. Cambridge University Press.

²¹Laugier, S. (2021). Paradoxes in the invisibility of care work. *Philosophical Topics*, 80–61, (1)49.

²²Fraser, N. (2016). Contradictions of capital and care. *New Left Review*, 117–99, 100.

²³Bhattacharya, T. (2017). Introduction: Mapping social reproduction theory. In T. Bhattacharya (Ed.), *Social reproduction theory: Remapping class, recentering oppression* (pp. 20–1). London: Pluto Press.

²⁴Kabeer, N. (1994). *Reversed realities: Gender hierarchies in development thought*. Verso.

²⁵Kabeer, N. (2016). Gender equality, economic growth, and women’s agency: The “endless variety” and “monotonous similarity” of patriarchal constraints. *Feminist Economics*, 321–295, (1)22.

²⁶Torres Santana, A. (2023). *Care at the core: A feminist proposal* [Policy paper]. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES). Civil Society and Citizenship.

²⁷Ilkharacan, I. (2013). The Purple Economy: A call for a new economic order beyond the green economy. In LIFE e.V./GenaNet (Ed.), *Green economy and green growth: Who cares? Approaching the linkages between care, livelihood, and the green/sustainable economy* (pp. 38–32). Berlin: LIFE e.V./German Federal Ministry for the Environment.

²⁸Ilkharacan, I. (2025). From green to purple: Building blocks of life-serving future economies. In P. Kuenkel (Ed.), *Transforming economies*. Berlin: Routledge.

A complementary contribution to feminist political economy is the Purple Economy framework, originally developed in Türkiye and increasingly adopted by women's rights organizations, UN agencies, and global advocacy networks. The Purple Economy positions care as the foundation of economic and ecological wellbeing and argues that no green transition is possible without transforming the organization, valuation, and governance of care^{27,28}.

By explicitly linking the Green Economy to a Care+ Economy, the framework critiques growth-led environmental policies that overlook social reproduction and calls instead for economic models that center life-serving systems, time justice, and interdependence. Its uptake by global actors, including the UN Economists Network's articulation of the Purple Economy as the Care+ Economy²⁹, demonstrates a growing recognition that care is not only a social policy concern but a structural pillar of sustainable economic transformation. This perspective reinforces the argument that care must be treated as a central economic category and a precondition for both gender justice and ecological transition.

Global Frameworks on Care: The Global Alliance for Care

The growing international recognition of care as a structural public good has been strengthened by global political commitments emerging from the Generation Equality Forum (GEF), held in 2021 as part of the Beijing +25 process. One of the GEF Action Coalitions, namely The Action Coalition on Economic Justice and Rights, launched the Global Alliance for Care (GAC), co-led by UN Women and the Government of Mexico. GAC represents the first large-scale, multi-stakeholder global initiative dedicated to transforming care systems, redistributing care responsibilities, and positioning care work at the center of social and economic policymaking.

GAC has produced a set of strategic knowledge products that have shaped global and regional debates on care, including the widely used advocacy toolkits, which translate feminist political economy principles into actionable policy guidance for governments, civil society, and development institutions. The Alliance's work emphasizes that investing in care is essential to achieving gender equality, inclusive economic development, and crisis resilience.

Moreover, the recently published UN System-wide Policy Paper on Transforming Care Systems (2024)³⁰ is the most comprehensive and up-to-date global framework guiding how governments, international agencies, and development actors should understand, resource, and redesign care systems.

The paper sets out a unified UN position on why care must be treated as a structural public good, outlining the policy, financing, and institutional reforms required to build integrated care systems across the life course. Importantly, it also makes explicit the connection between care systems and environmental sustainability.

The framework emphasizes that climate change is reshaping the conditions under which care is provided, increasing unpaid care demands and magnifying existing inequalities. It calls for climate-responsive care policies, investments in resilient public services, and the incorporation of care considerations into climate adaptation planning and budgeting. In doing so, the policy paper positions the care economy not only as a gender equality priority but as a critical pillar of sustainable development and climate action.

Moreover, emerging evidence demonstrates that transforming care systems is not only socially necessary but economically strategic. Policy simulations across diverse national contexts consistently show that public investments in care generate higher employment, stronger earnings effects, and more inclusive growth outcomes than equivalent investments in physical infrastructure.

Because care services are labor-intensive and have high employment multipliers, they create substantial numbers of decent jobs while reducing unemployment and poverty. This has been documented in studies for Türkiye³¹, in cross-country analyses covering 45 countries³², and in recent country-level modeling for Jordan³³.

²⁹ Carpenter, C. L., Staab, S., & Bidegain, N. (2023). Purple economy framework. United Nations.

³⁰United Nations. (2024). Transforming care systems in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals and Our Common Agenda: UN system policy paper.

³¹Ilkcaracan, I., Kim, K., & Kaya, T. (2015). The impact of public investment in social care services on employment, gender equality and poverty: The Turkish case. Istanbul Technical University, Women's Studies Center in Science, Engineering and Technology

³²Ilkcaracan, I., & Kim, K. (2019). The employment generation impact of meeting SDG targets in early childhood care, education, health and long-term care in 45 countries. International Labour Organization.

³³UN Women. (2020). The care economy in Jordan: Policy brief. UN Women Arab States.

Complementary guidance from the ILO and UN Women on public investments in care services³⁴ reinforces the significance of treating care as a productive sector with transformative macroeconomic potential. Incorporating these insights strengthens global frameworks, such as the GAC and the UN System-wide Policy Paper, by evidencing that care systems are not only a gender equality priority but a foundational pillar for sustainable, climate-responsive, and inclusive economic development.

Feminist Ecological and Climate Justice Approaches

Feminist and decolonial approaches to climate justice challenge the technocratic, growth-oriented models that dominate environmental governance³⁵. These paradigms often isolate environmental issues from social relations, thereby obscuring the gendered labor and inequality that sustain ecological systems. For example, in many parts of the WANA region, women's unpaid work in water collection, seed saving, land care, and small-scale regenerative agriculture directly maintains the ecological conditions on which households and communities depend. Yet, this labor remains invisible in formal climate policy.

Feminist scholars argue that environmental degradation and gender injustice are co-produced through the same structures of dispossession, colonial extraction, and capitalist accumulation^{36,37,38}.

Farah Daibes (2024)³⁹ reinforces this longstanding feminist critique, advanced by scholars such as Marilyn Waring in *If Women Counted* (1988)⁴⁰, that dominant economic indicators like GDP systematically erase the value of care work and discount the environmental costs of extraction.

