



# Disability-inclusive emergency planning: policy review and recommendations

January 2026

# Who we are

## The Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland (ERCS)

ERCS is an environmental law charity and the only organisation in Scotland that provides free legal expertise in public interest law.

Our mission is to assist everyone, especially people who face the biggest barriers, to exercise their rights in environmental law and to protect the environment.

Find us on [www.ercs.scot](http://www.ercs.scot).

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## Inclusion Scotland

Inclusion Scotland believes in and is founded upon the social model of disability, we are disabled by the barriers we face rather than our impairments themselves. Using the social model, we work to achieve positive changes to policy and practice, so that disabled people are fully included throughout all Scottish society as equal citizens.

Find us on [inclusionScotland.org](http://inclusionScotland.org).

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## Sensing Climate

Sensing Climate is a five-year research project (2023-2028), led by Dr Sarah Bell at the University of Exeter. The project is exploring opportunities for responses to the climate crisis to build fairer societies, building on the priorities and insights of people who are disabled, d/Deaf, neurodivergent and people with long-term health conditions.

Find us on [sensing-climate.com](http://sensing-climate.com).

# Acknowledgements

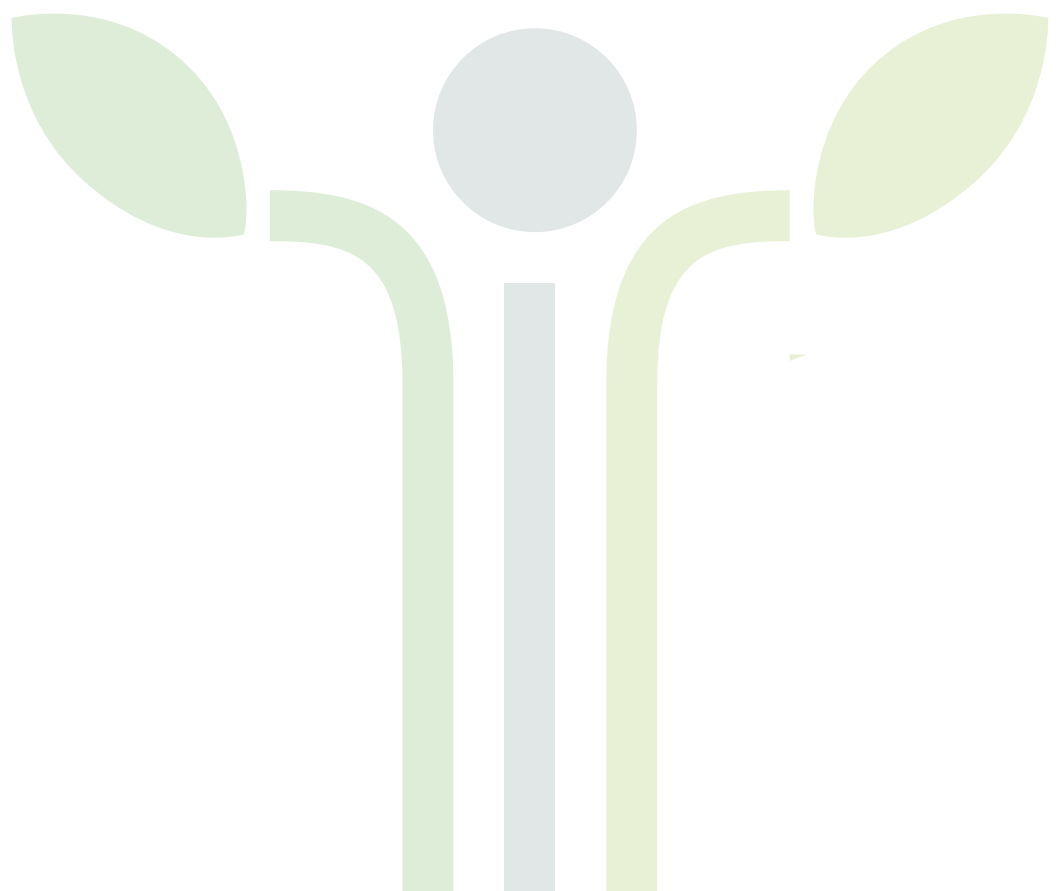
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# Disability-inclusive emergency planning: policy review and recommendations

## 1 Introduction: The obligation to deliver disability-inclusive emergency planning

Globally, climate change is intensifying and increasing the frequency of extreme weather events and thereby increasing the risk of disasters.<sup>1</sup> This includes the UK,<sup>2</sup> with the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) issuing a record number of flood alerts and warnings during the winter of 2024.<sup>3</sup>

Disabled people make up 26% of the Scottish population<sup>4</sup> and there is a disproportionate impact of climate change on disabled people, many of whom are at a heightened risk because of intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalisation.<sup>5</sup> For example, disabled people are 2–4 times more likely to die or be injured in heatwaves, storm events and floods.<sup>6</sup> It is crucial to understand that this heightened risk is not due to an innate ‘vulnerability’ but is due to societal perceptions, priorities, decisions, policies and practices that place disabled people at a disadvantage.<sup>7</sup>

**This report seeks to identify to what extent Scotland’s emergency planning policies are disability-inclusive.**

This report is informed by the research undertaken by the Sensing Climate project based at the University of Exeter, the Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland and Inclusion Scotland.<sup>8</sup>

We consider that Disability-inclusive means that policies are co-designed by disabled people, are informed by their priorities and include tangible actions to reduce the risks for disabled people.

The Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland and Inclusion Scotland published a briefing in 2021 on how the human right to a healthy environment advances the rights of disabled people.<sup>9</sup> Here, the two organisations with the Sensing Climate project are collaborating to identify accessible and inclusive approaches to emergency planning.

