

It's our planet too:

Climate change, disabled people and climate action in Scotland



Disabled people's priorities ahead of COP 26 A Briefing from Inclusion Scotland



Our voices ■ Our choices

www.inclusionscotland.org

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1. Introduction

Climate change is considered by many people, including many disabled people, to be the most important issue of our time.

Around the world, as disabled people, we are being hit hard by extreme weather events. Bigger wildfires, longer droughts, and more intense storms and floods can be catastrophic for some of us, as we are more likely to be marginalised by poverty and other social barriers that make us less likely to be evacuated safely, more prone to health risks and less likely to have insurance that protects our assets and homes.

However, despite disabled people making up 15% of the world's population, our rights, needs and perspectives have often been overlooked in our responses to a changing climate.^{1 2}

The impacts of climate change are not felt equally

As the Covid-19 pandemic has shown, as disabled people we are often among those most adversely affected in an emergency, sustaining disproportionately higher rates of

morbidity and mortality, and are among those least able to access emergency support.^{3 4}

Around the world, sudden-onset natural disasters and extreme weather events such as heatwaves and floods can seriously affect disabled people's access to food and nutrition, safe drinking water and sanitation, health-care services and medicines, education and training, adequate housing and access to decent work.⁵

This is not just an issue for disabled people in the developing world. We saw in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in America that federal and community evacuation warnings, shelters and emergency transport were not accessible to disabled people,^{6 7} and as a result, significant numbers of disabled people drowned in their own homes or in nursing homes.^{8 9}

1. Jodoin, Sébastien, Katherine Lofts, and Nilani Ananthamoorthy (2020). 'A Disability Rights Approach to Climate Governance.' *Ecology Law Quarterly* 47 (1).
2. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2020). 'Analytical Study on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Context of Climate Change.' <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/44/30>

3. David Perry (2017) 'Disability and Disaster Response in the Age of Climate Change' <https://psmag.com/environment/fixing-america-disability-disaster-response>
4. Alex Ghenis (2016) 'The End of the World As We Know It' <https://www.newmobility.com/2016/03/climate-change-and-disability/>
5. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2020) 'Analytical Study on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Context of Climate Change.' <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/44/30>



Despite this growing recognition that disabled people will be hardest hit by extreme weather events, alarmingly,

85%

OF DISABLED PEOPLE FROM 137 COUNTRIES

reported in a 2013 UN survey that they have not participated or been consulted in community disaster management processes.



We are already seeing the impact of the global climate

CRISIS IN SCOTLAND

with warmer temperatures, more extreme weather events, rising sea levels, flooding and the subsequent impact on the health and prosperity of Scottish society and the economy.



It is estimated that around one in six houses in the UK are at some risk of flooding, with the new National Flood Risk Assessment suggesting

284,000 PROPERTIES

in Scotland are vulnerable to rising river and sea levels.

It is estimated that every degree of warming in Scotland will cost the Scottish economy

1% OF GROSS

domestic product – in effect, eliminating the prospect of growing the economy.



Ground floor and level access properties, required by many disabled people with mobility impairments, will be particularly vulnerable to flooding, as are many nursing and residential homes which have been built on

FLOOD PLAINS.

6. National Council on Disability (2006) 'The Impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on People with Disabilities: A Look Back and Remaining Challenges' <https://ncd.gov/publications/2006/Aug072006>
7. Robin Scher (2017) 'The Disabled Are Probably the Most Vulnerable to Climate Change Effects' <https://www.truthdig.com/articles/the-disabled-are-probably-the-most-vulnerable-to-climate-change-effects/>
8. New York Times (2015) 'Louisiana's Deadly Storm Took Strong as Well as the Helpless' <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/18/us/louisianas-deadly-storm-took-strong-as-well-as-the-helpless.html>

9. Finger, Anne (2005) 'Hurricane Katrina, Race, Class, Tragedy, and Charity' *Disability Studies Quarterly*, Volume 25, No. 4 <https://dsq-sds.org/article/view/630/807>

2. Climate Action in Scotland & Disabled People

We are already starting to feel the impacts of a changing climate in Scotland and the Scottish Government has responded by declaring a climate emergency and legislating to achieve a target for net-zero emissions of all greenhouse gases by 2045.

Mitigating and adapting to climate change in Scotland will lead to initiatives that will impact on many aspects of disabled people's everyday lives in relation to a wide range of policy areas - urban and infrastructure planning, housing, transport, energy efficiency, waste management, risk management and emergency planning to name a few.

However some of the solutions identified to reduce emissions and pollution and create a circular economy may actively disadvantage some of us.

Active travel that emphasises walking/cycling, car-free zones, low-emission zones, integrated transport, promotion of electric vehicles for example have the potential to actively discriminate against disabled people who rely on cars, or who need support from others who drive cars, who cannot afford new electric vehicles (or find accessible or adapted electric vehicles), or who find the infrastructure to charge vehicles inaccessible.