A feminist ecological economy thus requires integrating care for people and care for the planet into measures of well-being and sustainability. Her approach rejects “green growth” narratives in favor of a redistributive and relational model of sustainability, one that centers care as both an ethical and economic principle.

Institutional frameworks also reflect this shift. For example, the ILO's 5R model—recognize, reduce, redistribute, reward, and represent—together with UN Women's (2022) Toolkit on Paid and Unpaid Care Work⁴¹, emphasizes that equitable policy must not only redistribute resources but also ensure the visibility and representation of caregivers. Applied to climate justice, this means that adaptation and mitigation strategies must center the care systems that sustain communities.

Care as Infrastructure for Climate Justice

The final pillar conceptualizes care as a form of infrastructure, meaning a social, economic, and ecological foundation that sustains life yet remains largely invisible in climate and development policy. Rather than treating care as a reactive or humanitarian response to a crisis, this perspective views it as a structural condition for justice.

In the WANA region, fragmented welfare systems, ongoing conflict, and climate-induced scarcity intersect to shape care infrastructures, both formal and informal, that ultimately determine who survives, who thrives, and who bears the burden of systemic neglect.

³⁴Ilkkaracan, I. (2021). Policy guidance tool on public investments in care services: A tool for gender-responsive economic recovery. International Labour Organization (ILO) & UN Women.

³⁵Bee, B. A., Rice, J., & Trauger, A. (2015). A feminist approach to climate change governance: Everyday and intimate politics. *Geography Compass*, 350–339 ,(6)9.

³⁶Park, J. (2025). Rethinking resource scarcity: Toward ecofeminist decolonial degrowth. *Cogent Social Sciences*, (1)11.

³⁷Oki, O. J. (2025). Ecofeminism and the politics of land ownership: A critical analysis of Lynn Nottage's *Ruined*. *International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research*, ,(1)3 672–660.

³⁸Ojeda, D., Nirmal, P., Rocheleau, D., & Emel, J. (2021). Feminist ecologies. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 26–1 ,(1)46.

³⁹Daibes, F. (2024). *Feminist ecological economics: For a just and sustainable future in MENA and beyond*. Beirut: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES Lebanon Office).

⁴⁰Waring, M. (1988). *If women counted: A new feminist economics*. Harper & Row.

⁴¹UN Women. (2022). *A toolkit on paid and unpaid care work*.

Drawing on Farris (2021)⁴² and Torres Santana (2023)⁴³, care is reframed as the public infrastructure of social reproduction, deserving the same institutional investment as health, transport, or energy systems. Recognizing and financing care as public infrastructure aligns with feminist ecological critiques that call for redistributive and life-sustaining economies^{44,45}.

Integrating care into climate governance means directing public expenditure and climate finance toward care-responsive systems, such as childcare, eldercare, healthcare, water management, and clean energy access, that reduce women's time poverty while improving ecological health. This framing resonates with ecofeminist insights, including Vandana Shiva's work, which highlights how the degradation of ecosystems and the devaluation of women's reproductive labor stem from the same extractive logics⁴⁶. Shiva's critique adds an important dimension: care work, whether performed for communities or the environment, is a form of life-sustaining labor that dominant economic and climate policies routinely invisibilize.

From this perspective, care becomes a political and material infrastructure that binds the reproduction of human and planetary life. It is both the invisible precondition and the transformative horizon of climate justice. A feminist approach to climate governance must therefore treat care not as adaptation, charity, or moral labor, but as essential infrastructure that sustains societies and ecosystems in the face of global crisis.

⁴²Farris, S. R. (2021). Towards a critique of care fetishism: Social reproduction feminism and the ethics of care. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 200–177, (2)23.

⁴³Torres Santana, A. (2023). Care at the core: A feminist proposal [Policy paper]. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES).

⁴⁴Ojeda, D., Nirmal, P., Rocheleau, D., & Emel, J. (2021). Feminist ecologies. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 26–1, (1)46.

⁴⁵Daibes, F. (2024). Feminist ecological economics: For a just and sustainable future in MENA and beyond. Beirut: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES Lebanon Office).

⁴⁶Shiva, V. (1988). *Staying alive: Women, ecology and development*. Zed Books.



Regional Context: Care, Gender, and Climate Justice in WANA

The WANA region is experiencing multiple and overlapping crises that simultaneously expose and deepen structural inequalities in both the care economy and climate justice⁴⁷. While countries in the region differ politically and economically, they share structural characteristics, including a heavy dependence on extractive or service-based economies⁴⁸, high rates of informal labor, and underdeveloped welfare systems⁴⁹.

The region is also marked by deep gendered inequalities in care and social reproduction. Women spend, on average, four to five times more hours than men on unpaid domestic and caregiving tasks⁵⁰. The WANA region also records the lowest female labor force participation rates globally, a pattern shaped not only by the absence of childcare, eldercare, and social protection systems⁵¹ but also by deeper structural drivers. This includes the region's limited capacity to generate decent jobs and the weak employment intensity of economic growth^{52,53}. This unpaid labor is the hidden infrastructure that sustains households, communities, and economies during chronic instability, austerity, and conflict.

Climate Vulnerability and Care Work

Climate change exacerbates these preexisting inequalities across the region, where rising temperatures, water scarcity, desertification, and extreme weather events are increasing⁵⁴. Indeed, the WANA region is among the most climate-vulnerable areas worldwide⁵⁵. Recent studies show that temperatures are increasing at nearly twice the global average, accompanied by a significant decline in annual precipitation and an escalation in extreme heat events⁵⁶. This environmental degradation threatens food security, health, and livelihoods, particularly in rural and low-income communities.

Women, who already shoulder the burden of unpaid subsistence and care work, are on the frontlines of these impacts⁵⁷. They are often disproportionately responsible for water collection, food preparation, caregiving, and managing household energy use, all of which are affected by environmental degradation⁵⁸.

When droughts, floods, or resource shortages occur, women's workloads expand, collecting water from further distances, coping with rising food prices, and caring for sick or displaced family members⁵⁹. As agricultural yields decline due to rising temperatures, shifting rainfall patterns, soil degradation, and water scarcity, livelihoods in climate-sensitive farming communities become increasingly unstable.

Migration patterns are also deeply gendered. Women's decisions to migrate, or remain behind when men leave, are constrained by caregiving responsibilities, limited access to assets, and social norms restricting mobility. For example, female-headed households are more likely to migrate for work (8%) than male-headed households (2%) in Sudan, yet they face heightened risks of gender-based violence, economic exploitation, and lack of social protection in relocation sites⁶⁰. In addition, in Jordan, stay-behind women from migrant households assume expanded unpaid workloads, managing household survival, food production, and community care under worsening water scarcity⁶¹.

