ARTICLE

Justice-Oriented Climate Diplomacy in the Mediterranean: Türkiye as a Norm Entrepreneur

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Abstract

This article examines the persistent gap between formal commitments and effective outcomes in global climate governance by arguing that this disconnect is not merely institutional or technical, but fundamentally conceptual. Contemporary approaches frame climate change in predominantly technocratic and economistic terms, while neglecting sociopolitical determinants of vulnerability. As a result, climate policies often reproduce or exacerbate existing inequalities, limiting both their effectiveness and legitimacy. To address this limitation, the article takes up environmental justice as a diagnostic and analytical framework for rethinking climate governance. Drawing on its tripartite structure—distributive, procedural, and recognition justice—it demonstrates how climate risks and policy outcomes are unevenly distributed across and within societies, shaped by power relations, institutional arrangements, and social hierarchies. Building on this framework, the article reconceptualizes climate diplomacy as a political arena that must move beyond its state-centric and technocratic orientation. Focusing on the Mediterranean as a climate hotspot, it introduces the concept of "justice-oriented climate diplomacy," integrating social vulnerability, human rights, and inclusive governance into diplomatic practice. The article further argues that incorporation of social dimensions into climate policy enhances effectiveness and legitimacy by addressing structural drivers of vulnerability. Finally, it examines Türkiye's role as a potential norm entrepreneur in climate diplomacy, particularly in the context of its COP31 presidency, suggesting that intermediary actors can shape the evolving agenda of climate governance by advancing inclusive, context-sensitive, and justice-oriented approaches to implementation.

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1. Introduction

Climate change has become a central organizing challenge of contemporary global governance. Rather than a unified system, it is characterized as a "regime complex" which refers to a loosely coupled set of partially overlapping institutions,[1] and as a multi-level governance problem that cuts across global, national, and local scales.[2] Over the past three decades, frameworks such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) have produced an increasingly dense yet fragmented institutional architecture. While this structure enables flexibility, it also generates coordination challenges and contributes to a persistent gap between formal commitments and effective outcomes.[3] This gap is particularly evident in the Mediterranean, where climate impacts are intensifying faster than the global average while policy-relevant evidence on integrated mitigation–adaptation strategies remain limited.[4]

A central claim of this article is that the persistent disconnect in climate governance reflects not only insufficient ambition or coordination, but a deeper problem in how climate change is framed. Contemporary approaches remain largely technocratic, privileging environmental metrics, economic efficiency, and technological solutions. Adaptation paradigms, in particular, have been criticized for their depoliticizing tendencies, emphasizing technical interventions while neglecting the sociopolitical drivers of vulnerability.[5] As a result, climate policies often overlook inequality and intra-societal differences and fail to address the underlying drivers of vulnerability, generating outcomes that are both ineffective and unjust.[6] To address this gap, the article adapts environmental justice as a diagnostic and analytical framework for rethinking climate governance. Environmental justice shifts attention from aggregate outcomes to differentiated impacts, from formal participation to meaningful inclusion, and from universal solutions to context-sensitive approaches.[7] It also aligns with broader arguments that climate change is fundamentally a justice issue. By foregrounding how climate risks and responses are shaped by existing social inequalities, this perspective reveals how impacts disproportionately burden disadvantaged populations, often exacerbated by poorly designed policies.[8]

Building on this framework, the article reconceptualizes climate diplomacy as a political mechanism that must move beyond its technocratic and state-centric orientation. While existing diplomatic practices have enabled coordination and goal-setting, they remain limited in addressing social vulnerability, human rights, and inclusive governance. This limitation reflects broader shifts in global climate governance toward fragmented, multi-actor architectures and a growing emphasis on legitimacy and justice.[9] Integrating

social dimensions is therefore essential to improve both the legitimacy and effectiveness of climate policy. This transformation also creates strategic opportunities for emerging and intermediary actors. In this context, Türkiye is well positioned to take up the role of a «norm entrepreneur»in advancing justice-oriented climate diplomacy.[10] Located at the intersection of the Global North and South, exposed to Mediterranean climate risks, and increasingly active in multilateral diplomacy, Türkiye can leverage its role as host of the 2026 UN Climate Change Conference, commonly known as COP31, in November 2026 to shape the agenda of global climate diplomacy, particularly by integrating social dimensions into policy frameworks. Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative and interpretive approach, drawing on official statements, policy documents, and diplomatic discourse to develop analytically informed reflections on climate governance practices and emerging normative orientations.

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The article proceeds as follows: Following the current introduction, the second section develops the theoretical framework of environmental justice. The third part establishes the connection between environmental justice and climate diplomacy, while the fourth examines the social dimensions of climate change in the Mediterranean context. The fifth section identifies limitations in current policy approaches, followed by the sixth section that advances analytical propositions for integrating social dimensions. The seventh section analyzes Türkiye's strategic role in climate diplomacy, and the conclusion reflects on the implications for a more just and effective model of global climate governance.

2. Theoretical Framework: Environmental Justice as a Diagnostic Tool

Environmental justice provides a critical analytical framework for examining how climate change and related policies produce uneven social outcomes. Originating in the study of environmental inequalities in the U.S., the concept has evolved into a multidimensional framework that interrogates the distribution of environmental harms and benefits, the inclusiveness of decision-making processes, and the recognition of diverse identities and vulnerabilities.[11] In the context of climate change, this framework shifts the focus from purely technocratic solutions toward the social structures that shape vulnerability and resilience. This article adopts a tripartite understanding of environmental justice—

distributive, procedural, and recognition justice—to analyze the limitations of current climate governance.

