

A Crisis of Queer Invisibility: Climate Change as a Risk Multiplier for LGBTQ People



ReportOUT



Author: Elliot Hatt (ReportOUT)



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A Statement from ReportOUT's Chair

This is an important piece of work for ReportOUT. Important because the Climate Emergency is upon us, important because we are seeing more and more people increasingly aware of what is happening to our climate, and important, because it seeks to address the overlooked impact of it on sexual and gender minorities (see LGBTQ).

As the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, said:

"Saving our planet, lifting people out of poverty, advancing economic growth...these are one and the same fight. We must connect the dots between climate change, water scarcity, energy shortages, global health, food security, and women's empowerment. Solutions to one problem must be solutions for all"

A priority at ReportOUT has been to connect these dots between our own most basic human rights, and our own development needs as sexual and gender minorities. In a world where international development mechanisms and narratives have traditionally been both cisnormative and heteronormative, we must evidence and raise our voices, if we are to be heard.

If we are to also achieve the United Nation's bold Agenda 2030, outlining 17 Sustainable Development Goals, with Goal 13 being 'climate action,' then a conversation must urgently start. We know that the increasing impact of the Climate Emergency is adversely affecting disadvantaged people and communities across the globe, but so little research and time has explored the impact of this on some of our world's most marginalised population groups. At ReportOUT, we strongly believe that sexual and gender minorities are some of the most vulnerable people worldwide, and the impact of the Climate Emergency on their lives, both now and in the very near future, can not be understated.

If we are to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of Agenda 2030 and to truly tackle the Climate Emergency around us, then all voices should be heard, especially those who stand to be most impacted by it.

This ground-breaking research report aims to cast light on how a changing climate represents a risk magnifier for sexual and gender minorities, and to offer some hopeful solutions to engage with sexual and gender minorities so we can ensure that "no one is left behind."



Drew Dalton
Chair of Trustees

Acknowledgements

ReportOUT is a global human rights organisation that documents the lived experiences of sexual and gender minorities, and their communities, in different nations across the globe. We use our research to inform the public, educate others, and to campaign about human rights infringements, and the development needs of, sexual and gender identities.

This report was researched and written by Elliot Hatt, an independent Research Consultant commissioned by ReportOUT to lead our Green in the Rainbow Project. Drew Dalton, Chair of ReportOUT, provided editorial and strategic guidance to this project. We are grateful to the ReportOUT volunteers who supported this project by assisting with translation and dissemination of the online survey.

We would like to thank each of the individuals who responded to our survey and shared their experiences and knowledge of climate change. Their insights were invaluable and have greatly strengthened the findings of this report. We would also like to thank the civil society organisations that shared the survey with their members and supporters, helping us to reach a wider audience.

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About the Author

Based in the UK, Elliot (he/him) is a human rights researcher whose work primarily centres on the rights of LGBTQ people and the criminalisation of same-sex activity, as well as the criminalisation of people living with HIV.

Elliot attended the University of Sussex in Brighton where he studied law at undergraduate level and international human rights law at postgraduate level. Since finishing his studies, Elliot has gained several years experience working for human rights organisations and has been delighted to work with ReportOUT on our 'Green in the Rainbow' project.



A Note on Terminology

This report uses the acronym 'LGBTQ' to refer to people with sexual orientations and gender identities which do not align to hetero- and cis-normative assumptions. We also use the term 'queer' as an umbrella term in place of 'LGBTQ' throughout this report. We recognise that these terms, and indeed any terms, fail to fully encapsulate the diversity of language used by the people they refer to, and are not universally adopted across the globe.

We refer to the notion of 'climate vulnerability' throughout this report, however this should not be taken to imply that the risks that marginalised people face due to climate change are inherent to their character, as this vulnerability arises due to their treatment by society.

This report uses a range of terms to refer to climate change including 'climate crisis' and 'climate emergency' to highlight the urgency of the issue and to situate it within the broader spectrum of crises which impact LGBTQ people.

We avoid using the terminology of 'natural disasters' when referring to extreme weather events such as heatwaves, cold snaps, floods, droughts, and others. Although this terminology is widely used, we avoid it because it implies that these events are inevitable acts of nature and obscures the fact that human activity has caused the frequency and severity of these events to increase.

Glossary

Cisnormativity	Cisnormativity is the assumption that everyone is, or belief that everyone should be, cisgender, meaning that their gender corresponds with the sex they were assigned at birth
Climate change	Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns which can be naturally occurring, but are increasingly caused by human activity, primarily due to the burning of fossil fuels which causes greenhouse gases to be generated, trapping heat and raising temperatures
COP	Conference of the Parties
COPD	Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
Gender identity	Gender identity is understood to refer to each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth
Heteronormativity	Heteronormativity is the assumption that everyone is, or belief that everyone should be, heterosexual, meaning that they have the capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to individuals of the same gender
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
MSM	Men who have sex with men
Paris Agreement	The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change. It was adopted by 196 Parties at COP 21 in Paris, on 12 December 2015 and entered into force on 4 November 2016. Its goal is to limit global warming to well below 2, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels
Sexual orientation	Sexual orientation is understood to refer to each person's capacity for profound emotional, affectional, and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, individuals of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

Glossary

UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Methodology

The research for this report consisted in part of an analysis of existing literature on the observed and projected impacts of climate change by mainstream assessments such as those by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and the extent to which these assessments considered the disproportionate impact of climate change on vulnerable populations. Our review also assessed reports and articles on this issue by academics and civil society, and while there has been important work undertaken to examine the disproportionate dangers posed by certain kinds of climate risks, it became clear at the outset of this review that a broad consideration of the range of impacts on LGBTQ people is largely absent within mainstream climate discourse.

We therefore broadened out our research to review literature on the drivers and symptoms of queer marginalisation as well as the failures of the state response to crisis, which we propose would heighten the risk faced by LGBTQ people in the context of climate change. We reviewed the impacts of crises such as extreme weather events, economic depressions, and pandemics on LGBTQ people to further understand how the climate crisis may manifest in the lives of queer people. This report draws on literature from across the world in recognition of the global nature of the issues discussed, however there is a predominance of sources from the UK due to the nature of the funding for this project.

Additionally, we undertook primary research in the form of an anonymous online survey to assess the ways in which LGBTQ people had experienced the impacts of climate change in their lives, their levels of awareness of the crisis, and thoughts on how LGBTQ people might be better supported by governments to deal with the likely impacts. This survey was targeted primarily at LGBTQ-identifying individuals but was also open to individuals employed in civil society organisations working on LGBTQ issues.

This survey was open from 13 July – 5 August 2022 and we received 103 valid responses. Despite our efforts to disseminate the survey to a wide global audience, as well as making the survey available in four languages (Arabic, English, French, Spanish), the bulk of the respondents were based in four regions: Western Europe (37%), Sub-Saharan Africa (21%), North America (18%), and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (10%). We recognise that responses from some regions particularly vulnerable to climate change, specifically small-island nations in the Pacific, Caribbean, and parts of Asia, were limited.

Responses to some questions were non-compulsory, meaning that the total responses to each question did not always equate to 103. Where percentages are provided these are in relation to the total respondents to the specific question rather than to the survey overall. Equally, percentage totals may not always equate to 100% due to rounding up or down.

The majority of survey questions were multiple choice, however in two questions respondents were invited to give general thoughts on the ways that climate change may impact LGBTQ people, and the actions that might be taken to address them. We include excerpts of these responses throughout the report where relevant. The substantive questions which made up this survey, and the multiple choice options provided, are included in the annex to this report for reference.

An Overview of this Report

This report considers the ways in which climate change impacts LGBTQ people, assessing how climate harms can be heightened for the queer community, and highlighting that this issue has not been adequately considered within mainstream climate discourse.

Although climate change is something that impacts the lives of all people across society, like all crises, it has disproportionate impacts on those who are marginalised. This report endorses the conceptualisation of climate change as a 'risk multiplier', as it interacts with pre-existing marginalisation to heighten the risks posed to certain groups. Many groups have now been accepted as more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to their degree of socio-economic marginalisation. Here this analysis is extended to queer people, arguing that if climate harms are multiplied by the intersection with marginalisation, LGBTQ people are particularly at risk given the high levels of socio-economic discrimination and exclusion they face.

The report identifies a range of impacts on human populations that are likely to materialise in the context of the climate crisis and explores how these climate harms may be multiplied for LGBTQ people. This report contends that potential climate harms are yet further heightened by the failure of state systems to adequately consider how crises impact LGBTQ people in their planning, and to respond to the needs of queer people in their management.

Therefore, as the title of this report suggests, LGBTQ people are made invisible victims of the climate crisis, both by the failure in mainstream climate discourse to fully consider the harms posed to this community, and by failure of states to properly account for their needs in the response to crisis. These oversights leave LGBTQ people at a heightened risk as the climate crisis unfolds.

This report is divided into four parts:

- **Part I** reflects on the human cost of climate change, examining the extent to which the crisis has been accepted as a barrier to the realisation of human rights and human development broadly, before identifying a range of more specific impacts of the crisis on human populations.
- **Part II** considers the unequal harms brought about by the crisis, endorsing the notion of climate change as a risk multiplier, before identifying the various indicators of identity-based climate vulnerability which have been recognised in mainstream discourse.
- **Part III** makes up the bulk of this report as it specifically addresses the ways in which LGBTQ people are vulnerable to climate change, beginning by outlining the key drivers of their marginalisation, before considering how each of the climate harms identified in Part I may manifest to create specific and heightened risks for queer people, and finishing with a review of the ways in which the state management of crisis fails to properly consider and respond to the needs of LGBTQ people in crisis settings.
- **Part IV** concludes this report with a discussion of how LGBTQ climate vulnerability might be addressed, considering some general principles for climate mitigations broadly, noting established frameworks which may provide scope for the inclusion of LGBTQ people, and finishing with a series of recommendations to address LGBTQ climate vulnerability.

Introduction



Introduction

We live in an age defined by crisis. From economic downturns, to pandemics, to conflict, modern society is confronted with a seemingly constant stream of crises, none greater than the crisis of climate change. Although climate scientists have been sounding the alarm on the devastating link between human activity and an increasingly changing climate for decades, for much of the recent past this has been a 'back of the mind issue' for most people, something seen as a distant threat unlikely to have much if any consequence in our day-to-day lives. This, the so-called 'Giddens' Paradox' (1), has characterised both the lack of governmental action and an often laissez-faire attitude towards the issue among a majority of the public. Over the past decade, however, this societal indifference has begun to fade away, and a shift in public perceptions has been notable. For instance, in Great Britain, three quarters of adults now state that they are 'worried' about the impacts of climate change (2), and the environment is consistently cited among the most important issues facing the country, increasing more than fourfold over the past decade (3).

Despite this increase in public concern, political action to tackle the causes of the problem has largely been lacklustre. States have increasingly paid lip service to the severity of the crisis – an official declaration of a 'climate emergency' has been made in more than 30 countries (4) – yet talk is cheap, and action has been slower to materialise. There were hopes of a turning tide in climate action on the back of COP21 in Paris, after the adoption of the legally binding Paris Agreement, in which 196 countries agreed to limit global warming to 'well below' 2 degrees, preferably to 1.5 degrees, compared to pre-industrial levels (5). Despite being hailed as a genuine triumph of multilateral cooperation on climate action, the delivery on this pledge has been less than triumphant, and projections seven years on estimate that we are on course for warming of up to double the 2015 target (6).

COP26, held in Glasgow in 2021, was widely considered a crucial moment; it was the first COP to take place in the 2020s which has been called the decisive decade in our efforts to avert the worst of the climate crisis (7), and the first in which states were required by the Paris Agreement to update their national pledges on climate action (8). Despite some undoubted progress – the Glasgow Agreement was, astonishingly, the first to explicitly mention fossil fuels, and firmly established climate change as a health concern (9) – the Conference was considered by many to be underwhelming in its impact, with governments being criticised for a failure to sufficiently progress their emissions commitments and to deliver on essential financing for mitigation and adaptation (10).

Positively however, mainstream climate discourse has increasingly begun to recognise that climate change does not affect us all equally, considering how marginalised people are specifically, and often disproportionately, impacted by climate change. This has been reflected both in scientific analyses of climate harms and their impacts on human populations, as well as in political statements and through the space afforded to civil society at climate events. Recent COPs have consistently made space for events in which the perspectives and experiences of various marginalised groups, such as indigenous people, women, people with disabilities, and young people, can be considered. Mainstream discourse has also gradually acknowledged the climate justice movement, which demands that the response to the crisis of climate change acknowledges historic and continued injustices and ensures that these are addressed as part of a just transition to a greener future.

Introduction

This progression in the assessment of climate harms and the acknowledgment of the need to address injustices gives reason for hope that the international response to climate change may tackle its disproportionate impacts head on. Regrettably, however, adequate space has not yet been afforded for a consideration of the impacts of climate change on LGBTQ people, and queer voices have largely been silenced within mainstream discourse. Indeed, we have not been able to find evidence of a single side event at any iteration of COP whose focus was on the specific impacts of the crisis on LGBTQ people.

This oversight highlights an absence of knowledge on the issue of queer climate vulnerability which persists across society. In the international context and within most states, the impact of climate change on LGBTQ people appears less than a 'back of the mind issue'; it doesn't even feature as a consideration, rendering LGBTQ people an invisible victim in this crisis. This report attempts to draw some light upon this issue and demonstrate that LGBTQ people, like all marginalised people, face specific and heightened risks from climate change due their status in society. Without first acknowledging that the issue exists, it cannot be addressed.

Part I – The Human Cost of Climate Change



Part I – The Human Cost of Climate Change

1. Climate Change as a Barrier to Rights and Development

Climate change has the potential to significantly obstruct the realisation of both human rights and human development. The crisis creates new risks and exacerbates existing issues, multiplying human rights harms and hindering the advancement of living standards to the point of undoing decades of progress on development. In times of crisis the state is more likely to fail in its obligations to uphold human rights and protect individuals from violations of their rights, and efforts to ensure their development through the realisation of basic needs are undermined.

Importantly, the frameworks on human rights and development are intertwined and interdependent. A failure by states to respect, protect, and fulfil human rights makes the actualisation of human development more difficult to attain, while a failure to ensure the development of communities limits their ability to fully realise their rights. Although these frameworks are interlinked, this section will separately, and briefly, consider the extent to which the challenge climate change poses to the realisation of each has been acknowledged and acted upon. This section does not assess the specific human rights and development goals jeopardised by climate harms, as these are discussed in the section that follows.

1.1. Human rights framework

In 2015 former High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, described climate change as “probably the greatest human rights challenge of the 21st century” (11). United Nations (UN) mechanisms have increasingly recognised this challenge. In 2022, the Human Rights Council issued a resolution that recognised the negative impact that climate change has on the enjoyment of human rights (12). This followed similar observations by other human rights mechanisms, including, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR) (13), at least five human rights treaty bodies, and a range of special procedures (14).

They have been less willing to establish the protection from climate change as a human right in itself. In somewhat euphemistic resolutions issued by the Human Rights Council in 2021 (15) and the General Assembly in 2022 (16), the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment was recognised as a human right, but did not firmly place an obligation on states to tackle the clear barrier that climate change is on the realisation of this apparent right. While resolutions such as these are undoubted symbolic progression on the international stage, they are not legally binding and are therefore unenforceable; neither vulnerable states or individuals have the ability to compel polluting states to take action to uphold these resolutions. States do however have a positive obligation to respect, protect, and fulfil all human rights protected under the international treaties to which they have voluntarily acceded. Although most do not include an explicit right to a clean environment (17), or to protection from climate change, the fact that climate change creates a barrier to the full enjoyment of all human rights is well established and does require action on the part of states.

1.2. Human development framework

In 1986, the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development set out that development “aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom” (18). In an age of deepening climate crisis, the constant improvement in wellbeing seems an increasingly unlikely goal. Indeed, as with the realisation of human rights, climate change has been recognised as the single biggest threat to sustainable development of people everywhere (19).