Girls face distinct and often more severe consequences within these gendered migration dynamics.

⁴⁷United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). (2024). Inequality in the Arab region: Crisis upon crisis.

⁴⁸Drine, I. (2010). In time of troubles: Challenges and prospects in the Middle East and North Africa (Working Paper No. 981). William Davidson Institute.

⁴⁹Saoudi, H. (2024). Formalizing the informal sector: A fundamental policy for the economic stability of the MENA region. IEMed.

⁵⁰Khafagy, F., & Abdel Khalik, Z. (2021). Women's economic justice and rights: Policy paper. UN Women Arab States.

⁵¹Dione, O., Saadah, F., Brhane, M., & Mohammed, N. (2025). Empowering women in MENA: Breaking barriers, building futures. World Bank Blogs – Arab Voices.

⁵²Ilkcaracan, I. (2012). Why so few women in the labor market in MENA? Economic Research Forum (ERF) Policy Paper No. 2. Economic Research Forum.

⁵³Karshenas, M., & Moghadam, V. M. (2001). Female Labour Force Participation and Economic Adjustment in the MENA Region. *Research in Middle East Economics*, 74-51, 4.

⁵⁴Qasem, R. H. M., & Scholz, M. (2025). Climate change impact on resources in the MENA region: A systematic and critical review. *Physics and Chemistry of the Earth*, 139, 103936.

⁵⁵McFee, E. K. (2023). Climate change, conflict, and migration (CCM2-MM). International Organization for Migration (IOM), Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa.

⁵⁶Qaisar, S., Almazroui, M., Saeed, F., & Ashfaq, M. (2024). Accelerated warming and drying trends over the Middle East and North Africa region: Observational evidence and regional climate model projections. *Journal of Geophysical Research: Atmospheres*, 129.

⁵⁷Moneer, Z. (2024). Women and climate change in MENA: Turning adversity into opportunity. Middle East Institute.

⁵⁸Masdar / WiSER. (2024). Arab women leaders summit: Gender inclusion and climate change in MENA [Report]. Masdar.

⁵⁹International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2024). Climate, mobility, women and girls in MENA.

⁶⁰D'Cunha, J., Azab, A. M., Jaskolski, M., Salama, M., El Nagdi, Y., Gebril, H., & Ghonaim, M. (2023). Gender and climate-related migration in Jordan and Sudan. Arab Water Council (AWC) & UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States.

⁶¹Ibid.

Climate-driven scarcity, displacement, and household labor pressures undermine their access to education and safety, particularly when caregiving demands increase or families relocate. In many parts of the region, girls are more likely than boys to be withdrawn from school—11% of girls at the primary level and 18% at the secondary level are out of school, compared with 9% and 12% of boys, respectively⁶². As water sources become more remote or insecure, girls are often tasked with additional water collection, exposing them to physical risk and reducing their likelihood of transitioning to secondary education. These gendered constraints limit girls' mobility, learning, and long-term well-being, reinforcing intergenerational cycles of vulnerability that climate change continues to intensify.

Climate-induced displacement compounds the care crisis. As men migrate in search of income, women absorb both productive and reproductive labor. Their unpaid care work increases during climate shocks, caring for the sick, elderly, or displaced, fetching scarce water, and securing food amidst inflation and shortages. This intensification of unpaid labor reflects what feminist scholars term the “feminization of survival,”⁶³ where care becomes both a coping mechanism and an unacknowledged form of climate adaptation.

Simultaneously, women migrants, especially those in informal urban economies or working as domestic laborers, sustain host communities through their reproductive and service labor while facing insecure housing, poor infrastructure, and exclusion from decision-making.

Conflict, Displacement, and the Gendered Politics of Care

Armed conflict and displacement compound the intersectional burdens of care and climate vulnerability across the WANA region. In conflict-affected settings, such as in Syria⁶⁴, Yemen⁶⁵, Palestine⁶⁶, as well as Sudan⁶⁷, the collapse of water, sanitation, healthcare, and energy infrastructure increases the unpaid and underrecognized forms of reproductive labor⁶⁸.

For example, when conflict destroys essential services, such as water treatment facilities or electricity infrastructure in Gaza and Yemen, women are disproportionately burdened with fetching water, securing food, and caring for the sick and elderly under conditions of scarcity and insecurity⁶⁹. As men may be engaged in combat fighting, migration, or other survival strategies, women often become the de facto providers of social services, stepping into roles normally performed by the state⁷⁰.

After more than a decade of war, in northeast Syria, nearly 60 percent of women in drought-affected areas were compelled to work additional hours in tailoring, petty trading, and informal care activities while maintaining their domestic responsibilities, leading to physical exhaustion and economic precarity⁷¹.

These multiple burdens highlight how the feminization of survival⁷² acutely manifests in conflict zones, where women's unpaid labor sustains households and humanitarian response systems.

⁶²UNICEF. (2019). MENA Generation 2030: Investing in children and youth today to secure a prosperous region tomorrow. United Nations Children's Fund. <https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/4141/file/mena-gen2030.pdf>

⁶³Sassen, S. (2000). Women's burden: Counter-geographies of globalization and the feminization of survival. *Journal of International Affairs*, 524–503 ,(2)53.

⁶⁴Laughlin, S., & Barnes, K. (2022). How drought is shifting gender dynamics in northeast Syria. Thomson Reuters Foundation.

⁶⁵Alabdaly, B. (2024). The climate change impacts on women in Yemen: Self-initiatives and innovative solutions. Change Horizons Forum / Peace Track Initiative.

⁶⁶Saber, A. (2024). The price of victory in the Gaza war: Women, climate, and peace. Wilson Center.

⁶⁷ACAPS. (2024). Impact of the war on women and girls: Thematic report [Analysis Hub].

⁶⁸Haroon, S., Afzal, S., & Butt, H. (2025). Integrating gender perspectives into environmental sustainability: Ecological security and post-conflict impacts in the Middle East. *Sociology & Cultural Research Review*, 272–262 ,(01)4.

⁶⁹Saber, A. (2024). The price of victory in the Gaza war: Women, climate, and peace. Wilson Center.

⁷⁰Qazzaz, H. (2024). When conflict destroys services, who fills the gaps in care? We need to make sure it's not always women. *Views & Voices* (Oxfam).

⁷¹Laughlin, S., & Barnes, K. (2022). How drought is shifting gender dynamics in northeast Syria. Thomson Reuters Foundation.

⁷²Sassen, S. (2000). Women's burden: Counter-geographies of globalization and the feminization of survival. *Journal of International Affairs*, 524–503 ,(2)53.

