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Have we left behind the rainbow warriors?

**The Climate Emergency
and its impact on global
queer people and their
communities**

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Please note that I will use the term 'queer' to describe global sexual and gender minorities, or LGBTQIA+, as it is a shorthand umbrella term.

This maintains inclusivity and recognises the variety of lived experiences and identities which may not use LGBTQIA+ to culturally describe themselves, or to locate themselves politically. LGBTQIA+ will only be used where cited as such.



A photograph of several industrial smokestacks emitting thick plumes of dark smoke into a hazy, orange-tinted sky, likely at sunset or sunrise. The smokestacks are dark silhouettes against the lighter sky. The overall scene conveys industrial activity and air pollution.

What is the Climate Emergency?

- Climate change is characterised by changes to the global climate resulting from an enhanced greenhouse effect, which is caused by greenhouse gases, **such as carbon dioxide which is produced predominantly by the burning and use of fossil fuels (McCormick, 2022).**
- In 2018, the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** launched a report on the impact of global warming if global temperatures **reach higher than the 1.5°C 'guard rail,' which could be exceeded in just 12 years, by 2030 (IPCC, 2018).**
- Recognising the human-made impact of climate change, the IPCC (2018) report also outlined a **series of catastrophic environmental disasters which would happen to life on earth should it rise above this level -** stated that without global support and rapid changes from the carbon emissions of humans, the Earth will see a succession of harmful EWEs.
- Furthermore, the same report, forecasted a temperature **rise of 2.5° to 10°C over the next century, which would lead to elimination of life, and significant changes to humans.**

Effects of this?

- Changing weather patterns have seen an increased intensity, frequency, and duration of hurricanes, as well as the additional frequency of the strongest hurricanes (regarded as Category 4 and 5), **all of which have increased since the early 1980s (NASA, 2022).**
- Global warming sea level has **risen by about 20 centimetres since reliable record keeping began in 1880** due to melting ice caps, glaciers, and floating ice, are already threatening coastal areas and island nations.
- It is projected to **rise to up between 30 centimetres to 243 centimetres by 2100**, which will see additional storm surges and increased flooding for approximately 100 years, **even if carbon emissions are stopped now.**
- Worryingly, **almost 4 in 10 people (39%) live within 100 kilometres from a shoreline and are at risk of flooding** if sea levels continue to rise. In addition to this, **600 million of these people live in a 'low-level coastal zone', and 200 million on a coastal flood plain (NASA, 2022, Met Office, 2022).**
- The human impacts have seen **increased conflict** over resource scarcity ('water wars'), risks to water supplies, food insecurity, failing fisheries (due to ocean acidification), localised flooding and heat stress **(Met Office, 2022).**
- **Paris Agreement adopted in 2015** gathered global agreement to keep the global temperature rise well below the 2° C above pre-industrial levels **(UN SDGS, 2022).**
- As of April 2018, **175 parties had ratified the Paris Agreement and 168 parties** had communicated their intentions to contribute toward reduced emissions.
- United Nations Sustainable Development Goals were also launched in 2015, **with Goal 13: Climate Action, as one of the key goals (UNSDGs, 2022).**

CRITICALLY INSUFFICIENT

IRAN

RUSSIA

SAUDI ARABIA

SINGAPORE

THAILAND

HIGHLY INSUFFICIENT

ARGENTINA

AUSTRALIA

BRAZIL

CANADA

CHINA

COLOMBIA

INDIA

INDONESIA

KAZAKHSTAN

MEXICO

NEW ZEALAND

SOUTH KOREA

UAE

UKRAINE

VIET NAM

INSUFFICIENT

CHILE

EU

GERMANY

JAPAN

NORWAY

PERU

SOUTH AFRICA

SWITZERLAND

USA

ALMOST SUFFICIENT

COSTA RICA

ETHIOPIA

KENYA

MOROCCO

NEPAL

NIGERIA

UK

1.5°C PARIS AGREEMENT COMPATIBLE

THE GAMBIA



OVERALL RATINGS

Overall Climate Action Tracker ratings

Sept 2021

Update



In your view, how is the Climate Emergency affecting all of us right now?