Part I – The Human Cost of Climate Change

The recognition of this fact is clearest through the inclusion of a standalone goal in the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), highlighting the need to take “urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts” under Goal 13 (20). That climate change has been allowed to proliferate largely unabated since these Goals were adopted casts into doubt the sincerity of the global community in tackling this as a barrier to human development, however. In its 2022 report on progress towards achieving the SDGs, the UN acknowledged that current national commitments are not sufficient to limit global heating to the 1.5 degree target laid out in the Paris Agreement (21), rendering Goal 13 unachievable. Not only does the omission to adequately tackle climate change equate to a failure to uphold Goal 13, but it also makes the realisation of all other development goals more difficult, as increasingly oppressive climatic factors will interfere with socio-economic development.

Importantly, the means of powering development must also be adapted for the challenges posed by climate change, as historically economic development has relied upon the burning of fossil fuels and the overconsumption of finite resources. The countries of the Global North which have benefited most from this state of affairs – a 2019 analysis suggested that almost half (47%) of global emissions since 1751 had been contributed by the United States and the EU-28 (then including the United Kingdom) (22) – must stump up the financing for a transition to more sustainable means of development to ensure that countries of the Global South are enabled to achieve their potential while minimising the additional harm caused to the climate. Only then can the SDGs be realised comprehensively.

2. The Impacts of Climate Change

The impacts of climate change are numerous, complex, and still developing, though climate scientists are able to outline with increasing confidence the likely consequences. It is beyond the scope of this report to provide a detailed analysis of the projected impacts of climate change on the environment, though it is worth recording some of the observed and projected impacts documented by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in its sixth assessment report (2022) to underline the severity of the crisis. These include:

- Increased frequency and intensity of climate and weather extremes, including heat, precipitation, drought, fire, and cyclones.
- Substantial damage and irreversible losses to ecosystems, including deterioration in structure, function, resilience, and adaptive capacity.
- Changes to ocean environments, including acidification and sea level rise.
- Significant changes to ecosystems including shifts in seasonal timing and species habitats, with more than half of assessed species shifting pole-wards or to higher elevations.
- Mass mortality events and species extinctions (23).

The impacts of climate change on the environment in turn have a number of significant impacts on human populations, which are reliant upon a healthy and functioning environment. These impacts are increasingly materialising in our everyday lives, though we are unlikely to see the full effects for some years. The potential human impacts of the climate crisis are equally varied and interconnected, but for the purposes of this report are grouped into distinct categories, some of which will now be considered in turn. It is important, however, not to view these impacts in isolation, as they mutually influence and intersect with each other.

Part I – The Human Cost of Climate Change

2.1. Physical health

An increase in temperatures and extreme weather events has the potential to cause significant injury, illness, and even death, something which is increasingly being observed in many parts of the world. Long-term shifts in temperature norms have already had devastating impacts on human health. The more frequent and prolonged summer heatwaves observed in large parts of Europe in recent decades have brought an increase in heat-related mortality and morbidity (24). The summer heatwave of 2003, for instance, saw exceptionally high temperatures over a prolonged period, and has been attributed with the premature death of tens of thousands of people, with one study suggesting there were more than 70,000 additional deaths during this event (25).

Extreme weather events have the potential for similar or even greater impacts on physical health, and are becoming increasingly common and damaging. In March 2019, Cyclone Idai killed more than 1,000 people in the African countries of Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe, a crisis which was made more severe by a string of weather events intensified by climate change including a prolonged drought, that made the land more susceptible to flooding (26).

Temperature shifts and extreme weather events not only cause deaths directly, but have an indirect impact on human health by increasing the likelihood of certain health conditions. Degraded air condition due to increased pollution, and in some regions increased wildfires, has been blamed for an increase in the severity of symptoms of respiratory conditions such as asthma (27). One peer-reviewed study projected a two and a half-fold increase in the number of hospital admissions for heat-related respiratory illnesses in Europe by 2050 (28).

Furthermore, disease transmission rates have increased, with the IPCC noting that food, water and vector-borne diseases are all increasing in frequency (29). Although it is difficult to link individual disease outbreaks to climate change, experts are increasingly warning that some of the causes, such as unsustainable agricultural practices, and consequences, such as shifts in animal habitats and migration patterns, of the crisis make pandemics more likely (30).

Together with morbidity and mortality which can be directly linked to climate change, crises have the potential for indirect damage to public health due to strains on public resources and a reduction in the capacity of health systems. During the COVID-19 pandemic for example, NHS England reported a reduction in the treatment of health conditions during the first year of the pandemic due to the system being at capacity dealing with COVID-19 patients, and a decrease in people seeking health care (31). Although the main barrier to health-seeking behaviour were fears of catching the illness, which is of course unique to pandemics of contagious diseases, the report also identified a fear of burdening an already strained health system as another cause. In the context of the climate crisis, it is conceivable that similar concerns may arise should health systems find themselves preoccupied with helping patients of climate-related events such as heatwaves and other extreme weather, or because of a long-term reduction in health system capacities due to strained public finances. This poses a danger as a delay in seeking medical attention often results in exacerbated health conditions.

Part I – The Human Cost of Climate Change

2.2. Mental health

As with the physical impacts of climate change, the mental health consequences can be both direct and indirect. The IPCC notes that mental wellbeing has been negatively affected for those who experience increased temperatures, trauma from weather events, and loss of livelihoods and culture (32). However, climate change also indirectly impacts mental health, with ‘climate anxiety’ an increasingly damaging phenomenon.

Sometimes termed an ‘invisible injustice’, the mental health impacts of the climate emergency are often overlooked compared with the more visible impacts on physical health. Research shows a clear relationship between first-hand experience of the effects of climate change and worsening mental health, which can range from low-level interferences such as cognitive issues caused by interrupted sleep during heatwaves, to more severe conditions such as distress or post-traumatic stress disorder following extreme weather events (33). There is even evidence of increased suicide rates as a result of higher temperatures, with some studies suggesting each degree of warming beyond a certain threshold leading to a 1% increase in suicide rates (34).

Those not yet directly impacted by the climate crisis are also vulnerable to negative mental health impacts, with awareness of the crisis, anticipation of its effects, and distress at the lack of action being linked to new and exacerbated mental health issues. ‘Climate anxiety’ is an increasingly prevalent phenomenon among people who have not personally experienced significant impacts of the crisis, and is characterised by increased levels of anxiety, hopelessness, anger, and grief (35). Climate anxiety affects certain groups more than others, with young people whose futures will be most affected but who have little to no power to influence the actions taken to tackle the crisis (36), and indigenous people due to their proximity to changing geographical landscapes and interdependence on the natural world (37), likely to be most impacted.

Like with physical health impacts, climate change also has the potential to have an indirect effect on mental health by disrupting health systems due to an increased need for support, and an inability of existing structures to meet demand (38). This is particularly problematic in the context of mental health as existing systems in many countries are already inadequately designed to deal with mental health issues, neglecting to treat them with the importance and urgency assigned to physical health conditions.

2.3. Economic impacts

Extremes in temperatures and weather events cause widescale disruption and damage to infrastructure, as well as to land and water used to support essential business such as agriculture, fishing, forestry, and energy production. There is no doubt that extreme weather events are becoming more common and more costly. 2017 has been described as the year with the highest economic cost from weather events in terms of insured financial losses – driven in large part due to a trio of hurricanes to hit the Americas in Harvey, Irma, and Maria – second only to 2011 in terms of total losses when uninsured losses are factored in (39).

The IPCC has noted that land-based and tourism industries have been hit by economic damage from climate change, and that extreme weather events have decreased economic growth in the short term (40). Although this economic cost can affect all societies, and is greater in absolute terms in richer nations, it can be particularly damaging to developing countries.

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In countries where people are more likely to be engaged in land-based work or in the tourist sector, which are more easily disrupted by environmental damage than service industries which are dominant in developed countries, the financial hardship can be more enduring and therefore greater in relative terms. Equally, developing nations have fewer financial reserves to rely upon to address immediate relief needs, supplement lost incomes, and rebuild infrastructure.

When financial losses from weather events are quantified in multiple billions, the real effect on the lives of ordinary people can be obscured. Individuals working in industries affected by climate change related weather extremes are vulnerable to a loss of income, which has devastating and financially costly impacts on all aspects of life. For instance, an increase in food and water insecurity may cause individuals to seek alternative, potentially costly, sources of sustenance. Likewise, housing may be damaged or destroyed and require repairs or replacement, while damage to public infrastructure may impact the ability to access work, further limiting income sources and causing economic harm. The potential for financial harm from climate crisis is therefore substantial.

2.4. Displacement

Climate change also brings an increased risk of displacement. Most immediately, this will be in the form of temporary displacement, for instance a period of separation from homes at risk during extreme weather. In the Australian bushfire season of 2019-20 for instance, around 65,000 people were displaced in the short term as the fires spread to their neighbourhoods, with the destruction of 3,100 homes potentially leading to longer-term displacement for 8,100 people (41). In 2019, Cyclone Idai caused the displacement of more than 2.2 million people across Southern Africa as people escaped the vulnerable areas (42).

The ability for people to return to their homes depends on a number of factors such as governmental preparedness, economic resiliency, and international support, and in absence of these factors many people are left displaced for prolonged periods. In 2009-2019, there were an average of 21.5 million displacements caused by weather events, more than double those caused by conflict (43). Although many are often able to return to their homes in relatively short order, many are displaced for more sustained periods, and at the end of 2021 there were almost 6 million people internally displaced due to environmental disasters (44).

Another driver of displacement is the more permanent inhospitality of areas caused by long-term climate shifts, such as extreme temperatures, rising sea levels, and ecosystem collapse. This will create huge numbers of climate refugees – people forced to permanently abandon their homes due changes to the environment caused by the climate crisis – who will seek new homes in areas less affected by the crisis. Some estimate the number of people at threat of becoming climate refugees by 2050 could be over one billion (45).

Displacement contributes to increased poverty and food and water insecurity, multiplying risk factors for those displaced. It also brings to the fore political, economic, and demographic tensions, and increases the risk of conflict. Countries are rarely positioned to absorb large numbers of displaced people, and they are often forced to live for long periods in ‘temporary’ refugee camps which are not able to adequately provide for their needs, creating tensions between communities and increasing the risk of human rights abuses (46).

2.5. Housing

Another potential climate impact linked to displacement is damage to housing infrastructure. The same forces which make displacement more likely during the climate crisis, namely extreme weather and the inhospitality of land due to long-term climate shifts, threaten the security of individual homes and viability of neighbourhoods or entire regions. The potential destruction of buildings and possible forced abandonment of residential areas due to climatic factors increase demand for finite housing stock, resulting in shortages of homes and ultimately, high levels of homelessness. During the severe floods in Pakistan in 2022, for instance, an estimated 2.1 million homes were totally or partially destroyed, leaving millions of people temporarily homeless (47).

Other possible climate harms, such as economic hardship caused by rising prices for essential goods in short supply, such as food and energy, also increase the risk of homelessness, as people are forced to choose between spending limited money on eating, heating, or paying their rent or mortgage. Similarly, chronic physical or mental health conditions brought on or made worse by experiences of climate change may prevent individuals from earning a living sufficient to pay for their housing. Wider societal economic downturns lead governments to cut back spending on house building and maintenance, further increasing pressures on a limited housing stock, and on funding housing shelters for those without someone to stay.

Homelessness is not only a potential consequence of climate change, but a risk factor in itself. Those living on the streets are the most vulnerable to extreme temperatures and weather events, as well as pollution and degraded air quality, and may experience health issues or even death as a result (48). Homelessness is therefore a cyclical harm in the context of climate change.

2.6. Access to resources

An interruption in the accessibility of basic resources can occur as a direct and indirect consequence of climate change. The IPCC has already observed significant impacts on the accessibility of resources as a direct result of climatic factors. It has noted that increases in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events have caused a reduction in food and water security globally, and an increase in malnutrition in many communities (49). In 2022, for instance, 6.4 million people in Somalia faced acute water shortages due to a prolonged drought (50), while the worst drought for 70 years in Northern Italy resulted in the production of staple foods such as olive oil, risotto rice, and tomatoes being reduced by up to a third (51).

Climate change is also contributing to long-term shifts in the suitability of land and oceans for food production. Increases in temperatures and changes to rainfall patterns are jeopardising the long-term viability of certain food crops in some countries. Maize production is predicted to fall by 24% globally by the end of the century, for instance (52).

Although changes in global weather patterns may enable areas of land to be used for food production which were previously unsuitable, it is unlikely that production will be able to establish sufficiently to counteract losses in countries which currently produce those crops. Likewise, changes to our oceans, including warming and acidification, has had a negative impact on both wild and farmed population of fish used for food (53). These changes not only contribute to food insecurity, but has a direct financial impact on those who rely on the production of now failing crops for their income, underscoring the intersecting nature of climate risks.

Part I – The Human Cost of Climate Change

In terms of indirect impacts on resource accessibility, damage or destruction to infrastructure caused by extreme weather can cause disruption to modes of transportation of food, or damage water reservoirs and pipes. While in this case the production of food and water may not be affected, the distribution of those resources to people may be. Furthermore, displacement caused by weather events could render it difficult to ensure displaced people have adequate access to resources, as there may be a surge in populations in areas not set up to handle so many people.

2.7. Community breakdown

The importance of community for personal welfare is often overlooked in favour of health or economic factors, however, the potential disruption to community cohesion caused by climate change poses its own challenges to wellbeing. A strain on public resources can lead to reduced funding for community centres, support services, and cultural activities, which are often considered expendable by authorities during times of crisis and economic hardship. For instance, a 2019 study found that since the imposition of austerity in the UK in 2010, Conservative government-imposed cuts have led to a 17% decrease in council spending on local services, causing huge numbers of family centres, youth centres, and public libraries to close (54). As well as a disruption to funding for community services, individuals within communities may divert their attention to 'fire-fighting' climate issues as the crisis takes hold, leaving less space for developing and nurturing community.

Whatever the driver of reduced investment in and maintenance of community services, this has the potential to cause a breakdown in community cohesion, leading individuals to become disconnected and isolated, which can have a significant detrimental effect on mental health and wellbeing. Young people and those with specific support needs may also see their development inhibited. Studies have linked the decline of community services to a range of negative outcomes on areas such as education, employment, and health outcomes (55).

2.8. Conflict and hostility

Much has been made about the possibility of 'climate wars' emerging in a future world in which countries and communities struggle for survival. Although it remains to be seen whether this apocalyptic world will materialise, it is not beyond the realm of possibility for global geopolitics to be strained by environmental degradation to the point in which conflicts may arise, and states may compete for increasingly depleting resources. The UN has recognised that climate change makes conflict more likely, at least indirectly (56), and while the IPCC has found only a weak association between climate change and the prevalence of conflict to date, it has noted that in the long-term higher global warming levels are increasingly likely to affect interstate violence (57).

At the individual and community level, a rise in hostilities is a possible consequence of the climate crisis as pre-existing strains in community relations may be torn open, and new tensions may develop. For instance, as drought and crop failure become more frequent as a result of rising temperatures and extreme weather, resources become scarcer and people become more desperate. Displaced people seeking sanctuary in neighbouring countries may be met with hostility and even violence, and protections against human rights abuses can be limited. People and communities that are already stigmatised and discriminated against are most at risk in this scenario, as they may be considered an easy target for blame and for exclusion.