Neoliberalism, Care, & Climate

Neoliberal economic reforms, rooted in privatization, fiscal austerity, and market deregulation, and the dismantling of the public sector, have fundamentally reshaped the relationship between the state, the economy, and social reproduction across the MENA region⁷³. Beginning with the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s and 1990s, many states, including Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, and Morocco, implemented reforms backed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that reduced public spending on health, education, and social protection in favor of debt repayment and market liberalization⁷⁴. These policies eroded the capacity of welfare systems to provide collective care and shifted the burden of social reproduction to households, where women absorb the impact through unpaid domestic and caregiving labor.

This trend began in the 1980s and accelerated over time. In Egypt, IMF-backed reforms, including energy subsidy removals and value-added tax increases, sharply raised the cost of living: fuel prices rose by over 250% between 2014 and 2018, and electricity tariffs doubled⁷⁵.

These measures disproportionately affected low-income households, where women absorbed the impact by expanding their unpaid care and subsistence work. In Tunisia, public spending on health and education declined sharply after 2011⁷⁶. This exacerbated inequalities in access to care, increasing out-of-pocket expenses, and shifting greater care responsibility onto women.

At the same time, neoliberal environmental governance has prioritized economic growth and foreign investment over ecological and social sustainability. In Gulf countries, energy diversification strategies and climate adaptation plans often focus on green technology and infrastructure development while maintaining extractive, carbon-intensive economies dependent on migrant labor⁷⁷.

Across North Africa, water privatization, export-oriented agriculture, and large-scale construction projects have intensified environmental degradation and resource inequality⁷⁸. These dynamics ultimately link the care crisis to the climate crisis: when public investment in social as well as environmental infrastructure declines, households, especially women, shoulder the responsibility for coping with water scarcity, food insecurity, and displacement.

Neoliberalism, thus, produces a double bind in WANA: women sustain the social fabric under austerity while also managing the everyday effects of climate breakdown. Addressing this dual crisis requires re-centering care and environmental justice as public, not private, responsibilities, integrating them into redistributive economic and climate policy frameworks.

Policy Gaps

While many scholars and organizations have drawn attention to the International Labour Organization's "5R" framework—recognize, reduce, redistribute, reward, and represent—recent UN guidance has expanded this model into the 5R+ framework, adding Resource for Care⁷⁹. However, policy implementation across the WANA region remains fragmented and largely disconnected from climate and environmental strategies.

Regional and national climate adaptation strategies rarely address care burdens. Most national climate plans and environmental strategies frame gender equality as participation or empowerment⁸⁰, rather than redistributive justice or care infrastructure.

⁷³Said, S. (Ed.). (2017). *Towards socially just development in the MENA region*. Contributors: G. Achcar, N. Abdelkarim, S. Abboud, S. Said, A. Kamal, R. Abdelhaliem, & H. Hamouchene. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

⁷⁴Mossallem, M. (2015). *The IMF in the Arab world: Lessons unlearned* (Climate Investment Funds Monitor 7). Bretton Woods Project.

⁷⁵Abdo, N. (2019). *The gendered impact of IMF policies in the Middle East and North Africa region*. Oxfam International.

⁷⁶Nasri, H., Amara, M., & Helmi, M. (2022). *The landscape of social protection in Tunisia* (ERF Working Paper No. 1592). Economic Research Forum.

⁷⁷Mossallem, M. (2015). *The IMF in the Arab world: Lessons unlearned* (Climate Investment Funds Monitor 7). Bretton Woods Project.

⁷⁵Abdo, N. (2019). *The gendered impact of IMF policies in the Middle East and North Africa region*. Oxfam International.

⁷⁶Nasri, H., Amara, M., & Helmi, M. (2022). *The landscape of social protection in Tunisia* (ERF Working Paper No. 1592). Economic Research Forum.

⁷⁷Qanas, J., & Sawyer, M. (2025). *Navigating the energy transition in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states: The role of industrial policies in fostering sustainable economic competitiveness*. Journal of Economic Issues. Advance online publication.

⁷⁸El Nour, S. (2021). *Towards a just agricultural transition in North Africa*. Transnational Institute.

⁷⁹United Nations. (2024). *Transforming care systems in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals and Our Common Agenda: UN system policy paper*.

⁸⁰Haroon, S., Afzal, S., & Butt, H. (2025). *Integrating gender perspectives into environmental sustainability: Ecological security and post-conflict impacts in the Middle East*. Sociology & Cultural Research Review, 272–262 ,(01)4.

Climate and migration policies in the region remain siloed, rarely addressing the interdependence of care, migration, and adaptation⁸¹. Integrating care into climate governance requires investing in public infrastructure (water, health, childcare), ensuring decent work and legal protection for migrant women, and recognizing the centrality of social reproduction to both adaptation and development.

As Daibes (2024) notes, this reflects a dominant “productivist” paradigm that prioritizes growth and investment over well-being and care⁸². Climate justice is narrowly defined as economic diversification or infrastructure reform, overlooking the social and affective labor that sustains communities during crisis.

⁸¹D’Cunha, J., Azab, A. M., Jaskolski, M., Salama, M., El Nagdi, Y., Gebril, H., & Ghonaim, M. (2023). Gender and climate-related migration in Jordan and Sudan. Arab Water Council (AWC) & UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States.

⁸²Daibes, F. (2024). Feminist ecological economics: For a just and sustainable future in MENA and beyond. Beirut: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES Lebanon Office).



This paper adopts a scoping study approach to map and synthesize existing knowledge on the intersection of care and climate justice in the WANA region. Scoping research is well-suited to topics that are conceptually emergent, dispersed across disciplines, or insufficiently studied 83,84.

In WANA, climate debates have largely centered on environmental degradation, migration, and economic vulnerability, with far less attention to how care work and gendered labor shape climate justice.

This methodological approach aims to examine how care and climate have been conceptualized, researched, and politicized across scholarship, policy, and activism in the region. It identifies key conceptual trends, highlights existing gaps, and traces how regional actors are reframing debates on sustainability, justice, and social welfare.

Scope and Sources

The study adopts a broad scope to capture the multi-dimensional nature of the care-climate nexus in WANA. It draws from three main categories of sources:

1. **Academic Literature:** Peer-reviewed journal articles and edited volumes on feminist political economy, care work, environmental policy, and gender justice in WANA.
2. **Grey Literature:** Policy/institutional reports from regional and international organizations, as well as civil society and feminist outputs such as advocacy briefs, research summaries, workshop reports, and statements.