Distributive justice concerns how the costs and benefits of climate change and climate policy are allocated across social groups. A substantial body of research shows that those least responsible for greenhouse gas emissions, particularly in the Global South,[12] and climate-sensitive regions such as the Mediterranean,[13] are disproportionately exposed to climate risks. Within countries, low-income households, small-scale farmers, and informal workers face heightened vulnerability due to limited adaptive capacity.[14] In Mediterranean contexts, these inequalities are reflected in unequal access to water, land, and food systems under conditions of rising temperatures and increasing drought. These environmental pressures directly threaten livelihoods dependent on agriculture and natural resources, reinforcing existing socioeconomic disparities.[15] Climate policies themselves may also reproduce inequalities, for example through regressive energy transitions or uneven subsidy structures. From a distributive perspective, climate governance must therefore address how risks, resources, and opportunities are allocated.

Procedural justice addresses the fairness and inclusiveness of decision-making processes. It asks who has access to participation, whose voices are heard, and how decisions are made in climate governance. Climate policy processes are frequently dominated by state actors, technical experts, and economic elites, while vulnerable groups remain underrepresented.[16] This exclusion is particularly evident in global climate diplomacy, where negotiations tend to prioritize national interests and technical bargaining over inclusive deliberation. At national and local levels, structural barriers limit the participation of groups such as rural communities, women, migrants, and informal workers.[17] As a result, policies may fail to reflect the lived realities and needs of those most affected. Therefore, procedural justice is not only a normative concern but also a functional one. Inclusive governance processes enhance the legitimacy, accountability, and effectiveness of climate policies by incorporating local knowledge, increasing public trust, and fostering collective ownership of solutions.[18] The persistent exclusion of vulnerable groups thus undermines both the democratic quality and practical success of climate governance.

Recognition justice emphasizes the need to acknowledge diverse identities, experiences, and knowledge systems in climate governance. It highlights how misrecognition through cultural marginalization, stereotyping, or invisibilization can reinforce material inequalities and political exclusion.[19] Climate vulnerability is often shaped by intersecting factors such as gender, class, ethnicity, and migration status. For example, women in many Mediterranean and Global South contexts face structural constraints in access to resources and decision-making, increasing their exposure to climate risks.[20] Similarly, migrants and displaced populations often experience legal and social exclusion, limiting access to adaptation measures. Recognition justice also extends to epistemic dimensions, including the valuation of local and indigenous knowledge systems: privileging technocratic expertise over local and indigenous knowledge can result in policies that overlook

context-specific adaptation strategies and reinforce top-down governance.[21] Addressing recognition justice therefore requires not only identifying vulnerable groups but also actively incorporating their perspectives, knowledge, and agency into climate governance frameworks.

These three dimensions reveal a fundamental limitation of contemporary climate governance: the insufficient integration of social determinants of vulnerability. Prevailing approaches tend to frame climate change primarily as an environmental or merely as an economic problem, emphasizing technological solutions and aggregate outcomes. This leads to a threefold failure: already existing distributive inequalities persist or even deepen, procedural exclusions undermine legitimacy, and misrecognition results in poorly adapted policies. Integrating environmental justice into climate governance is therefore essential both for normative reasons and for improving policy effectiveness and ensuring socially sustainable outcomes.

3. Conceptual Bridge: From Environmental Justice to Justice-Oriented Climate Diplomacy

Climate diplomacy refers to the set of international negotiations, strategies, and political processes through which states and non-state actors address climate change at the global level. The concept, not always conceptualized as a distinct field, is situated within the broader literature on global climate governance, which emphasizes the interaction between formal intergovernmental negotiations and transnational actors and networks.[22] From this perspective, climate diplomacy encompasses formal arenas such as UNFCCC negotiations, as well as informal practices including coalition-building and transnational governance initiatives. In recent years, climate diplomacy has become increasingly shaped by a plurality of actors beyond the state. Subnational governments, cities, private firms, and civil society organizations have emerged as significant contributors, reflecting a shift toward more polycentric and multilevel forms of governance.[23] At the same time, climate diplomacy operates not only through formal agreements but also as a communicative arena in which ideas, norms, and policy approaches are diffused.[24] Even where binding outcomes are limited, diplomatic processes can influence domestic policy by reframing national interests and encouraging incremental change. However, this expansion has not resolved core limitations. The proliferation of actors has contributed to a fragmented governance landscape characterized by weak coordination and uneven accountability. More importantly, climate diplomacy remains largely shaped by technocratic and economistic frames, where climate action is

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justified primarily through efficiency, competitiveness, and green growth. Consequently, climate change continues to be framed predominantly as a coordination problem among states.

This orientation is reinforced by the institutional logic of international negotiations, which privileges measurable and negotiable elements such as emissions reductions, climate finance, and technology transfer.[25] While these priorities facilitate coordination, they also narrow the scope of climate diplomacy, marginalizing its social and political dimensions. As a result, issues of inequality, power asymmetries, and differentiated vulnerability remain insufficiently addressed. These limitations parallel those identified in the environmental justice literature. First, climate diplomacy marginalizes the distributive implications of climate policies, particularly for vulnerable populations whose livelihoods are directly affected by mitigation and adaptation measures.[26] Second, it constrains participation, as decision-making processes are largely confined to state representatives and technical experts, limiting the meaningful inclusion of civil society and marginalized groups.[27] Third, climate diplomacy overlooks the importance of recognition, as diverse forms of knowledge, local experiences, and culturally embedded understandings of climate risk are often excluded from diplomatic processes.[28] Despite increasing rhetorical commitments to equity and inclusiveness, such as references to "climate justice" and "just transitions," these principles are not systematically rooted in the structure and practice of international climate negotiations.[29] The end result is usually a huge gap between normative aspirations and institutional realities.