Part I – The Human Cost of Climate Change

Climate harm	Affected human rights	Affected Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
Physical health	Right to life (ICCPR Article 6)	Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages (SDG 3)
Mental health	Right to health (ICESCR Article 12)	
Economic impacts	Right to work (ICESCR Article 6)	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (SDG 8)
	Right to just and favourable conditions of work (ICESCR Article 7)	
	Right to adequate standard of living (ICESCR Article 11)	End poverty in all its forms everywhere (SDG 1)
Displacement	Right to housing (ICESCR Article 6)	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (SDG 11)
Housing	Right to free movement and residence (ICCPR Article 12)	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss (SDG 15)
Community breakdown	Right to health (ICESCR Article 12)	Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages (SDG 3)
Access to resources	Right to food (ICESCR Article 11)	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture (SDG 2)
	Right to water (ICESCR Article 11 – CESCR General Comment 15)	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all (SDG 6)
	Right to health (ICESCR Article 12)	Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages (SDG 3)
Conflict and hostility	Right to life, liberty and security (ICCPR Article 6(1) and 9(1))	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (SDG 16)

Table 1. Climate harms, affected rights and the Sustainable Development Goals

Part II – The Unequal Harm of Climate Change



Part II – The Unequal Harm of Climate Change

3. Climate Change as a Risk Multiplier

“We are in the same storm, but not in the same boat” (58)

It is a common retort that disasters do not discriminate, but they do not take place in a vacuum; they shine a light on and exacerbate pre-existing inequalities in society, causing most harm to those with the fewest resources to shield themselves from their effects. In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, that same retort that the disease did not discriminate was rolled out (59). While it is true that the disease could be transmitted to anyone, the way our societies are organised made certain people less able to insulate themselves from infection. People working in lower-income industries such as the retail and sanitation sectors – who are disproportionately racial, ethnic, and other minorities – were often required to be physically present at their workplaces to continue earning a living, while those in higher-income office-based roles were more able to remain in the relative safety of their own homes (60).

As the pandemic made plain the fallacy of the notion that crises do not discriminate, the notion that climate change is the ‘great equaliser’ should also be challenged. Although climate change impacts us all, marginalised people are likely to feel disproportionate impacts. This fact has been recognised by the IPCC in its 2022 report, stating that “across sectors and regions the most vulnerable people and systems are observed to be disproportionately affected” (61), and increasingly a consensus is forming that climate change is taking the largest toll on marginalised people.

Far from being a ‘great equaliser’ then, climate change is the ‘great multiplier’ (62). It intersects with existing vulnerabilities and risk factors present in communities to multiply the challenges they face in the crisis. How severely a person or group will be affected by the climate crisis will depend directly on their degree of exposure, but also indirectly on their social resiliency – that is, how well they are able to protect themselves from and respond to climate events such as temperature increases, extreme weather, or a scarcity of resources (63).

Importantly, it should be made explicit that individuals and communities are not inherently vulnerable to climate change due to one or more aspects of their identity (64). Instead, their vulnerability is a product of historic and enduring marginalisation which determines their status in society and their power and agency to propose and demand solutions to the crisis. All vulnerable populations share one key feature which makes them vulnerable to climate change, a degree of marginalisation. This factor is also what makes LGBTQ people vulnerable.

4. Recognised Indicators of Identity-Based Climate Vulnerability

Certain characteristics, some of which we touch on in this section, are now accepted or becoming accepted within mainstream climate discourse as having a significant influence on individual vulnerability to climate change (65). The effect that an individual’s sexual orientation or gender identity have on climate vulnerability are largely overlooked within mainstream discourse, however.

Although the focus of this report is on LGBTQ climate vulnerability, this section will consider in brief some characteristics which are increasingly recognised as markers of climate vulnerability for two key reasons. Firstly, more than one aspect of identity can intersect to multiply vulnerability, meaning that queer people’s experiences of climate change will not be homogenous (66). Secondly, highlighting that mainstream climate discourse is open to accepting that certain groups of people are at heightened risk provides a foundation on which to advocate for the recognition and discussion of LGBTQ climate vulnerability.

Part II – The Unequal Harm of Climate Change

4.1. Socio-economic status

Those with a lower socio-economic status are marginalised in virtually all aspects of life. It follows then that economic disadvantage is a marker of climate vulnerability. Arguably, this is the single most important indicator of vulnerability, as lower socio-economic class is a common thread that unites all other categories of marginalised identity, and economic privilege is capable of counterbalancing and overriding vulnerability markers that might otherwise create a heightened susceptibility to climate risks.

With increased purchasing power comes greater freedom of choice, including greater choice of areas to live in, while those of a lower socio-economic status are forced to live in areas less desirable for people with greater wealth, deepening inequalities in living standards (67). There is now significant evidence that environmental risks are unequally distributed along deprivation lines, with environmental hazards most prevalent in areas occupied largely by working class and poorer communities. Globally, people with lower socio-economic status often end up living on floodplains or hillsides, areas most vulnerable to climate hazards such as flooding, mudslides, and water contamination (68). Highly polluted areas are also more likely to be occupied by poorer communities; in the USA, those with low incomes are 15% more likely to live in areas projected to experience increases in childhood asthma rates due to pollution (69). Compounding these risks, poorer communities are less able to invest in hazard-reducing measures, or to insure themselves against potential losses (70). Cruelly, not only is the experience of climate harms divided along socio-economic lines, but the contributions to it are also hugely disproportionate with richer individuals being responsible for much higher rates of emissions. A 2019 study found that the richest half a percent of the human population emitted substantially more than the bottom 50% (71). Further, the global fleet of superyachts – perhaps the most obscene symbol of capitalist excess – generate as much carbon emissions as the entire 10 million population of Burundi (72).

4.2. Ethnic minorities

Ethnic and racial minority communities have also been pushed into living in more hazardous areas at a higher rate, due to their restricted socio-economic status as a result of historic and continued marginalisation. Proximity to climate change drivers, such as fossil fuel production sites, disproportionately impacts those from ethnic minorities. In North America for instance, African Americans are three times more likely to die of airborne pollution than the general population due to exposure to toxic air by virtue of their neighbourhoods being situated closer to fossil fuel production sites (73).

As well as these long-term health outcomes, the immediate health shock of weather events can take a greater toll on ethnic minorities. In New Orleans, for instance, working class communities, which were disproportionately African American, had congregated in cheaper low-lying areas most at risk of flooding, so that when Hurricane Katrina devastated the city in 2004, these communities were most severely impacted. More affluent residents were able to escape the city in their vehicles, often booking accommodation in hotels, while poorer residents, who could not afford accommodation and often did not own cars, were left in the city to deal with the aftermath and relied on government support to overcome the disaster. This highlighted additional inequalities, as although the federal and state response was criticised roundly for its sluggishness, disorganisation, and militarisation, many within the black population felt this could be attributed to the demographics of the city and those requiring government assistance (74): polling a year after the hurricane showed that 66% of African Americans felt the government response would have been faster if the victims were majority White (75).

Part II – The Unequal Harm of Climate Change

4.3. Developing nations

People in developing nations are generally at a greater risk from climate change than people in more developed nations for several reasons. Firstly, by nature of the geography of developing countries, which tend to be located close to the equator such as those in Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific (76), temperatures are higher than in more temperate parts of the world where more developed nations tend to be situated. The climate in these countries is more finely balanced, and a rise in average temperatures, as is being witnessed, is likely to have significant effects on health, food production, and water security.

Equally, many developing nations are island or coastal states, which increases their vulnerability to rising sea levels, flooding, and certain weather events such as tropical cyclones, hurricanes, and tsunamis (77). Although disasters generally represent short to medium term shocks, steadily increasing sea levels pose long-term survival risks for people living in these countries. For instance, the Marshall Islands, a country of more than 1,100 atolls in the Pacific, is threatened so severely by rising sea levels, flooding, and loss of freshwater reserves that many of its islands could become inhabitable as early as mid-century (78).

Finally, developing nations have historically been exploited by the colonial enterprises of richer nations, and continue to be disempowered within intergovernmental mechanisms such as those of the UN. Despite being most at risk in the climate crisis, the demands and pleas of governments of developing nations in climate discourse often fall on deaf ears, perhaps signified most clearly by the failure of developed nations to deliver on the funding for climate adaptation and mitigation long promised (79). Together, the dangers posed by increased temperatures, rising sea levels, and distribution of extreme weather events, heighten the levels of climate vulnerability experienced by developing nations. The IPCC has observed higher food and water scarcity in developing nations, driven by spatial and economic factors, while mortality from floods, droughts, and storms was 15 times higher for vulnerable countries in 2010-2020 compared with least vulnerable countries (80).

4.4. Indigenous people

Indigenous and tribal populations are vulnerable to climate change in many respects. They are vulnerable due to their geography, as they are often situated in tropical, sub-tropical, and polar locations, whose ecosystems are less able to absorb long-term environmental changes. Even where they are located in more temperate locations, they have often been pushed to less 'desirable' geographies by colonising powers. In the USA for instance, where native populations have had ancestral land stripped from them and been confined to much reduced territories, indigenous people are 48% more likely to live in areas more vulnerable to climate change than the general population (81).

Furthermore, indigenous people are vulnerable due to their reliance on and interdependence with the land both for sustenance and for cultural reasons, as climate change has seen their ecosystems degraded and destroyed, leading to long-term impacts on food security, cultural identity, health and wellbeing (82). Many of the drivers of climate change, such as fossil fuel production, mining, and deforestation, have already destroyed indigenous lands. Compounding this, it has been suggested by the NGO Survival International that some of the proposed 'solutions' to climate change would actually worsen the problem, threatening further land grabs of their protected land in the name of 'conservation' (83). The alienation of indigenous people from government institutions also makes them vulnerable, as continued exploitation of the land and ecosystem destruction may render them dependent on modern nation states who are often ill-prepared to provide them with appropriate support.

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4.5. Displaced and migrating people

In addition to displacement being a consequence of climate change, it is also an indicator of vulnerability. Those who have been displaced or who are in the process of migrating are at increased risk of experiencing various harms brought about by climate change due to their instability. In extreme weather or conflict situations, the safety of displaced and migrating people is jeopardised, as they may not have access to information, be beyond the reach of state support, or move into territories which are hostile to them and their needs.

Even those in more 'permanent' displacement settings such as refugee or internally displaced persons' camps are at increased risk due to the insecurity and often inadequacy of their living conditions. Food and water security and access to other resources such as adequate housing are often limited in displacement settings, and studies have demonstrated significant rates of infectious disease transmission in refugee camps (84). Further, incidents of violence can be high in refugee and displacement camps, and these acts are often undertaken with impunity. Factors such as these has led the Human Rights Council to recognise migrants and displaced people as among the most vulnerable populations to climate change (85).

4.6. Young people

As the most extreme consequences of climate change are unlikely to be seen for several generations to come, young people will be subjected to greater climate breakdown and for a longer duration. Without immediate solutions to tackle climate change, all of the human impacts of the crisis are likely to worsen over the coming decades, severely jeopardising the health, wellbeing, and development of younger populations. However, it is not just in the long-term that young people are at risk from climate change. As noted in section 2, climate anxiety is increasingly being recognised as an issue already causing harm to young people; a 2021 study of 10,000 16-25 year olds in 10 countries found that 59% were 'very' or 'extremely' worried about climate change, and 45% said that these worries negatively affected their daily lives (with higher rates in the Global South, demonstrating the intersectional nature of climate harms). A clear link between these negative emotions and a lack of faith in government responses can be identified, with almost two thirds of respondents feeling that governments are not taking responses seriously enough, are not taking appropriate climate action, and cannot be trusted to tackle the crisis (86).

4.7. Women

Women are increasingly being seen as more vulnerable to climate change than men due to historic marginalisation and a resulting lower socio-economic status. Globally, women are more often engaged in land-based work, making up 50-80% of world food production, but are denied the financial rewards of this work, being much less likely to own land and being underpaid for their work (87). Additionally, in much of the world women are often the family caregivers, which may make them less able to migrate to find better economic opportunities or to escape climate breakdown (88).

There is also some evidence that women are more likely to be killed during extreme weather events. A 2007 study of weather events over a 20 year period showed that the mortality rate for women during these events was higher than that for men, and that the more intense the event, the greater this disparity (89). This is due largely to their socio-economic status, as well as to pre-existing gender inequalities being exacerbated and compounded in disaster response settings, creating both direct and indirect risks to their safety.

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Women are also often denied the agency to influence decisions, and are therefore less involved in the development of solutions to tackle climate change (90). The needs and skills of women may therefore be overlooked as communities adapt to and mitigate the effects of the climate crisis (91). This compounds the marginalisation of women in the context of the climate crisis.

4.8. People with disabilities

The fact that people with disabilities (92) are disproportionately affected by climate change has been recognised within international rights literature (93). A majority of people with disabilities live in poverty (94), which makes them more at risk to the economic effects of climate change, as well as knock on effects such as food insecurity and access to housing (95). Furthermore, climate change exacerbates existing health conditions, which may include those that people with disabilities live with, for instance severe respiratory conditions (96).

In emergency settings the safety of people with disabilities can be jeopardised, to the point that rates of morbidity and mortality are disproportionately high (97). The specific needs and support systems for people with disabilities may be side-lined and abandoned in times of emergency. Those with physical impairments such as reduced mobility can be directly dependent on social and state support to access essential resources such as food and water, which may be disrupted in climate-induced emergencies (98), and may be less physically able to escape danger. In disasters for instance, people with disabilities face heightened risks, as emergency information may not be in an accessible form, or they may even be physically left behind in disaster response, resulting in higher death rates (99). People with disabilities are also at greater risk in conflicts, which are also potentially more likely as climate change worsens (100).

4.9. Urbanised communities

Populations have rapidly concentrated in urban areas in recent decades. More than half of the world's population now live in urban areas, and that is projected to rise to more than two thirds by 2050 (101). With this increased urbanisation comes increased population density, as well as the spread of cities into larger mega-cities. In these overcrowded, often inadequately designed and maintained environments, risks are multiplied. Temperature rises impact urban areas greatest due to the urban heat island effect (102), while natural disasters have the potential to cause much greater physical and economic damage. The IPCC has noted that human vulnerability will concentrate in urban areas, and particularly, informal urban settlements which are not set up to withstand large-scale damage (103).

Informal settlements are those which are made up of poor-quality buildings built outside of formal regulations. More than one billion people globally live in such settlements. The characteristics of informal settlements such as their location in at-risk areas, poor-quality housing, lack of piped water, overcrowding, and lack of formal services (104), make them more vulnerable to climate change.

Part III – Establishing LGBTQ Climate Vulnerability



5. Drivers of LGBTQ marginalisation

It is clear that climate change is a ‘risk multiplier’, with marginalised communities being most likely to experience the most severe effects due to their position in society, their more limited resources to insulate themselves from climate harms, and their restricted agency to influence mitigations. However, the impact of the crisis on LGBTQ people has been largely overlooked within mainstream climate discourse. This is a significant oversight; if marginalisation is the key indicator of vulnerability to climate change, LGBTQ people must be particularly vulnerable, given that they are invariably among the most marginalised people in any society and face a raft of heightened and specific barriers to the realisation of their rights and development.

This section will briefly examine some of the major ways in which LGBTQ people are marginalised, setting the foundations for a deeper consideration of the specific impacts of climate change on the community in the next section.

5.1. Criminalisation

In 2022, around 70 countries in most regions of the world continue to criminalise LGBTQ people in some form. All of these criminalise sex between men, a small number criminalise sex between women, and a smaller number still criminalise gender expression by transgender and gender non-conforming people. These laws range in formulation, scope, and severity, but are often worded vaguely, allowing law enforcement officials and the judiciary to interpret them broadly and impose their own prejudices (105).

The criminalisation of LGBTQ people is against international human rights law. This has been recognised by a growing number of bodies including the European Court of Human Rights (106), the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (107), the UN Human Rights Committee (108), and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (109). Criminalisation also encourages further rights violations; police officers arbitrarily arrest and detain LGBTQ people, subject detainees to abuse, violence, and even torture, and deny their basic rights and access to healthcare. During prosecution, those charged can be tried without a fair trial. Even where laws are not officially enforced, their existence emboldens police harassment, threats, and extortion, and puts LGBTQ people beyond the protection of the law.

The criminalisation of LGBTQ people also interferes with their development. People who are forced to hide their identities for fear of criminalisation cannot fully engage with society, and are unlikely to realise their full potential if they are threatened with arrest. Those who are subjected to prosecution and conviction under laws criminalising same-sex activity will have their work and life prospects diminished. Furthermore, the attainment of essential development needs such as access to food, water, and housing may be determined by external parties, who may hold discriminatory attitudes or be influenced by societal stigma driven by criminalisation which may result in this access being impeded or denied. LGBTQ people may also be excluded in the workplace, which is not only a barrier to their development but a financial detriment to the wider economy (110).