Selection Criteria

A systematic yet adaptive search strategy was used to identify relevant materials across academic databases (Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR), institutional repositories, and grey literature databases. The searches were conducted in English. To ensure comprehensive coverage, the search terms were intentionally broad and not limited to the keyword “care.” Instead, combinations such as “women and climate,” “gender and climate change,” “care and climate justice,” and “care economy” were used. The regional terminology was also varied to include “Arab region,” “MENA,” “WANA,” and country-specific searches (e.g., Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Palestine, Yemen, Sudan).

Inclusion criteria:

- Publications addressing care, gender, or social reproduction in relation to climate change, sustainability, or environmental justice;
- Materials focusing on WANA countries or comparative analyses involving the region;
- Sources incorporating feminist, intersectional, or justice-oriented frameworks;
- Outputs produced between 2000 and 2025, reflecting the contemporary evolution of climate and care discourses.

Excluded materials include technical environmental reports without a gender or justice dimension, or purely biomedical framings of care disconnected from social or political context.

83Arksey, H., & O'Malley, L. (2005). Scoping studies: Towards a methodological framework. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 32–19 ,(1)8.

84Levac, D., Colquhoun, H., & O'Brien, K. K. (2010). Scoping studies: Advancing the methodology. *Implementation Science*, 69 ,5.

Analytical Process and Data Handling

The analysis followed a four-stage scoping methodology, adapted to feminist qualitative research principles:

1. **Mapping:** Identifying and categorizing all materials that address care, gender, and climate justice in WANA.
2. **Charting:** Extracting key variables, including author, country focus, conceptual framing, methodology, and policy relevance.
3. **Thematic Analysis:** Coding materials under recurring and emergent themes, such as care burdens under climate stress, feminist organizing, ecological care ethics, and policy invisibility of reproductive labor.
4. **Synthesis:** Integrating findings to trace regional trends, conceptual gaps, and feminist interventions in the care-climate discourse.

Data coding combined deductive categories derived from the conceptual framework (e.g., redistribution, recognition, representation, interdependence) with inductive themes emerging from the literature (e.g., care-based adaptation strategies, ecological well-being, and feminist policy reform).

To clarify the range of contributions, all collected materials were further grouped into two analytical clusters:

1. Works that make an explicit link between care work and climate change/justice.
2. Works that discuss the impacts of climate change on women's labor and well-being without directly framing them as "care" issues.

Limitations

The major limitation of this scoping review is that the search was conducted in English, potentially excluding relevant Arabic- and French-language scholarship, documents, and community-based materials. The review also relies on publicly accessible sources; many knowledge products exist but are not publicly available or systematically archived, including grassroots initiatives, informal care practices, and locally circulated reports.

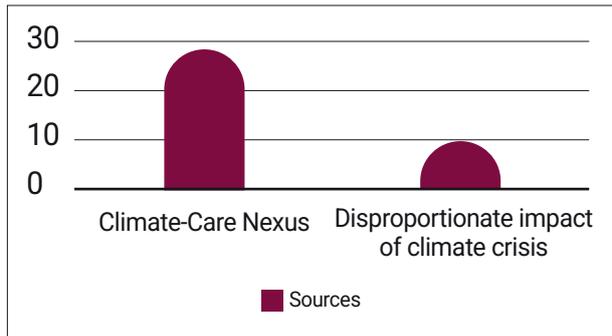
As a scoping review, the study prioritizes breadth over depth, aiming to map existing evidence and conceptual frameworks rather than offer evaluative or causal analysis. Nevertheless, triangulation across academic, institutional, and civil society sources supports a more representative synthesis of the regional care-climate landscape.



Descriptive Findings

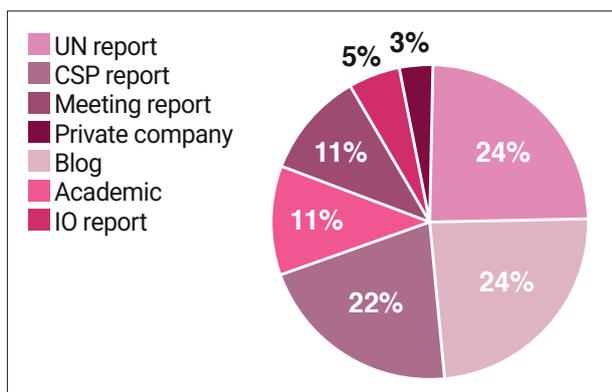
General Data

A total of 37 publicly available English-language sources on care and climate in the WANA region were identified. The majority ($\approx 76\%$) explicitly addressed care work. The remaining sources ($\approx 24\%$) focused on women's disproportionate climate impacts.



Countries. Across the full dataset, Lebanon accounted for the highest share (21.8%), followed by Sudan, Iraq, and Egypt (19.2%). Jordan and Morocco were close behind (17.9%), following Tunisia (16.7%). Syria, Yemen, and Palestine (15.4% each) are among the more frequently referenced countries. Mid-range occurrences included Libya (9%) and the United Arab Emirates (7.7%). Lower-frequency countries included Algeria (6.4%), Saudi Arabia and Somalia (5.1% each), and Qatar (2.6%). Remaining countries, including Bahrain, Djibouti, Kuwait, Mauritania, and Oman, each appeared once (1.3%).

Types of sources. Across all the sources, UN reports and blogs each accounted for 24.3% of the dataset, making them the most prevalent document types. CSO reports followed at 21.6%. Academic publications and meeting reports each represented 10.8% of the materials. IO reports comprised 5.4% of the dataset, while private-sector outputs were the least represented, appearing once and accounting for 2.7% of the total.

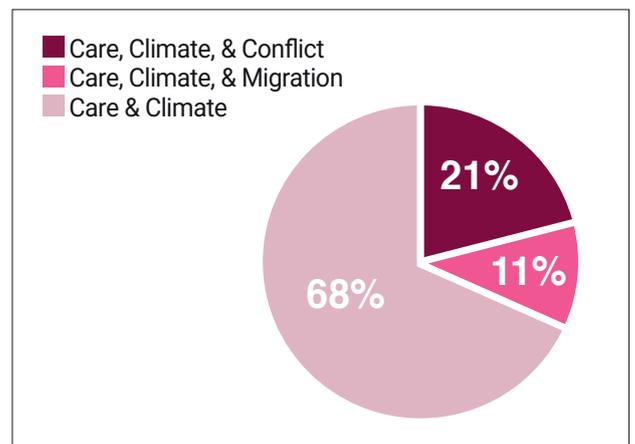


Climate-Care Nexus

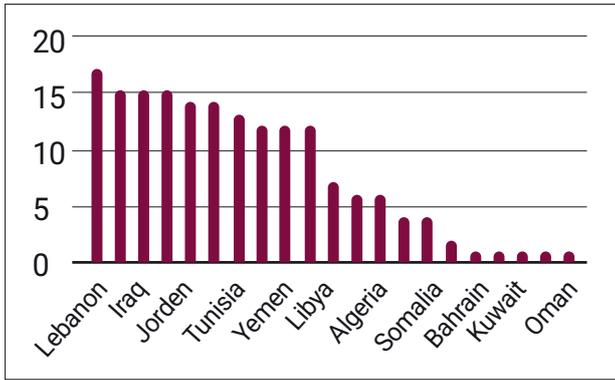
Topics. The majority of the sources that directly address care work (68%) focus on general intersections between care and climate. These sources tend to emphasize the impacts of climate change on unpaid care work, social reproduction, and household responsibilities during environmental crises, often through the lens of adaptation, resilience, or gender-sensitive planning.

