Disability-inclusive climate emergency planning in Scotland: Summary of findings

Glossary

Climate action is when people and governments do things to slow down and help people cope with climate change.

Climate change is the human-caused warming and destruction of our planet's atmosphere, ocean and land.

Climate disasters are extreme weather events that are dangerous to life and our environment.

Climate justice is about understanding that climate change does not affect everyone equally. It says that to fix our climate we need to address all **inequality**.

Co-design is about bringing together people with lived experience (e.g. disabled people) to create something where each person is valued equally.

Disabled People's Organisations (DPO) are organisations led and controlled by disabled people. Inclusion Scotland is a DPO.

An **Emergency** is something dangerous that needs quick attention to keep people safe. For example, a flood or fire.

Emergency planning means a government, council and communities having pre-made plans for sudden unexpected situations (like climate disasters) to stop people from getting hurt or dying.

Emergency services are the police, ambulance and fire fighters who respond to an emergency.

Greenhouse gases are the harmful gases that are making the climate change. For example, carbon dioxide and methane.

Local authorities are your local council. For example, Glasgow City Council. They are responsible for important public services in your area.

Net Zero is about reducing our **greenhouse gas** emissions so that the amount of greenhouse gases that are put into the atmosphere is balanced by the amount that are taken out. This is needed to stop climate change.

Inequality happens when certain groups of people are treated unfairly.

Intersectionality is about how people might be treated unfairly because of more than one experience of inequality (race, class, gender, sexuality and disability). For example, a black gay disabled man will have different experiences from a white straight disabled woman.

Inclusive governance means that the people making decisions and policies listen to all members of a society. This often involves co-design and talking to people who have different types of lived experience.

Just transition is when changes to a place that are made to help the planet are fair for all the people who live there too. For example, ‘a just transition to net zero’.

Stakeholders are the people interested in or affected by a policy or decision.

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Introduction

Inclusion Scotland, the Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland and Sensing Climate project have collaborated to research climate policy and emergency planning in Scotland and its level of engagement with disabled people. Our aim is to identify to what extent Scotland's emergency planning policies are disability-inclusive.

Globally, climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. Disabled people make up 26% of the Scottish population and there is an unequal impact of climate change on disabled people. For example, disabled people are 2-4 times more likely to be injured or die from heatwaves, storm events and floods. Scotland needs to plan and prepare for these dangerous situations now, learning from previous failures like the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in the avoidable deaths of many disabled people.

In the 2025 Disability Equality Plan, the Scottish Government have said "We will strengthen our resilience and emergency planning to ensure appropriate, accessible, and timely responses for disabled people in times of crisis. Civil Contingencies Division and the Directorate for Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights will do so by working with DPOs to create a resourced plan setting out how we will enhance our disability competence and learn from the lived experience of disabled people…"

Drawing from international evidence, we used a six-step model to assess to what extent Scotland's emergency planning policies are disability-inclusive. If properly carried out, the six steps show how we could deliver a community focused, inclusive approach to the governance, planning, delivery and evaluation of emergency planning.

We graded Scotland's progress on each of the steps by traffic light colours:

- Green – Good, actively achieving.
- Orange – Doing some work, making progress but more needs to be done.
- Red – Bad, failing.

1. Know your stakeholders

Know your stakeholders is about being aware of the number of disabled people who need support, where they are and what their needs are in an emergency. Emergency planners and responders need this information to communicate and engage with disabled people and DPOs.

Scotland is making progress, but more needs to be done 

Scotland collects census data from disabled people and people with a health condition). Data is also held by a number of organisations (e.g. utilities providers, the NHS, social care providers, the police etc.) about households that may include vulnerable individuals. However, there remain barriers to sharing and using this data pro-actively to improve emergency response and recovery planning.

2. Acknowledge and address existing inequality

Emergency planning policies and practices must recognise existing inequality and design services in a way that reflects and addresses the challenging realities that many disabled people face.

Scotland is making progress, but more needs to be done 

Scotland's existing climate policies do acknowledge the unequal impacts of climate change on disabled people and the need to address these. However, disabled people are regularly referred to as a climate 'vulnerable' group with little acknowledgement of their expertise. This

excludes them from being active participants in emergency planning and climate action.

3. Develop Inclusive Governance

Disabled people are a diverse community. Their lived experiences and expertise are necessary to inform and design emergency planning policies and practices.

An example of inclusive governance is establishing working groups with disabled people, DPO representatives and emergency services experts to guide, test and evaluate emergency planning policies through a programme of engagement, collaboration and co-design.

Scotland is failing 

While there was some engagement with disabled people in Scotland's Net Zero Nation Public Engagement Strategy 2021, it has been very limited since then.

Inclusion Scotland, Glasgow Disability Alliance, ERCS and Stop Climate Chaos Scotland continue to call for meaningful inclusion of disabled people's voices in Scotland's climate action.

4. Build awareness and capacity of disabled people in emergency planning

raining disabled people to become active leaders in emergency planning activities has been proven effective for collaboration with emergency responders. Resources must be dedicated to building capacity with and between disabled people, DPOs, and support services.

Scotland is failing 

There is currently no mention of building awareness or capacity so that disabled people can contribute as experts to emergency planning policies and no initiatives have been identified as best practice examples of this in Scotland.

5. Build awareness and capacity of emergency services

Emergency services need to be trained to be aware of the presence, needs and priorities of disabled people. Training is often best delivered by trained disabled people. This approach is critical for both the design and delivery of inclusive emergency planning practices.

Scotland is failing 

There is no mention of building awareness or capacity of emergency services in the context of disability-inclusive emergency planning, and no initiatives have been identified as best practice examples of this in Scotland.

6. Ensure all emergency planning information is accessible

Emergency planning information needs to be universally accessible, including early warning procedures, emergency plans and information about available resources. These resources should be co-designed with disabled people and DPOs.

Scotland is making progress, but more needs to be done 

The Ready Scotland website provides a statement on accessibility but there is no indication that guidance or resources have been tested by or co-produced with disabled people.