We also need to ensure that moves to facilitate low-waste/low-emission living in Scotland are accessible to disabled people where possible – recycling initiatives, return deposit schemes, low-emission vehicles/charging points for example – and that disabled people are not financially penalised, or socially stigmatised, if they simply cannot live a 'greener' life or participate in these schemes for reasons related to their impairment/s.



Case study:

Spaces for People Active Travel Schemes

Spaces for People Active Travel Schemes have been introduced in a number of Scottish city and town centres in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak. These schemes were aimed at creating more space for people passing each other on pavements, combatting emissions by reducing the number of vehicles on roads by creating more cycle lanes and pedestrianised areas, and making cycling, wheeling and walking safer and more attractive to residents and visitors.

However, disabled people and their organisations, including local access panels have raised serious concerns about the schemes and have reported that they are causing particular problems for disabled people with mobility impairments as they have led to blue badge parking spaces being removed, buses that are no longer able to stop at kerbsides and use ramps to help disabled people enter and exit, poorly designed 'pop-up' cycle lanes that incorporate 'floating' bus-stops, which are difficult for disabled people to use, and fewer dropping-off points for disabled people who need to use taxis.

Disabled people have reported to Inclusion Scotland that Spaces for People schemes were put in place far too hastily and without adequate consultation or Equality Impact Assessments, and are in effect creating 'no-go' areas for disabled people in city centres in Scotland, including Edinburgh and Stirling.

The Edinburgh Access Panel, RNIB and Guide Dogs have recently asked Edinburgh City Council to put the Spaces for People scheme on hold to allow it to be independently audited.

Case study:

Poverty and disabled people in Scotland

Disabled Scots are at greater risk of living in poverty than non-disabled citizens, a risk factor that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) strongly associates with greater climate vulnerability. Covid-19 has supercharged existing inequalities, deepening poverty and drawing many thousands more families into poverty and destitution, putting the human rights of disabled people at further risk.

The official measure of poverty (households living on less than 60% of median income) fails to take into account the additional costs associated with disability.

In 2018 Scope found that Scots disabled people spent on average £632 a month on disability-related expenses (e.g., taxis, increased use of heating, special equipment, care costs, etc.). These are the highest excess costs in the UK. Once these costs are taken into account fully, half a million (500,000) Scottish disabled people and their families are living in poverty, 48% of the total of all people in Scotland living in poverty, despite making up only 22% of the population.

Even using the official measure of poverty, according to Scottish Government figures one in four (24%) Scots children were living in poverty in 2018/19 but in households containing a disabled adult or child, the rate of poverty among children rose to 29%. This meant that nearly half (45% or 100,000) of all the children living in poverty in Scotland were to be found in households containing a disabled person.

3. What is eco-ableism?

Despite a growing recognition that disabled people will be hit hard by climate change, as disabled people we have often been left out of the policymaking process for climate action.

This may be a result of ‘eco-ableism’ – a failure by non-disabled environmental activists to recognise two key issues: that disabled people stand to be impacted significantly by climate change; and that many of the climate actions being promoted to address climate change may make life more difficult for disabled people.

Examples of eco-ableism include:

- Ignoring disabled people in emergency planning, e.g. when designing flood protections or flood evacuations
- Urban planning for low-carbon cities that discriminates against disabled people who need to drive a car or rely on support from others who drive cars and find public transport inaccessible to them
- Protesting about climate change (blocking roads or public transport) in ways that negatively impact on and alienate disabled people
- Banning plastic straws without accepting that some disabled people need them to drink safely and conveniently
- Removing disabled parking bays to make way for cycle lanes
- Promoting active travel without realising that some disabled people cannot walk, wheel or cycle
- Recycling initiatives that don’t include providing the right support to disabled people who struggle to recycle or who need information about recycling in accessible formats

Tackling ableism in the climate action movement can be fairly liberating for everyone involved as it allows us to move away from a focus on individual responsibility and individual behaviour change towards real market solutions and an insistence on corporate responsibility for reducing emissions, waste, pollution and addressing biodiversity loss.

Why shouldn’t those who have contributed most to the causes of climate change be most responsible for addressing it rather than those who have been least responsible but who may be hit hard by it?

4. Right to Protest

It is also time to think about disabled people's right to protest about the climate emergency in Scotland and elsewhere – how can organisations that support climate action and protest in Scotland make sure that disabled people are not shut out – what does inclusive direct action actually entail?

Lessons from the Extinction Rebellion (XR) 'autumn uprising' protests in London are important here as they highlighted that actual methods of protest (blocking roads and disrupting public transport) had disability-related impacts and alienated some otherwise supportive disabled people.¹⁰ Yet, in addition, when active efforts were made by XR protestors to include and support disabled climate activists and make the protests more accessible and inclusive, these efforts were reported as being frustrated by the police.