A smaller portion (21%) explicitly links care to conflict settings, highlighting how war, political instability, and state collapse intensify care burdens and undermine public infrastructure. The remaining 11.1% engage with care and migration, focusing on displacement-related responsibilities, access to services, and the gendered vulnerabilities of climate-induced or displacement.

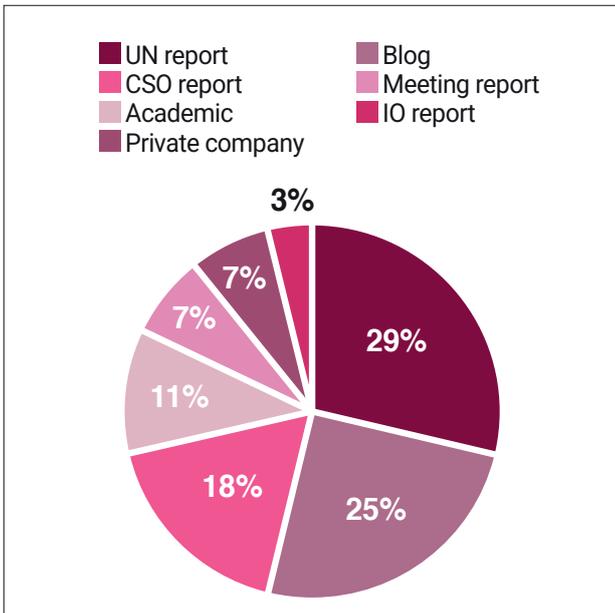
This distribution reflects a growing awareness of care as a climate issue, though more critical engagement is still needed in contexts where intersecting crises amplify structural inequality.



Countries. Across the sources, 21 countries were mentioned at least once, with clear variations in frequency. Lebanon appeared most consistently (60.7%), followed by Sudan, Iraq, and Egypt (each 53.6%). Jordan and Morocco were mentioned in half of the entries (50%). Tunisia (46.4%), Syria (42.9%), Yemen (42.9%), and Palestine (42.9%) also featured prominently. Mid-range mentions included Libya (25%), the United Arab Emirates (21.4%), and Algeria (17.9%). Saudi Arabia and Somalia each appeared in 14.3% of entries, while Qatar (7.1%), Bahrain, Djibouti, Kuwait, Mauritania, and Oman (each 3.6%) were referenced only occasionally.

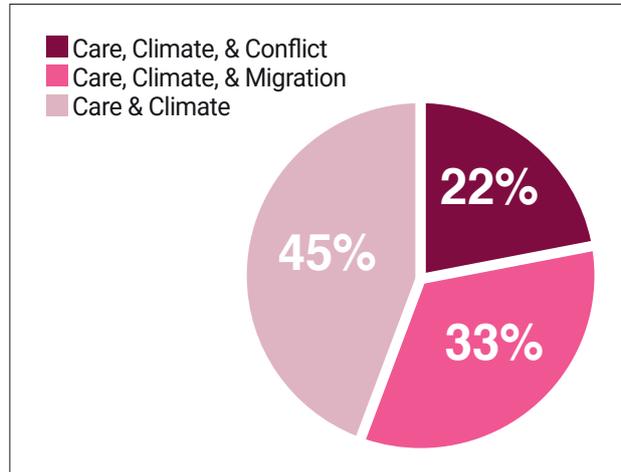


Types of sources. Across the 28 sources reviewed, UN reports constituted the largest share at 28.6%, followed by blogs (25%). CSO reports made up 17.9% of the dataset, while meeting reports accounted for 10.7%. Academic publications and IO reports each represented 7.1% of the total. Private-sector outputs were the least common, appearing only once and representing 3.6% of all sources. Most of the sources are from institutional or semi-institutional actors, with comparatively limited contributions from academic and private-sector sources.



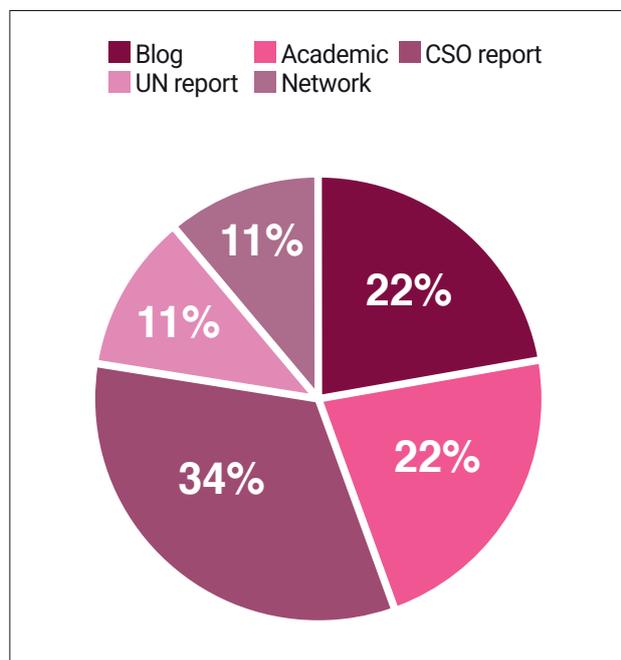
Disproportionate Impact of the Climate Crisis on Women

Topics. Across the nine entries reviewed, climate-focused sources constituted the largest share (45%). Materials addressing conflict and migration together accounted for 33%, while conflict-only sources represented 22% of the dataset. Overall, climate-related content appeared slightly more frequently than conflict-oriented material.



Countries. Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Tunisia each appeared in 57.1% of the sources. Morocco, Jordan, Libya, and Yemen were each included in 42.9% of the entries, while Iraq appeared in 28.6%. A group of countries, including Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, and the United Arab Emirates, each appeared once, representing 14.3% of the entries.