Section 1 of this paper provides the international context and key definitions for discussing disability-inclusive emergency planning in the context of extreme weather events in Scotland. Section 2 proposes a six-step model to assess the inclusivity of Scotland’s national and local policies. Section 3 reviews Scotland’s key climate change policies relating to emergency planning, followed by a review of Scotland’s emergency planning guidance. Section 4 provides a scorecard, assessing these policies against the six-step model. Section 5 summarises discussions held during a workshop with disabled people to identify key priorities for disability-inclusive emergency planning from the perspectives of people with lived experience of disability. Lastly, Section 6 identifies the gaps that need to be addressed to achieve disability-inclusive emergency planning and provides a list of recommendations.



## 1.1 Context

Disabled people have often been excluded from emergency planning. Emergency planning that is not inclusive risks further marginalising disabled communities by compromising their resilience and is counter to the principle of the Disabled People's Movement, 'nothing about us without us'. Inclusive emergency planning acknowledges and addresses systemic ableism.

The COVID-19 pandemic starkly demonstrated what can happen when disabled people are deprioritised and left out of emergency planning. The mortality rate of disabled people was almost eleven times higher during the pandemic than that of non-disabled people.<sup>10</sup>

*'If we had been better prepared, we could have avoided some of the massive financial, economic and human cost of the Covid-19 pandemic.'*  
(UK Covid-19 Inquiry, 2024)<sup>11</sup>

In 2021, in preparation for the COP26 Climate Summit in Glasgow and drawing from experiences of the recent pandemic, Inclusion Scotland published the report *It's our planet too:*

*Climate change, disabled people and climate action in Scotland.*<sup>12</sup> It highlighted the exclusion of disabled people from national and international climate discussions and the devastating impacts of this on disabled people's human rights. Engagement with disabled people following the report's publication found that the barriers that prevent them from fully participating in climate discussions include inaccessibility, fear of eco-ableism and lack of understanding of climate justice.

The report concluded with six recommendations including: involving disabled people and their organisations in climate policymaking and considering the accessibility of information, events and resources. According to Inclusion Scotland, very little of the report and recommendations have been taken on board by the Scottish and UK Governments.

## 1.2 International law and responsibilities

As a signatory to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD), the UK and its devolved nations must 'protect and promote' the human rights of disabled people and people with long-term health conditions.<sup>13</sup> Under the Convention, Scotland is obliged to assess and address the disproportionate climate risks experienced by disabled people, develop and implement mitigation and adaptation policies to minimise harm, provide accessible information to disabled people and enable their participation in climate decisions that affect them.<sup>14</sup> Article 11 of the Convention makes clear that countries must take 'all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of [disabled people] in situations of risk, including [...] humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters.'<sup>15</sup>

In 2019, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on climate change and disability rights, calling on governments to adopt a disability-inclusive approach to climate adaptation. This approach empowers disabled people as agents of change to address the harmful effects of climate change in their day-to-day lives.<sup>16</sup>

## 1.3 The need to define terms

### Disability

We use identity-first language, in line with Inclusion Scotland and the Disabled People's Movement in the UK. This is because we understand disability to be produced by societal barriers, inequalities and oppressions, and not as a direct result of an individual's impairments or health conditions. This is known as the Social Model of Disability, as opposed to the medical model.

The medical model suggests disability is caused by impairments, and focuses on treating, managing or curing those impairments rather

than changing societal barriers and injustices.<sup>17</sup> The medical model perspective can lead to 'ableism', whereby the lives of non-disabled people are prioritised in decision-making, with disabled people's ways of being and living viewed as inferior.

We do recognise the use of person-first language in the UNCRPD and acknowledge that some people will choose to use it (e.g. many people with learning difficulties).

### Emergency planning

Emergency planning, internationally often referred to as disaster risk reduction, is defined as actions taken directly before, during or immediately after a disaster in order to save lives, reduce adverse health impacts, ensure public safety and meet the subsistence needs of the people affected.<sup>18</sup> The three stages of emergency planning are typically preparation, response and recovery.

The leading body for UK emergencies, the UK Health Security Agency, uses the term emergency preparedness, resilience and response, often shortened to emergency planning or emergency preparedness.<sup>19</sup>

### Resilience

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights defines resilience as, 'the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate to and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions'.<sup>20</sup>

However, the concept of resilience is multi-scalar and contested. A key observation is that building resilience relies upon addressing the underlying socio-cultural, economic and political factors, as well as the natural and built environment that might reinforce disabling practices.<sup>21</sup>

## Vulnerability

United Nations University defines vulnerability concerning environmental hazards as a combination of three main factors:

- 1 **Exposure** – geographical susceptibility to hazards
- 2 **Sensitivity** – characteristics that make individuals or groups more likely to be affected by hazards (e.g. age or health)
- 3 **Adaptive capacity** – the resources available to people to respond and recover from hazards.<sup>22</sup>

Although the language of vulnerability is often used in this context, disability cannot be equated with vulnerability. Disabled people are not inherently vulnerable to environmental hazards; they are made vulnerable by a society that fails to meet their needs, involve them in decision-making or affirm the adaptation expertise they have had to develop to survive in such conditions.

## Eco Ableism

Inclusion Scotland defines eco ableism as discrimination towards disabled people by non-disabled environmentalists. Disabled people stand to be impacted significantly by climate change and many of the climate actions promoted to address climate change may make life more difficult for disabled people.<sup>23</sup>

Examples include:

- Banning plastic straws without recognising that some disabled people need them to drink safely and conveniently.
- Removing disabled parking bays to make way for cycle lanes.
- Urban planning for low-carbon cities that discriminate 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.

Disabled people must be included in developing climate policy which is enabling and factors in the needs of disabled people for equitable solutions.



## 2 Proposing a six-step model for disability-inclusive emergency planning

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to disability-inclusive emergency planning. Various studies have created models based on a country's specific populations, hazards, cultures and governance.