Other types of criminalisation can also disproportionately impact LGBTQ people even if they are not directly targeted at them. For instance, outdated laws exist all over the world which ostensibly criminalise HIV transmission but in effect criminalise people living with HIV for conduct which carries no risk of transmission and/or where there is no intent to transmit.

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These laws have a disproportionate effect on LGBTQ people; men who have sex with men and transgender people, particularly transgender women, are two 'key populations' among whom HIV rates are 28 and 14 times higher than the general population, respectively (111). This acts as a significant barrier to the health and human rights of LGBTQ people globally (112).

Another type of criminalisation that can affect LGBTQ people is that of sex work, which is criminalised to some extent in almost all countries (113). LGBTQ people can find it difficult to find and maintain formal employment due to societal stigma, so many engage in the unregulated sex trade. In the US for instance, a 2015 study suggested that almost 11% of transgender people had participated in sex work, which was even higher for transgender women (15%) and black transgender people (40%) (114). Laws criminalising sex work put these people at risk of arrest and imprisonment, and leave them vulnerable to discrimination and violence in their work due to the lack of legal protections.

5.2. Legal recognition

Another legal barrier for certain queer people is the restriction on legal recognition of gender identity. While people with non-conforming gender identities have historically been respected and even idolised in many countries, contemporary formal legal systems have generally only contained gender recognition laws since the turn of the century, and many countries still fail to provide any legal system in which one's official sex or gender can be changed, while others do so only with restrictive and pathologising requirements based on factors other than self-determination. A small minority of countries allow individuals to have their sex or gender removed from official documents entirely or adopt an alternative option such as an 'X' marker, which provide means for non-binary people to have their gender expression recognised (115).

Despite some progress at the national level, the international rights system has been slow to protect a right to legal recognition of gender identity. While UN treaty bodies have encouraged states to review and modernise laws regulating recognition of gender identity, they have not taken a strong stance in favour of a right to self-determination (116). The European Court of Human Rights has slowly chipped away at invasive requirements for legal recognition of gender identity such as sterilisation and other surgeries over the two decades since it first found a violation of the Convention in 2002 (117), but has not gone as far to endorse a self-determination model (118). The Inter-American Court of Human Rights has arguably gone the furthest; in a 2017 (non-legally binding) advisory opinion, it stated that the American Convention requires member states to adopt legal systems to enable self-perceived gender identity to be recognised in law without requirements of medical or psychological certification, surgery, or other medical procedures (119).

Nevertheless, advocates of LGBTQ rights at the international level have been clear that the right to gender recognition is an essential human rights protection, and should not require external approval or other restrictive requirements. The Yogyakarta Principles include a right to legal recognition of self-perceived gender identity as part of the protected human right to legal capacity and recognition before the law (120), and the UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity has argued that states have a positive obligation to implement legal recognition systems in line with self-determination (121). A failure to provide for gender recognition denies trans and gender non-conforming people their dignity and invades their right to privacy and expression. People whose sex or gender on identity documents do not match their gender expression are at heightened risk of harm when they engage with systems that require their identity to be checked. Furthermore, denial of legal recognition creates a barrier to education and employment, restricting their development.

5.3. Discrimination and violence

As well as being rights violations in themselves, criminalisation and denial of legal recognition encourage further rights violations through wider societal discrimination, prejudice and stigma. However, even in countries with a relatively liberal legal environment, discrimination and violence can be pervasive. A 2021 study on 'LGBTI acceptance' in 175 countries found that only 63 (36%) had an acceptance score over 5 (out of 10). Concerningly, the study found almost the same number of countries experienced a fall in acceptance since 1980 as experienced an increase (122). Although the UK was among the top 10 most LGBTQ-friendly countries in this study and is consistently among the highest ranking countries in other studies, progress has started to stall, and the UK has fallen behind other European countries due in large part to increasingly hostile attitudes towards transgender people and their legal rights (123).

Despite its comparatively higher acceptance of LGBTQ rights, there are still significant levels of discrimination in the UK. In the 2018 National LGBT survey, 40% of respondents had experienced an anti-LGBTQ incident in the previous year, which included verbal harassment and insults, non-consensual 'outing', threats, and physical and sexual violence (124). Another 2018 study by Stonewall found that around 21% of LGBT people had experienced a hate crime or incident in the previous year, rising to 41% for transgender people (125).

Societal discrimination, prejudice, and stigma also result in LGBTQ people facing barriers in, or being outright denied access to, essential services. This has wide-ranging detrimental impacts on LGBTQ people and their ability to live fulfilled lives and realise their individual development. The following subsections will consider outcomes for LGBTQ people in three key areas: healthcare, employment, and housing. In all three, LGBTQ people suffer due to outright prejudice and implicit stigma.

5.4. Health

Given the extent of societal discrimination present across the world, LGBTQ people face barriers in accessing health services and often cannot find healthcare tailored to their needs. It is perhaps unsurprising then that LGBTQ people can suffer worse health outcomes than the general population, however the extent of the disparities in health outcomes is alarming. NHS England for instance, notes that LGBTQ people fare worse than the general population in almost every analysed measure (126). Self-reported rates of mental health issues are extremely high among LGBTQ people compared with the general population; a 2018 Stonewall survey found that 52% of LGBTQ people had experienced depression in the last year, while 13% of 18-24 year olds had attempted to take their own life, with suicide attempts particularly high for trans and non-binary people (127).

LGBTQ people in England have reported significant issues in accessing appropriate healthcare (128). While increasingly an issue for the general population in England, this is particularly problematic for LGBTQ people who are likely to require more frequent care due to the worse health outcomes and higher rates of mental health issues outlined above, but also higher prevalence of HIV among men who have sex with men (MSM) (129), and transgender people (130). Trans people may have complex and ongoing healthcare requirements linked to their gender identity, but they are being inadequately served in England due to the limited services set up specifically to deal with these matters; 80% of trans respondents to a 2018 survey said that accessing gender identity services had not been easy. Where access was possible, the services were generally found to be inadequately set up to provide appropriate care (131).

5.5. Employment

There is also some evidence that LGBTQ people fare worse in employment, both in terms of access to jobs and treatment when in work. Data from both the UK (132) and the USA (133) has found that the unemployment rate among transgender people is higher, and incomes lower, as compared with the general population. Where LGBTQ people are in work, they face the risk of discrimination and abuse. Stonewalls 2018 survey found that 18% of LGBT people had been subjected to negative comments or conduct at work due to their identity in the previous year, while 12% of trans people had been physically attacked by colleagues or customers. Over a third hid their identities in the workplace to avoid discrimination (134).

Discouraged by discrimination and institutional barriers to employment, LGBTQ people sometimes turn to informal forms of work for income. This may include domestic jobs conducted 'off the books', such as cleaning or care jobs, or work which is stigmatised or even criminalised, such as sex work. Beyond the protection of employment law, this insecure work leaves people open to exploitation and underpayment.

Given the barriers put up against LGBTQ people in employment, in some countries there is evidence of higher rates of economic hardship among them as compared with the general population. In the US for instance, a 2019 analysis by the Williams Institute found that 22% of LGBTQ people live in poverty, compared with 16% of cisgender straight people. Importantly however, the disaggregated data showed these heightened rates were borne largely by transgender and bisexual women, 29% of each lived in poverty (135).

5.6. Housing

The heightened levels of discrimination and stigma against LGBTQ people results in disparities in their ability to secure safe and affordable housing. Queer people can be forced out of their homes due to familial prejudice. Consequently, LGBTQ people face exceptionally high rates of homelessness as compared with the general population; in the UK, LGBTQ people comprise up to 24% of the youth homeless population, while corresponding figures are anywhere up to 40% in the USA (136) and Canada (137). The literature shows that rejection by parents is the leading cause of these rates, while abuse and violence are also significant contributing factors.

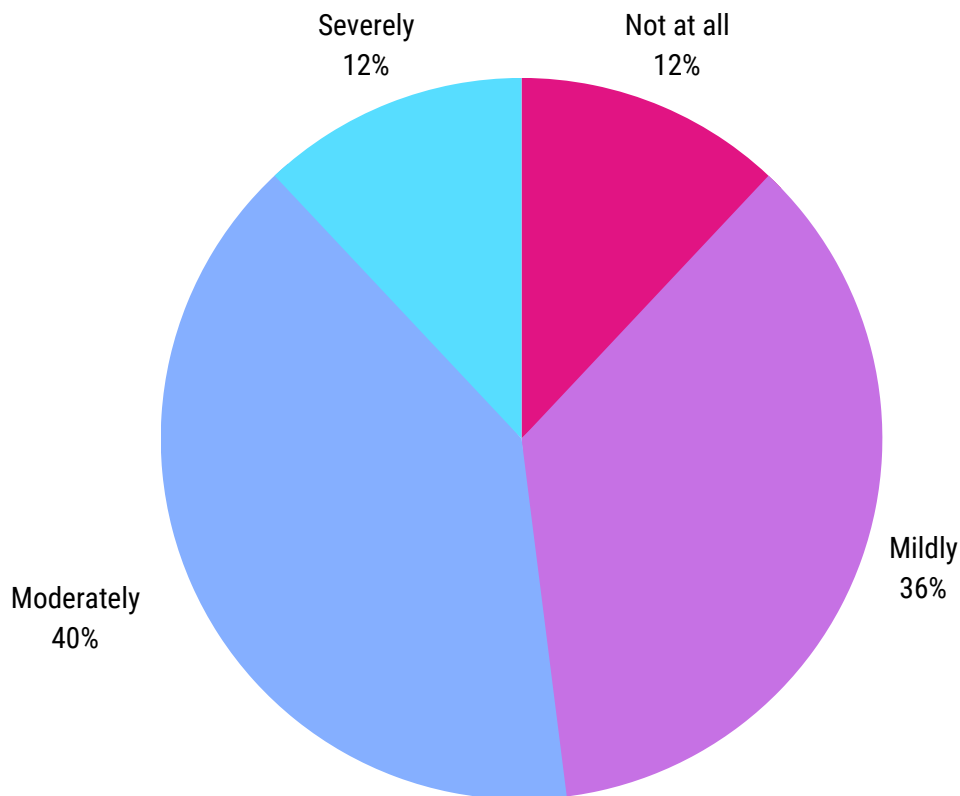
Globally, familial rejection can be even more prominent, and coupled with widespread societal stigma and even criminalisation, LGBTQ people can be left without any social networks or institutions to house and support them. With no option to live openly in their home countries, the UNHCR notes that many LGBTQ people are forced to flee their country of origin or habitual residence in order to avoid persecution or to protect their children from harm. However, this is rarely the end of their discrimination; when they arrive in destination countries, displaced LGBTQ people are often subject to similar types of discrimination from which they fled (138). Many end up in encampments for prolonged periods, which are often inadequately equipped to serve the needs of LGBTQ people and protect them from violence.

6. The Impacts of Climate Change on LGBTQ People

Having considered some of the main drivers of LGBTQ marginalisation, it is important to consider how these factors intersect with the general impacts of climate change to create specific and exacerbated harms. This section will consider each of the broad categories of climate harms outlined in section 2 and the extent to which they impact LGBTQ people. It draws on data gathered through a review of existing literature as well as primary research in the form of a survey of self-identifying LGBTQ people and those employed in organisations working on LGBTQ issues (139), to demonstrate how climate harms are manifesting in people’s lives.

In general terms, 88% of our respondents stated that they had personally felt the effects of climate change in their lives, the majority of whom described these impacts as ‘moderate’ (40%) or ‘mild’ (36%), while only 13% described these impacts as ‘severe’. Just 12% of respondents stated that climate change had not had an impact on their lives to date.

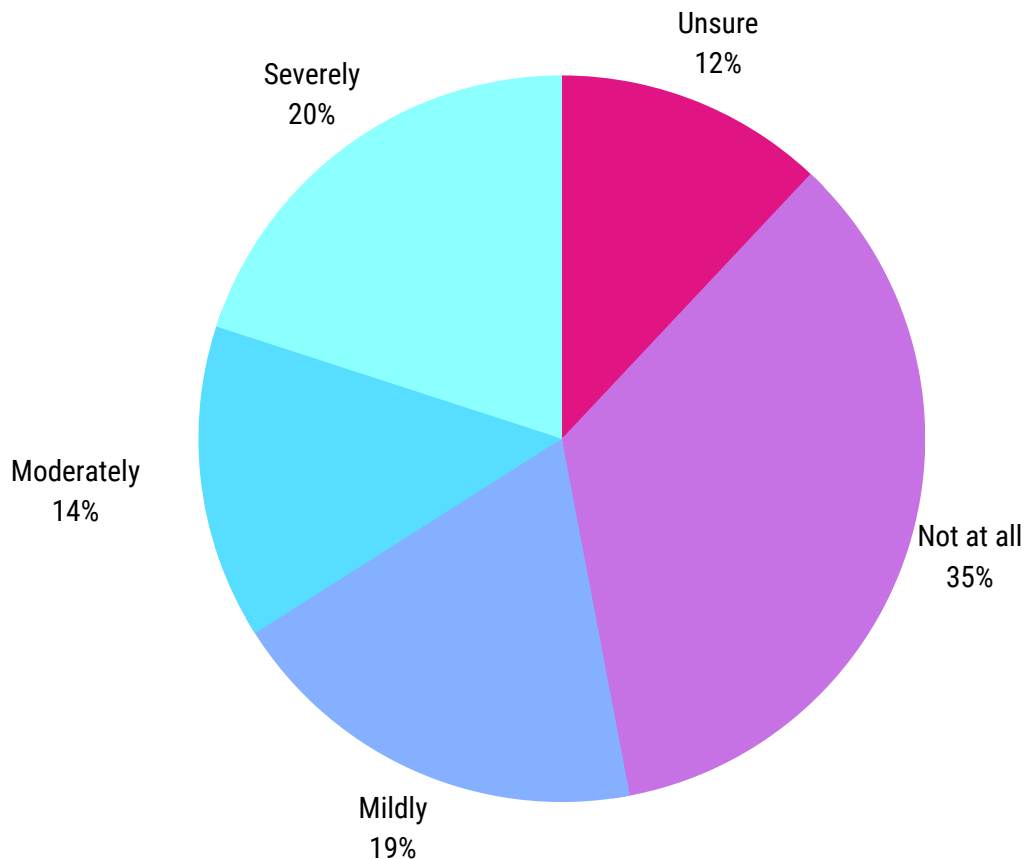
Chart 1. Extent to which survey respondents had experienced climate impacts



When asked to what extent they thought these impacts were made worse by their sexual or gender identity, 20% of survey participants responded ‘severely’, 14% ‘moderately’, while 19% believed this had made it ‘mildly’ worse. Revealingly, a greater number of our respondents believed that the climate impacts they had experienced were made worse due to an aspect of their identity other than sexual or gender identity (61% total; 25% believed there was no effect) compared with their LGBTQI identity (53% total; 35% believed there was no effect). As will be explored throughout this section, the types of impacts that our respondents had experienced vary. The vast majority had experienced extreme weather as a result of climate change (82%), but more direct impacts on their lives were mixed.

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Chart 2. Extent to which survey respondents perceived impacts heightened by LGBTQ identity



When asked to what extent they expected to experience the impacts of climate change in future, half of our respondents (50%) believed that the impact on their lives would be 'severe', 30% responded 'moderate', while 10% believed that the impacts would be 'mild'. Just 3% did not expect any impact on their lives in future, with the remainder being unsure (7%) of how their lives might be affected.

6.1. Physical health

As highlighted above, one of the major human impacts of climate change is the damaging effect on people's physical health. Although this can affect anyone, a general downward pressure on physical health will disproportionately affect groups who already experience worse health outcomes compared with the general population, one of which, as seen in section 5, is LGBTQ people.

