

# ON A JUST FEMINIST ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION IN MONTRÉAL



# Acknowledgments

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This opinion paper was adopted by the CM members at the regular meeting held on August 23, 2022, and was submitted to the municipal council of the City of Montréal.

The CM uses nonsexist language in its communications and its written research. This commitment aims at justly representing all women as well as nonbinary and trans people.

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# About the Conseil des Montréalaises

The Conseil des Montréalaises (CM) was founded in 2004 and is made up of 15 volunteer members who reflect the diversity of Montréal’s women. It acts as a consultative body of the municipal government on matters related to the status of women and equality between women and men and among women themselves. The CM takes an intersectional feminist approach to understanding the different realities of Montréal women.

## The CM has the following roles:

- Providing opinions, on its own initiative or by request from the City of Montréal’s mayor, executive committee or city council, on matters related to gender equality, equality among women and the status of women, and submitting its recommendations to the Montréal city council;
- Soliciting opinions, and receiving and considering requests and suggestions from any person or group on matters related to gender equality, equality among women and the status of women;
- Helping to develop and implement a gender equality policy framework for municipal employees;
- Conducting or commissioning studies and research it deems useful or necessary to the performance of its roles.

The CM is an invaluable democratic tool. It is well aware of the ideas and ways of thinking of feminist citizens and community organizations in the region, and it stays abreast of their analyses and attuned to their voices. Its main areas of intervention are city life, city governance and working for the City. The CM’s work therefore focuses on the quality of life of Montréal women (transportation, housing, the fight against poverty, safety, homelessness, sports and leisure offerings, etc.), on the presence and participation of women in municipal politics, on the employability of Montréal women and on the working conditions of women who are civil servants.

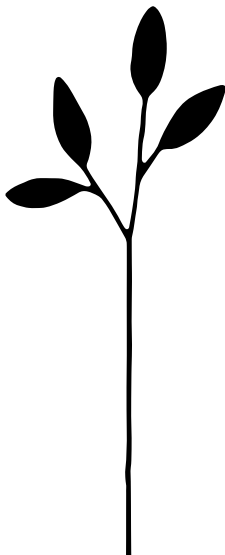
# Introduction

In December 2020, Montréal published *Climate Plan 2020–2030: Building An Inclusive, Resilient, Carbon-neutral City*. The Plan aims to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 55% by 2030 and to put some adaptation measures in place. The Plan speaks of “making the city more resilient, greener and carbon neutral, but also more inclusive and fairer”; however, it does not specifically address gender issues.

Studies show that, generally, women are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, while they contribute the least to GHG emissions. Also, women are more involved than men in climate action, but paradoxically are less represented in the decision-making arenas with power to act on the issues. Gender-differentiated concerns and impacts are still far too rarely addressed in public policy and environmental practices, despite the fact that scientific research has clearly demonstrated the importance of taking this into account in order to gain a tangible understanding of climate changes, since gender influences how the crisis is experienced (Köhler et al., 2019).

The CM published an opinion paper to document the impacts of climate change on Montréal women and to make recommendations to the City of Montréal for a just ecological transition. By using an intersectional approach to take gender into account in its fight against climate change, the City would avoid reproducing sexist biases and worsening the inequalities that exist between men and women and among women themselves.

This document summarizes the *Opinion Paper: Conseil des Montréalaises on a Just, Feminist Ecological Transition in Montréal*. It presents an overview of climate change knowledge through the lens of gender and then identifies the current and forthcoming environmental issues for Montréal women: access to affordable quality housing; transportation and mobility; accessibility of parks and natural areas; accessibility of local shops and services; and the role of citizen involvement in the fight against climate change. In light of these observations, 15 recommendations are made to the City of Montréal.

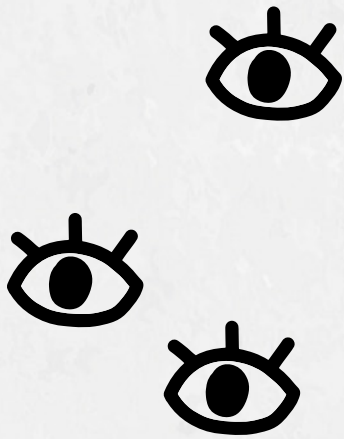


# 01 Methodology

**The *Opinion Paper: Conseil des Montréalaises on a Just, Feminist Ecological Transition in Montréal* is based on a qualitative research approach inspired by the principles of feminist research. Intersectionality recognizes that systems of oppression overlap. Thus, special attention has been given to the views of Montréal women of varied backgrounds, ages, ability and sexual orientations, as well as from different neighbourhoods and socioeconomic milieus.**