In 2015, the UK adopted the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030* to guide the development and implementation of emergency planning.<sup>24</sup> It is one of the first global frameworks that gives explicit recommendations to address the needs of disabled people and ensure disability-inclusive emergency planning. The guiding principle is:

*'Disaster risk reduction requires an all-of-society engagement and partnership. It also requires empowerment and inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory participation [and all policies and practices should include] a gender, age, disability and cultural perspective.'*<sup>25</sup>

However, the framework is high level and needs to be adapted to the national and local context to implement this principle; and a recent report highlights the lack of global progress made in the past decade.<sup>26</sup> Doing so is also problematic in Scotland, where there is little research on disabled people's experiences in emergencies or the inclusivity of emergency planning. What we do know is that there are numerous barriers to disability inclusion and a comprehensive approach is needed to ensure that the needs of disabled people are addressed in emergency planning.<sup>27</sup>

Drawing from international evidence, this paper proposes a **six-step model** to assess to what extent Scotland's emergency planning policies are disability-inclusive. When fully implemented, the six-step model reflects a locally delivered community approach to the governance, planning, delivery, and evaluation of emergency planning.

### 1 Know the needs of disabled people

Disaggregated data is collected and safeguarded to support the effectiveness and accountability of emergency planning policies and practices.

This approach will ensure that emergency services are fully aware of who might need assistance in the context of an emergency, in what ways, and allows for effective monitoring and evaluation of services.

This information is necessary to:

- Accurately identify, locate and communicate with disabled people before and after an emergency.
- Engage effectively with disability support organisations and emergency responders.
- Understand the differential needs of disabled people and identify the physical, social and economic resources required to support them with dignity, for example through providing support with the development of person-centred risk assessments and Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans.<sup>28</sup>
- Make considerations for intersectional factors that affect resilience, such as gender, race, age and economic circumstances.<sup>29</sup>

## 2 Acknowledge and address existing inequality

The social model of disability informs how disability and vulnerability are defined in policy circles, so that disabled people are seen as critical stakeholders with valuable knowledge for building adaptive capacity, rather than solely as passive recipients of assistance.

Acknowledging existing discrimination and marginalisation of disabled people is necessary to address them. Framing disabled people as inherently 'vulnerable' and 'hard to reach' in policy perpetuates negative views about the skills and expertise of disabled people and hampers their participation in not only emergency planning but also everyday life.<sup>30</sup>

Emergency planning policies and practices must use inclusive language and communications as well as being designed in a way that reflects, and addresses, the challenging realities that many disabled people face.

## 3 Develop inclusive governance

There is early engagement with disabled people and Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) in risk assessment and policy formulation processes at local and national levels, recognising their role as knowledgeable stakeholders rather than passive victims or 'expected losses'.<sup>31</sup>

It is also recognised that disabled people are a highly heterogeneous community, whose experiences will also be shaped by wider forms of social inequality linked to differences in income, gender, ethnicity and age.

An example of inclusive governance is creating and resourcing partnerships or working groups with disabled people, DPO representatives and

emergency services experts to guide emergency planning policies through a programme of engagement, collaboration and co-design. This involvement requires investment and a single authority tasked with ensuring adherence to inclusive policies at the national and local levels for accountability.<sup>32</sup>

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

Resources are dedicated to building capacity with and between disabled people, DPOs, and support services, recognising the trust and long-term relationships that DPOs have with many disabled people in the community.

With the underfunding and multiple demands on time and resources experienced by DPOs and support services, they are often ill-equipped materially to engage with emergency planning processes fully.<sup>33</sup> Such efforts require innovative and accessible training methods that raise awareness, up-skill, resource and empower disabled people, DPOs and support services to increase their resilience.

An example framework to achieve this is the Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) framework. P-CEP is an Australian co-designed and tested framework that helps disabled people to assess their capabilities, identify their needs, communicate with others and plan for different emergency scenarios.<sup>34</sup>

Additionally, training disabled people to become active leaders in emergency planning activities has been proven effective for collaboration with emergency services. It also increases the visibility of disabled people in emergency planning as knowledgeable actors, rather than a homogenised or inevitably vulnerable group.<sup>35</sup>

## 5 Build awareness and capacity of emergency services

Emergency services personnel are trained to be aware of disabled people, their needs and priorities.

This awareness is needed in the acute context of an emergency but also to ensure that disabled people can provide feedback on the accessibility of proposed emergency rest centres, participate in table-top and simulated emergency planning exercises, and review emergency preparedness, response, recovery (and where necessary, relocation) plans to identify gaps in protection.

Training is often best delivered by trained disabled people. This approach is critical for both the design and delivery of inclusive emergency planning practices.

In a study of disability-inclusive emergency planning with the Deaf community in NSW, Australia, Deaf individuals were trained to be Deaf Liaison Officers to deliver Deaf Awareness training to emergency services personnel. It provided personnel with a culturally sensitive understanding of Deaf people's lived experiences, their culture, how they view themselves and their place in society, how to communicate respectfully and effectively and how to support their needs.<sup>36</sup>

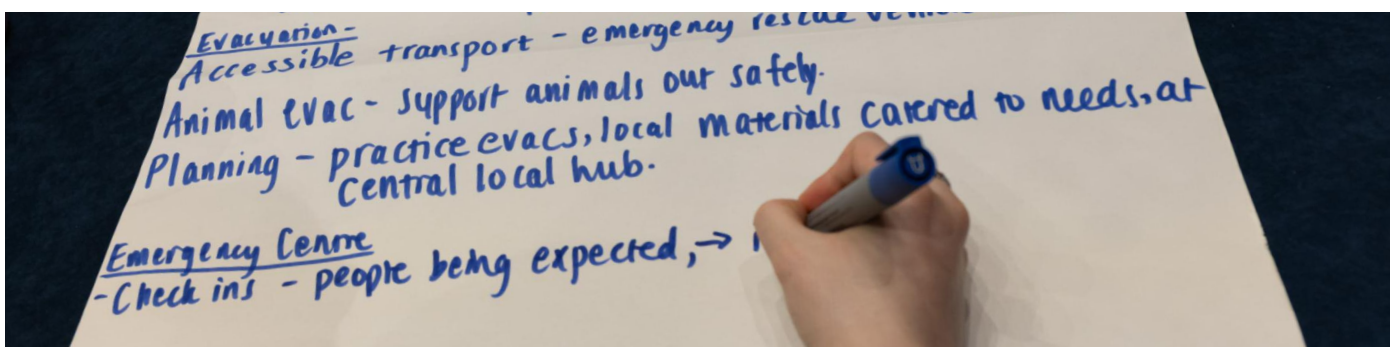
Conversely, it raised awareness of the knowledge, tools, and resources needed by community health and disability support providers to engage in emergency planning.