Those most vulnerable to physical health impacts of weather events such as extreme temperatures are those with pre-existing medical conditions, or comorbidities, that can heighten the impacts of other conditions. Equally, the increase in pollutive agents in the atmosphere may cause new illnesses to form, which can intersect with existing health conditions. For instance, the development of respiratory illnesses from increased pollution is particularly problematic for people living with HIV, as respiratory conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are a comorbidity for HIV, which could result in more complex health needs (140). Given the exceptionally high HIV rates among MSM and transgender people outlined in section 5, this creates a heightened risk for LGBTQ people.

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For LGBTQ people with potentially complex health needs such as people living with HIV and transgender people, who often require ongoing access to medication such as antiretrovirals or hormones as well as other types of medical care, an interruption in access to health services could be hugely detrimental to physical health. As outlined in section 2, the increasingly disruptive nature of climate change creates a risk of such an interruption to the provision of health services. During the COVID-19 pandemic for instance, where the capacity of health services was radically reduced as they reoriented to tackle COVID-19 cases and shut down ‘non-essential’ treatments to prevent transmission, HIV care was significantly disrupted globally, with capacity for testing being reduced by around a third to a half across 44 countries, and fewer resources available for ongoing treatment (141). Equally, gender-affirming treatment and so-called ‘elective’ surgeries, which often take several years to secure, were postponed during the pandemic, causing a further detrimental effect on the physical and mental health of trans people (142).

Another circumstance in which the delivery of important health services can be impacted is due to reduced public spending, which may come about due to a diversion of government finances to tackle the climate crisis. Reflecting again on austerity in the UK, the impact of reduced public spending brought about to tackle the perceived ‘crisis’ of the national debt had profound effects on the delivery of health services. For LGBTQ people specifically, there was a significant reduction in the quality of health care provided. A 2013 report by the trade union UNISON on the impact of UK public sector cuts on the LGBTQ population found that specialised sexual health services had become inaccessible, leaving many unsure of where to access appropriate health information and support, and resulting in an increase in unsafe and risky sexual behaviour, reduced HIV and STI testing, and undiagnosed sexual infections (143). This could have significant and lasting impacts on the health of LGBTQ people.

Of our survey respondents, 37 (41%) stated that they had experienced impacts on their physical health as a result of climate change, which was defined to include illness and injury caused by increased temperatures, pollution, and other climatic factors. One trans respondent highlighted the risk that extreme heat has on access to gender-affirming treatment:

As a trans person, I receive medication through the post. I worry about the effects of extreme heat on this medication during transportation. My gender-affirming therapy means I'm more susceptible to heat stroke and this week was physically impossible to get to the shops to purchase food and drink. This affects both me and my children.

Another trans-identifying respondent demonstrated the difficulties that arise with completing everyday gender-affirming tasks in the context of the summer 2022 heatwaves in Europe:

With the current heatwave taking place in Europe, I am struggling to Chest Bind and relieve my Gender Dysphoria due to it being unsafe to do so.

Another respondent identified the potential damage that can be caused by a reduction in specialised LGBTQ health services:

In extreme weather conditions, [specialised] health facilities and Key Population led organisations may be inaccessible, hindering service uptake as most of the LGBTQ community get discriminated and stigmatised in other hospitals.

6.2. Mental health

As was seen in section 5, LGBTQ people have significantly higher rates of mental health conditions compared with the general population, and these issues are particularly severe for transgender people. This creates problems in the context of climate change in part for the same reasons as with physical health; due to the reduced human and financial resources within the healthcare system to respond to the need for mental health services. The 2018 UK National LGBT Survey found that 71% of LGBT people reported that accessing mental health services was not easy, and 72% said the wait was too long (144). This is only likely to get worse in the context of a healthcare system stretched by climatic stressors.

Additionally, the reduced capacity to maintain high levels of physical healthcare as well as possible limitation of so-called 'non-essential' surgeries and other treatments that may occur in times of crisis has a knock-on effect for the mental health of those seeking such treatments. Although mental health conditions are proven to be significantly higher among transgender people, studies have shown that their prevalence is reduced over time following gender-affirming surgeries (145). Where access to these surgeries are limited in times of crisis, as was seen in the COVID-19 pandemic, the prevalence of mental health issues is likely to remain higher than would be the case if those that want to access surgeries were able to do so (146). Similarly, the reduction in HIV testing and treatment during COVID-19 is likely to increase levels of anxiety for people living with HIV or those trying to access testing facilities.

Importantly, it is also not just the overall reduction in mental health services that matters, but in particular the reduction in LGBTQ-focussed mental health services which specialise in queer issues. For instance, during austerity in the UK, LGBTQ people reported that a reduction in queer-friendly services led them to attempt to access mental health support through general health services, whose staff were over-burdened and had inadequate training to address LGBTQ issues, resulting in ineffective support or being 'bounced' between departments (147). Further, climate anxiety is likely to have a disproportionate harm for LGBTQ people given the already higher prevalence of mental health conditions among this cohort, as an additional stressor will complicate and compound existing conditions. Equally, self-perceived LGBTQ identity is more common among younger people (148), who are most likely to experience climate anxiety. Several of the respondents to our survey identified climate anxiety as being an issue for the community:

In terms of indirect impacts, I believe LGBTQ+ people are more at risk for struggling with climate anxiety due to our increased likelihood of forming progressive or politically left-leaning communities. When our communities are passionate about climate change, the discourse is inescapable.

There is a lot of struggle and anxiety in general, and now also the eco-anxiety is strongly coming along.

Additionally, the inability to experience activities which might ordinarily provide relief for mental health challenges was identified as something that may have a negative impact on general wellbeing:

As a queer person, the outdoors are a safe haven. As it gets progressively warmer, it's becoming less and less enjoyable to be outside and be in outside safe spaces.

In total, 66 respondents (73%) reported that they had experienced mental health impacts as a result of climate change, making this the second highest category of experienced effects.

6.3. Economic impacts

As there is evidence that some LGBTQ people are more likely to be in poverty or unemployed than the general population, they are less likely to have financial resources to rely on to protect against economic hardship. They are therefore likely to feel greater shocks caused by economic stressors, both in the short and long-terms.

In the short term, crises can impact LGBTQ people's jobs. There is some evidence in some countries that LGBTQ people were more likely to lose their jobs during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic compared with the general population (149). This might be because LGBTQ people were likely to be in more insecure forms of work or on unfavourable contractual terms which made them easier to dismiss, but could also be attributable to conscious or subconscious employer prejudices that might have resulted in LGBTQ staff being seen as less essential to the team than others, or more tolerable choices for redundancy based on heteronormative assumptions of family dependencies.

Importantly, the data available on the impact of crises on employment will often not include work which is informal or criminalised. Government support mechanisms often fail to address the needs of sex workers during responses to economic hardship due to invisibility of or hostility towards the industry. During the COVID-19 pandemic, sex work was hit hard by government restrictions and changes in client behaviour, and sex workers were largely excluded from government economic support initiatives available to those in regulated jobs as they could not prove their employment status and income (150).

In the longer term, LGBTQ people, who often already face higher rates of unemployment, may face greater levels of hardship and reduced work opportunities during economic downturns. This is another factor pushing some into unregulated and insecure forms of work, where minimum pay is not guaranteed. During UK austerity it was reported that sex workers were forced to slash prices as their clients were less able to afford their services, leading to a rise in financial instability and incidents of violence (151).

Twenty-two respondents to our survey (24%) identified that they had experienced economic impacts, including a loss of work, due to climate change. Although fewer than for physical and mental health impacts, we anticipate this number to rise as climate-induced economic hardship becomes more common and more industries become financially unviable. Many of our respondents suggested that they believed LGBTQ people were likely to suffer greater economic hardship due to climate change, for instance:

I think the climate crisis is bad for everyone. Although I can see why LGBTQ+ persons, who are historically more vulnerable to economic hardship, might feel the effects more.

Loss of livelihood - most of the LGBTQ [community] live hand to mouth. This includes LGBTQ sex workers.

I suspect in any crisis marginalised groups, like LGBTQI+ people are likely to be disproportionately affected as they are already made vulnerable, likely to be less economically and socially resilient and less able to access any support services established to deal with the crisis.

6.4. Displacement

As seen in section 2, an increased rate of displacement is an inevitable consequence of climate change, and the swelling of populations of climate refugees, both temporary and permanent, is already evident. For LGBTQ people, the risks posed by displacement are magnified; not only are they subject to the same precarities faced by all displaced people such as food and water insecurity, but they also face specific risks due to their sexual and gender identity.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has found that displaced LGBTQ people are vulnerable in transit and in asylum, as displacement centres and receiving countries can be environments with high levels of stigma and discrimination, sometimes even more so than those countries in which they were forced to leave (152). Unlike other groups, displaced LGBTQ people often feel unable to rely on authorities or humanitarian actors for support, either due to stigma or an unawareness of how to address their needs. Reception centres are often not adapted for the needs of LGBTQ people, and they may face hostility, inappropriate behaviour, or even violence (153). Importantly, the issues faced by sexual and gender minorities are not universal, and vary by identity. Transgender people, for instance, are not only at risk of violence and abuse if they express their identity, but may have difficulties in transit if their legal documents don't match their gender expression, which can result in mistreatment such as invasive body searches (154). Lesbian and bisexual women are also vulnerable in displacement environments; in the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake, so-called 'corrective rape' of lesbian and bisexual women was reported to be widespread in displacement camps (155).

Case study 1: Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya

Kakuma Refugee Camp in north-western Kenya is home to a growing number of refugees, around 350 of them being LGBTQ (156). Although Kenya is considered relatively safe for queer people in the region, on arrival at the camp LGBTQ people experience extreme levels of discrimination. One study by Rainbow Railroad suggested that 93% of LGBTQ inhabitants reported having verbal insults directed at them, with 83% experiencing physical assaults. While many are integrated throughout the camp, a significant minority of LGBTQ people live collectively in Block 13, which is said to be a place where sexual orientation and gender identity are openly displayed (157). This increased visibility and community comes with an increased risk, and physical violence against the group is common. The LGBTQ group living in Block 13 has been subjected to multiple incidents of violence, including a suspected arson attack (158).

Particularly concerning is the fact that the police and security services charged with maintaining order within the camp were unresponsive to the systemic violence and discrimination committed against the LGBTQ population in Kakuma. Where individuals sought police assistance, 88% reported this being denied (159). Reports suggest police demanded bribes in exchange for assistance, something unaffordable for a majority (160). One lesbian respondent to the Rainbow Railroad study described her pain at having to witness the men who raped her walking freely around the camp due to the police's failure to respond to the incident. Also concerning is the denial of services to LGBTQ people in the camp; 83% reported services being denied, and 76% experienced withholding of shelter (161). The prevalence of discrimination, abuse, and violence, and the failure of police to adequately respond, makes Kakuma a site of re-traumatisation for LGBTQ people.

While some might suggest that displaced LGBTQ people should hide their identities in order to avoid issues in temporary camps, this misses the point. For many, it may be impossible to be 'discrete' about their identities, either because there are others in the camp who are aware of and disclose their identity, or because their physical appearance or other characteristics tend to reveal their identities.

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Even if others can successfully conceal their identities, this is an extremely psychologically damaging experience, and there is no guarantee that it would only be short-lived, as many find themselves in apparently 'temporary' accommodation for years. Many therefore feel that the only reasonable option is to seek asylum in countries perceived to be a safer destination to live openly as themselves.

Claiming asylum on the basis of sexual or gender identity is inherently difficult however, even where countries have recognised this as a legitimate ground for asylum. Those forced to leave their homes for climatic reasons but unable to move on to displacement camps due to persecution are required to evidence this to claim asylum. LGBTQ people often have difficulty 'proving' their identity when they had to conceal it in their destination of origin for their own safety, while the danger they are fleeing may also be difficult to evidence if the harms are anticipated and yet to materialise. Furthermore, there is evidence that in many countries asylum processing officials often display a lack of nuanced understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity, asking invasive questions, and relying on their own biases and stereotypes to determine the credibility of a claim (162).

In the UK thousands of people seeking asylum are routinely detained each year, and studies suggest that LGBTQ people are particularly at risk at the hands of the brutal asylum system. A study by UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group (now Rainbow Migration) and Stonewall involved interviews with 22 LGBTQ asylum seekers and found that the detention system was deeply damaging to their health and wellbeing. They faced discrimination, harassment, and bullying from other detainees as well as staff (163), and are detained without adequate access to information and basic necessities, effectively being treated like prisoners (164). This causes long-term impacts on the mental health of those detained, and can even result in many considering taking their own lives (165). The processing of applications is also found wanting, as interviewers often resort to inappropriate questioning, display a lack of sensitivity, and deny their experiences (166). Countries of origin are often inaccurately considered 'safe' based solely on a lack of criminalisation, but where the law in their home countries does criminalise LGBTQ people, detention is an especially cruel response to queer asylum claims (167).

In the context of increased displacement brought about by climate change, some of those displaced will likely opt to seek asylum in countries such as the UK, which are less likely to experience extreme weather and environmental breakdown. In the UK, LGBTQ asylum seekers will not be entering a country which is currently positioned to process their claims with respect and dignity. Increasingly, the options for safe travel to the UK are being closed down, and arrivals being treated with increased levels of hostility.

In our survey we found that eight respondents (9%) reported experiencing displacement as a result of climate change. Individuals identified potential risks for LGBTQ people in the context of increased displacement:

I think the impacts will be greater as there could be difficulties for climate refugees due to their sexual orientation or gender identity that would reduce their safety and limit their ability to get help.

Refugees are likely to be victims of violence (be it violent crime, or violence inflicted by police and other state security personnel) anyways. LGBTQI+ people fleeing climate emergencies will, logically, be even bigger targets (especially in hostile countries) due to the stigma towards LGBTQI+ people and our identities.

6.5. Housing

There are several elements of the housing circumstances of LGBTQ people which interact with the impacts of climate change to increase their vulnerability. LGBTQ people are often more likely to live in major urban areas, which are deemed more accepting of sexual and gender diversity, have better specialised services, and more like-minded people. In London, for instance, there is higher proportion of LGB people compared with other regions (168). As the IPCC considering people in urban areas to be particularly at risk from rising temperatures (169), this has a disparate impact on LGBTQ people who are more likely to be situated in cities.

The high rates of homelessness seen among the LGBTQ community also puts them at risk from climate change. As seen in section 2, those who live on the streets are more vulnerable to extreme weather, as they have less means to physically shield themselves. They are also more at risk from pollution caused by both the drivers and consequences of climate change. For instance, queer people living on the streets of Alberta and British Columbia in Canada experience the brunt of smoke and smog produced by increasing wildfires (170).

The marginalisation of LGBTQ people, including direct exclusion from formal housing settlements, as well as the indirect effect of reduced economic stability, can lead to their habitation in areas less desirable and therefore more prone to pollution or other environmental hazards. For instance, the flooding which followed Hurricane Katrina largely spared the traditionally gay male neighbourhoods of New Orleans, but those which were home to many lesbians, transgender people, and especially queer women of colour, were severely flooded due to geographical and social factors (171). LGBTQ people can also be forced into informal settlements, which as the IPCC notes are particularly vulnerable to climate change.

Case study 2: Gully Queens

Labelled as possibly “the most homophobic place on Earth” in 2006, Jamaica is a country which has been known to be hostile to LGBTQ people (172). Same-sex activity is criminalised in Jamaica, and although rarely enforced, the effect is to outlaw the very existence of LGBTQ people, and to give tacit approval of discrimination against this marginalised group. Indeed, the levels of violence and abuse faced by queer people in Jamaica is severe; in recent years reports of beatings, stabbings, and mob attacks have been frequent, even leading to the murders of two gay men in 2013 (173).

In this harsh terrain it’s no surprise that queer Jamaicans seek refuge, but ostracised from ordinary forms of housing, many LGBTQ people find themselves homeless and some have been driven, quite literally, underground. Self-styled as the ‘Gully Queens’, a group of LGBTQ Jamaicans made their home in the storm drains of Kingston (174). Although the gully may be dark and unsanitary, it offers something in short supply for LGBTQ people: relative safety among a like-minded community. In the context of climate change, however, that safety is in jeopardy.