Types of sources. Across the nine sources reviewed, CSO reports made up the largest share with three entries. Blogs and academic sources each appeared twice, while network outputs and UN agency reports were represented once each. The dataset, therefore, reflects a mix of civil society, scholarly, and institutional contributions, with CSO materials appearing most frequently.





Discussion

This section examines how the climate–care nexus is framed in publicly available English-language materials from the WANA region and what this reveals about agenda-setting, knowledge production, and the visibility of feminist perspectives. While 37 sources address care, climate, or their intersections, the landscape is shaped primarily by institutional and semi-institutional actors, reflecting broader patterns in regional knowledge production where multilateral agencies, international organizations, and CSOs maintain the most consistent publishing capacity. Academic contributions and grassroots feminist inputs remain more limited in comparison.

By analyzing who produces knowledge, what narratives are most visible, and which issues are underrepresented, this section identifies key gaps in the current evidence base. It also considers the implications of relying largely on publicly accessible English-language sources in a region marked by intersecting pressures of climate stress, conflict, and displacement. The objective is to clarify why integrating care into climate justice is essential, what is overlooked when care is treated as peripheral, and how these omissions shape policy, advocacy, and feminist analysis across the region.

Agenda-Setting and Visibility

The dataset indicates that institutional and semi-institutional actors currently drive much of the written output on care and climate justice. UN reports and institutional blogs together constitute 48.6% of all sources, while CSO reports contribute an additional 21.6%. These actors often have established mechanisms for documentation and dissemination, which explains their strong presence.

Academic publications represent 10.8%, reflecting a smaller but valuable set of contributions. The relative absence of a coordinated feminist movement or a specialized academic subfield engaging systematically with the care–climate nexus means that institutional frameworks remain the dominant reference point in the available literature. At the same time, the dataset shows no consolidated feminist regional position on care and climate justice comparable to other domains, nor explicit regional declarations linking the two agendas.

Who Produces Knowledge and What Becomes Visible

Visibility in the dataset largely corresponds to the capacity to regularly publish, translate, and archive materials. As a result, the most visible outputs derive from:

1. Multilateral agencies and international organizations
2. CSO publications produced through donor-funded initiatives
3. Institutional blogs and online knowledge platforms

These materials frequently approach care through programmatic or descriptive lenses: documenting increases in unpaid care work, highlighting gendered impacts of climate change, and emphasizing the need for gender-responsive planning. Fewer sources conceptualize care as a structural political-economic system.

The dataset contains limited contributions from grassroots feminist organizations, community caregiving networks, refugee-led groups, or informal care providers. Their knowledge exists but often remains unpublished or locally circulated, which limits its visibility in this review. Academic engagement with the nexus also remains scattered, without a cohesive body of regional scholarship.

Are There Movements or Academic Fields Linking Care and Climate Justice?

The mapping of 37 English-language sources indicates that there is growing engagement, but no consolidated movement or established academic field in the WANA region that consistently brings care and climate justice together as an integrated framework. Existing work spans institutional reports, CSO publications, blogs, and a smaller number of academic outputs, but these contributions remain fragmented and largely situated within broader gender-and-climate or resilience-oriented programming.

A notable regional development is the Rabat Declaration for Feminist Economic, Social, and Environmental Transformation (2025), which advances a feminist vision for climate justice.

The declaration articulates principles related to redistribution, equality, and ecological justice, and demonstrates that regional feminist actors are beginning to articulate collective political positions on climate-related issues. However, within the scope of this review, such frameworks have not yet translated into a substantial body of published analysis linking care work specifically to climate justice. As a result, the care–climate nexus does not yet appear as a distinct thematic area with sustained movement-based or academic production.

The emerging landscape suggests interest but not consolidation. Connections between care and climate justice are present but limited and dispersed, appearing in isolated reports or thematic sections rather than through coordinated regional platforms, shared research agendas, or feminist scholarly networks.

What Is Missing?

Key Gaps in the Evidence Base

There are four main gaps in the literature:

1. Limited Theoretical Analysis

The dominant approach in the identified sources is descriptive: documenting how climate change increases unpaid care work, affects household responsibilities, or shapes gendered vulnerabilities. While these contributions are valuable, they offer limited engagement with structural explanations. Few of the sources examine how political economy, austerity-driven reforms, privatization, or extractivist development models shape both climate exposure and care burdens. Likewise, there is minimal analysis of how labor regimes, including informality, migrant domestic labor systems, and social protection gaps, intersect with climate impacts.

As a result, care is often framed as a consequence of climate stress rather than as part of a broader system of social reproduction embedded in economic and environmental structures, although emerging scholarship argues that comprehensive care systems should be understood as a strategic component of climate adaptation, offering a pathway to strengthen society's capacity to absorb environmental shocks⁸⁵.

2. Under-Integration of Conflict and Displacement

Only 21% of care-focused sources discuss conflict or displacement, despite their centrality to the region.

This creates a disconnect between actual lived conditions and published knowledge. Countries such as Palestine, Sudan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq experience overlapping climate stressors and protracted crises, yet the literature rarely treats these dimensions together. Climate impacts, conflict dynamics, refugee movements, and care responsibilities are discussed in parallel rather than as intersecting phenomena. This siloing limits the ability to understand how war-induced infrastructure collapse, displacement, and loss of livelihoods amplify gendered care burdens and shape adaptive capacities.

3. Minimal Representation of Grassroots Voices

The dataset contains almost no published work from community-based caregivers, mutual aid groups, informal networks, domestic worker collectives, or refugee women's organizations, despite their central role in sustaining everyday life during crises. Their absence is partly structural: much of this knowledge is produced through workshops, community meetings, or internal documentation rather than through formal publications. Yet the result is an evidence base that privileges institutional perspectives while overlooking locally generated strategies of care, adaptation, and survival. This gap limits understanding of how communities themselves conceptualize care and climate justice beyond policy-oriented frameworks.

4. Lack of Regional Frameworks Explicitly Connecting Care and Climate Justice

While initiatives such as the Rabat Declaration articulate feminist principles relating to economic, social, and environmental justice, the review reveals no sustained regional frameworks that explicitly center care within climate justice agendas. Care is often addressed within gender mainstreaming approaches rather than through integrated feminist political frameworks. This limits the region's ability to articulate shared demands, develop cross-country coalitions, or advance a collective feminist vision for climate-responsive care systems.

⁸⁵Grown, C., De Henau, J., Martinez, L., & Ilkcaracan, I. (2025). Integrating care and climate adaptation into a holistic fiscal framework at the country level. The Brookings Institution.