Building on the environmental justice framework, we use the concept of justice-oriented climate diplomacy as both an analytical and normative approach. This perspective seeks to integrate distributive, procedural, and recognition-based concerns into diplomatic practice. Furthermore, it foregrounds social vulnerability by moving beyond aggregate national metrics to examine how climate impacts and policy interventions are distributed within societies, particularly across class, gender, ethnicity, and livelihood structures.[30] Justice-oriented climate diplomacy also links adaptation to human rights, recognizing that climate change directly affects access to food, water, health, housing, and livelihoods. Closely following human rights principles, the concept strengthens accountability and helps prevent the reproduction of existing inequalities.[31] Moreover, this perspective reconceptualizes the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" by incorporating not only historical (colonial) responsibility but also present-day social and institutional capacities, thereby addressing disparities both between and within countries.[32] Another important advantage of this new concept is that it positions vulnerable populations as active agents rather than passive recipients of aid. This entails expanding participation to include local communities, grassroots organizations, and marginalized groups, and strengthening their capability for political control over decision-making processes.[33] In other words, justice-oriented climate diplomacy is a more sustained form of co-governance and strategic collaboration that can enhance both procedural justice and policy effectiveness by incorporating context-specific knowledge and fostering local ownership of climate solutions.[34]

4. The Missing Link: Social Dimensions of Climate Change

Climate change is not merely an environmental phenomenon, but a fundamentally social process shaped by existing structures of inequality, governance, and economic organization. Vulnerability and resilience are determined by exposure to climatic hazards and are produced through the interaction of environmental stressors with social, economic, and political conditions. Drawing on case studies from the Mediterranean region, this section demonstrates how climate impacts are mediated through unequal access to resources, institutional arrangements, and social hierarchies. A substantial body of scholarship has moved beyond biophysical interpretations of climate vulnerability, conceptualizing it as a socially constructed condition shaped by unequal distributions of resources, power, and opportunities.[35] Climate hazards such as droughts, heatwaves, and floods do not generate uniform outcomes; rather, their effects are differentiated through socioeconomic and institutional structures that shape exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity. Unequal access to multiple forms of capital—human (education, health), economic (income, savings), social (networks, political voice), physical (infrastructure), and natural (land, water)—plays a central role in determining how individuals and communities anticipate, cope with, and recover from climate-related shocks.[36]

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These inequalities are particularly visible in the Mediterranean and North African contexts, where populations dependent on climate-sensitive sectors face heightened vulnerability. Smallholder farmers reliant on rain-fed agriculture in countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt are simultaneously exposed to declining precipitation and constrained by limited access to irrigation, financial resources, and institutional support.[37] At the same time, institutional and governance arrangements structure the distribution of risks by shaping access to infrastructure and public services. Weak governance, fragmented policy coordination, and inequitable service provision can significantly constrain adaptive capacity.[38] In this sense, environmental stressors interact with political economy structures, producing differentiated and often unequal outcomes across society. This dynamic is clearly illustrated in the case of water scarcity in Jordan, where climatic pressures intersect with socioeconomic inequalities and governance limitations (see Case Study 1). Notably, while the notion of water security is widely invoked in policy and academic discourse, it lacks a universally standardized definition within international frameworks. Its meaning varies across national and regional contexts, reflecting differing hydrological conditions, infrastructural capacities, and socioeconomic priorities. Accordingly, in this analysis, water security is understood as

a context-dependent and relational concept, encompassing not only physical availability but also equitable access, quality, and the institutional capacity to manage water resources under conditions of stress.

Beyond shaping vulnerability, climate change operates as a threat multiplier, interacting with and intensifying pre-existing social, economic, and political pressures.[39] It produces entirely new risks and also amplifies underlying inequalities, exposes institutional limitations, and generates cumulative and relational effects across interconnected systems. In climate-sensitive sectors, rising temperatures, prolonged droughts, and precipitation variability undermine livelihoods, disproportionately affecting populations with limited adaptive capacity. At the same time, climate stress places additional strain on institutional systems, including water management, public health, and urban infrastructure, which are often inadequately prepared for increasing climate variability.[40]

Case Study 1: Water Inequality and Social Differentiation in Jordan

Jordan constitutes a paradigmatic example of how climate vulnerability is socially produced rather than merely environmentally determined. While the country faces severe and worsening water scarcity driven by declining precipitation, rising temperatures, and demographic pressures, the impacts are distributed unevenly across society. Projections indicate that by the end of the century, per capita water availability may fall below 40 liters per day, with low-income households disproportionately affected with up to 91% facing sustained water shortages for most of the year. This unequal exposure is not simply a function of natural scarcity but reflects existing socioeconomic hierarchies and infrastructural inequalities. Wealthier households are able to supplement public water supply through private tanker systems, while poorer communities remain dependent on rationed municipal distribution. Similarly, refugee populations, particularly in camps such as Azraq and Za'atari, experience even more constrained and lower-quality water access, reinforcing layered vulnerabilities shaped by displacement status and institutional marginalization. Moreover, the crisis is intensified by geopolitical and governance factors, including transboundary water competition and uneven allocation policies.

At the same time, transboundary water systems also constitute critical arenas for cooperation and institutional innovation. Shared water resources in the region have, in various instances, facilitated dialogue, data-sharing, and joint management initiatives, demonstrating their potential to function as platforms for confidence-building and regional integration. From this perspective, water should not be understood solely as a source of contention but as a strategic resource that, when governed through inclusive and cooperative frameworks, can support sustainable development and mitigate geopolitical tensions. These dynamics demonstrate that water insecurity—understood here as uneven, unreliable, or socially exclusionary access to adequate water—emerges through the interaction of environmental stressors, political economy structures, and institutional arrangements.