The methodological strategy was deployed in two stages. The first consisted of a review of the recent scientific literature on gender and on climate change, along with exploratory discussions with three Quebec experts on gender and climate change issues. This stage revealed that there is nothing “natural” about climate change vulnerability factors. Instead, they result from land use issues and social inequalities that take material shape over a territory. By overlaying the maps of heat islands and flood zones with the map of material and social deprivation, we identified areas of Montréal that are already affected by climate disruptions or are most at risk of being so: Montréal-Nord, Rivière-des-Prairies, Pointe-aux-Trembles, Mercier-Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, Pointe-Saint-Charles, Ville-Émard, Lachine, Pierrefonds, Ahuntsic-Cartierville, Parc-Extension and Saint-Michel.

The second stage involved 16 semi-directed discussions and one focus group, with three categories of participants: Quebec experts on gender, the environment and urban design, health and human rights; workers from community organizations from locations previously identified as vulnerable; and environmental activists involved in citizen action for social and environmental justice in Montréal. In total, 23 people took part in the data collection.





# Overview of climate change through the lens of gender

Generally speaking, the perception of a climate threat is higher among women, who also are less likely to be climate-change skeptics. Social reproduction responsibilities (domestic and care work) play a role in women's greater awareness of the threat that climate change represents. Women thus show greater sensitivity and pragmatism than do men in response to the reality of climate change. Given this heightened awareness, experts argue that communication and awareness-raising strategies should take gender differences into account.



Studies show that, generally, women are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. This increased vulnerability, which is the result of social inequalities (Gaard, 2015), manifests at two levels: women are more at risk of being impacted by climate change and they are more at risk of not having the capacity to adapt to it.

Our review of the literature revealed that there are four major aspects of climate change impacts that are especially differentiated along gender lines. The first, and most significant, is that women's vulnerability to changes in climate seems to stem from their greater economic insecurity, especially as it relates to reproductive work (IPCC, 2002, ch. 18; Weiss, 2012). The second is damage to health and, especially, mental health. The long-term impacts of extreme events (e.g. flooding) are more intense because of the way social reproduction work is allocated (Sellers, 2016; Waldron, 2018). The third aspect in which climate change has impacts along gender lines is the rise in physical, psychological and sexual violence toward women during extreme events such as floods, heat waves and pandemics (Perkins and Peat, 2017).<sup>1</sup> Fourthly, climate change contributes to increasing the inequalities between women and men but also among women themselves, by strengthening the sexual division of labour that assigns social reproduction work to women (Eastin, 2018).

While it is important to acknowledge women's increased vulnerability, it is also important to remember that they are agents of change in the fight against climate change as well and that they have solutions to contribute. In light of the fact that this vulnerability is the outcome of socio-environmental processes and factors, it is possible—and necessary—to pursue a just ecological transition and to propose solutions that consider these socio-environmental gaps. A differentiated reading of the impacts of climate change and of the solutions considered must be done in a way that does not reproduce or strengthen gender stereotypes.

# 03

## Montréal women and climate change: Current and forthcoming issues

**The data collected reveals that the living conditions of Montréal women vary greatly from one area of the city to another, and that these variations significantly impact women's resilience to climate change.**

When we asked community workers to name the major needs of women in their neighbourhoods, their answers clustered around four major themes: housing, transportation and mobility, parks and access to nature, and the proximity of services and businesses. These issues are not only interdependent, they are directly linked to climate change resilience.



### 3.1

#### Access to affordable, quality housing

The lack of social and affordable housing is unquestionably one of the most glaring problems in Montréal at the moment. Not only is housing a fundamental need, it is also “an important prerequisite to the citizen and political participation of Montréal women” [translation] (TGFM, 2019). Housing conditions impact the well-being and physical and mental health of individuals, along with their resilience to climate change (Rochette, 2016). Indeed, people with inadequate housing are more vulnerable to the risks associated with climate change, because their home does not offer them the same protective benefits.

Homelessness, which has worsened during the pandemic, makes women highly vulnerable, notably to risks associated with climate change. The major threats facing women experiencing homelessness relate to their reduced ability to protect themselves from extreme climate events, be it heat waves that put them at risk of dehydration or cold snaps that result in the death of homeless women every year. Such events, which will become more frequent as the climate continues to change, have significant repercussions on their health. The organizations that currently work with women experiencing homelessness have very little means to support women during such episodes.