What evidence of this do you see?

Are we viewing it as an emergency in our daily lives?

'Back of the Mind Issue'

- The Climate Emergency is a **paradox**. It has entered mainstream debate and has touched upon global governance, but it is **not felt to be a pressing issue amongst some of the world's population**.
- **'Giddens' Paradox'** (Giddens, 2009) suggests three **problematic areas** which remain at the core of the narrative when tackling the Climate Emergency.
- Firstly, electorates of many nation states cannot grasp the significance of the Climate Emergency **as it appears to be too abstract, not dramatic enough, and 'distant' from their lives**.
- Giddens (2009) argues that many people **will not understand the consequences of this until they see the most catastrophic results**.
- Secondly, Giddens (2009) argues that another unique challenge in the Climate Emergency debate, **is that it is not a subject of debate which can be pushed away and dealt with later**.
- Climate disasters become a concern of the distant future in and a 'back of the mind issue,' which means it is less attractive to act now. **The longer the issue is debated and fought over, the more pollution is happening, which is exacerbating the issue even further (Giddens, 2009)**.



Finally...

- A final, and linked point raised by Giddens (2009), is **the problem with people as ‘free riders,’** who have ample opportunity to tackle climate change, but instead wait for others to do so. **As Giddens (2009) goes onto say:**
- “Since the dangers posed by global warming aren’t tangible, immediate, or visible in the course of day-to-day life, many will sit on their hands and do nothing of a concrete nature about them. Yet waiting until such dangers become visible and acute—in the shape of catastrophes that are irrefutably the result of climate change—before being stirred to serious action will be too late” **(Giddens, 2009: 2).**
- **Giddens’ (2009)** other central argument is that a strong state is needed to play a key role in averting future catastrophes, and **this ‘enabling state’ is the only institution** able to mould social behaviour, develop hard-hitting policies for re-shaping social behaviours, and establishing new energy investments.
- **Problems?**



'It effects all of us equally'

- It doesn't...
- Very **heteronormative** and **cisnormative** debate.
- The climate justice conversation **lacks sufficient representation and voices from marginalised groups**, such as people living with disabilities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ+) people; and migrants and refugees (**Open Global Rights, 2022**).
- Whilst this is accurate in that the Climate Emergency does affect all aspects of the globe, **it is and will be felt unevenly across places, spaces, and populations**.
- Discussions about climate action and the SDGs, and the Climate Emergency at a United Nations levels, **has not been forthcoming regarding queer people**.
- Instead, **it has remained on a focus on 'women and girls' as a homogenous grouping** or the 'climate change/Emergency' is positioned as something which does have uneven impacts upon populations **but has no focus on queer lives**.



The Gully Queens

- Self-titled as the 'Gully Queens' (Reuters, 2017) many have fled homophobia and transphobic violence from their communities, or fled family rejection from within their homes. Based in Kingston, Jamaica.
- Resorting to petty crime, begging, or sex work to survive, and living in deep levels of poverty, these young people have assembled as a small queer community to live in precarious safety in the city's gullies.
- These gullies are six to nine feet wide, and they lie below street level, draining rainwater and the city's refuse out to sea.
- Through living in their open location, these queer young people face regular attacks from the public from being visible in the open gullies, are vilified by the press, and they face regular raids and confiscation of property by the police (Independent, 2014).