As a coastal city in a small island state, Kingston faces environmental risks from sea level rise, flash floods, hurricanes, and earthquakes. Indeed, Kingston has been described as one of the world’s most vulnerable cities to climate change (175). With a high prevalence of informal settlements, many communities in Kingston are at risk from climate hazards and less able to build resilience (176). This is perhaps no truer than for the group of Gully Queens who set up home in the storm drains. As sea levels continue to rise, tropical storms increase in intensity, and earthquakes continue, those LGBTQ people forced into this informal settlement are at great risk of coming into physical harm.

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Turning to our survey, seven respondents (8%) stated that they have experienced homelessness as a consequence of climate change. One respondent identified the potential for LGBTQ people to be pushed into less desirable areas, which in turn may have adverse effects on health:

Depending on discrimination factors in the workforce, employment, and housing, they could be more likely to be placed in a more polluted environment. Here, they could experience a greater likelihood for health issues and concerns.

Another recognised that losing secure housing can be particularly problematic for LGBTQ people who may encounter systemic discriminatory factors which may make it more difficult for them to find alternative accommodation:

If you lose your home in a wildfire [as an LGBTQ person] you might have more trouble securing somewhere to live.

6.6. Access to resources

A reduction in food and water security is likely to hit those marginalised, including LGBTQ people, the most. Where food production falls prices increase, and those with fewer financial resources are less able to absorb additional costs and may find themselves going short. Equally, scarce resources may only be accessible for those with high socio-economic status, which may exclude LGBTQ people.

Additionally, scarce resources are more likely to be shared among 'in-group' members, at the exclusion of people who are other-ed. In societies which marginalise people who don't conform to expected norms, it is less likely that support would be forthcoming for other-ed people who are struggling to access resources. In the context of disasters, this may be even more pronounced. The need for access to food and water can be more immediate in the wake of a disaster, and LGBTQ people may not have the same depth of social contacts and networks in place to help them access these resources compared with the general population, meaning that the community has to meet its own needs (177). Where LGBTQ people are actively blamed for disasters, discussed further below, exclusion from resource sharing may be exacerbated.

Exclusion from essential resources such as food and water has both immediate impacts on the ability to survive, as well as health impacts over the medium to long term. Ongoing or repeated resource shortages increases the risk of malnutrition and dehydration, which can cause significant health impacts and even lead to death.

Of our survey respondents, 28% (26) identified that they had personally experienced issues with accessing resources such as food and water as a direct consequence of climate change. Three responses included below elaborate on this issue:

Any future scenario that pits people against each other in the context of resource scarcity is going to have a significant impact on individuals and communities seen as out-group rather than in-group. Media coverage in recent years has attempted to turn trans people in particular into a visible out-group, meaning that in-group members are already primed ahead of a worsening climate situation to discriminate against queer and trans people. It doesn't feel like too much of a stretch to assume that in-group people will be more inclined to help & share resources with other people they identify as in-group ("nice", conformist, potentially capable of unassisted reproduction) at the expense of people who've already been identified as out-group.

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As the climate emergency heightens and resources become more scarce, minorities could be targeted especially if the crisis gives rise to more right wing authoritarian regimes. The minority characteristic such as LGBT+ could be used as justification for depriving these groups of scarce resources in favour of the majority.

Although there is no research on how climate impacts on food or water security will impact LGBTQI+ communities, they are disproportionately food insecure and have higher rates of chronic illnesses that could be detrimentally impacted by water insecurity.

6.7. Community breakdown

As outlined in section 2, the importance of strong community networks and services for personal wellbeing cannot be overstated. For queer people who may experience family rejection or a feeling of not belonging in their hometowns, finding a community of like-minded people can be a lifeline. When LGBTQ people, particularly young people, move away from existing social ties in search of a new start, the availability of both properly funded public services and active community networks are essential for LGBTQ people to thrive. However, in times of crisis and financial hardship, these services and networks can be restricted and sacrificed, having significant detrimental impacts on queer people.

Two non-climate crises over the past decade demonstrate the damaging – and in some ways disproportionate – impact that community breakdown can have on LGBTQ people. Firstly, under UK austerity in the 2010s, specialist LGBTQ community services, including information and advice services, LGBTQ forums and support groups, youth services, and social cohesion projects, were widely cut or curtailed which led to increased feelings of isolation, and a reduced ability to find necessary support (178). These issues were particularly acute for LGBTQ people with intersecting minority identities, who experienced disadvantage in additional ways (179). For LGBTQ people, experiences of isolation can be particularly damaging due to the already high prevalence of mental health issues, which may be exacerbated.

As a second example, the COVID-19 pandemic sharply illustrated the damage that community breakdown can have on LGBTQ people. A 2020 survey of 1855 LGBTQ people in Ireland ascertained that the COVID-19 lockdown had a disproportionately damaging impact on their mental health; 62% experienced a decline in mental health compared with 51% in the general population (180). The lockdown exacerbated feelings of isolation from their community and of not belonging at home, contributing to an increased reliance on potentially harmful coping mechanisms such as drinking and smoking (181). This example demonstrates the damage that LGBTQ people can suffer as a result of community breakdown, which may arise in the age of climate crisis.

Extreme weather events can also cause an interruption to community resources, both in terms of destruction of physical spaces and reduced capacities of community groups which may sacrifice normal services to ‘fire-fight’ the immediate challenges created by disasters. In the wake of the 2010 Haitian earthquake, LGBTQ people reported that the greatest impact on their lives was the decimation of limited physical spaces, social networks, and support services, creating increased levels of loneliness and isolation. The leading community organisation in Haiti for MSM, SEROVie, pivoted to provide emergency support to its members as many LGBTQ people found themselves homeless, destitute, and grieving in the days and weeks after the earthquake. This resulted in the organisation discontinuing all regular services, which reduced the ability for LGBTQ people to use the space for community-building and networking (182). Disasters such as this have the potential for significant negative impacts on community cohesion, health, and wellbeing.

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One respondent to our survey suggested that climate change might disproportionately affect LGBTQ people as they are often not able to rely on the support networks others may have access to:

Maybe the fact that a lot of queer people may not have the same support networks in place.

Another alluded to the difficulty in leaving home to connect with community when extreme weather hits:

Leaving a household even for a short period of time becomes harder if the other option is to bake to death in this heat.

6.8. Conflict and hostility

LGBTQ people are particularly vulnerable in times of conflict, which may be made more likely by climate change. Pre-existing hostilities towards LGBTQ people, which in times of peace may manifest as discrimination or stigma, come to the surface in crises and may be acted upon through acts of violence. The relative lawlessness that can appear in conflict zones allows anti-LGBTQ violence to take place with impunity, leaving queer people without adequate safeguards and extremely vulnerable.

Examples of LGBTQ people being targeted for violence in times of conflict are numerous. As Human Rights Watch reported in 2009, violence against LGBTQ people rose following the invasion of Iraq in 2003, with severe violence and execution of people perceived to be LGBTQ being reported. ‘Death squads’ acted with impunity, executing people suspected of being gay merely on account of trivial aspects of their physical appearance such as hair length or clothing (183). That same year, Amnesty International had reported that as many as 25 alleged gay men had been killed in Baghdad in a matter of weeks (184). More recently, threats, violence, and sexual assaults have been widely reported since the Taliban retook control of Afghanistan in 2021 (185). The Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity has documented how hostility against LGBTQ people can also be weaponised as an opportunistic tool during fighting, citing that opposing sides of the long-ongoing conflict in Colombia exploited societal prejudice against LGBTQ people to gain perceived legitimacy (186).

The violence suffered by LGBTQ people during times of conflict has significant impacts on physical and emotional health, with psychological conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder emerging (187). This is particularly damaging for LGBTQ people who already suffer mental health conditions which may be complicated and exacerbated by these experiences. These consequences, as well as other factors such as social complicity in violence, rejection of those who were forcibly ‘outed’, and loss of support networks may make reintegration more challenging post-conflict (188).

A related indirect impact of the climate crisis for LGBTQ people is the potential for backlash in the wake of disasters. Globally there have been countless examples of LGBTQ people being blamed for the occurrence of extreme weather events, with some religious leaders claiming they are a display of their god’s disapproval of LGBTQ tolerance. This was observed following Hurricane Katrina in 2004, with televangelist Pat Robertson blaming “immorality and debauchery” in New Orleans, the 2010 Icelandic volcanic eruption when the Association of the Russian Orthodox Experts blamed gay rights activism (189), and in the UK where a UKIP councillor blamed a series of floods in 2014 on the recent adoption of same-sex marriage (190). While easy to deride, statements like these can have real world consequences. In Haiti for instance, at least one attack on a gay man was attributed to sermons given by religious leaders blaming the 2010 earthquake on LGBTQ people for invoking the ‘wrath of God’ (191).

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An increase in extreme weather events like these may create heightened risks for LGBTQ people unless latent hostilities are tackled.

Many of our respondents identified this religious hostility in the wake of crises. In the words of one respondent, LGBTQ people are “scapegoats for a dying world”. Other responses included:

People from African countries attribute calamities to LGBTQ as a curse from God. This in turn hikes levels of insecurity and further fuel phobic attacks.

In areas where same sex rights are not recognised and orthodox religious views are politically reflected; climate change may be seen as “punishment” for forbidden sexual practices and LGBTQI+ are likely to be blamed socially and politically- and judicially.

Officeholders often exploit demographic hostilities for political gain, punching down against marginalised people as a distraction in times of political and economic instability which is likely to increase during the climate crisis. Although a cynical and often transparent ploy, this rhetoric can resonate with sections of the population, especially those who may feel that their needs have been deprioritised over other groups (192). Migrants, refugees, and welfare claimants are frequent targets of these tactics, but LGBTQ people also receive this treatment as politicians attempt to shore up support by exploiting people’s prejudices.

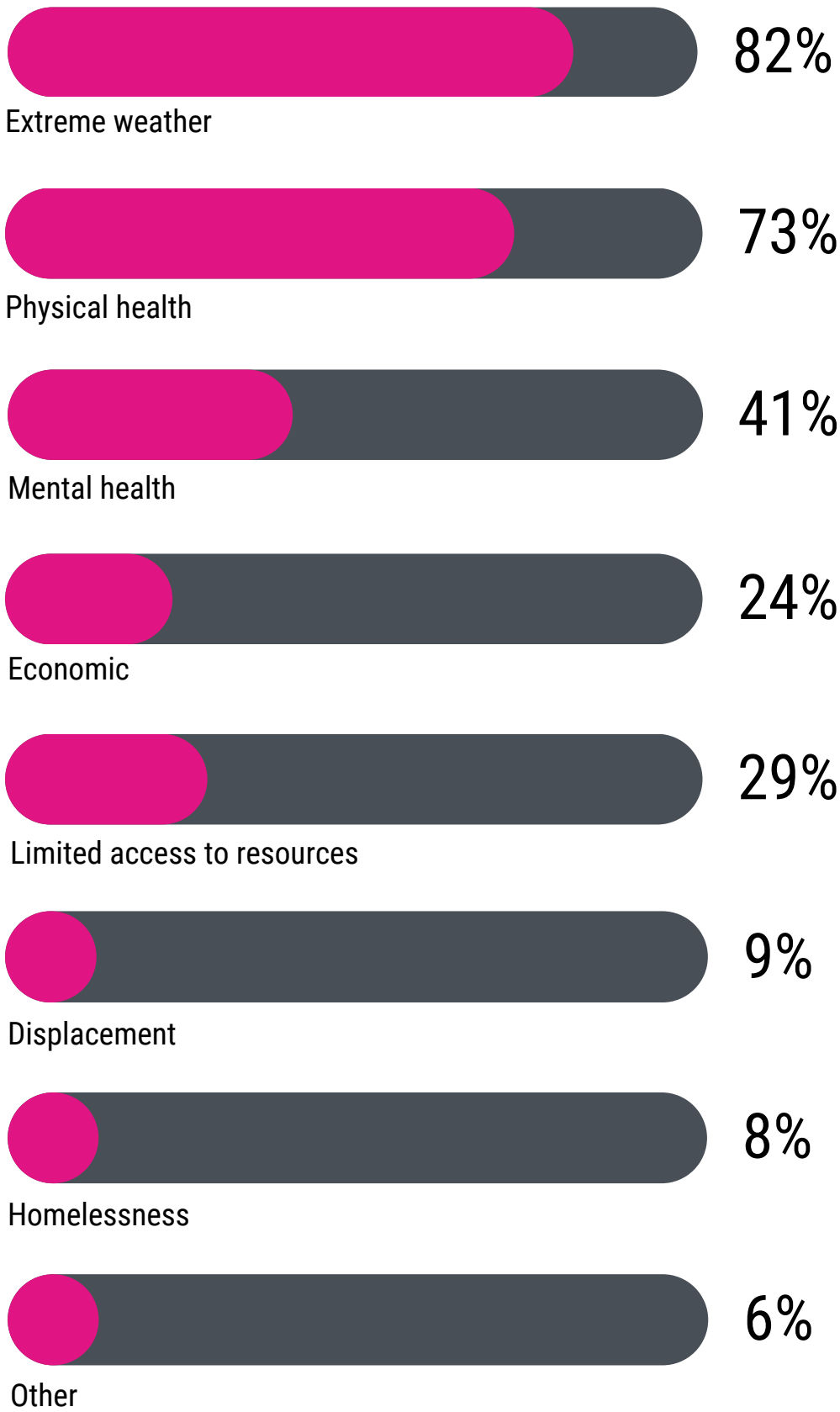
This has been observed across Europe, including in recent election campaigns in Moldova, Poland, and Hungary (193). In the UK, the Conservative Government has in recent tumultuous years used the rights of transgender people as a ‘culture war’ issue, exploiting anti-trans sentiment among the media, religious groups, and so-called ‘gender critical’ feminists. This has had real-life consequences, such as the abandonment of commitments to reform the Gender Recognition Act (2004) (194), and increased barriers to gender-affirming treatment (195).

As one respondent to our survey alluded to, the increased risk of turmoil that may be encountered during climate breakdown might give rise to further anti-LGBTQ hostility:

I think there is a real risk of an increase in the scapegoating of minorities in periods of economic, social and environmental upheaval. While they may not be directly blamed for disruptions, historically any period of chaotic change has been accompanied by a decrease in tolerance.

Part III – Establishing LGBTQ Climate Vulnerability

Chart 3. Types of climate impacts experienced by survey respondents



7. How Crisis Management Fails LGBTQ People

“If you are invisible in everyday life, your needs will not be thought of, let alone addressed, in a crisis situation” (196).

The scale of the climate crisis requires an inter-governmental response. As individuals and groups of people we are reliant on governments to take appropriate action to limit a worsening of the climate crisis and mitigate its effects. We are also reliant on the state to take appropriate actions to manage individual crises that arise within the broader climate emergency, and to ensure that the particular and varied needs of people affected are understood and addressed.

This poses a problem for marginalised people who may already be more reliant on state support. As seen in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina discussed in section 4, New Orleanians with greater financial means were able to remove themselves from harm and leverage their economic power to provide for their immediate needs, while those with reduced socio-economic status, particularly African Americans, were reliant on the state to provide shelter, food, water, and other resources. It became abundantly clear in the days and weeks that followed that the state lacked the knowledge, resources, and urgency required to provide suitable aid for those that needed it.

LGBTQ people often suffer a similar fate in the state response to crisis. High levels of economic hardship among LGBTQ people results in their being less able to rely on personal resources to respond to emergencies, requiring a greater need for state support. However, in many countries intrinsic societal discrimination, stigma, and even criminalisation, can lead LGBTQ people to remain hidden, avoiding interaction with state systems in order to avoid abuse. Even in countries more accepting of queer identities, the lack of LGBTQ people in positions of power can result in their perspectives being silenced. Within this context, the needs of LGBTQ people can be overlooked, neglected, and actively denied in crisis management. This has led OutRight International to state that “the lack of response to the specific impact of disasters on LGBT communities and individuals is itself an emergency that has doubtless resulted in unnecessary suffering and an untold number of deaths” (197).