## 6 Ensure emergency planning information and resources are accessible

All emergency planning information and resources are universally accessible, including infrastructure, early warning procedures, emergency plans and information about available resources.

These resources should be co-designed with disabled people and DPOs – examples include Easy Read, BSL-signed videos and screen reader accessible documents. Care should be taken to ensure that risk communications are trauma informed and emotionally sensitive, particularly amongst communities whose needs might not be met adequately by current emergency preparedness protocols.

A helpful resource to support such efforts is the Australian Government's Resource Map.<sup>37</sup> It shares good practice resources for disability-inclusive emergency management developed in Australia. The resource map identifies available and accessible resources for the different stages of emergency management (preparedness, response or recovery). Additionally, it shows where there is a concentration of resources and where there are gaps.



### 3 Review of Scotland's national and local policies – where we are at

The primary legislation for emergency planning in the UK is the *Civil Contingencies Act 2004*. *The UK Resilience Framework (2022)* outlines roles and responsibilities in emergency scenarios and is built on through the UK Government Resilience Action Plan (2025).<sup>38</sup>

This section first reviews to what extent Scotland's climate change policies relevant to emergency planning are disability-inclusive. Two steps of the six-step model were identified in current climate change policies: **Step 2: Acknowledge and address existing inequality** and **Step 3: Develop inclusive governance**. It then reviews Scotland's emergency planning guidance: *Preparing Scotland, Priority Services Registers and the Flood Resilience Strategy*.

#### 3.1 Scotland's climate change policies and disability inclusion

##### 3.1.1 Acknowledge and address existing inequality

Within Scottish climate change policies, there is consistent recognition of the unequal impact of climate change and the need to address these inequities. *The Scottish National Adaptation Plan 2024–2029* identifies the disproportionate impact that climate change has on certain groups, particularly disabled people and people with long-term medical conditions.<sup>39</sup>

The plan's predecessor, the *Climate Ready Scotland: climate change adaptation programme 2019–2024* committed to a human rights-based approach to tackling the challenges of climate change. It recognised the potential of climate change impacts to deepen social disadvantage and stated, 'socially vulnerable groups sensitive to climate impacts:

people in poor health or with poor mobility and access – people with existing physical or mental health problems may have a lower capacity to take action'.<sup>40</sup> The programme also identified drivers of social vulnerability such as income level, availability of greenspace and quality of housing stock.<sup>41</sup>

*Scotland's Climate Change Plan 2018–2032* states, 'Scotland will also retain a strong focus on climate justice, recognising that climate change impacts tend to impact most severely poor people and vulnerable communities.'<sup>42</sup> The plan's update, *Securing a Green Recovery on a Path to Net Zero*, advocates for an approach to climate action to 'tackle existing inequalities and exclusion, whilst anticipating and mitigating risks to those worst impacted so no one is left behind.'<sup>43</sup>

#### A lack of inclusive language

Despite the acknowledgement that climate change deepens social disadvantage, disabled people are framed primarily as one of several climate 'vulnerable' groups, with little acknowledgement of the role of disabled people as 'agents of change' as advocated for by the UN Human Rights Council Resolution on climate change and disability rights.

*Scotland's Climate Change Plan 2018–2032* mentions disabled people once in reference to how increasing energy costs are most likely to have more of an adverse effect on them.<sup>44</sup> Again, disabled people are only briefly mentioned in *Securing a Green Recovery on a Path to Net Zero*, concerning special considerations needed for green jobs, transport and recognising the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>45</sup>

*The Climate Ready Scotland: climate change adaptation programme 2019–2024* briefly mentioned disabled people in regard to emergency planning, encouraging them to notify their energy supplier ahead of potential disruptions and stating that due to severe weather, there may be an increase in elderly and vulnerable people trapped within their homes requiring rescue.<sup>46</sup> The programme did not examine the difficulties that some disabled people may experience in notifying their energy supplier.



The updated *Scottish National Adaptation Plan (2024–2029)* recognises disabled people and those with long term medical conditions as one of several groups that may face additional adaptation barriers, as well as feeling the negative effects of disruptions of public services more acutely. It suggests that ‘our responses to climate change can protect and improve population health, wellbeing and reduce inequalities’.<sup>47</sup>

### Actions to address inequality through climate change policy

Until the publication of the *Equality Impact Assessment and Fairer Scotland*, published alongside the *Scottish National Adaptation Plan (2024–2029)*, there has been a lack of explicit action in climate change policy that serves to address existing inequality. This assessment provides more detail on the implications of climate change on disabled people, noting greater risks of heat-related mortality and adverse outcomes from flood events amongst people with pre-existing conditions, including higher sensitivity to disruptions in medical and food supply chains, transport, energy and other accessibility services.<sup>48</sup>

The assessment also highlights a range of potential benefits of the adaptation plan for disabled people:

- Increased ‘awareness and development of the Ready Scotland platform (Scotland’s emergency planning guidance platform) as an accessible resource providing information and advice on emergency preparedness and response’.
- Increased ‘resilience of supply chains. This in turn will benefit people with a mobility disability who may have increased difficulty in travelling to different locations to obtain medicine or buy food in the event of supply chain disruption as well as those who may require specific medicine or nutritional intake of certain foods due to their disability.’
- Supporting communities and individuals ‘in taking locally led adaptation action. With strategic management, these provisions could allow for people with disabilities and disability groups to have the opportunity to collaborate with other community groups in ensuring a greater reflection of their needs and views in the integration process of climate resilience into wider community priorities.’<sup>49</sup>

This Equality Impact Assessment begins to discuss adaptations necessary to address the effects of climate change on disabled people, but there is a lack of explicit recognition of the expertise that disabled people could bring to the design and development of such adaptations.