The most disadvantaged neighbourhoods are also those hardest hit by heat waves, because the mineralization and poor quality of the built environment worsen the effect of heat. The community workers we interviewed stated that heat waves have many negative impacts on women's physical and mental health. In addition, women often have to care for other people around them, such as seniors, which adds to their workload. In these neighbourhoods, a high percentage of tenants live in poorly insulated or aging dwellings, be it apartments rented from private owners or social housing managed by the Office municipal d'habitation de Montréal (OMHM). In many cases, the building condition makes it impossible to install an air conditioning system.

The energy wasted by poorly insulated buildings is a major environmental problem that has real repercussions on people's well-being, especially during winter's bitter cold. Unfortunately, the consulted community workers report that women tenants have very little leverage to improve the thermal comfort of their apartment since they are often dependent for building maintenance and/or renovation.

Since housing quality has an impact on resilience to climate change, taking action to improve the housing conditions of Montréal women amounts to providing them with additional protections to face these changes.

### 3.2

#### Transportation and mobility

Mobility is a critical issue<sup>2</sup> for women because it affects their social and economic integration and, as a result, their quality of life.

Two priorities were raised by our participants repeatedly: the accessibility and the reliability of public transportation. Outside central areas, public transit often only consists of buses and is substantially insufficient. The need to develop the public transit network is especially dire in the eastern and northern parts of the Island of Montréal. This is a situation that has been known and documented for many years.

The women who depend on public transit are those most penalized by a weak service offering, be it due to infrequent or unreliable schedules, feeling unsafe while getting around or waiting for public transit, cost or lack of accessibility. These factors tend to make women limit their activities, which may penalize them on several fronts (e.g. financial, social, diet) and cause isolation.

In summary, critical improvements are needed in Montréal's public transportation system. Given this situation, it is not surprising that the percentage of women who have a driver's licence or are becoming drivers is on the rise. Offering alternatives to cars involves improving the public transport offering, both in terms of developing the network and improving existing services.

As regards active means of transportation, walking and biking are the main modes used by women. To encourage these activities and improve the experience of women who use them, several urban design choices must be reconsidered. However, it is important to emphasize that active transportation is not within the reach of all women, and it must be supported in tandem with public transit.

In many parts of the city, the urban design is definitely not conducive to walking. Traffic calming measures, lower speed limits, greening initiatives and the addition of street furniture are simple, effective ways of designing public spaces to be more pedestrian friendly. Urban safety is an important issue that was raised by several of the research participants. The increase in gun violence in some Montréal areas is a major concern for female residents there. Street harassment is a nuisance for many women, particularly those with intersecting oppressions, notably women from the 2SLGBTQIA+ (two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, and all other sexual orientations and genders) community, racialized women, women with a disability or working-class women (Blais, Dumerchat and Simard, 2021).

Although the bike route network is expanding in Montréal, our research participants pointed out that it is overly concentrated in central neighbourhoods. According to them, increasing the use of this mode of transportation would notably require that safe paths and bike lanes be developed in several neighbourhoods that currently do not have any. However, democratizing cycling involves more than just city planning issues. It is essential that the representation of cyclists be diversified so that women of all origins and walks of life can imagine themselves cycling.

### 3.3

#### Accessibility of parks and green spaces

In the city, parks and green or natural spaces make a key contribution to quality of life. These spaces are essential to mental and psychological health, providing a place for relaxation and leisure, to cool off in summer and to connect with nature. At the city scale, green spaces also play a decisive role in countering heat islands, in addition to improving air quality and helping to reduce air pollution (Benedict and McMahon, 2006).

While Montréal has many parks, they are not equally distributed over the territory, which causes accessibility problems in many neighbourhoods. Access to urban parks with sports and leisure facilities is a widespread request from all subgroups of women. Mothers especially call for recreational equipment, because they want safe places near home to do activities with their children.

Many women also demonstrate a keen interest in gardening and greening activities. They also call for green alleys and other greening initiatives in public spaces to improve their living environment. However, where the number of such developments increases, there is a risk of "green gentrification," which the City must be especially vigilant about. Furthermore, these initiatives should not be based solely on the mobilization of local residents, given the amount of time women already dedicate to social reproduction work in addition to their paid work.

For citizens who are not able to get out of the city, the network of nature parks and unprotected natural spaces, such as undeveloped land, offer precious points of contact with nature. Paradoxically, despite their appeal, many nature parks are difficult to get to because they are located in the outskirts of the city.

In short, having access to parks and green spaces that are safe, appealing and well equipped is essential to urban women's quality of life, not to mention that these types of spaces offer considerable ecological benefits. What's more, these spaces provide citizens with oases of coolness during heat waves,<sup>3</sup> thus contributing to community resilience.

