WiN Global COP31 Position Paper: From ambition to delivery

Women, nuclear science and technology, and the way back to 1.5°C

Authored by Verónica Garea, WiN Global Focal Point to the UNFCCC.November 2026.

WHO WE ARE

Women in Nuclear Global (WiN Global) is a non-profit organization of women working professionally in nuclear energy and radiation applications, open to individuals from all genders and legally registered in Vienna. Since 1992 it has advocated environmental sustainability, diversity and plurality. With around 35,000 members, it is present in more than 145 countries, regions and international organizations, and has been an observer organization to the UNFCCC since 2020.

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HEADING: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The pledges exist. What is missing is the capacity to deliver them, and that capacity is made of people.

Three years after the Declaration to Triple Nuclear Energy was launched at COP28, the debate has moved from whether nuclear belongs in the climate solution to how it can be built in time. Meanwhile, the world is set to exceed 1.5°C, and every year of delay raises the peak. COP31 is an implementation COP, in a host country about to start up its first nuclear power plant, and in the first year of the Belém Gender Action Plan.

WiN Global calls on Parties, the COP31 Presidency, financial institutions and our own industry to treat women's leadership and expertise as a condition of delivery, not as a parallel agenda:

1. Put women where delivery is decided: in delegations, technical bodies, regulators, project boards and financing committees.
2. Treat the workforce as key climate infrastructure: include gender-balanced nuclear skills plans in national climate and energy strategies.
3. Count what matters: publish gender-disaggregated data across the nuclear sector, including newcomer countries.

4. Finance based on the evidence: give nuclear equal access to climate and development finance, with gender-responsive conditions.
5. Build "social clearance" with communities: engage early, listen to women's concerns, and answer them with evidence.
6. Recognize the full nuclear toolbox: use nuclear science for health, food, water, oceans and waste, as well as for clean power.

The world needs to hear women. Delivery needs them too.

HEADING: WHY NOW: FROM PLEDGES TO DELIVERY

COP31 opens with 1.5°C no longer reachable without overshoot. UNEP's Emissions Gap Report 2026 finds that the lowest remaining pathway peaks at 1.7-1.8°C around mid-century and returns to 1.5°C by 2100, with a 50 per cent chance. Reaching it requires emissions cuts of 18 per cent by 2030, 45 per cent by 2035 and 69 per cent by 2040, relative to 2025 (PBL/UNEP).

Full delivery of today's national plans would cut only 5-8 per cent by 2030 and 11-15 per cent by 2035. Current policies point to 2.8°C this century, and every five years of emissions at current levels adds about 0.1°C to peak warming (PBL/UNEP).

This gap calls for every low-carbon option working together. Renewable capacity has grown three times faster than anticipated since the Paris Agreement, and we welcome that success. Nuclear adds firm low-carbon supply: it generated a record 2,701 TWh in 2025, around 9 per cent of world electricity (World Nuclear Association). UNECE found it has the lowest lifecycle carbon footprint of the technologies it assessed, at 5.1-6.4 gCO2e/kWh (Hogan Lovells on UNECE).

Three things have changed since our COP28 paper:

1. The pledge has grown. 39 countries now back the Declaration to Triple Nuclear Energy, up from the group that launched it at COP28 (WNA).
2. Finance has opened. The World Bank ended its ban on nuclear financing in June 2025, and the Asian Development Bank revised its energy policy in November 2025 (Energy for Growth Hub).
3. Gender now has a nine-year plan. The Belém Gender Action Plan sets 27 activities and 98 deliverables for 2026-2034, with a review in 2029. It covers finance, technology, capacity-building, inclusive leadership and data, and it links gender to the just transition (UNFCCC).

Delivery has not kept pace. National targets would take global nuclear capacity to 1,467 GWe by 2050, more than the tripling goal, yet 11 reactors started construction in 2025, nine of them in China and two in Russia. Tripling would eventually require build rates around six times today's level (WNA). The targets exist. The people, institutions and trust needed to meet them must now be built.

HEADING: WOMEN ARE EXPERTS, NOT ONLY THOSE AFFECTED

Women carry a heavy share of the climate and energy crisis, and they also hold expertise the response depends on. Our earlier papers documented the first point, and it remains true. Around 655 million people still lack electricity and about 2 billion lack clean cooking (Tracking SDG 7, UN DESA). The expansion now planned is the moment when the gender balance of this sector can shift fastest. If it is missed, today's imbalance will be built into a fleet designed to run for generations.

HEADING: NUCLEAR SCIENCE ACROSS THE COP31 AGENDA

Nuclear science contributes to almost every COP31 Thematic Day, and much of that work has nothing to do with power generation. The COP31 program is organized around Thematic Days and Global Implementation Targets and our members´ expertise connects with all of them: Crop improvement through nuclear applications; radiotherapy, imaging and nuclear medicine,

energy and transport, radiation for zero waste, financing for countries that choose nuclear, education and careers in nuclear technology, low carbon heat, isotopic techniques used in ocean science.

The host country makes this concrete. Türkiye is about to start up its first nuclear power plant (WNA), and it also hosts a Rays of Hope Anchor Centre at Ege University (IAEA statement). Energy and cancer care are both part of what nuclear means for society.