The failure to properly address the needs of LGBTQ people in the context of crises manifests in several stages of their management. This section will consider these stages in turn, with reference to real world examples of response to crises including extreme weather events, conflicts, pandemics, and economic depressions.

7.1. Invisibility in crisis preparation

The marginalisation of LGBTQ people can result in their needs being overlooked in crisis planning and preparation, which creates great potential for harm when crises do arise. A failure to undertake impact assessments of potential crises on LGBTQ people, consult with LGBTQ communities, or to employ LGBTQ people in decision-making roles, leads to their vulnerability in crises settings. In absence of LGBTQ people in positions of power or consultation with queer communities, crisis response policies can be hetero- and cisnormative. Heteronormative assumptions of family units can be built into policies on resource distribution which may later lead to queer couples and families being treated with suspicion in relief settings or being totally excluded. Aid may be distributed in line with pre-determined priority groups, which can favour ‘traditional’ family units over individuals (queer or otherwise) or queer families, while reunification efforts may be hampered by the failure to acknowledge same-sex relationships (198). Policies on the preparation of aid supplies such as clothing and sanitary products can suffer from the same heteronormative assumptions of family composition, so that same-sex couples are not able to access the resources they need.

Part III – Establishing LGBTQ Climate Vulnerability

Equally, cisnormative assumptions in crisis policies may result in an overlooking of the needs of transgender and gender non-conforming people in crisis environments. Without inclusive policies in place, transgender people may face obstacles in receiving aid and may be treated with suspicion due to identity documents which don't match their lived gender. Further, a failure to understand the health needs of transgender people can result in prepared aid supplies neglecting necessary medications and other gender-affirming resources.

The exclusory nature of crisis policies was recognised by respondents to our survey, with one stating that:

[LGBTQ people] face institutional barriers due to cisheteronormative climate adaptation and disaster policies.

The failure to properly consider the needs of LGBTQ people and their increased vulnerabilities in the context of planning for disasters is endemic. The United Nations Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 considered the disparate impact that disasters have on a range of marginalised groups, but failed to include LGBTQ people within this category (199). At the national level, research conducted in 2021 uncovered that only five countries mention LGBTQ people in their official disaster policies (200).

As Goldsmith, Raditz and Méndez point out, governments can and should legislate to require authorities to give appropriate weight to the impact of disasters on LGBTQ people and other marginalised groups within their disaster planning policies (201). California has adopted landmark legislation on this issue, legally requiring local authorities to update emergency planning documents to address how different communities living in their jurisdiction, including sexual and gender minorities, are served by emergency planning and preparedness (202). A failure to undertake a review of the extent that crisis planning policies include LGBTQ people make it more likely that they will suffer a range of harms when crises unfold.

7.2. Exclusion from immediate relief systems

There are numerous examples, some of which have already been discussed in this report, of queer people being excluded from state relief systems in the immediate aftermath of crises. Susie Jolly of the Institute of Development Studies recounted incidents in which female couples and a hijra-identifying person were denied government support in India following a typhoon as they did not fit rigid identity categories (203). In New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, some in same-sex relationships were excluded from disaster relief provided to 'families', which limited this concept solely to heterosexual people, resulting in some gay couples being resettled in different cities (204).

International humanitarian organisations, to whom the response to crisis may be in part or totally delegated, can also be inadequately set up to support non-confirming identities. Matcha Phorn-In, a lesbian feminist human rights defender working to support women in disaster-prone Thai villages at the border with Myanmar, highlights that humanitarian programmes tend to be heteronormative and reinforce patriarchal perspectives of society, excluding non-traditional families, such as lesbian couples, from certain relief structures. This was seen following the 2010 Haiti earthquake, when emergency food rations supplied by international humanitarian organisations were distributed to female heads of households, which had the unintended consequence of excluding gay men and transgender people. In one incident this policy led a desperate gay man to dress in feminine clothing to conceal his identity in an attempt to receive food aid, but alarmingly, he was discovered and beaten until he left (205).

Part III – Establishing LGBTQ Climate Vulnerability

Other types of organisations may also take on relief duties. As Goldsmith, Raditz, and Méndez highlight, in the US there has been a rise in faith-based organisations operating disaster response and relief centres due to reductions in state funding. This poses a unique problem for LGBTQ people, who still today continue to be subjected to prejudice by many faith-based groups in the US. This can manifest in the total exclusion of queer people from relief settings, such as in the wake of Hurricane Katrina where anti-LGBTQ sentiment among churches resulted in the exclusion of same-sex families from relief services (206).

Case study 3: Aravanis

On Boxing Day 2004, parts of Asia experienced one of the deadliest disasters in history. The third largest earthquake ever recorded struck off the coast of Indonesia, triggering a series of massive tsunami waves which devastated nearby coastal nations, causing the death of more than 200,000 people and widespread disruption to lives and business. Although states sprang into action to ensure relief for those affected, certain non-conforming groups were left out of support mechanisms.

The Aravanis, a distinctly recognised group of people in Tamil Nadu in southern India who identify neither as male or female, were invisibilised in the relief and rehabilitation process, and their systemic exclusion resulted in total dehumanisation as their deaths and financial losses were not included in official records, denying their dignity as a community and as individuals, and making it difficult for losses to be compensated. This also prolonged the suffering for friends and relatives of those missing, whose existence was not even acknowledged by the state. Subsequent research suggests at least five Aravanis died in the tsunami, with many more missing and unaccounted for.

Many Aravanis were made homeless but were not given places in temporary shelters. Those who did manage to get in report harassment, abuse, and even 'corrective rape'. They were also excluded from emergency aid, being overlooked for food, clothes, and bedding. The process of applying for ration cards was stigmatising and exclusionary; the rigid categories for assistance failed to consider the existence of gender non-conforming people such as the Aravanis. Many suffered severe injuries which prevented them from being able to work, and although their wounds were treated in hospitals, they did not receive cash compensation afforded to those identifying as men or women. While generous monetary payments were handed out by government to immediate family members of those who died, no such payments were made to the closely-knit Aravani community. Without a ration card, most Aravanis could not access permanent housing in the reconstruction phase. Two years on from the crisis many were still homeless and reliant on friends for shelter (207).

This example demonstrates the inadequacy of state disaster planning and management, which often fails to properly consider the needs, and indeed very existence, of marginalised groups. Some respondents to our survey highlighted the likelihood of LGBTQ people being excluded from disaster response:

Natural disasters often come with the displacement of populations. LGBTQI+ people face significant challenges in this situation because they are excluded from the continuum of humanitarian services.

The stigmatisation and discrimination suffered by the population may increase and they may be denied rights or access to aid in climate crisis situations due to their sexual orientation and gender identity.

7.3. Lack of protection in crisis settings

As the Human Dignity Trust suggests, “in times of increased lawlessness and pressure on scarcer resources, homophobia rises to the surface and can be acted upon with impunity” (208). Reports have identified that levels of anti-LGBTQ violence can be significantly increased in the post-disaster context, especially within camps housing displaced people (209). It is essential that a robust state system is in place to identify and address the tendency for increased LGBTQ hostility in the wake of crises such as extreme weather or conflict, however such a system is often lacking.

In section 6 we examined the vulnerability of queer displaced people in refugee camps. Authorities in these camps are often characterised by a lack of understanding of the particular needs of LGBTQ people, insensitivity as to appropriate language and behaviour to use, and lack of protection by authorities. These circumstances can arise in temporary displacement camps in the aftermath of disasters, as marginalised people such as queer women face significant levels of violence and harassment without adequate mechanisms to protect them (210). In Haiti, LGBTQ people living in displacement camps following the 2010 earthquake reported a lack of confidence in the capacity and willingness of police to protect them against increased rates of violence being experienced. Queer women reported feeling unsafe in queues for food aid which were often chaotic and dangerous, particularly as familial rejection meant they didn’t have any male relatives to accompany them for support (211).

Government facilities set up to house people affected by extreme weather events can be sex-segregated, which creates challenges for people whose sexuality or gender does not conform to expected norms. Where non-conforming people are able to access relief systems, they may experience discrimination from staff or other individuals. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, a transgender woman was arrested after taking a shower in the women’s bathroom at Texas A&M University, which had been set up as an emergency shelter. The woman had previously received permission to use the bathroom that matched her gender identity and had used the shower multiple times without incident. However, when one other shelter resident complained, the transgender woman was arrested for criminal trespassing and spent five days in jail. She was eventually released and the charges were dropped, however not without significant distress being caused simply for using the bathroom which matched her gender identity (212).

This ordeal demonstrates the volatility of state support for LGBTQ people in disaster contexts, and the potential for compounded trauma for people who do not fit expected norms. It underscores the importance not only of inclusive crisis planning policies, but also robust anti-discrimination laws which can be applied in disaster contexts. One response to our survey also highlighted the need for proper training of relief staff to overcome prejudices:

The lack of cultural competence in staff that may assist LGBTQI+ communities during climate related disasters further exacerbate impacts.

7.4. Failure to adequately address crises affecting LGBTQ people

The overlooking of LGBTQ needs and perspectives may also manifest as a failure to respond to crises which primarily affect the queer population. The best examples of this to date relate to disease outbreaks, which as noted in section 2 are made more likely by climate change.

Part III – Establishing LGBTQ Climate Vulnerability

The most severe example of this state blindness is the early response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. When HIV was being transmitted at sufficient levels in New York City and San Francisco to grab public attention in the early 1980s, it was initially termed gay-related immune deficiency, or colloquially the more offensive ‘gay plague’ (213), given that it mostly appeared to have developed in gay men. Despite, or perhaps because of, the thousands of largely gay men dying, it took four years for President Reagan to publicly acknowledge the issue (214). When the issue was discussed by politicians and officeholders, many treated it as a joke (215), or even welcomed the epidemic as punishment for perceived immorality (216). This political inertia – which was not limited to the USA – was matched by a failure to properly fund research into the new condition, undoubtedly contributing to its transmission, as acknowledged later by health officials (217).

The fatally slow response to HIV/AIDS provides an extreme example of how issues predominately effecting LGBTQ people can be inadequately addressed and even totally ignored by authorities. Although this occurred during an era of pervasive societal homophobia, more recent disease outbreaks have demonstrated a continued malaise in government response to tackling issues affecting LGBTQ people. Specifically, the response to the 2022 outbreak of Monkeypox in several western countries – another disease which at least initially mostly affected MSM – was sluggish and has drawn criticism for a failure to learn lessons from both the HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 pandemics. Stakeholders criticised authorities for their slowness to respond and to rollout vaccines, as well as to develop health communications targeted at affected populations (218).

Although it is impossible to predict what new or existing diseases may emerge or increase in prevalence as the climate crisis unfolds, or to know which communities are likely to be affected, should future disease epidemics disproportionately affect LGBTQ people, previous state responses suggest that governments may not be well placed to act quickly to address the needs of those affected.

7.5. Neglect in crisis recovery and management

Finally, the marginalisation of LGBTQ people can result in their perspectives being overlooked in crisis recovery and management in the long-term. Governments are likely to deprioritise the need of the socially marginalised as they have less political and financial capital, and investment of public resources may be diverted elsewhere. Two examples of crisis recovery are illustrated here.

Once the dust had settled following Hurricane Katrina and authorities looked towards recovery, decisions needed to be made about which areas of the city to prioritise for investment. New Orleans authorities prioritised time and money into ensuring that the French Quarter – which had been relatively unaffected compared with other parts of the city – was seen to be recovering and able to accommodate tourists. Authorities were aware that the influx of gay male tourists to the French Quarter was a vital income stream for the local economy, but in focussing their attention on this part of the city, the areas occupied by queer women of colour, which had been more significantly damaged, were largely overlooked (219).

The example of austerity in the UK, referenced throughout this report, provides insight into how LGBTQ people can be overlooked in the long-term management of crises. In section 6 we examined how certain LGBTQ resources, such as sexual health services, were deprioritised in the allocation of government spending. LGBTQ respondents to the UNISON survey reported that they perceived themselves to be an “afterthought” to policymakers, that their needs were a luxury that could be dropped in harder times (220).

Part III – Establishing LGBTQ Climate Vulnerability

This may also be done to pacify sections of the population – which can become more hostile to LGBTQ people during hardship – who don't wish public money to be spent on perceived 'luxuries' or 'special treatment' for a marginalised group. This idea was reflected in one response to our survey:

When widespread problems arise, whether it is climate change, economic crises, pandemics or anything else affecting (nearly) everyone, it seems that people are more critical of addressing a marginalised population's needs and obstacles that exist on top of the widespread ones.

Specific examples given by respondents in Zimbabwe and Uganda demonstrate how climatic factors, whether changing environments or exploitation of land, have resulted in LGBTQ people being out of work, with little support from the state, resulting in economic hardship:

Zimbabwe has been affected by drought & change in its raining season. A lot of LGBTI people have been affected by this compounded by Covid-19 & movement restrictions. Most LGBTI people in Zimbabwe rely on the informal/self-employed sector, one of it being farming. They are also side-lined from government programs because of their sexual orientation.

Impacts of climate change in Uganda have been severely felt in Bunyoro-Kitara Region of Uganda due to the oil discovery and exploration efforts by government and other stakeholders (Oil Companies). Due to this, there has been massive deforestation, increase in the water levels particularly in Bulisa District around Lake Albert. There has also been increased temperatures making uncomfortable for human settlement. In this way, LGBT people in the area have been left helpless with no support from the local authorities especially where most government interventions and policies are not addressing the needs of LGBT people in the area, many have been forced to become homeless, beggars since all their farmable land has been gazetted for oil exploration.

Examples such as these demonstrate how governmental blindness to the needs of LGBTQ people makes their recovery from crisis more challenging, as public spending may be prioritised towards other groups.

Part IV – Addressing LGBTQ Climate Vulnerability



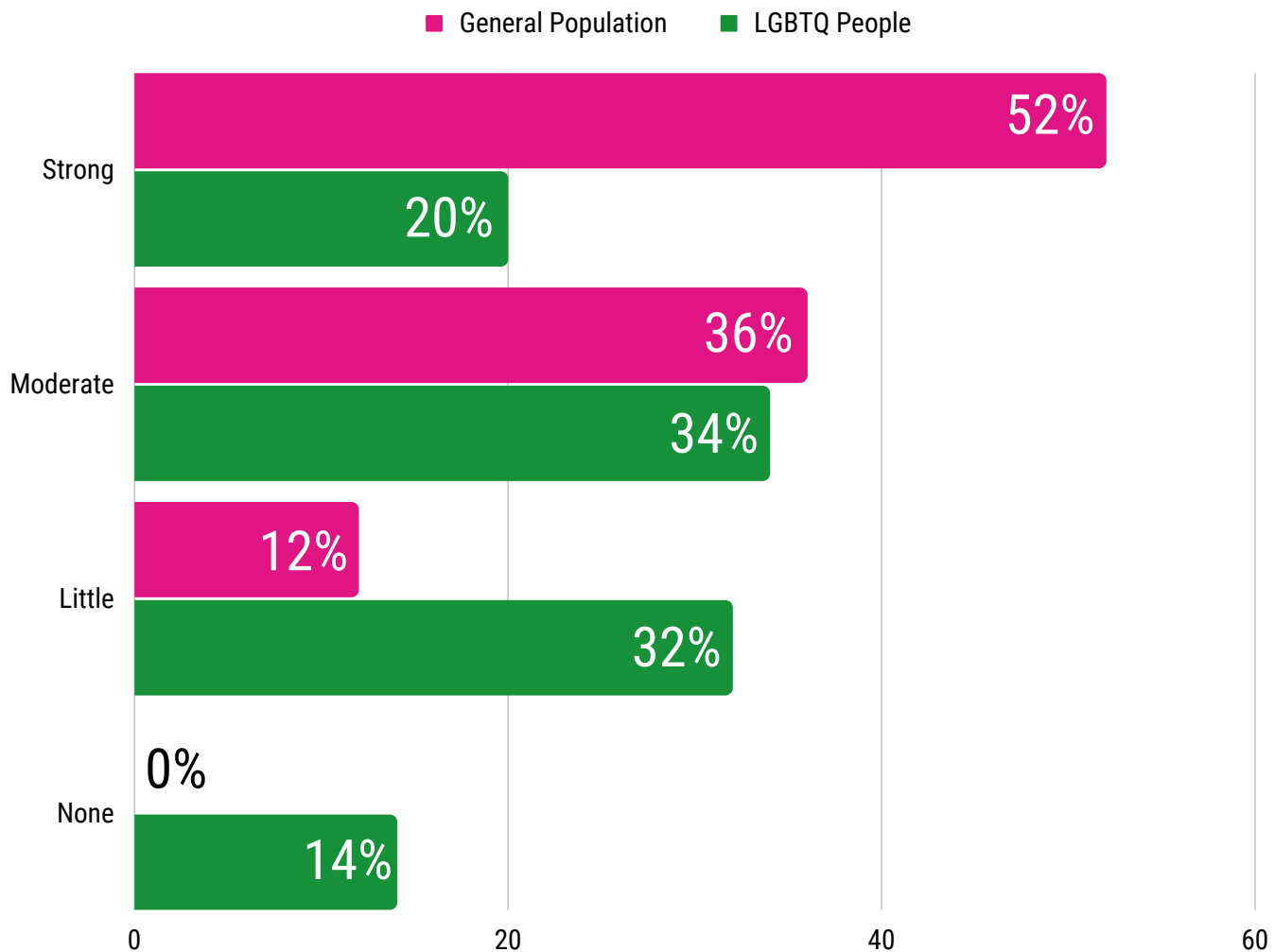
Part IV – Addressing LGBTQ Climate Vulnerability

8. Approaching Mitigations to Climate Harms

Setting out solutions to the climate crisis is no easy task, and it is not the focus of this report to propose or analyse methods of mitigating climate change itself. Instead, this section aims to identify ways in which the potential impacts of climate change on LGBTQ people discussed through this report can be reduced.