### 3.4

#### Access to nearby shops and services

Neighbourhood resilience also depends on there being local services and shops that are tailored to the local population’s needs. In Montréal, community organizations are concerned about two trends in particular:

First, some neighbourhoods are devitalized and the shops and services available there are very limited. Several areas of the city, mainly located in the eastern part of the island, can be described as “food deserts.” There are very few large grocery stores in these neighbourhoods, and they are generally located on major thoroughfares and are very spread out. Women, who are often responsible for day-to-day purchases, must therefore travel great distances to get to them. Transportation challenges force women to do their shopping over multiple trips, to be able to carry their purchases.<sup>4</sup> In such situations, the residents in these areas often resign themselves to buying from smaller stores located nearby, which offer a limited range of fresh foods and charge more than the large grocery stores.

Second, several neighbourhoods that used to be more affordable are going through rapid gentrification, which radically changes the local commercial offering. The community workers we consulted said that not all women have the means to buy organic products or shop in premium food stores. Many of them mentioned the need to maintain a diverse food offering suited to every budget.

These two trends mean that the most disadvantaged segment of the population in these neighbourhoods eventually faces geographical and economic accessibility problems.

### 3.5

#### A desire for citizen involvement

Be it as activists, professionals, entrepreneurs, politicians, mothers or simply citizens, women are active agents who can make a difference in their community. Through their day-to-day experiences with their neighbourhoods, they have a profound understanding of their specific features and challenges. Because of this knowledge, their proposals should be given credibility and Montréal women should be involved in decisions about their living environments.

Community organizations play a strategic role in supporting these mobilizations. Thanks to their close ties to local communities, they are essential actors in a just ecological transition. What’s more, environmental projects led by community organizations are fantastic opportunities for popular education. The positive outcomes of raising environmental awareness are more than just ecological. For instance, it fosters empowerment for individuals and groups and strengthens social ties. Thus, it seems essential to give women the resources they need to carry out projects to improve their living environments and fight climate change, while trying as much as possible not to add to their load.



# Key takeaways

- Gender plays a role not only in perceptions and impacts of climate change but also in the types of solutions envisioned and their effects.
- Women have a heightened awareness of but also a greater vulnerability to climate change.
- Changes in climate create or exacerbate socioeconomic vulnerabilities and affect the most vulnerable communities first.
- There is nothing “natural” about climate change vulnerability factors in the city. Instead, they result from land use decisions and social inequalities that take material shape over a territory.
- By overlaying the maps of heat islands and flood zones with the map of material and social deprivation, we identified areas of Montréal that are already affected by climate disruptions or are most at risk of being so: Montréal-Nord, Rivière-des-Prairies, Pointe-aux-Trembles, Mercier–Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, Pointe-Saint-Charles, Ville-Émard, Lachine, Pierrefonds, Ahuntsic-Cartierville, Parc-Extension and Saint-Michel.



- A differentiated reading of the impacts of climate change and of the solutions considered must be done in a way that does not reproduce or strengthen gender stereotypes.
- Montréal women report needs in their neighbourhoods on the following interdependent issues that are directly related to climate change resilience: access to affordable quality housing; transportation and mobility; accessibility of parks and natural areas; accessibility of local shops and services; and the role of citizen involvement in the fight against climate change.
- An interdisciplinary and cross-cutting approach is needed to fight climate change equitably and effectively.
- Montréal women are active agents who can make a difference in their community. Through their day-to-day experiences with their neighbourhoods, they have a profound understanding of their specific features and challenges. Because of this knowledge, their proposals should be given credibility and Montréal women should be involved in decisions about their living environments.
- In Montréal, community organizations and citizen groups are actors that can be relied on, since they have an in-depth understanding of the realities on the ground and the issues faced by various communities.

# What's to be done?

## Recommendations of the Conseil des Montréalaises

Whereas the IPCC's sixth assessment cycle emphasizes the importance of taking vulnerable populations into account in climate policy diagnosis, thinking, participation and implementation;

Whereas gender has a differentiated impact on vulnerability as it relates to climate change;

Whereas the research conducted by the Conseil des Montréalaises for this opinion paper demonstrates that Montréal's population is already feeling the impacts of climate change in a way that is differentiated and unequal according to certain vulnerability factors;

Whereas reducing social inequalities contributes to improving resilience to climate change, and climate action can contribute to reducing social inequalities;

The Conseil des Montréalaises makes the following recommendations:

### Recommendation 1

That the City of Montréal ensure that its *Climate Plan* takes vulnerable populations, particularly women, into account in applying the climate test approach to assessing impacts.