Sources: Josie Garthwaite, "Stanford Study Reveals a Deepening Water Crisis in Jordan – And a Way Forward," Stanford Report, March 29, 2021, https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2021/03/jordans-worsening-water-crisis-warning-world (Accessed: 30.03.2026); Synne Furnes Bjerkestrand, "Creative Solutions Needed to Fight Jordan's Water Scarcity," Al Jazeera, March 31, 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/3/31/creative-solutions-needed-to-fight-jordans-water-scarcity (Accessed: 30.03.2026).

These pressures unfold across interconnected domains. Climate change affects human health directly through heat stress, air pollution, and extreme events, and indirectly through its impact on food and water systems.[41] Rising temperatures and more frequent heatwaves have been associated with increased mortality, particularly among elderly and socially vulnerable populations, as evidenced by extreme heat events in Southern Europe.[42] Disruptions to agricultural production undermine food security, increasing the risk of malnutrition, especially among low-income groups. Water scarcity further compounds these risks by limiting access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Livelihoods and labor conditions are similarly affected.[43] Climate change undermines economic stability by disrupting sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, and informal labor markets.[44] In North Africa and the Mediterranean, recurrent droughts and declining water availability reduce agricultural output and increase income precarity for smallholder farmers and laborers. Extreme heat directly affects labor productivity, particularly in outdoor sectors, leading to reduced working hours, and declining income stability.

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The impacts of climate change are equally evident in the domains of housing, urban vulnerability, and displacement. Coastal and low-lying urban areas are increasingly exposed to flooding, sea-level rise, and extreme weather events. In cities such as Alexandria, Egypt rising sea levels and storm surges threaten infrastructure, housing, and economic activity, while processes such as salinization degrade agricultural land and contribute to displacement.[45] These dynamics are closely linked to broader patterns of mobility. Rather than constituting a direct or monocausal driver, climate change interacts with existing socioeconomic vulnerabilities, governance deficits, and livelihood insecurities to shape migration outcomes. Environmental stressors such as drought, water scarcity, and declining agricultural productivity may erode livelihoods and increase the propensity for mobility, but decisions to migrate are mediated by factors including income, social networks, political stability, and access to adaptation resources. In this sense, climate change functions as an indirect driver—or threat multiplier—that influences migration through its effects on social and economic systems. Such movements, in turn, place additional pressure on already strained urban systems and public services. At a systemic level, these interconnected pressures illustrate how climate change interacts

with resource scarcity, migration, and governance capacity, producing compounded and reinforcing dynamics rather than linear causal relationships (see Case Study 2).

Case Study 2: Climate–Water–Migration Interactions and Cooperative Security in the Mediterranean

Climate change in the Mediterranean intensifies a complex nexus linking water scarcity, human mobility, and security dynamics. Rising temperatures, declining precipitation, and increased evapotranspiration are projected to reduce freshwater availability significantly across the region, with some areas facing up to a 15% decline in water resources. These pressures are particularly acute in semi-arid and arid zones of North Africa and the Middle East, where growing populations and overexploitation of groundwater further exacerbate water stress. While environmental stressors such as water scarcity can undermine agricultural productivity and rural livelihoods, migration in the region is primarily driven by a combination of socioeconomic inequalities, political instability, governance deficits, and, in some contexts, violent conflict. Climate change interacts with these structural drivers by exacerbating livelihood insecurity and constraining adaptive capacity, thereby influencing, but not determining, mobility decisions. In this sense, migration should be understood as a socially embedded and multicausal process rather than a direct outcome of environmental change. Mobility, in turn, reshapes socio-ecological systems in receiving areas. As displaced or mobile populations concentrate in urban centers or transit regions, demand for housing, water, land, and basic services increases. In contexts where infrastructure and governance systems are already under strain, this can intensify pressure on natural resources, particularly water, and contribute to challenges in service provision and environmental sustainability. However, these dynamics are mediated by policy responses, institutional capacity, and the inclusiveness of urban planning frameworks. In certain contexts, particularly those characterized by institutional fragility, these pressures can contribute to heightened risks of instability. Importantly, these outcomes are contingent rather than deterministic. Climate change does not directly cause conflict; instead, it operates as a threat multiplier that can exacerbate existing grievances and structural vulnerabilities. At the same time, transboundary water governance also offers opportunities for cooperative risk management and conflict prevention. Institutionalized water-sharing agreements, joint monitoring mechanisms, and regionally coordinated adaptation strategies can transform potential points of tension into sites of collaboration, strengthening resilience across interconnected systems. While climate change is not a direct cause of conflict, it operates as a threat multiplier, amplifying existing vulnerabilities while simultaneously underscoring the importance of cooperative governance frameworks. In this sense, the climate–

water–migration–security nexus highlights the need for integrated, cross-sectoral policy responses that address environmental, social, and political dimensions simultaneously.

Sources: Yara Asi, "The Brewing Crisis of Food (In)Security, Conflict and Climate Change in the Mediterranean: Causes, Outcomes and Mitigating Strategies," in Bologna Peacebuilding Forum 2021 Event Report, 2021, pp.15–27. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356578352_Environmental_Security_and_Climate_Diplomacy_in_the_Mediterranean; Jürgen Scheffan, "Environmental Security and Climate Diplomacy in the Mediterranean," in Bologna Peacebuilding Forum 2021 Event Report, 2021, pp. 28–44. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356578352_Environmental_Security_and_Climate_Diplomacy_in_the_Mediterranean.

Finally, climate change reinforces existing patterns of inequality and marginalization, shaping both exposure to risk and the capacity to respond.[46] Gender inequalities are particularly significant: in many contexts, women face structural barriers to accessing land, credit, and decision-making processes, limiting adaptive capacity while increasing exposure to climate-related risks.[47] Similarly, marginalized groups, including migrants, refugees, and informal workers, are often excluded from institutional support systems, heightening vulnerability. At the same time, affected communities often develop localized coping strategies, including water recycling and small-scale agricultural adaptation. However, while such bottom-up responses demonstrate agency, they remain insufficient to address the structural drivers of vulnerability (see Case Study 3).