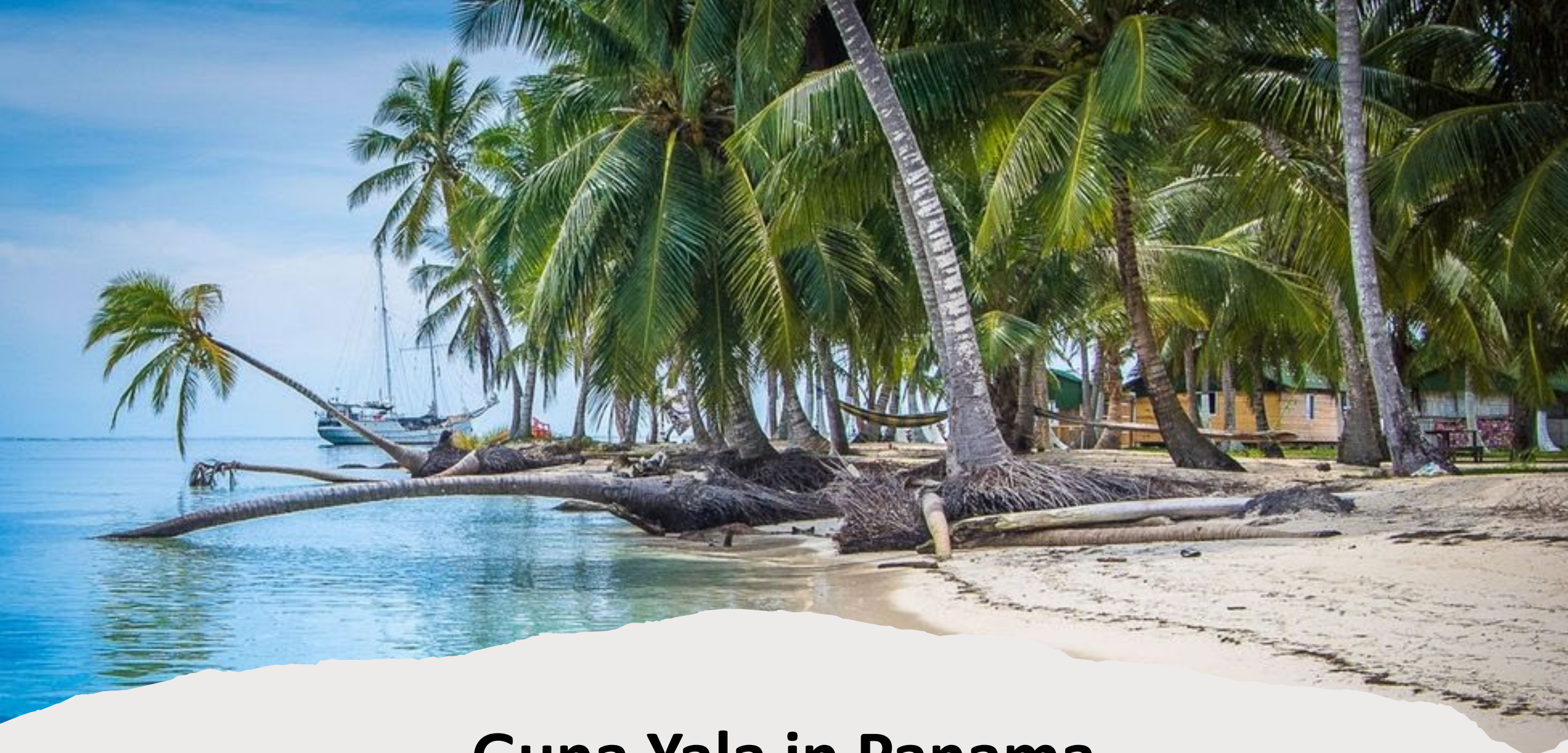


Threats to Gully Queens

- Jamaica's 2.93 million people are facing serious **threats from hotter temperatures and droughts, but also floods linked to climate change (World Bank, 2022).**
- These waterways, **as places of supposed refuge for the Gully Queens, have become a potential hazard**, with a real risk of drowning as the gullies swell due to freak and sudden flooding, due to Extreme Weather Events (EWE's).
- With EWE's and flash flooding a serious and very real risk, compounded by the effects of state homo and transphobia and familial rejection, **this presents these young people with few safer spaces left to go.**
- The tangible **links between institutional homophobia and transphobia, and the effects of the Climate Emergency on the lives of queer people** have never been more pronounced, as evidenced by the lived experience of the Gully Queens.

Homelessness and the Climate Emergency...