After a lengthy gap since the Scottish Government’s 2016 *A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People*, a delivery plan to 2021 for the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, the Scottish Government have now agreed a *Disability Equality Plan (2025)* with leading Scottish DPOs. It commits to working with DPOs on strengthening ‘resilience and emergency planning to ensure appropriate, accessible and timely responses for disabled people in times of crisis’, and that its ‘transition to Net Zero and a climate resilient Scotland will be fair and just for disabled people’.<sup>50</sup>

The Plan continues, ‘working with DPOs and disabled people on the co-design of our *Just Transition Plans*, we will ensure that their needs are reflected in plans, and in wider Scottish Government climate change policy’.<sup>51</sup> It also includes a commitment to strengthen emergency planning to ensure it is appropriate, accessible, and timely for disabled people. There is no detail of how and when it will do this, beyond establishing new governance structures to steer and hold the Government to account for the implementation of the overall plan.

### 3.1.2 Develop inclusive governance

*Scotland’s Net Zero Nation Public Engagement Strategy 2021* is designed as a ‘guiding framework for the design and implementation of public engagement on climate change across all parts of government’.<sup>52</sup> While disability is not explicitly mentioned in the strategy, it does commit to appropriate engagement with different audiences, which includes ensuring that all reporting is accessible and inclusive.

The strategy’s Equality Impact Assessment states, ‘our messaging will be designed to be inclusive and tailored to its audience’ and ‘building an understanding of climate change within the disabled community is of key importance’.<sup>53</sup>

The *Climate Change – Net Zero Nation: public engagement strategy mid point review 2025* highlighted workshops hosted by Glasgow Disability Alliance with its members, which ‘tripled engagement levels’.<sup>54</sup> While this increased engagement is positive, more support is required to engage and enable disabled people to play an integral role in this work and there remains a lack of meaningful collaboration with Scotland’s DPOs in climate action across Scotland, e.g. disabled people in rural Aberdeenshire will have different experiences and risks from urban Glasgow and the central belt.

Engagement efforts could draw on guidance included in, for example, the *National Standards for Community Engagement*, which recognise the need for early, meaningful, inclusive and accessible forms of engagement. These standards note the need for action to remove engagement barriers and meet support needs, e.g. accessible transport, venues and catering, care-giving responsibilities and personal assistance, access to interpreters and communication aids, appropriate scheduling and clear timeframes, transparent and clear communication, access to out of pocket expenses and capacity building.<sup>55</sup>



In 2023, Adaptation Scotland published a *Community Climate Action Roadmap* as a practical guide for communities to adapt to climate change. While the roadmap recognises that ‘climate action and social justice need to be considered alongside each other’, it does not explicitly discuss disabled people or the adaptations that may be required to enable genuine participation of disabled people in shaping climate action. This omission is surprising as it does note that ‘low-income, working class, ethnic minority and migrant communities are faced with intersectional experiences of climate vulnerability and greater marginalisations, exclusions and injustices’.<sup>56</sup>

The opportunities for disabled people to participate meaningfully in climate action continue to be undermined by poverty, caused by reduced and inadequate welfare payments, low pay, high social care support costs, high energy costs and digital exclusion.<sup>57</sup>

## 3.2 Scotland’s emergency planning guidance and disability inclusion

### 3.2.1 Preparing Scotland

Scotland’s Civil Contingencies Division leads on emergency planning for the Scottish Government and manages the Scottish Government Resilience Room. Its purpose is to coordinate the work of the Scottish Government and its agencies, and brief Ministers during emergencies and significant events.<sup>58</sup>

Preparing Scotland is a set of guidance documents on emergency planning and resilience and is delivered through the Ready Scotland website. It is underpinned by the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (Contingency Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2005.

Preparing Scotland’s core document, *Philosophy, Principles, Structure and Regulatory Duties*, is coupled with 12 detailed guidance documents on specific matters.<sup>59</sup> The core document refers to disabled people once as a group requiring special consideration and as ‘harder to reach’.<sup>60</sup>

A disability-inclusive approach would replace this term with ‘seldom reached’ to emphasise that disabled people are often overlooked and more needs to be done to amplify their voice and ensure they are heard.

The *Warning and Informing Scotland* document indirectly mentions disabled people through its ‘audience-based approach’ which considers segmenting communications to the public based on proximity, demographics, factors of vulnerability and access to communication channels.<sup>61</sup>

The *Care for People Affected by Emergencies* document covers activities aimed at providing support to meet people’s practical and emotional needs after an emergency and refers to disabled people as vulnerable people. It outlines the special considerations that may be needed for disabled people regarding transport and access to a Survivor Reception Centre and a Family and Friends Reception Centre and the facilities they provide. It suggests that these considerations cannot be comprehensive and that this depends on the individual and the unique circumstances of an emergency.<sup>62</sup> The *Scottish National Adaptation Plan 2024–2029* suggests this ‘Care for People Affected by Emergencies’ guidance is currently under review.

The *Building Resilient Communities* document identifies that communities are diverse but only mentions this diversity in reference to differences in vulnerability. It advocates for empowering, engaging and enabling individuals, communities and the voluntary sector to ensure resilient communities.<sup>63</sup>

Without specific reference to disabled people, the four guidance documents referred to above recognise differing needs for different people but primarily identify disabled people as ‘vulnerable’ and fail to recognise the causes of this vulnerability or the ability of disabled people to contribute to emergency planning guidance when enabling conditions are created to do so.

The 'Regional Resilience Partnerships' in the North, East and West of Scotland are Scotland's regional bodies for emergency planning. They work with twelve Local Resilience Partnerships across Scotland and are required to assess the emergency risks within their region, communicate this assessment to the public and determine the region's level of preparedness. The partnerships have a statutory requirement to publish a Community Risk Register, which conveys the risks identified within the region. The guidance does not explicitly mention disabled people but highlights the need to consider the diversity of the population, including any particularly vulnerable groups and the level of preparation amongst different communities.<sup>64</sup>

All three partnerships maintain a focus on communities of place and make no mention of disabled people or communities with other protected characteristics

### 3.2.2 Priority Services Register

Key emergency services such as Scottish Fire & Rescue services, Scottish Water and energy providers must have a Priority Services Register to identify individuals who require additional help during emergencies. For example, Scottish Water's register states it can assist disabled people by providing bottled water in the event of a large-scale water supply interruption, large print materials and allowing extra time for home visits.<sup>65</sup> The disadvantage of this register is that it is self-referring and there are limits to the support provided. For example, being on a Priority Services Register does not include assistance with the extra costs incurred by people with impaired thermoregulation to run fans or heaters during temperature extremes.