### Recommendation 2

That the City of Montréal strengthen its application of the ADS+ intersectional gender analysis when implementing all actions relating to climate change adaptation; and that the ADS+ results be published in the annual reporting called for under the *Climate Plan*.

### Recommendation 3

That the City of Montréal ensure that the entire team at the Bureau de la transition écologique et de la résilience (BTER) receives ADS+ training.

### Recommendation 4

That the City of Montréal collect gendered, intersectional and local data, so that its implementation of the *Climate Plan* be better adapted to the realities of various communities in different parts of the City.

### Recommendation 5

That the City of Montréal expand its eight indicators for the follow-up of the *Climate Plan* by adding gender-based and intersectional targets (e.g. increase the modal share of active transportation among women by X%).

### Recommendation 6

That the City of Montréal make sure that information contained in the yearly *Climate Plan* reporting is transparent, accessible and presented in a way that is easy for all Montrealers to understand.

### Recommendation 7

That the City of Montréal set up a permanent advisory committee to guide the implementation of its *Climate Plan*, along the lines of the City of Vancouver's Climate and Equity Working Group.

### Recommendation 8

That the City of Montréal recognize women's groups as partners in the ecological transition (Action 2 in its *Climate Plan*) by providing them with recurrent financial support, with funds specifically earmarked for this, for their climate change-related activities and by giving them more tools in this area.



### Recommendation 9

That the City of Montréal ensure that its Resilient City Strategy take into account the impacts on women of climate change–related events, such as increased economic insecurity, increased risk of violence and health effects.

### Recommendation 10

That the City of Montréal take gender into account in an intersectional perspective in Actions 4 and 8 of its *Climate Plan*; that its strategies to encourage the adoption of eco-responsible practices be equitable and not rely on women’s reproductive work (domestic and care tasks).

### Recommendation 11

That the City of Montréal make sure that the ecological transition education and awareness-raising programs (Actions 4 and 8 of the *Climate Plan*) take gender-differentiated perceptions and realities into account, in an intersectional perspective.

### Recommendation 12

That the City of Montréal prioritize supporting citizen initiatives on the ecological transition in the city’s most vulnerable areas (see definition of Montréal’s vulnerable areas in the Methodology section of this paper, on page 7).

### Recommendation 13

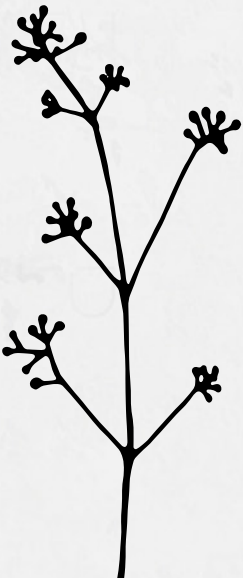
That the City of Montréal prioritize support for the creation of climate resilience hubs (Action 9 of the *Climate Plan*) in the city’s most vulnerable areas (see definition of Montréal’s vulnerable areas in the Methodology section of this paper, on page 7).

### Recommendation 14

That the City of Montréal include, in its *Plan d’urbanisme et de mobilité* (PUM), the demands relating to mobility, housing and neighbourhood life included in “Feminists for the Right to the City”<sup>12</sup> platform from the Table des groupes de femmes de Montréal.

### Recommendation 15

That all boroughs in Montréal implement strategies and action plans on the ecological transition and that these plans take vulnerable populations, particularly women, into account.



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# Notes

- 1- We must also take into consideration the fact that the extractive industry, which contributes greatly to climate change, produces many forms of violence against women, particularly Indigenous women in Canada (NIMMIWG, 2019; Konsomo and Pacheco, 2016).
- 2- Given its importance, the CM published an opinion paper entirely focused on this issue in 2009: *Accessibility of Public Transportation, and Its Impact on the Quality of Life of Montréal Women*. Sadly, several of the recommendations made in that paper continue to be relevant.
- 3- Due to climate change, heat waves will increase considerably in the coming years. Ouranos (2020) reports that the average number of days in which the temperature goes above 30 °C was 11 per year from 1981 to 2010 but will rise to 41 for 2041 to 2070.
- 4- While grocery delivery services have improved considerably since the pandemic, shoppers must have an Internet connection and a minimum level of computer literacy to take advantage of them, which is far from being the case for all, and especially for older or less financially stable women. Further, most large food businesses only offer delivery during certain hours.
- 5- See the site “Feminists for the Right to the City”: <https://www.tgfm.org/en/our-publications/99>.

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