- It is increasingly clear that **queer people are often facing the 'front line' of the Climate Emergency, and the associated climate effects and EWEs which come alongside it.**
- Homelessness is a key factor in this increased vulnerability to a changing climate, and whilst globally it is estimated that **150 million people worldwide are homeless, which stands at around 2% of the global population, with the numbers are likely to be much higher (World Economic Forum, 2019).**
- Despite **global homeless data being fragmented** regarding queer populations, nation state reports tend to show that young queer people are more likely than many other societal demographics to live homeless, **with an estimation of 20-40% of the homeless population being a sexual or gender minority (Fraser, et al, 2019).**
- Homeless people, and those with inadequate or temporary housing, **will be strongly affected by any natural calamity and are clear victims of temperature rise and polluted air (Goldsmith and Bell, 2022).**
- The precarious economic and physical conditions that often affect homeless groups **may also lead queer people to choose sex work and begging, despite the heightened risk of criminal prosecution, to meet their basic needs.**
- This **exposes them to hostility and abuse from police and municipal authorities, making it difficult for them to access government services** should a climate disaster happen.



Guna Yala in Panama

Queer needs...



- Queer needs are **not considered in international aid and reconstruction programmes** provided by nation states and the international community.
- This **lack of visibility allows queer people to be targeted by others, excluded from the allocation of resources,** and little to no support offered after violations have happened.
- Human Dignity Trust (2019) note that natural disasters and **climate disasters ‘unmake’ queer homes, queer communities, and a wider sense of queer belonging.** How?
 - Firstly, climate disasters ensure the **destruction of residences belonging to queer people and their families.**
 - They **elevate anxieties and concerns about privacy and discrimination for individuals and families in refuge shelters.**
 - They impact upon **the loss of queer neighbourhoods or areas, and their accompanying community infrastructure.**



The Aravani of Sri Lanka

The fate of the Aravanis...

- Despite not being directly related to the Climate Emergency, the fate of the Aravanis in Sri Lanka provides a useful window **in which to highlight the socio-historical invisibilisation of queer people from the state, humanitarian, and development organisations.**
- After the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami in Sri Lanka, and subsequent disaster relief efforts and NGOs/INGOs moved in to provide support, **many Aravanis were denied access to both social care and medical support because of entrenched discrimination from both the state, and from the NGOs/INGOs.**
- This invisibilisation meant that **they did not appear in damage assessments by either the government, or by other relief organisations** working in post-disaster relief, meaning that they were denied bedding, shelter, and food.
- The Aravanis are already an oppressed minority in Sri Lanka, who often find employment in begging or dancing, and many who survived the Tsunami lost their small savings, make-up, dancing costumes and jewels, often their only tools for dancing employment in the future, with no recourse to funds **(Humanitarian Practice Network, 2012).**
- People needed to be registered as a resident of their municipality if they wished to access government food aid. This process involved **sharing a permanent address with the police**, which blocked some queer people from seeking support, in a nation state whereby homosexuality was then illegal **(The New Humanitarian, 2020).**

Climate disasters



- Research from Human Dignity Trust (2019) noted that times of lawlessness **happens after climate disasters and the increased pressure on more scarce resources.**
- This **leads homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia to 'rise to the surface.'** Perpetrators of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia **use pre-existing stigma to gain resources or to enact violence or harm,** with the perpetrators acting upon this **without impunity or consequence.**
- Mozambique is regarded as one of the 'friendliest' nations in Africa for sexual and gender minorities (**O'Donnell, 2016**), the 2019 devastation of Cyclone Idai in the city of Beira, **compounded existing issues of poverty, inadequate housing, and women's vulnerability to gender-based violence.**
- Due to the devastation of Cyclone Idai, many poorly constructed shelters in which **minority women lived were destroyed, leading to reports** about the heightened visibility and therefore vulnerability, of lesbian and bisexual women to sexual violence and so-called 'corrective' rape (**The Ecologist, 2021**).

Climate disasters...