WiN Global relaunched its Groups of Expertise in January 2026. Its twelve groups now cover nuclear medicine, radiopharmaceuticals, applications, safety, security, reactors, fuel, R&D, innovation, finance, law and peace (WiN Global). Policymakers working on any of these Thematic Days can call on them.

HEADING: WHAT DELIVERY REQUIRES

Four conditions will decide whether ambition becomes capacity, and women's participation strengthens each one.

SUBHEADING: WORKFORCE

The workforce is a climate asset that takes years to build. The World Nuclear Association urges early skills strategies across regulation, construction, operation and the fuel cycle (WNA). The NEA's 2026

outlook also finds that the tripling goal needs a substantial acceleration in workforce growth (ANS).

A sector that recruits mainly from half of the population is limiting its own supply of talent. The 2023 OECD Recommendation on Improving the Gender Balance in the Nuclear Sector already offers a framework: attract, retain and advance women, supported by data and accountability (NEA). Its reach should now extend beyond OECD countries. Structured mentoring belongs in these plans, because it transfers tacit knowledge between generations while keeping women in technical careers.

SUBHEADING: FINANCE

Opening the door to finance is only the first step. Nuclear projects are capital-intensive and long-lived, and the cost of recent builds in some countries has been high. We do not ignore this. We ask that nuclear be judged on evidence, alongside other low-carbon options, by what it delivers to the whole energy system.

The new financing landscape also creates leverage. COP30 invited entities providing climate finance to consider the Belém Gender Action Plan and support its implementation (Decision 7/CP.30). Nuclear financing should be gender-responsive from its first project, including workforce plans, local employment and community engagement.

SUBHEADING: NEWCOMER COUNTRIES

Newcomers can build balance in from the start. New entrant countries are projected to reach 153 GWe by 2050 (WNA), and recent endorsers of the tripling declaration include Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal and Togo (WNN; WNN; WNA).

These countries are creating regulators, operators and training systems, many for the first time. An institution founded with balanced recruitment and leadership has no legacy culture to undo. Nuclear will not suit every country, and each decision remains national. Where a country chooses this path, gender should be part of its infrastructure planning from the first phase of the IAEA Milestones Approach.

SUBHEADING: "SOCIAL CLEARANCE"

Gender is often the strongest demographic marker of support for nuclear energy (WNA). In the United States in 2024, 70 per cent of women favored nuclear energy, compared with 85 per cent of men, and 41 per cent of women remembered hearing anything about it, compared with 59 per cent of men (Bisconti Research).

We read this gap as a signal to listen, not a messaging problem to fix. Concerns about safety, waste and trust in institutions deserve direct, evidence-based answers. WiN Global itself was born from this need:

emerged after Chernobyl as a space where women could voice concerns and discuss them on scientific grounds (WiN Global).

Projects that engage communities early, include women in that engagement, and return to answer their questions earn something stronger than acceptance. They earn the "social clearance" that lets a program last for decades.

HEADING: OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Each recommendation names who should act, because implementation is what COP31 is asking of everyone.

SUBHEADING: PARTIES

- Send gender-balanced delegations, including to technical negotiations, and report their composition voluntarily, as COP30 invited.
- Nominate more women to technology bodies, starting with the Technology Executive Committee and the Climate Technology Centre and Network Advisory Board.
- Include gender-balanced nuclear skills plans in the national energy and climate strategies of countries that use or are considering nuclear.
- Design energy policy on scientific evidence, with a level playing field for all low-emission technologies.
- Support the safe long-term operation of existing plants where technically and economically justified.

SUBHEADING: COP31 PRESIDENCY AND UNFCCC BODIES

- Recognize all low-emission technologies, including nuclear, in efforts to reach the COP31 electrification target.
- Ensure that the just transition mechanism covers women workers in all energy sectors, including regions moving away from coal.
- Ask Action Agenda initiatives to report gender-disaggregated data.

SUBHEADING: MULTILATERAL DEVELOPMENT BANKS AND CLIMATE FUNDS

- Turn policy change into practice through technical assistance, co-financing and workforce development for countries that choose nuclear.
- Apply gender-responsive criteria to nuclear projects, in line with the Belém Gender Action Plan.

SUBHEADING: NUCLEAR INDUSTRY, REGULATORS AND RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS

- Publish gender-disaggregated data every year, including outside OECD countries.
- Set targets for women's share of STEM and skilled trades recruitment, and for promotion into leadership.
- Fund structured mentoring, provide flexible careers, and act firmly against bias and harassment.
- Include women in community engagement from the earliest stage of every project.

SUBHEADING: WIN GLOBAL'S OWN COMMITMENT

- We will make our members' expertise available to delegations, UNFCCC technology bodies and the gender and climate technology expert roster.
- We will contribute good practice to the UNFCCC on women's full and equal participation and leadership.
- We will support our chapters in newcomer countries and open our mentoring networks to the next generation.

HEADING: CONCLUSION

The climate debate has reached the point of delivery, and delivery is a human task. Reactors, cancer centers, laboratories and regulators are all built and run by people. Leaving half of the available talent at the edge of those decisions would be a choice the climate cannot afford.

WiN Global comes to Antalya with around 35,000 members ready to work. We ask decision-makers to bring women into the rooms where this decade will be decided.

The world needs to hear women. Delivery needs them too.

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