

Briefing document on climate change and Disability

Background

There is unequivocal evidence that climate change is happening, and that human activity is the principal cause. We know that all of humanity will be negatively affected unless we take radical action to change the way we live. However, Disabled people — an estimated 1 billion globally — face this threat compounded by discrimination, poverty, marginalization, and other pre-existing inequalities, making the threat to our lives even greater. It is therefore vital that our voices, ideas, and representations are heard and included, as world-wide solutions are developed and implemented.

The UK Government have even acknowledged that to date, very little work has explored issues around people with disabilities and resilience-building in the context of longer-term climatic and environmental change.

The UN also have acknowledged that people with disabilities are at increased risk of the adverse impacts of climate change – including threats to their health, food security, water, sanitation, and livelihood.

Current situation

Disabled people are frequently unable to leave their homes and reach safety in the event of evacuation due to environmental catastrophes, leading to the loss of many lives. Disabled people are twice as likely as any other group to die in disasters.

Pandemics strike Disabled individuals harder than anyone else due to long term health conditions including weakened immune systems, and unequal access to health care. Covid-19 is believed to be the first of many Pandemics which will sweep across the Globe as the climate changes.

Higher temperatures are more likely to affect people with disabilities or pre-existing conditions that limit the body's ability to stay cool. Medications that Disabled people rely on to manage their conditions can also interact negatively with the heat.

Environmental illnesses of many kinds are on the rise. Environmental Pollution is a major cause of ill health: creating childhood disability, impairing children's health, diminishing their capacity to learn, and reducing their life chances.

Evidence

DR UK combined research with the New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) on the impact of the crisis on older and Disabled people [How will the climate and nature crises impact older people and Disabled people? - NPC \(thinknpc.org\)](#)

Disabled people are 'lost and excluded' when disasters hit, says UN advocate. [Disabled people are 'lost and excluded' when disasters hit, says UN advocate | Global development | The Guardian](#)

Why the rights of people with disabilities are crucial for understanding climate-resilient development pathways [On CRDPs and CRPD: why the rights of people with disabilities are crucial for understanding climate-resilient development pathways - The Lancet Planetary Health](#)

'Eco-ableism', the EU, and climate disaster ['Eco-ableism', the EU, and climate disaster \(euobserver.com\)](#)

Master's student David Liebman works to build awareness of the elevated threat level of climate change for people with disabilities [The Intersection of Disability and Climate Change | Harvard Graduate School of Education](#)

Climate change: Why are disabled people so affected by the climate crisis? [Climate change: Why are disabled people so affected by the climate crisis? - BBC News](#)

Guardian report on Disability and Climate Change [Disabled people being 'systematically ignored' on climate crisis, says study | Climate crisis | The Guardian](#)

[The impact of climate change on the rights of persons with disabilities | OHCHR](#)

Climate Change and the Health of People with Disabilities [Climate Change and the Health of People with Disabilities | US EPA](#)

People with disabilities left out of climate planning [People with disabilities left out of climate planning - Daily Times](#)

UN Releases First Report on Disability Rights in the Context of Climate Action: [People with Disabilities Needed in Fight Against Climate Change | Human Rights Watch \(hrw.org\)](#)

UK Government Report [Disability and Climate Resilience Research Report - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Pandemic and ancient infectious diseases [Viral spillover risk increases with climate change in High Arctic lake sediments | Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences \(royalsocietypublishing.org\)](#)

ONS covid and disability survey [Coronavirus and the social impacts on disabled people in Great Britain - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

Disability and Plastic use [Not All Policies are Created Equal: Why Plastic Bans are an Injustice to Disabled Populations - Turning Green](#)

Disability Debrief on the Climate Crisis [Climate Crisis - Disability Debrief](#) (Aine)

Climate Cares is a team of researchers, designers, policymakers and educators aiming to understand and support mental health in the current climate and ecological crises.

[Climate Cares | Institute of Global Health Innovation | Imperial College London](#)

The negative effects of heat on disabilities including [diabetes](#), [spinal cord](#) [traumatic brain injuries](#), and [cerebral palsy](#)

Disability Rights UK policy document on disability and climate change [Climate change | Disability Rights UK](#)

The obligation to respect, protect, and fulfil the human rights of persons with disabilities is not just a moral obligation. It is enshrined in international laws and frameworks:

- I. [United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(UNCRPD\)](#)
- II. • Article 4 (3) and General Comment 7, by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, obliges all State Parties to actively involve and consult with persons with disabilities, through their representative organisations, in decision-making on matters that affect their lives (including climate change)
- III. Disability Inclusion in UK Climate Action 5
- IV. • Article 9 obliges State parties to take measures to ensure that persons with disabilities have access, on an equal basis with others, to the following: - the physical environment; - transportation; - information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems; - all other facilities and services, open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas.
- V. • Article 10 obliges State Parties to “take all necessary measures” to ensure the inherent right to life of persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others. • Article 11 obliges all State Parties to take “all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters.”
- VI. • Article 21 obliges all State Parties to provide information intended for the general public to persons with disabilities in accessible formats.
- VII. • Article 32 obliges all State Parties to ensure that international cooperation and development programming, including international cooperation on climate action, is inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities. As outlined in the Article, appropriate technical and economic assistance must be provided to enable this.

Solutions

1. Disabled people must be involved in all debates and in shaping solutions. Representatives from the global Disabled community must be at the table when environmental solutions are being developed and implemented.
2. The needs of Disabled people must be addressed in all climate change discussions and all environmental solutions must be designed to be accessible for us all.
3. All climate events must be designed to be accessible as possible considering all aspects of accessibility including sign language interpreters, access for wheelchair users and others with mobility and sensory impairments. There should be an option to join debates virtually.

Disabled people are currently excluded from discussions and solutions on climate change, meaning that laws, policies, and programmes don't consider the needs of Disabled people or the impact of proposed change. This is referred to as "Eco-ableism." "Eco-ableism" will only end when decision makers listen to and work with Disabled people.