There is also no data on the efficacy of these registers in Scotland.<sup>66</sup>

### 3.2.3 Flood resilience strategy

One of the guiding principles of the *National Flood Resilience Strategy 2024* is that flood resilience activities uphold the principles of a Just Transition 'to deliver fairness and tackle inequality and injustice.'<sup>67</sup> It does not make specific mention of disabled people or other protected characteristics.

The *Equality Impact Assessment* of the strategy states the use of the social model of disability and signposts the vulnerability of disabled people to environmental hazards.<sup>68</sup> It recognises that the secondary impacts from hazards on infrastructure and services for disabled people are underexamined. For example, as noted in the 2025 Building Standards consultation on proposed *Flooding and Groundwater* updates, there is a risk that property level flood resilience measures (e.g. raised entrance thresholds) will compromise key accessibility features.

The *Equality Impact Assessment* of the *National Flood Resilience Strategy* references Glasgow Disability Alliance's (GDA) consultation response to the draft National Adaptation Plan, emphasising the ongoing issue of eco-ableism and that community support and advice must recognise it.<sup>69</sup> It also highlights Glasgow Disability Alliance's concern that the *Scottish National Adaptation Plan 2024–2029* focuses on place-based and local solutions rather than engaging with communities of identity and interest, stating that the emphasis solely on geographical communities can potentially increase inequalities for disabled people.<sup>70</sup>

Disabled people are not mentioned in *Scotland's Flood Warning Development Framework 2022–2028*, although it does commit to improving 'how we engage communities in our flood warning services, both on the ground and digitally, ensuring inclusivity which reflects the diversity of the people of Scotland, to help understand and meet the needs of communities at risk of flooding'.<sup>71</sup>

Particular care is needed when a policy of 'no active intervention' is adopted in response to flood risk, as long-term relocation may be required for at-risk households. In such cases, there is a need for long-term meaningful engagement with disabled residents to shape sensitive and inclusive approaches to planned relocation.

*The National Flood Resilience Strategy* acknowledges the need for long-term planning to 'support communities through a resilience process that may include a slow transition away from those areas most exposed to flooding and coastal erosion where protection cannot be sustained in the long term'.<sup>72</sup> Reflecting further on the challenges of relocation and the importance of clear communication, the *Scottish Coastal Change Adaptation Plan (CCAP)* Guidance recognises that 'CCAPs are not

something that should be done 'to' communities, rather they should be developed, reviewed, communicated, and updated in a long-term partnership between practitioners, residents, and businesses'.<sup>73</sup>

### 3.2.4 Adverse weather and health planning

Public Health Scotland leads the production of *Adverse Weather and Health Plans*, which aim to reduce the health risks of extreme temperatures, flooding and drought. The 2024–2027 plan, *Protecting the population from the negative health and wellbeing impacts of adverse weather*, recognises the extra risks to adverse weather experienced with age, pre-existing medical conditions, socio-economic deprivation and homelessness.

It notes that 'preparing and planning for these events can help mitigate the impact they can have on individuals and communities',<sup>74</sup> and commits to tailoring public health messaging 'so that it is accessible and engaging to people with different needs.' It also calls for the integration of health and health inequalities into adaptation planning through a 'health in all policies approach'.<sup>75</sup> While the third/voluntary sector is listed as a stakeholder in relation to the plan, there is no specific mention of DPOs.

## Question 2

What can people in charge of emergency planning learn from you as a disabled person?



## 4 Disability-inclusive emergency planning scorecard

Based on the analysis in Section 3, this section assesses to what extent Scotland's emergency planning policies are disability-inclusive. It uses a traffic light scorecard against the six-step model proposed in Section 2.

● **Green = actively achieving** ● **Orange = making progress, but more to be done** ● **Red = failing**

- 1 ● **Know the needs of disabled people** – Scotland collects census data of people with a health condition or disability and what type. This data can be compared with data about other protected characteristics to identify intersectional factors for emergency planning. Geographic data is also available. The Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities collects data on the number of adults with learning disabilities who are known to local authorities, the type of accommodation they live in, the number attending further education, employment, training and volunteering status and whether they have attended a day centre. They have not published a statistics report since 2019.<sup>76</sup> It is unknown whether this data has been applied and tested in emergency planning policies and practices.

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- 2 ● **Acknowledge and address existing inequality** – There is an acknowledgement that disabled people have greater exposure to climate change impacts in Scotland's climate change and emergency planning policies. However, disabled people are primarily identified as vulnerable, disadvantaged and deemed less likely to engage with climate change issues. Policies fail to identify disabled people as knowledgeable actors and do not identify the full range of societal factors which create vulnerability. The newer *National Flood Planning Resilience Strategy 2024* refers to the social model of disability and uses it throughout.

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- 3 ● **Develop inclusive governance** – While there has been some engagement with disabled people led by Glasgow Disability Alliance, there is a lack of collaboration or co-design with disabled people in the policies reviewed. Inclusion Scotland and Stop Climate Chaos Scotland continue to call for the meaningful inclusion of disabled people's voices in Scotland's climate action.<sup>77</sup>

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- 4 ● **Build awareness and capacity of disabled people in emergency planning** – There is no mention of awareness or capacity building of disabled people in policies and guidance, and no initiatives have been identified.

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- 5 ● **Build awareness and capacity of emergency services** – There is no mention of awareness or capacity building of emergency services in the context of disability in policies and guidance, and no initiatives have been identified.

