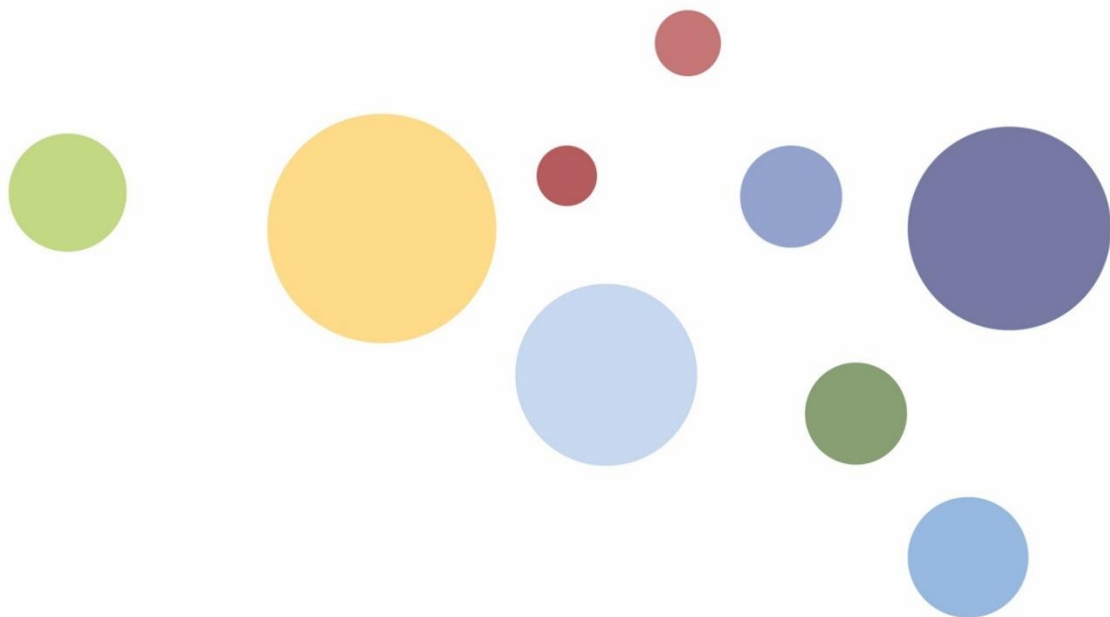


Intersecting Storms

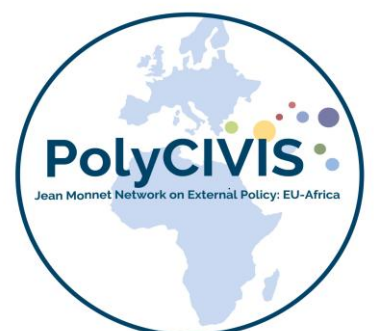
Advancing LGBTQIA+ Rights in the Era of Climate Change
and Environmental Justice

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The Polycrisis & Policy Brief Series is coordinated by the *Policy Work Package* which is part of the PolyCIVIS Network. The PolyCIVIS Policy brief series aims to provide actionable insights and recommendations for policymakers, at various levels and to foster dialogue among stakeholders on effective policy responses.



Executive Summary

As the world faces the growing complexity of a polycrisis—where simultaneous systemic shocks such as climate change, economic instability, and social inequalities intersect¹ — LGBTQIA+ communities are disproportionately affected. This policy brief addresses the urgent need to integrate LGBTQIA+ rights into climate resilience and environmental justice frameworks. The central questions explored are: How do climate change and other crises exacerbate the vulnerabilities of LGBTQIA+ individuals? What policy measures can effectively mitigate these compounded risks?

The research highlights that climate change amplifies existing social inequalities, disproportionately affecting LGBTQIA+ individuals by exacerbating their economic, health, and social vulnerabilities. For instance, LGBTQIA+ communities often face barriers in accessing emergency shelters during climate-induced disasters, and experience heightened risks of displacement. Additionally, LGBTQIA+ rights often become a wedge issue in international collaboration, particularly between regions with differing cultural attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities, complicating global efforts to address the polycrisis.