All these dynamics illustrate that climate change operates through interconnected social systems rather than discrete sectors. Its impacts are cumulative and relational, linking health, livelihoods, mobility, and inequality in ways that reinforce vulnerability across multiple domains. This underscores the limitations of technocratic and sectoral approaches to climate governance and highlights the need for integrated strategies that incorporate social dimensions, particularly equity, inclusion, and institutional capacity, into climate policy design and implementation.

Case Study 3: Migrant Labor, Heat Stress, and Unequal Adaptation in Southern Spain

Southern Spain, particularly the agricultural regions of Almería and Huelva, offers a contemporary example of how climate change reinforces existing social inequalities within the Mediterranean. Rising temperatures, prolonged droughts, and increasing frequency of heatwaves have intensified environmental stress in one of Europe's key food-producing regions. These impacts are disproportionately borne by migrant agricultural workers, many of whom are employed informally and live in precarious conditions. Migrant workers, primarily from North and Sub-Saharan Africa, often lack legal protection, secure housing, and access to healthcare. They are therefore more exposed to extreme heat and have limited

capacity to adapt. Informal settlements, frequently lacking basic services such as clean water and electricity, further exacerbate vulnerability. Heat stress has become a significant occupational hazard, affecting both productivity and health outcomes. At the same time, workers and local communities have developed coping mechanisms, including shifting working hours to cooler periods, informal water-sharing practices, and collective strategies to manage heat exposure. Some farms have also introduced drip irrigation and greenhouse shading techniques to cope with water scarcity and temperature increases. However, these adaptations remain fragmented and insufficient. Structural factors, such as labor informality, exclusion from social protection systems, and unequal access to resources, limit the effectiveness of these responses. This case also underscores the importance of procedural justice in climate governance, as those most exposed to climate risks, for example, precarious migrant workers, are often the least represented in decision-making processes that shape adaptation policies.

Sources: Sarah Williams, "How Does Heat Affect the Health of Migrants Working in Agriculture in Southern Europe?" ISGlobal Barcelona Institute for Global Health, May 20, 2025 https://www.isglobal.org/en/healthisglobal/-/custom-blog-portlet/-como-afecta-el-calor-a-la-salud-de-los-migrantes-que-trabajan-en-la-agricultura-del-sur-de-europa- (Accessed: 31.03.2026); Eoghan Gilmartin, "In Spain, Farmworkers Are Dying in the Heat," Jacobin, September 10, 2025, https://jacobin.com/2025/10/spain-farmworkers-heatstroke-climate-crisis (Accessed: 31.03.2026).

5. From Policy Failure to Governance Reorientation

Contemporary climate governance remains predominantly anchored in environmental, economic, and technological logics. While these dimensions are essential, their dominance has produced a narrow, technocratic framing of climate change that obscures its social and political character. This section argues that current policy approaches fall short due to three interrelated limitations: (i) the reduction of climate change to a technical problem, (ii) the neglect of structural determinants of vulnerability and resilience, and (iii) the failure to account for the broader social consequences and integration potential of climate interventions. First, climate change is frequently approached as a technical and managerial challenge, addressed through emissions targets, market-based instruments, and technological innovation. This is reflected in the centrality of carbon accounting, climate finance, and technology transfer within international and national policy frameworks.[48] While necessary, these tools tend to depoliticize climate governance by prioritizing efficiency and measurability over questions of power, equity, and social justice. As a result, the social relations shaping vulnerability and adaptive capacity remain insufficiently addressed, limiting the transformative scope of policy interventions.[49]

Second, current approaches insufficiently engage with the structural determinants of resilience. As established earlier, vulnerability is not solely a function of exposure to climatic hazards but is produced through unequal access to resources, institutional capacity, and social inclusion.[50] However, adaptation strategies continue to prioritize

infrastructural and technological solutions without addressing underlying inequalities. Consequently, interventions such as irrigation systems or climate-smart agriculture may disproportionately benefit actors with existing access to land, capital, and institutions, thereby reproducing rather than reducing vulnerability.[51] A central, yet often neglected, dimension of these structural determinants is the design and reach of social protection systems. Social protection—encompassing instruments such as public healthcare, unemployment insurance, pensions, targeted cash transfers, and climate risk insurance—can mediate the distribution of climate risks and buffer households against livelihood shocks. When universal, adequately funded, and accessible, such systems enable individuals and communities not only to absorb climate-related shocks but also to reorganize their lives and livelihoods without falling into chronic precarity. In this sense, social protection marks a shift from a narrow risk-management paradigm, which focuses on short-term coping, toward a climate justice framework concerned with redistribution, recognition, and the substantive security of vulnerable groups. By reducing income volatility, supporting health and care needs, and providing compensatory mechanisms for those adversely affected by climate policies, robust social protection architectures can transform adaptation from a set of ad hoc measures into a more equitable, rights-based project.

Social protection—encompassing instruments such as public healthcare, unemployment insurance, pensions, targeted cash transfers, and climate risk insurance—can mediate the distribution of climate risks and buffer households against livelihood shocks.

Third, climate policies often generate unintended social consequences while failing to leverage potential synergies with broader development objectives. Mitigation and adaptation measures can exacerbate inequalities through processes such as land dispossession, displacement, or regressive cost distribution, particularly in the absence of compensatory mechanisms.[52] In contexts where social protection systems are weak, fragmented, or exclusionary, these adverse effects are intensified, as those most affected by climate shocks and policy trade-offs lack access to supportive institutions and redistributive instruments. Conversely, when climate measures are explicitly linked to social protection—for example, through targeted support for low-income households in energy transitions, or public employment programs for ecosystem restoration—they can simultaneously reduce emissions, enhance resilience, and advance social rights.