As should be clear at this stage of the report, LGBTQ climate vulnerability is an issue which has received little to no attention in mainstream climate discourse, and while some LGBTQ activists and organisations have attempted to draw some light onto this issue, it remains a blind spot in considerations of the disparate impacts of the crisis. Importantly, it appears that the reduced awareness of LGBTQ climate vulnerability permeates to the queer community; as Chart 4 below illustrates, the LGBTQ people who took part in our survey have much greater awareness of the impacts of climate change on the general population than on LGBTQ people specifically. This might be partly explained by the ‘Giddens Paradox’ outlined in the introduction to this report; it may be that most LGBTQ face far more immediate existential threats in their everyday lives that the particular risks they face in the climate crisis become a back of the mind issue for many. However, this report contends that the failure to properly consider the impacts of climate change on LGBTQ people is a systemic failing of wider climate discourse that must be addressed.

Chart 4. Extent of survey respondents’ awareness of general and LGBTQ-specific climate impacts



8.1. Guiding principles for climate change mitigation

While it is beyond the scope of this report to examine in detail, it would be remiss not to recognise as a starting point that the only way in which to effectively mitigate and reduce the harms likely to come about from climate change is to acknowledge and tackle the main drivers of it. Without addressing the causes of the crisis and making genuine efforts to reverse current warming trajectories, any action will merely be a sticking plaster over a deepening wound.

Tackling climate change will undoubtedly necessitate a significant adjustment in the management of our societies, but unlike climate fatalists might propose, does not require a total abandonment of our modern way of living, and, importantly, a reduction in living standards. There should be a move away from our current anthropocentric exploitation of the earth in order to achieve perpetual growth and profit by any means. In this sense both traditional and modern teachings have a lot to offer. Indigenous knowledge and ways of living should be instructive, as indigenous people have lived harmoniously and with respect for the environment for thousands of years, proving themselves to be the best guardians of their land. Meanwhile, the modern queer ecology movement challenges the orthodox way of viewing the environment through a heteronormative, binary, and rigid lens, and which holds humans as superior to all other organisms, suggesting a new approach which respects the totality of ecosystems and the right of all beings to thrive.

There is a clear need for international cooperation as the climate crisis is ultimately a global crisis. All too often perceived short-term nationalistic interests have prevented a meaningful multilateral consensus from forming and mechanisms to uphold country commitments to tackle climate change have proven ineffective. Nevertheless, intergovernmental collaboration is the only way that a crisis which is so global in nature can be effectively tackled.

8.2. Mechanisms for influencing climate action

In absence of sufficient political will to act on climate change, it must be asked what measures can be undertaken by activists and the population at large to persuade decisionmakers to take meaningful actions. In recent years there has been a groundswell of climate activism with the emergence of organisations such as Extinction Rebellion and movements such as School Strike for Climate. Marches and demonstrations undertaken by movements such as these have undeniably had an impact on climate awareness; in the UK for instance, the occupation of several central London sites in April 2019 by Extinction Rebellion coincides with a significant jump in the number of people in the UK identifying environmental challenges as one of the major issues facing the country (221).

Despite their successes, these types of demonstrations have not translated into sufficient action by states. While other less civil forms of action are often derided and seen as beyond the acceptable boundaries of activism, others see a role for them within the broader catalogue of actions. In his provocatively titled book, *How to Blow up a Pipeline*, climate writer Andreas Malm lays out a case for an escalation in tactics to force policymakers to act to curb the climate breakdown. Malm considers actions undertaken by groups such as Ende Gelände, which has targeted coal mines across Europe and forced them to temporarily shut down, and activists who have slashed the tires of SUVs in cities across the world, and links these actions to successful social movements of the past which, despite received wisdom, have often had a less-than-civil arm to them (222).

The courtroom is emerging as another important arena in which climate action can be forced. The number of cases being brought to challenge governments on their inadequate climate change response rises each year (223).

Part IV – Addressing LGBTQ Climate Vulnerability

The vast bulk of these cases have been filed in nation states, predominately the USA, but international and regional courts have increasingly accepted climate cases, creating an opportunity for the legal system to consider the ways in which the crisis may interfere with the realisation of broader human rights and possibly compel climate action (224). In relation to LGBTQ climate vulnerability, states have an obligation to address factors which contribute to the marginalisation of certain groups of people, which interact with climate risks to heighten vulnerability. The UNOHCHR has emphasised that the rights to equality and non-discrimination necessitate action on the part of states to address the disproportionate impacts of climate change on the most marginalised, and to ensure that actions taken to address the crisis benefit all people, including those most vulnerable (225).

8.3. Frameworks for the inclusion of LGBTQ people

While these measures provide scope for holding policymakers to account through international and national mechanisms, it is essential that space be made for marginalised voices impacted by this crisis in the mainstream climate arena. The frameworks of 'climate justice' and a 'just transition' have the potential to facilitate the inclusion of marginalised groups such as LGBTQ people in discussions on the response to climate change and the amelioration of the impacts of the crisis on them. The IPCC has acknowledged the climate justice movement, recognising it as a framework which links development and human rights to achieve a rights-based approach to addressing climate change. It notes that it consists of three principles:

"Distributive justice which refers to the allocation of burdens and benefits among individuals, nations and generations; procedural justice which refers to who decides and participates in decision-making; and recognition which entails basic respect and robust engagement with and fair consideration of diverse cultures and perspectives" (226).

In more simple terms, climate justice is about recognising that certain people and countries have derived a great deal of privilege from the drivers of climate change while in the process marginalising and exploiting other groups and nations, who are now most at risk in the crisis. The climate justice movement identifies the crisis as a symptom of wider social inequality and exclusion of marginalised people from the systems of power and decision-making (227).

A just transition refers to a move away from the system of exploitation and extraction which has characterised the human relationship with the environment for the past two centuries, towards a more sustainable and regenerative relationship which at the same time addresses societal injustices and inequalities. The just transition framework demands that not only must society swiftly adopt green technologies, but it must do so through the redeployment of the skills and expertise of workers into greener industries, uplifting and empowering marginalised communities in the process (228). An equitable and just response to climate change requires that these inequalities and marginalisation be addressed in the process of taking adequate climate action, and for the voices and perspectives of those marginalised people to be given proper weight in discussions around climate change mitigations. As the Climate Justice Alliance points out, we are at a point where transition is inevitable, but justice is not (229). The addressing of marginalisation, including of LGBTQ people, must be demanded as part of this transition.

The final section of this report will outline some recommendations for policymakers to tackle the causes of LGBTQ climate vulnerability. These are grouped into four categories which address: the drivers of marginalisation, the manifestation of LGBTQ climate risks, the failure of state crisis management, and the limited awareness and expertise of LGBTQ climate harms.

Recommendations and Conclusion

IF NOT US
WHO?
#CLIMATESTRIKE
IF NOT NOW
WHEN?

Recommendations

9. Recommendations

Actions to address LGBTQ marginalisation

- Decriminalise LGBTQ identities through the removal of laws prohibiting same-sex activity and gender expression and the equalisation of ages of consent.
- Adopt gender recognition laws which respect individual dignity and autonomy through a self-determination model.
- Adopt anti-discrimination and hate crimes laws which include sexual orientation and gender identity as protected grounds and introduce policies to ensure their proper implementation including education, training, public sensitisation, and other measures.
- Create and fund specialised LGBTQ health services including gender identity clinics and dedicated sexual health services such as HIV prevention and treatment programmes, ensure general health practitioners are given comprehensive training on LGBTQ sensitivity and inclusion.
- Adopt employment legislation and regulations which require action to be taken to address LGBTQ discrimination and exclusion in the workplace, ensure a properly funded welfare system to support queer people out of work, decriminalise and regulate sex work.
- Address LGBTQ homelessness by providing funding for shelters and dedicated LGBTQ charities and networks, require LGBTQ-inclusive policies in shelters and state housing support.

Actions to address specific LGBTQ climate risk factors

- Fund research into the issue of climate anxiety to better understand its impacts and intersection with existing mental health conditions.
- Ensure displacement and asylum systems sensitive to LGBTQ people, provide proper protection in camps and reception centres, acknowledge persecution on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity as legitimate grounds of asylum, end indefinite detention of LGBTQ asylum seekers.
- Provide funding for LGBTQ community projects, centres, and networks to strengthen community ties and reduce isolation.
- Introduce hate speech and incitement to violence laws to address hostility against LGBTQ people which poses a risk of violence in times of crisis.

Actions to improve state crisis management

- Adopt queer-inclusive disaster preparation policies by engaging with LGBTQ people to understand needs, legislate to require emergency response plans to consider impacts on LGBTQ people.
- Implement training on anti-discrimination laws in aid and crisis settings, ensure LGBTQ sensitivity training for humanitarian and state actors.
- Develop policies aimed at hiring LGBTQ people in senior roles in context of crisis preparedness to ensure disasters affecting LGBTQ people can be quickly identified and addressed.
- Ensure funding for crisis recovery allocated to LGBTQ services, engage with LGBTQ people to understand impact of reduced services on their needs and experiences.

Recommendations

Actions to raise awareness, expertise, and resilience

- Provide funding and human resource for awareness raising on the issue of LGBTQ climate vulnerability both among queer people and general population.
- Provide funding for LGBTQ civil society organisations to undertake climate change projects and explore impacts of the crisis on their service users.
- Dedicate funding for projects aiming to build queer climate networks and to help LGBTQ people increase climate resilience.
- Make funding available for further research into the issue of LGBTQ climate vulnerability including direct outreach with queer people.
- Ensure that LGBTQ people are given a role in mainstream climate discourse so that actions can be taken to address the harms they face in the climate crisis.

Conclusion

Climate change is undoubtedly the greatest challenge that faces human society in the twenty-first century. The scale of the crisis requires an effective intergovernmental response which has so far not adequately materialised, and while a rapid confrontation with the drivers of climate change must be forthcoming, a failure to examine why the experience of its impacts is unequal will perpetuate harms and ensure that the marginalisation of communities continues.

Increasingly, climate change has been recognised as a substantial – even the greatest – barrier to the realisation of human rights and human development. The harms it causes to the lives of human populations globally are numerous and far-reaching, but it is an error to believe the myth that this crisis “does not discriminate”. This crisis, like all crises, preys on the marginalisation of communities to multiply the harms they face. This idea has increasingly found favour within mainstream discourse, as the vulnerability of populations such as developing nations, indigenous people, women, and people with disabilities, has been recognised. The LGBTQ population, however, is an invisible victim of this crisis within these spaces.

There has been a failure to recognise that LGBTQ people, as some of the most marginalised people in any community, may experience specific and heightened risks within the context of the climate crisis. Queer people are marginalised through the application of the law, societal discrimination and violence, and the provision of services, in many instances pushing them to the very edges of society and restricting their ability to realise their potential. These drivers of marginalisation intersect with general climate harms to multiply the risks these communities face.

Compounding these harms, the state routinely fails to consider how crises, such as extreme weather events, economic depressions, and pandemics, may impact upon LGBTQ people. National disaster policies overlook the needs of LGBTQ people, often leaving them inadequately supported when crises strike. Previous crises have showed us that the needs of LGBTQ people are often the first to go, and the last to return, in the list of government priorities. Worse still, the prejudices of sections of the population can lead governments to actively reverse LGBTQ rights as a cynical ploy to gain favour. In the context of climate change, where individual crises become more frequent and severe, this leaves great scope for harm.

The oversight of the needs of LGBTQ people in times of crisis extends to the climate crisis, and discussions around its mitigations, where space has not been made for queer voices and perspectives. This crisis of invisibility must be urgently addressed, or may prove the most pernicious crisis of all.

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Annex - Survey questions

1. Please select the option which best describes you

- I am responding as someone who identifies as LGBTQI+ / queer / sexual minority / gender minority / similar
- I am responding as someone who works at an LGBTQI+ organisation
- I am responding as someone who works at an organisation which works on issues effecting LGBTQI+ people (if not explicitly LGBTQI+)
- None of the above

2. Which region are you based in?

- North America
- South America
- Caribbean
- Western Europe
- Eastern Europe and Central Asia
- Middle East and North Africa
- Sub-Saharan Africa
- South Asia
- East Asia
- Southeast Asia
- Pacific

Awareness

3. How would you describe your level of awareness of the current or future impacts of climate change on the global population?

- Strong awareness
- Moderate awareness
- Little awareness
- No awareness

4. How would you describe your level of awareness of the current or future impacts of climate change on LGBTQI+ people?

- Strong awareness
- Moderate awareness
- Little awareness
- No awareness

5. Do you think that the impacts LGBTQI+ people face from climate change are likely to be heightened due to their sexual and/or gender identity? Please explain

Experience

6. To what extent have you personally experienced the effects of climate change?

- Severely
- Moderately
- Mildly
- Not at all

Annex - Survey questions

7. [If you have experienced the effects of climate change] which of the following impacts have you experienced? Select all that apply

- Extreme weather events (including more regular/severe disasters, droughts, excessive rainfall, extreme heat/cold)
- Physical health impacts (including illness and injury caused by increased temperatures, pollution, etc.)
- Mental health impacts (including anxiety, depression or fear about climate change)
- Economic impacts (including loss of work due to climate change)
- Limited access to resources (including a lack of water or food)
- Displacement
- Homelessness
- Other (please explain)

8. [If you have experienced the effects of climate change] to what extent do you think that this has been made worse because of your identity as an LGBTQI+ person?

- Severely
- Moderately
- Mildly
- Not at all
- Unsure

9. [If you have experienced the effects of climate change] to what extent do you think that this has been made worse because of another aspect of your identity other than being LGBTQI+ (such as race, sex, disability, etc.)?

- Severely
- Moderately
- Mildly
- Not at all
- Unsure

10. To what extent do you expect to experience the impacts of climate change in future?

- Severely
- Moderately
- Mildly
- Not at all
- Unsure

11. To what extent do the current or anticipated effects of climate change impact your mental health?

- Severely
- Moderately
- Mildly
- Not at all

12. Do you have any thoughts on what actions should be taken to support LGBTQI+ people to deal with the impacts of climate change? Please explain

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ReportOUT
Pride Media Centre
Unit T1, Stonehills
Shields Road, Pelaw
Gateshead. NE10 0HW
United Kingdom

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