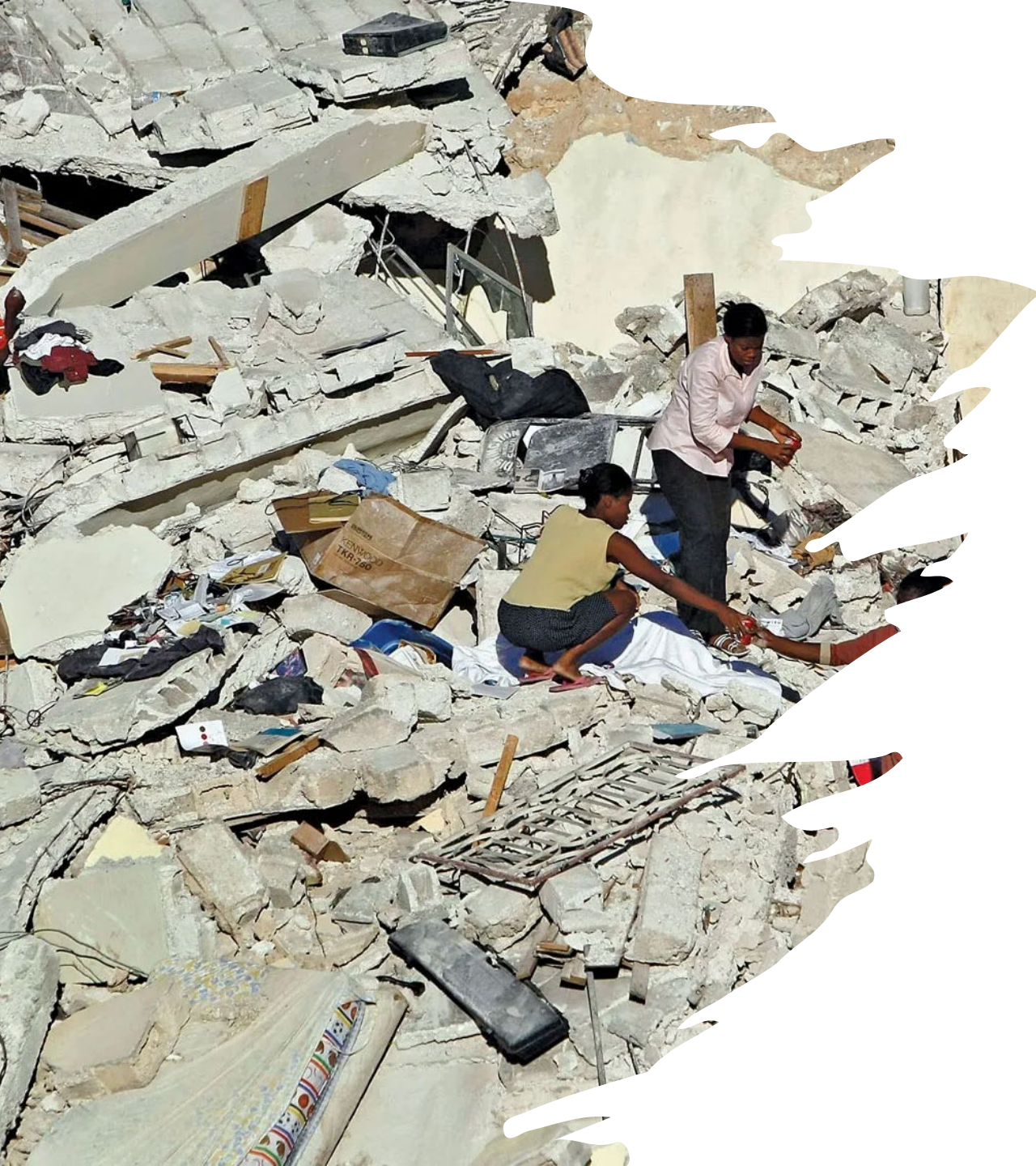
- In the aftermath of the 2013 Super Typhoon Yolanda in the **Philippines saw gendered lines drawn in relief efforts.**
- Queer people not only faced the shock of a super storm which destroyed households, belongings, and businesses (including loved ones), **they also faced unique challenges due to their minority status.**
- Despite a **focus on gender** in disaster relief and humanitarian rehabilitation in the Philippines, the **recovery efforts were based around a cisgender man-woman binary (Nichols, 2019).**
- Many **gender minorities were excluded from livelihood initiatives**, unable to access housing benefits and sanitation facilities **(UNDP, ODI, and GALAND, 2020).**





Seeking safety?