At the same time, policy design remains fragmented, limiting the integration of climate action with broader goals related to poverty reduction, health, and social inclusion under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) framework.[53] This fragmentation constrains the capacity of climate policy to produce co-benefits and reinforces siloed governance

structures. Therefore, these limitations of current climate governance stem from its insufficient engagement with the social dimensions of climate change. Technocratic framings, structural blind spots, and fragmented policy design collectively undermine both effectiveness and justice. Addressing these shortcomings requires a shift toward integrated, socially grounded, and justice-oriented approaches that explicitly incorporate inequality, participation, and institutional capacity into climate policy.

Building on the limitations identified above, integrating social dimensions into climate policy is not simply a normative addition but a necessary reorientation of climate governance. Rather than treating social factors as secondary considerations, this perspective positions them as constitutive of policy design, implementation, and outcomes. Three interrelated shifts are particularly critical. First, incorporating social dimensions enhances policy effectiveness by aligning interventions with the socioeconomic realities that shape vulnerability and adaptive capacity. As discussed earlier, climate risks are mediated by unequal access to resources, institutions, and knowledge systems. Policies that fail to account for these conditions often encounter implementation barriers, even when they are technically sound.[54] By contrast, approaches that integrate local knowledge, social practices, and context-specific constraints tend to produce more durable and applicable outcomes.

Second, integrating social dimensions strengthens the political legitimacy of climate governance. Climate policies are not neutral technical instruments but interventions that redistribute resources, risks, and opportunities. As such, their acceptance depends on perceptions of fairness, inclusion, and accountability. Procedural justice—particularly the meaningful participation of affected communities—plays a central role in building trust and fostering compliance.[55] Without such legitimacy, even well-designed policies may face resistance or fail to achieve long-term societal support. Third, a socially grounded approach enables a shift from short-term risk management toward addressing the structural drivers of vulnerability. Climate policy often focuses on immediate adaptation needs, yet vulnerability is produced through enduring conditions such as poverty, inequality, and exclusion.[56] Addressing these root causes through social protection, inclusive governance, and equitable access to resources enhances long-term resilience. At the same time, this approach facilitates stronger integration with broader development agendas, particularly the SDGs, allowing climate action to generate co-benefits across sectors.[57]

6. Türkiye and Climate Diplomacy: A Normative–Strategic Intervention

6.1. Türkiye's Strategic Position

Türkiye occupies a structurally hybrid position in contemporary climate politics. Vulnerabilities and incentives intersect in ways that are best understood not simply in geographical terms, but as a diplomatic and political location shaped by its simultaneous proximity to European institutional frameworks, Mediterranean ecological risk, and

broader Global South concerns regarding equity, development, and differentiated responsibility. In this sense, Türkiye embodies a form of intermediary positioning that gives it analytical relevance within an increasingly fragmented climate governance landscape. This positioning yields many interrelated advantages. First, Türkiye's strategic location can operate as a bridging actor across negotiating divides. Its status has long resisted neat categorization within the developed/developing binary, allowing it to articulate claims that resonate with both capacity-based and justice-based framings of climate responsibility. Another advantage is related with ongoing experience with climate change. Türkiye is itself materially exposed to the climate risks that define the Mediterranean as a global hotspot, including water stress, heat extremes, coastal vulnerability, and ecosystem degradation. Last but not least, Türkiye's upper hand in multilateralism will pave the way for a more effective role. Türkiye has sought to translate this exposure into diplomatic relevance by expanding its role in multilateral climate forums and presenting itself as a convening actor capable of linking implementation, development, and resilience. Official COP31 positioning has explicitly framed Türkiye as a bridge between developed and developing countries and has emphasized Mediterranean vulnerability, urban resilience, technology transfer, finance, and capacity-building as priority themes.[58]

Türkiye is itself materially exposed to the climate risks that define the Mediterranean as a global hotspot, including water stress, heat extremes, coastal vulnerability, and ecosystem degradation.

Crucially, these international narratives are increasingly anchored in an evolving domestic climate policy framework.[59] Following its ratification of the Paris Agreement, Türkiye adopted a 2053 net-zero emissions target and updated its nationally determined contribution (NDC) to commit to an economy-wide reduction of 41% in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 relative to a business-as-usual baseline, alongside a planned emissions peak by 2038. This has been accompanied by the preparation of a long-term climate strategy and mitigation action plan spanning key sectors such as energy, industry, buildings, transport, agriculture, waste, and land use. Domestically, policy discourse increasingly highlights renewable energy expansion, energy efficiency, and a just transition as central to achieving the 2053 target, while emphasizing that climate action must proceed in tandem with development and energy security concerns.

All these features suggest that Türkiye's relevance in climate diplomacy lies not merely in participation, but in its capacity to mediate across asymmetries that increasingly structure the politics of climate governance. In a system marked by institutional fragmentation and uneven vulnerability, such intermediary actors may acquire agenda-shaping influence disproportionate to their formal power. At the same time, a degree of disjuncture persists

between Türkiye's ambitious international signaling and the current trajectory of its domestic emissions and energy mix, which remains significantly reliant on fossil fuels and planned coal capacity. This tension renders norm entrepreneurship a contested and contingent project: the credibility of Türkiye's bridging narrative will depend on the extent to which domestic implementation progressively aligns with its declared long-term climate goals.