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- 6 ● **Ensure emergency planning information and resources are accessible** – The Ready Scotland website provides a statement on accessibility: 'We're continuously working to make ready.scot as accessible and usable as possible for all abilities and disabilities. This includes older audiences and those with visual, hearing, cognitive or motor impairments.'<sup>78</sup> There is no indication that guidance or resources have been tested by or co-designed with disabled people.

## 5 Lived experience workshop

### 5.1 Background

On Tuesday 4 November 2025, Inclusion Scotland, the Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland and the Sensing Climate project brought disabled people together for a workshop to share their lived experiences and explore what disability-inclusive planning could look like.

The workshop was a hybrid event, attended by 10 participants. Before the workshop, participants were provided with a summary report and easy-read version of this policy review on disability-inclusive emergency planning.<sup>79</sup>

The objectives of the workshop were:

- To hear directly from disabled participants about their experiences and perspectives on emergency planning.
- To discuss and build on this policy review's findings in a participatory way.
- To explore participants' interests and potential opportunities for engaging in climate and emergency planning work moving forward.

Participants were split into four groups, including one online. Each group, including a facilitator and scribe, were given the following two questions to discuss:

- 1 It is 20 years into the future. Planning for climate emergencies such as floods and hot weather has been shaped around disabled people's priorities and needs. A flood has happened in your area. You and your loved ones are safe and have all you need. How have your needs been met to keep you safe e.g. at home, during evacuation, in the emergency centre, when you return home?
- 2 What can people in charge of emergency planning learn from you as a disabled person?

### 5.2 Summary of discussions

Participants agreed that emergency planning in Scotland is currently not inclusive for disabled people.

*“Currently, emergency services assume disabled people won't survive [in a climate emergency]. We saw this in COVID.”*

Workshop participant

Participants expressed that to be included in emergency planning in Scotland, current engagement efforts are not sufficient and suggested the following priorities.

#### 1 Participation at all stages

Emergency preparedness, response and recovery planning must be proactive, empathetic, and trauma informed.

To ensure that accessibility is genuinely at the centre of emergency planning, disabled people's expertise must influence every stage of the process, not as an add-on but as a core design principle: from designing risk communications, to reviewing emergency preparedness, response and recovery plans, testing emergency responses through table-top and simulation exercises and ensuring the accessibility of emergency rest centres.

Disabled people should be compensated for their contributions and affirmed as equal partners in decision-making alongside non-disabled academics and decision-makers.

Emergency planners must take time to listen, learn, and act on what disabled people say, recognising the diversity and value of their experiences and needs rather than applying a one-size-fits-all model. Therefore, inclusive emergency planning requires a variety of disabled people to connect and contribute.

## 2 Building relationships to support participation

*“Give Deaf and disabled people the opportunity to speak for ourselves and share lived/living experience.”* Workshop participant

There is a large diversity of needs and experiences of disabled people. To include these in local and national emergency plans, there is a need to encourage and enable the active participation of disabled people. Essential to this is connecting to local networks and trusted intermediaries, while acknowledging that not all disabled people have the same access to good quality and consistent local networks.

Building relationships with DPOs, Deaf-led organisations, and community networks before emergencies occur is crucial, as is learning from their experiences of responding to crises such as COVID-19. Disabled people bring insights on disaster mitigation, planning/preparation, and adaptability that traditional approaches often miss.

Each local authority should have an accessibility working group, with regular training provided for emergency responders, planners, and communities, ideally by DPOs. Accountability will come from clearly defined roles, which will ensure consistent and equitable responses.

Community-based networks must be established and trained in advance to respond effectively to climate emergencies in a variety of inclusive ways. This should be supported by emergency responders who understand disabled people’s needs and can connect across agencies and communities.

## 3 Autonomy and capacity building with disabled people

*“My needs are known, this means I can help others.”* Workshop participant

Disabled people should be equipped with clear information and training on how to support

themselves during emergencies, including how to develop an emergency grab bag, and when, where, and how to evacuate and return safely. When unable to act on this information or training independently, people should have access to support to do so.

Disabled people must have the autonomy to make their own decisions, such as choosing not to return home until they feel safe. Ongoing feedback systems should capture lived experiences to continually improve future emergency planning and support.

Health, social care support, water, communication and energy systems must remain operational during crises. This requires strong coordination between local authorities, national government, DPOs, utilities, communities and emergency responders. Joined-up services and trusted collaboration ensure continuity through proactive repair responses, priority service registers for essential utilities, and sustained medical and social care support.

Personal assistants, carers, interpreters, and trained volunteers should be available and supported to stay with the disabled person they are supporting. This will help to maintain continuity of care and further communication, with ongoing coordination from local authorities to replace essential equipment and sustain support services.

Emergency rest centres must be set up in accessible buildings, with inclusion of quiet spaces (or ear defenders where these cannot be guaranteed), accessible toilets and sleeping areas, accessible and supportive seating, suitable lighting conditions, hearing loops, charging stations for mobility aids and access to back-up assistive equipment for when it has been left behind, lost or damaged during evacuation, and refrigeration of medications.

When disabled people cannot return home, they must be prioritised for accessible temporary accommodation. Additional practical supports include accessible transport, clear signage, individual accessibility passports, and community resilience training materials in accessible formats.

## 4 Practical advice, communication and support

*“Educating emergency services on the various needs of disabled people.”* Workshop participant

Reliable, up-to-date and safeguarded data should identify where disabled people live and the support they need, enabling targeted assistance.

Regular drills, training, and public information campaigns are essential to ensure that all individuals understand what actions to take during emergencies, reinforcing inclusion, preparedness, and community-wide resilience.

