



# Differential social impacts of climate change in the UK

**Project Code: UKCC22**

**Who this research is intended for: Environmental policy and regulators, government and government agencies, civil society**

## Objectives of the project

- identify the social impacts in the UK which are forecast to increase under climate change projections;
- identify the differential impacts, for example, based on exposure and sensitivity and the capacity to adapt; and
- identify adaptation measures that will need to consider these differential social impacts.

The research involved a literature review to identify the differential social impacts of climate change, analysis, a workshop and research into adaptation responses.

## Background

The Stern Review highlighted that 'the impacts of climate change are not evenly distributed – the poorest countries and people will suffer earliest and most'. Evidence shows that not only are the poorest people often more exposed to specific climate change impacts, they are also more vulnerable to those impacts, and find it harder to recover when they occur. Climate change will widen existing inequalities, globally and locally, unless social impacts are actively addressed across the range of adaptation<sup>1</sup> and mitigation<sup>2</sup> measures.

To inform UK climate change adaptation responses, the Scotland and Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental Research (SNIFFER) commissioned CAG Consultants to identify how climate change affects different people within the UK, and how adaptation measures should consider social impacts to help build the capacity of vulnerable groups to adapt to climate change.

<sup>1</sup> Adaptation to climate change refers to adjustment in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected changes in the climate or their effects, which moderates harm or exploits beneficial opportunities (IPCC, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Mitigation is an anthropogenic intervention to reduce the *sources* or enhance the sinks of greenhouse gases (IPCC, 2007).

## Key Findings and Recommendations

Changes in the weather, and more extreme conditions, such as heat waves, heavy rainfall, flooding and storms will have significant social impacts on UK society. In particular, climate change will affect physical, as well as mental health and wider quality of life. It will also affect people's access to, and the quality of, basic goods and services such as water, shelter and food, as well as other key priorities for human wellbeing such as education, employment and crime, therefore worsening social deprivation.

The people who are likely to be most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change are those:

- living in places at risk;
- people who are already deprived by the health, level of income, the quality of their homes and mobility; as well as
- people who lack awareness of the risks of climate change, the capacity to adapt, and who are less well supported by family, friends and agencies.

Deprivation often increases vulnerability to climate change, and climate change increases deprivation.

Action is needed at all levels: international, national, within devolved administrations and within regions; at a local level by councils and local agencies; but also at a community level, through voluntary and community groups, and with individuals.

The report finds that climate change adaptation policy within the UK recognises the social justice implications of climate change but offers little in terms of action. There is a myriad of mechanisms and tools which can be used to examine the differential social impacts of climate change within policy and practice. Sector-specific plans, such as in the health sector, are starting to consider these issues but more work is needed to ensure that adaptation responses involve, engage, empower and ultimately build the adaptive capacity of vulnerable people.

## Next Steps

The report identifies a number of gaps for further exploration and action. In particular, more work is needed to understand the impact of global climate change on immigration to the UK and greater focus is needed to promote community-led adaptation.

In line with the principles of the UK Adaptation Programme, socially responsive climate change adaptation policy needs to be delivered within the context of **sustainable development**; action should be **proportionate**, and **integrated** with climate change mitigation; and involve **collaboration** with the people who are most vulnerable to climate change.

## Further Information

Copies of the research outputs are available for free download from [www.sniffer.org.uk](http://www.sniffer.org.uk) (search on 'Project Search' UKCC22)

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## Partners

SEPA, NIEA, Scottish Government, Environment Agency, SNH, Forestry Commission, NICVA

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