The Metropolitan Police's advisers on disability accused the Met of 'degrading and humiliating' treatment of disabled activists – many of whom felt deliberately targeted for arrest during the protests – and of confiscating wheelchairs, ramps, noise-cancelling head-

phones, adapted toilets and other items intended to make protest sites accessible to disabled people, according to sources within XR.¹¹

We also need stakeholders active on climate issues to consider and ensure that participation in the national climate debate in Scotland, and other methods of national and local engagement on climate action are inclusive and accessible for disabled Scots.

10. 'Extinction Rebellion's Protests Are Making Life Harder For Disabled People Like Me' https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/extinction-rebellion_uk_5cb81d06e4b081fd16932fcd?-guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2x-ILmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAJHfOjOUyxLJISqcCTDa-zWoUB7VB6JH3BTi0vi_CDZ2UNCgeYN4WnaRa5iGzBs7IliUuhw-fz8hWtU06fSnBvaoloneg2-JfX8xg5FZZRjXdhQyq-ZYhEGQodwogU-794CixFVR5zHdY52zxNR7zXFyowKLD-qqmGEfaJ2gRCO3mG

11. 'Met police accused of "degrading" treatment of disabled XR activists' <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/oct/29/met-treatment-of-disabled-xr-activists-branded-degrading-and-humiliating>



5. Our Asks

We have a number of asks to ensure that climate action includes disabled people.

To the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

1. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) needs to recognise disabled people's organisations, and allied organisations who are promoting disability inclusion in climate action, as a constituency.

In the UNFCCC process, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have formed themselves into loose groups with diverse but broadly clustered interests or perspectives, called constituencies. At present, the nine

constituencies are: business and industry NGOs (BINGO), environmental NGOs (ENGO), farmers, Indigenous peoples' organisations (IPO), local government and municipal authorities (LGMA), research and independent NGOs (RINGO), trade union NGOs (TUNGO), women and gender (WGC), and youth NGOs (YOUNGO).

Given the impacts of climate change on disabled people and the potential for climate action to discriminate against disabled people, we are calling for a tenth constituency for disabled people to be recognised by the UNFCCC.



To the UK Government

2. **The UK Government should use COP26 as a platform to encourage national governments to view disabled people as key stakeholders in the development of international and domestic climate policy and to ensure meaningful participation of disabled people in climate action, including design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all climate-related policies, initiatives and finance.**

We believe COP26 will be a critical moment in the global fight against climate change. We would urge the UK Government to use the COP presidency to promote disability inclusion within climate negotiations, and international and domestic policymaking.

To the Scottish Government

3. **Involve disabled people and their organisations in policymaking to achieve a truly just transition to net-zero by 2045.**
4. **As work is underway to finalise public engagement on climate change in Scotland, we would urge the Scottish Government to ensure that disabled people and disabled people's own organisations (DPOs), are fully recognised and involved in the engagement process.**

In the context of 'normalising' climate action, we need to be sure whose 'normal' we mean. As we seek to rapidly shift towards a low-carbon economy and a just and green recovery from Covid-19, we need to acknowledge where disabled people may experience discrimination or additional disadvantage and actively involve them in identifying the challenges and opportunities for creating sustainable, inclusive and accessible responses to climate change, being mindful about the scope for competing interests and goals, and the need for disabled Scots to be involved in co-producing ways forward that work for us all.

To Scottish Local Authorities

5. **Ensure that efforts to reduce emissions, tackle pollution and create a circular economy across our towns and cities in Scotland include and involve disabled people and include full equality impact assessments.**

Disabled people have remained largely 'invisible' to climate adaptation efforts in Scotland. Many disabled Scots are concerned about climate change and want to be involved in climate action yet describe being alienated by a discourse around net-zero that fails to recognise that many of the changes to habits and lifestyle being promoted, which could contribute to minimising climate change and rehabilitating the environment, discriminate against disabled people or are difficult or impossible for disabled people to do. In this context, it is vital that policymaking in this area makes proper use of equality impact assessments.

To Civil Society Organisations Working on Climate Issues in Scotland

6. **Consider accessibility, disability inclusion and provision of accessible information when designing interventions, events, resources or protests about climate action.**

We would urge climate activists and their organisations in Scotland to engage with disabled people and their organisations to make climate activist spaces and protests as accessible and inclusive as possible. We call on civil society organisations active on climate issues to consider the concept of eco-ableism and how to tackle it within the environmental and climate change movements and to centre the voices of disabled people.

There can be no climate justice in Scotland without the active involvement of disabled people. After all, it's our planet too.

6. About Inclusion Scotland

Inclusion Scotland is a national network of disabled people's organisations (DPOs) and individual disabled people run by disabled people ourselves. This is important because disabled people know best about the barriers that prevent our full inclusion into society. We experience them every day.

See our website at www.inclusionscotland.org

You can become a member of Inclusion Scotland by visiting our membership page. Membership is free and open to disabled people, disabled people's organisations and our supporters.

<https://inclusionscotland.org/become-a-member/>

If you have any questions on this report,
or for further information, contact:

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