6.2. COP31 Hosting as an Agenda-Setting Opportunity

Türkiye's hosting of COP31 in Antalya on November 9–20, 2026 constitutes more than a logistical role within the UNFCCC process. It represents a strategic opportunity to intervene in the direction of climate diplomacy at a moment when the central challenge is no longer norm creation alone, but implementation under conditions of geopolitical instability.[60] UNFCCC and UN statements in early 2026 have repeatedly framed COP31 as part of a broader shift toward an "era of implementation," emphasizing delivery, partnerships, resilience, and concrete outcomes.[61] This context matters for the argument of this article. If earlier phases of climate governance were organized primarily around target-setting and institutional expansion, the current phase is increasingly defined by the problem of translating formal commitments into socially and territorially differentiated outcomes. Türkiye's emerging COP31 discourse appears to engage precisely this gap. Official statements by Turkish and UN actors have stressed dialogue over unilateralism, consensus over division, and action over stagnation, while also underscoring inclusiveness, implementation, and the need to leave no one behind.[62]

From the standpoint of environmental justice, this creates a significant agenda-setting opening. COP presidencies do not determine outcomes unilaterally, but they do shape priorities, sequencing, and the discursive architecture through which certain issues gain visibility. Türkiye can use this role to widen the scope of climate diplomacy beyond its traditional emphasis on emissions metrics, finance mechanisms, and state bargaining. In particular, it can foreground the social consequences of climate change and climate policy by linking adaptation to housing, public health, food systems, water insecurity, and urban transformation. Turkish official messaging has already pointed in this direction through its emphasis on urban climate resilience, climate-friendly planning, and stronger support for technology transfer, finance, and capacity-building.[63] Equally important is the institutional model through which COP31 is being organized.[64] The Türkiye–Australia partnership, under which Türkiye holds the presidency while Australia leads negotiations, reflects an explicitly cooperative arrangement designed to bridge political constituencies and strengthen trust across blocs.[65] This unusual governance model

Türkiye's hosting of COP31 in Antalya on November 9–20, 2026 constitutes more than a logistical role within the UNFCCC process.

reinforces the interpretation of COP31 as a site not only of negotiation, but of mediation between differentiated priorities within the climate regime. From a procedural justice perspective, the partnership also introduces mechanisms that broaden participation and amplify marginalized voices. First, the agreed modalities task Türkiye and Australia with jointly steering the "action agenda," including appointing high-level climate and youth champions and thematic champions from Pacific and other vulnerable regions, thereby opening representation beyond the traditional core of industrialized states. Second, holding the pre-COP in a Pacific island country, with Australian support, creates a structured space for Pacific actors to set priorities and articulate demands on finance and loss-and-damage before the main conference in Türkiye, embedding regional consultation into the COP31 process. Third, the modalities emphasize ongoing consultation between the Turkish COP31 president and the Australian president of negotiations. This co-governance arrangement is framed as a way to ensure "equal and fair representation" and to "leave no one behind," particularly among developing and climate-vulnerable countries. Seen through a procedural justice lens, the Türkiye–Australia partnership can thus be interpreted as an experimental attempt to redistribute agenda-setting influence within the UNFCCC system, whose effectiveness will ultimately depend on whether these provisions translate into real leverage for Global South, Pacific, and civil society actors during COP31.

6.3. Türkiye as a Norm Entrepreneur

Building on its strategic position and COP31 presidency, Türkiye can be understood as a potential norm entrepreneur in climate diplomacy. In this context, norm entrepreneurship should not be reduced to rhetorical leadership. Rather, it refers to the capacity to reframe the terms of legitimate climate governance by elevating specific principles, linking them to institutional practice, and embedding them within the agenda of multilateral negotiation. The interplay between Türkiye's international goals and its domestic climate pathway is central in this regard: norm entrepreneurship becomes credible when discursive commitments to justice, inclusion, and resilience are at least partially reflected in national policy trajectories, even if unevenly and incompletely.

Three possible normative interventions are especially relevant. First, Türkiye is well placed to advance a justice-oriented understanding of implementation. This would shift attention away from aggregate delivery alone and toward the unequal social distribution of both climate harms and policy benefits. Such a framing would be consistent with the argument developed throughout this article: that climate governance fails not only when it is insufficiently ambitious, but also when it remains inattentive to differentiated vulnerability within societies. By foregrounding Mediterranean risk, urban exposure, and the needs of vulnerable regions, and by drawing on its own stated commitments to an "inclusive, innovative and equitable transition" in the 2053 net-zero strategy, Türkiye can help reposition implementation as a distributive and political question rather than a merely technical one.[66]

Second, Türkiye can promote a more socially embedded model of adaptation.[67] Official COP31 messaging has already linked resilience to cities, infrastructure, and broader development needs, which creates space for expanding adaptation beyond narrow infrastructural responses. A justice-oriented extension of this approach would emphasize that resilience depends not only on physical investment, but also on social protection, public services, institutional access, and participatory governance. Such a reframing would be especially significant for middle-income and climate-vulnerable countries, where formal adaptation planning often coexists with deep internal inequalities. It would also create a channel through which domestic policy initiatives—such as the integration of adaptation into sectoral planning on water, disaster risk management, and urban development—can be articulated as part of a broader normative agenda in multilateral settings.

Third, Türkiye can contribute to a more regionally differentiated climate diplomacy by inserting Mediterranean experience into global agenda formation.[68] The Mediterranean is increasingly recognized as a climate hotspot whose ecological pressures intersect with migration, water scarcity, agricultural stress, and uneven governance capacity. By scaling these interconnected risks into multilateral debate, Türkiye can challenge universalized and overly technocratic policy narratives and instead support a context-sensitive understanding of climate impacts and policy design. This would amount to the introduction of a regional political ecology into global climate diplomacy— one that emphasizes interconnected vulnerabilities, asymmetrical capacities, and the need for integrated rather than siloed governance responses. The broader UN and COP31 discourse around resilience, stability, and implementation provides a receptive institutional context for such an intervention, while Türkiye's own domestic long-term strategy and NDCs offer an important—if incomplete—reference point for translating these principles into practice.