- Hurricane Katrina in 2005 devastated swathes of New Orleans in the USA, with deep level floods and household destruction, **leaving many people homeless, sanitation services swamped, and people forced to gather to live in football stadiums and temporary camps on dry ground.**
- When seeking safety, **transgender individuals were reportedly discriminated against, and even denied entry or access to emergency shelters, with two transgender individuals arrested for using the bathroom of their gender at a temporary emergency shelter (Goldsmith and Bell, 2022).**
- Queer people **were also blamed as the cause of the hurricane by some religious leaders or denied aid from faith-based organisations for lacking identification that matched their name or gender.**
- Queer people in **relationships and families were further isolated from US state disaster relief policies and benefits for married (heterosexual) couples, in a nation state where same-sex marriage were not legalised until 2015.**



Seeking support?

- In the 2020 Haitian Earthquake, **many queer people were denied access to emergency housing and relief.**
- In Nepal, a smallholder farmer who identified as a **third gender** was excluded from helping to build and take cover in shelter houses which are designed to protect the community from EWE's, **which are often sex-segregated along a cisgender binary (Devex, 2020).**
- During the 2011 floods in Queensland, Australia, it was revealed that **43% of queer individuals felt afraid of the actual evacuation centres during the disaster and recovery process (Dominey-Howes, Gorman-Murray, and McKinnon, 2017).**
- During Hurricane Maria in the North-eastern Caribbean in 2017, many pharmacies were destroyed or lost electricity due to fallen powerlines or destroyed generators, meaning **they were unable to get ART or hormone replacement therapy prescription refills to those who needed it (Melin, Maldonado, and López-Candales, 2018).**
- **We are not all feeling the Climate Emergency equally...**



Rise of the Far Right...

- We will see **tensions in the Global South**, as the Climate Emergency continues to see wide-ranging affects on environments.
- This will lead to the shift in **increased refugee movement from climate refugees, this will include queer people.**
- This could lead to **a narrative being used by far-right parties (and governments) to blame** queer people as refugees in the Global North.
- But also, a **tool in which to blame queer people in the Global South, as the cause of this issue.**
- The effects of this could see the **stripping back of human rights, especially of queer people.**
- Under a **rise of 'strong-man leaders' globally (Rachman, 2023)**, this could fuel their own narratives of blame. We become a scapegoat for their crises.
- Queer lives and the Climate Emergency are therefore **inextricably linked**, even through politics.

Minnesota Republican Absurdly Blames Global Warming on Pride Month

Minnesota state Senator Eric Lucero would like to turn back the clock on LGBTQ rights.

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Ha
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Claims
storm

Lucy Pash



If climate change is a 'back of the mind issue' then queer people and the Climate Emergency are a 'beyond the back of the mind issue' (Dalton, 2023)



What needs to happen?

1. Governments must ensure that queer communities are safe in times of crises and should implement laws and policies to tackle climate disasters inclusively, incorporating an intersectional approach from both governments and additional social actors.
2. Queer lives and communities need to be placed at the forefront as equals in the Climate Emergency debates and in climate action, as well as engaged in agenda setting and removing queer people from the 'beyond the back of the mind' as a population under threat.
3. Nation states decriminalise harmful, and often colonial laws, which seek to obstruct some of the world's most vulnerable queer populations from engaging in agenda-setting at a nation state level, without fear of risk and harm. Tackle the 'blame' culture which could emerge.
4. Localised issues facing queer people should be placed into wider global trends such as the Climate Emergency if populations are not to slip through the net and become isolated.
5. Voices of queer people in SDGs and Agenda 2030 need to be addressed, especially Goal 13.





'Green in the Rainbow' Project - Final Report



Throughout 2022 we undertook a **research project examining the impacts of the climate emergency on sexual and gender minorities**, looking in detail at the ways in which their marginalisation makes them vulnerable to climate change.

Thanks to funding from the [National Lottery: Together for Our Planet Initiative](#), ReportOUT are excited to publish our report on this issue, [A Crisis of Queer Invisibility: Climate Change as a Risk Multiplier for LGBTQ People](#)

[READ THE REPORT HERE](#)