The gaps identified in the dataset are reinforced by findings from the Asfari Institute’s forward-looking research agenda on the care economy in the MENA region, developed by Dr. Deepta Chopra, which similarly documents the structural absence of comprehensive regional evidence on care systems⁸⁶.

The research agenda highlights how the care–climate nexus remains an underdeveloped area of inquiry in the MENA region, despite climate change rapidly reshaping household labor, caregiving responsibilities, and access to essential resources. Her analysis notes that rising temperatures, water scarcity, food insecurity, and climate-related displacement significantly intensify unpaid care and domestic work, particularly for women and girls, yet there is almost no systematic research documenting these shifts in the region.

The research agenda shows that climate impacts—both direct, such as increased time spent securing water or energy, and indirect, such as livelihood loss—place additional strain on already fragile care systems. Dr. Chopra identifies this gap as a critical research priority, arguing that without evidence on how climate change reorganizes care, policymakers cannot design climate adaptation, social protection, or service-provision strategies that respond to the realities of gendered labor and social reproduction in crisis-prone settings. The findings reinforce the need to treat care as a central dimension of climate justice rather than a secondary social outcome.

Why These Gaps Matter: Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice

The gaps identified in the evidence base have concrete implications for how climate, care, and gender are understood and addressed in the WANA region. Asking who produces knowledge, whose perspectives are missing, and which agendas shape visibility is not simply a methodological exercise; it determines the kinds of problems recognized, the interventions prioritized, and the populations included or overlooked.

When institutional actors dominate published outputs and grassroots knowledge remains underrepresented, the resulting discourse tends to emphasize programmatic or technocratic framings of climate impacts.

This affects three main things:

- 1. Problem Identification:** Issues are defined in ways that mirror institutional priorities, often focusing on adaptation, service access, or localized coping mechanisms, while deeper structural determinants, such as macroeconomic policy, fiscal decisions, public budget allocations, labor regimes, and political economy dynamics, receive far less attention, even though they sit at the core of how care and climate vulnerabilities are produced and reproduced.
- 2. Policy Prioritization:** Climate strategies risk centering infrastructural or technical responses over the redistribution of care work, investment in social protection, or recognition of caregivers as central actors in climate adaptation.
- 3. Representation of Experiences:** The lived realities of caregivers, displaced women, informal workers, and refugee communities remain under-documented when their knowledge is not formally published or translated. This creates blind spots in policy design and reduces the visibility of local strategies of survival and resistance.

In a region where climate stress converges with conflict, displacement, and austerity, the consequences of these gaps are significant. A climate analysis that does not systematically integrate care risks becoming disconnected from the everyday realities of women and marginalized communities. It overlooks how households absorb shocks, how labor is reorganized under stress, and how communities mobilize care to cope with environmental, economic, and political disruption.

The absence of care in climate justice discussions limits the ability to understand how climate events reshape the distribution and intensity of household labor, particularly for women, and obscures the extent to which adaptation strategies depend on expanded unpaid and informal care work.

⁸⁶Chopra, D. (2025). Framing a research agenda on the care economy in the MENA region. The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship.

It also constrains the design of climate adaptation strategies, particularly those that recognize comprehensive care systems as a central mechanism for strengthening the capacity of households and communities to withstand climate disruptions⁸⁷, and prevents a full accounting of how conflict, displacement, as well as environmental degradation collectively transform care systems in protracted crisis settings.

When care is treated as peripheral, it becomes invisible, even though it is foundational to the functioning of social systems and the capacity to withstand and recover from crises. Integrating care into climate justice frameworks is, therefore, not an optional dimension. It is essential for producing analyses and policies that reflect the complex, intersecting realities of the WANA region.

Why Care Must Be Central to Climate Justice

In the WANA region, where environmental degradation intersects with political violence, economic collapse, and forced migration, care is not peripheral; it is core to how communities experience climate change.

Linking care to climate justice is necessary because climate impacts consistently increase unpaid and informal care work, while displacement and conflict further intensify care burdens and erode already fragile support systems. A just transition requires the recognition and redistribution of care labor, and any meaningful approach to climate justice must acknowledge that social reproduction is inseparable from broader environmental and economic systems.

Without integrating care, climate justice debates overlook the everyday labor that sustains life, absorbs shocks, and enables survival within protracted crises.

⁸⁷Grown, C., De Henau, J., Martinez, L., & Ilkkaracan, I. (2025). Integrating care and climate adaptation into a holistic fiscal framework at the country level. The Brookings Institution.



Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that care is not a secondary social concern but a structural element of climate justice in the WANA region. The scoping review shows that while climate impacts on women and households are increasingly acknowledged, the care economy remains widely absent from regional climate policy, academic scholarship, and institutional frameworks.

Existing materials tend to approach climate change through technocratic, sectoral, or resilience-oriented lenses, overlooking the political-economic systems that shape both environmental degradation and the social organization of care. Consequently, unpaid and informal care work, performed overwhelmingly by women, continues to absorb the pressures of climate stress, conflict, displacement, and austerity, without being recognized as a critical part of climate adaptation or sustainable development.

Integrating care into climate justice requires shifting from descriptive accounts of women's vulnerabilities to structural analyses that center social reproduction as a core component of climate policy. A feminist political economy perspective highlights that the same extractive logics driving ecological breakdown also undermine public care systems, while feminist ecological approaches reveal the interdependence of human and planetary well-being. Viewing care as social infrastructure further underscores that comprehensive, publicly supported care systems are not only gender equality interventions but essential to enabling households and communities to withstand climate disruptions.

The findings also point to significant gaps, including limited theoretical engagement, underrepresentation of conflict and displacement, minimal grassroots visibility, and a lack of regional feminist frameworks explicitly linking care and climate justice. Addressing these gaps is essential for advancing a research and policy agenda that reflects the realities of the WANA region, where climate shocks compound longstanding crises of governance, inequality, and social reproduction.

Moving forward, climate strategies must incorporate care as a central pillar of adaptation and transformation. This includes investing in public care systems, integrating time-use and social reproduction data into climate budgeting, ensuring decent work and legal protections for caregivers and migrant workers, and grounding policy in feminist, intersectional, and justice-oriented approaches. It also requires strengthening regional feminist networks, supporting locally produced knowledge, and building cross-country platforms capable of articulating a shared vision for care-centered climate justice.

By situating care at the heart of climate policy, the WANA region can begin to reimagine sustainable futures rooted not in narrow growth paradigms but in systems that sustain life socially, economically, and ecologically.



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