Türkiye's importance lies less in claiming exceptional status than in using the presidency to translate abstract principles such as justice, inclusion, and resilience into agenda-setting priorities within an implementation-centered phase of climate governance.

In this sense, Türkiye's importance lies less in claiming exceptional status than in using the presidency to translate abstract principles such as justice, inclusion, and resilience into agenda-setting priorities within an implementation-centered phase of climate governance. Its potential contribution is therefore multifaceted: to help move climate diplomacy away from a narrow negotiation framework and toward a model that is more attentive to social vulnerability, regional specificity, and the political conditions of effective implementation. Therefore, Türkiye's COP31 presidency extends beyond being a hosting function: it is a contingent opportunity to shape the evolving architecture of climate diplomacy. Whether this potential is realized will depend on the

extent to which Türkiye can institutionalize a broader understanding of implementation, one that integrates social justice, inclusive governance, and differentiated vulnerability into the core of multilateral climate action. As of April 2026, the official framing of COP31 already emphasizes implementation, inclusiveness, partnership, and bridge-building across negotiating divides; the analytical question is whether these themes can be translated into durable diplomatic practice.

7. Conclusion: Toward a Justice-Oriented Climate Diplomacy

This article puts the concept of justice-oriented climate diplomacy as both an analytical and normative reorientation of global climate governance in the Mediterranean. This approach challenges the prevailing reduction of climate diplomacy to a coordination problem among nation-states and instead reconceptualizes it as a political arena in which competing claims over responsibility, vulnerability, and development are negotiated. A justice-oriented perspective expands the scope of diplomacy beyond emissions, finance, and technology to include social vulnerability, human rights, and inclusive governance. It emphasizes that effective climate action requires not only aggregate progress but also equitable and context-sensitive outcomes. We also argue that the limitations of contemporary climate governance are not merely institutional or technical, but fundamentally conceptual. The persistence of the implementation gap—between formal commitments and tangible outcomes—reflects a deeper misalignment between how climate change is framed and how it is experienced. As demonstrated throughout the article, climate change operates through socially differentiated pathways, interacting with pre-existing inequalities, governance structures, and political economies. In this context, technocratic and state-centric approaches are insufficient, as they systematically overlook the distributive, procedural, and recognition-based dimensions of climate risk and response. By mobilizing environmental justice as a diagnostic framework, the article has shown that climate governance failures are simultaneously failures of distribution, participation, and recognition. Climate impacts are unevenly distributed across and within societies; decision-making processes remain exclusionary; and diverse forms of knowledge and lived experience continue to be marginalized. These dynamics are particularly visible in the Mediterranean, where climate change functions as a threat multiplier, exacerbating resource scarcity, livelihood insecurity, migration pressures, and sociopolitical tensions.

The analysis of the Mediterranean context further underscores the necessity of integrated approaches. As highlighted in the literature, climate-related risks rarely operate in isolation but instead compound existing fragilities, producing cascading and systemic effects across interconnected domains. Climate change in the region, however, cannot be adequately addressed through sectoral or fragmented interventions. Its impacts are relational, linking water scarcity, food insecurity, displacement, and conflict in mutually reinforcing ways. As such, policy responses must move beyond siloed frameworks toward multilevel and cross-sectoral strategies that incorporate social dimensions at their core. This aligns

with emerging insights from climate–security and environmental peacebuilding literature, which stress the importance of addressing underlying drivers of vulnerability and fostering cooperative, context-specific solutions. Within this evolving landscape, Türkiye's prospective role as host of COP31 illustrates the strategic relevance of intermediary actors in shaping the direction of climate diplomacy. Positioned at the intersection of geopolitical, ecological, and developmental divides, Türkiye has the capacity to act as a norm entrepreneur by advancing a justice-oriented framing of implementation. This entails redefining success not only in terms of delivery and targets, but in terms of how climate policies redistribute risks, resources, and opportunities within societies. The COP31 presidency thus represents a critical juncture: an opportunity to translate abstract commitments to justice, inclusion, and resilience with concrete diplomatic priorities and institutional practices. More broadly, the transition toward justice-oriented climate diplomacy reflects a shift in the nature of the climate governance challenge itself. The central issue is no longer solely the negotiation of agreements, but the governance of implementation under conditions of widening inequality, institutional fragmentation, and geopolitical uncertainty. Addressing this challenge requires re-politicizing/re-prioritizing climate governance—bringing questions of power, equity, and social transformation back into the center of analysis and practice.

Positioned at the intersection of geopolitical, ecological, and developmental divides, Türkiye has the capacity to act as a norm entrepreneur by advancing a justice-oriented framing of implementation.

In conclusion, a more just and effective model of climate governance depends on the systematic integration of social dimensions into both policy design and diplomatic practice. This entails recognizing climate change as a fundamentally political and social process, rather than a purely environmental or technical problem. Justice-oriented climate diplomacy offers a pathway to bridge the gap between normative aspirations and institutional realities by incorporating equity, inclusion, and differentiated vulnerability into the core of global climate action. In this respect, the article also contributes to the broader climate diplomacy literature by showing that justice and effectiveness need not be understood as competing imperatives; rather, they can be mutually reinforcing when climate governance is designed around socially grounded, inclusive, and context-sensitive forms of implementation. The extent to which this transformation can be realized in the Mediterranean will not only shape the effectiveness of climate policy in the region, but its success, legitimacy, and sustainability may have spillover effects in an increasingly unequal and climate-constrained world.

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