*“Communication must be clear, inclusive, and ongoing, before, during, and after emergencies.”*

Workshop participant

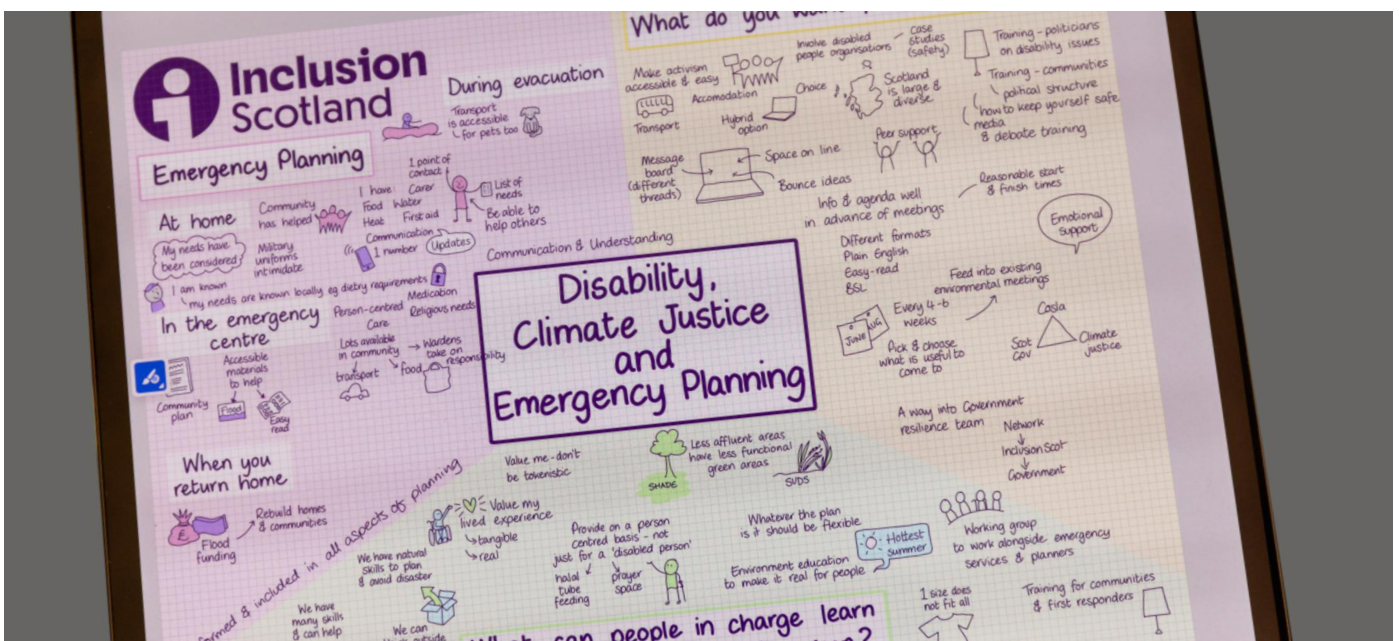
Communication must be fully accessible and continuous, in ways that meet disabled people’s needs before, during, and after emergencies. This includes warnings, updates, and key decisions. Information must be provided in a variety of languages, and in plain language, Easy Read,

British Sign Language, captions, and multiple accessible formats, avoiding reliance on digital-only channels.

Consistent updates and transparent information-sharing protocols are vital, alongside engagement and feedback mechanisms that allow disabled people to shape and evaluate communication processes and materials.

Economic support and security should also be recognised as central to personal safety and resilience, as financial stability enables more equitable preparedness and recovery (for example, through being able to afford the costs of flood insurance).

Mapping the location of accessible and adaptable housing in Scotland and its risks from current and future climate impacts could help to identify and prioritise households where specific support is required: be it to embed property level flood/heat resilience measures or, where risks cannot be mitigated sufficiently in situ, to ensure provision of alternative accessible housing in areas of lower risk, in close consultation with those affected. When property level climate resilience measures are introduced, care is needed to ensure they do not compromise key accessibility features.



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## 6 Conclusion and recommendations

This report has reviewed Scotland's national and local policies and assessed them against a six-step model for disability-inclusive emergency planning:

- 1 Know the needs of disabled people**
- 2 Acknowledge and address existing inequality**
- 3 Develop inclusive governance**
- 4 Build awareness and capacity of disabled people in emergency planning**
- 5 Build awareness and capacity of emergency services**
- 6 Ensure emergency planning information and resources are accessible.**

The review has identified that Scotland is not yet engaged in disability-inclusive emergency planning, with significant deficits in disability-inclusive governance.

The lived experiences of disabled people, as summarised in section 5, reinforce that the expertise of disabled people and DPOs is underutilised, and it is unknown to what extent emergency services are equipped to meet the needs of disabled people.

The priorities from the workshop align with the six step model and are:

- **Participation at all stages**
- **Building relationships to support participation**
- **Autonomy and capacity building with disabled people**
- **Practical advice, communication and support**

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## 6.1 Recommendations

Using our six-step model to progress disability-inclusive emergency planning, we recommend the following:

- 1 Identify what disaggregated data is available and what additional data needs to be collected and safeguarded regarding disabled people's needs and priorities for emergency planning. This data is needed to inform tailored responses that meet people's needs with dignity. It is essential to recognise that disabled people are not a homogenous group and to account for intersectional impacts of barriers including disability, poverty, place, and other characteristics.
- 2 Build on the inclusive language used in the *National Flood Planning Resilience Strategy 2024* in wider policies and identify disabled people as critical stakeholders with valuable knowledge for building adaptive capacity, rather than solely as passive recipients of assistance. Particular care is needed around the language of vulnerability that is typically used in emergency planning. Rather than equating disability with inevitable vulnerability, it is important to understand and affirm the contributions of disabled people, and to help disabled people understand what their risks might be at each stage of an emergency and provide support to mitigate those risks as appropriate.
- 3 Create the enabling conditions for the expertise of disabled communities to inform the development and review of climate and emergency planning policies.
- 4 Ensure that DPOs are resourced to build the awareness and capacity of disabled people for emergency planning.
- 5 Ensure that all emergency planning is inclusive and accessible by providing adequate training and capacity building, including resourcing DPOs to be involved in training and feedback across the multiple actors involved: from emergency responders through to community resilience groups and housing associations.
- 6 Ensure emergency planning information is fully accessible, particularly regarding early warning, emergency plans and information relating to available resources.

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