This policy brief proposes targeted climate action interventions to address the unique vulnerabilities of LGBTQIA+ communities, aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 3, 4, 7, 10, 13, and 17. Representation in climate policymaking is encouraged domestically in European states, while partnerships with Global South nations are urged to amplify LGBTQIA+ voices indirectly through civil society initiatives.

Legal frameworks are recommended to include anti-discrimination clauses in environmental and climate laws and to advocate for equitable policies in partner countries. Support systems such as crisis response funds and inclusive financial mechanisms, including the Green Climate Fund and Loss and Damage Fund, are prioritized to ensure LGBTQIA+ communities have access to emergency resources and economic stability during climate crises. The brief also highlights the importance of equitable access to green technologies and innovative tools like emergency preparedness apps tailored to LGBTQIA+ needs.

Finally, European states are encouraged to facilitate knowledge exchange, fund LGBTQIA+ initiatives in low- and middle-income countries, and promote global partnerships that bridge gaps in resources and representation. By implementing these targeted and pragmatic actions, states can ensure an inclusive and effective global response to the polycrisis, leaving no one behind.

Key messages

- ❖ The impacts of climate change are not felt uniformly across populations; they disproportionately affect marginalized communities, among them the LGBTQIA+ individuals who often face social exclusion, economic disparities, and limited access to resources.
- ❖ LGBTQIA+ individuals often work in sectors highly susceptible to climate change, such as agriculture and tourism, leading to job and income loss.
- ❖ Differing views on LGBTQIA+ rights, particularly between African and European nations, create tensions in international collaborations, complicating efforts to address climate change and geopolitical crises

¹ Helleiner, 2024

(1) Introduction

In the context of an escalating polycrisis—a term that encapsulates the simultaneous occurrence of multiple systemic crises such as climate change, economic instability, and social inequalities²—LGBTQIA+ communities find themselves uniquely vulnerable. The intersection of LGBTQIA+ rights with environmental challenges and climate change reveals a critical yet often overlooked area of concern. As climate change intensifies, it exacerbates pre-existing social inequalities, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities, including LGBTQIA+ individuals, who frequently face social exclusion, economic disparities, and discrimination in accessing resources.

This policy brief seeks to answer several pressing questions: **How does climate change intersect with and exacerbate the vulnerabilities of LGBTQIA+ communities? What specific risks do these communities face in the context of displacement, health, economic security, and social inequalities? And most importantly, what policy measures can be implemented to mitigate these compounded risks and ensure that LGBTQIA+ rights are upheld in the global response to the polycrisis?**

The analysis presented in this brief leads to a clear set of recommendations focused on building resilience through inclusive policy-making, legal and institutional reforms, and targeted support systems. By highlighting the intersectional challenges faced by LGBTQIA+

communities, the brief underscores the urgency of integrating their needs into broader climate policies. The proposed solutions are designed to not only address the immediate impacts of climate change but also to foster long-term resilience and justice for all affected populations, ensuring that LGBTQIA+ rights are at the forefront of global climate action. This comprehensive policy brief ensures that the unique challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ communities during the climate crises are addressed effectively and equitably.

(2) Climate Change, LGBTQIA+ Rights and intersection with polycrisis.

The impacts of climate change are not felt uniformly across populations; they disproportionately affect marginalized communities, among them the LGBTQIA+ individuals who often face social exclusion, economic disparities, and limited access to resources³. Environmental justice, a principle affirming the right to a healthy environment free from discrimination, demands that climate action considers the needs of all segments of society, including sexual and gender minorities⁴.

Climate change exacerbates existing vulnerabilities and creates new risks for the LGBTQIA+ community:

2.1. Climate Change, LGBTQIA+ Rights and Displacement and Migration

² Omega, 2022

³ The Climate Reality Project, 2021

⁴ The 17 Principles of Environmental Justice, 1991

The intersection of climate change with displacement and migration presents significant challenges, particularly for LGBTQIA+ individuals.

As climate change intensifies, extreme weather events such as hurricanes, floods, and droughts become more frequent and severe. These events often result in displacement, forcing individuals and communities to leave their homes, sometimes permanently. For LGBTQIA+ people, this displacement is compounded by unique vulnerabilities. LGBTQIA+ individuals may lack strong familial or community support structures due to societal stigma or familial rejection. This lack of support is crucial during times of crisis when individuals rely heavily on community networks for resources, information, and shelter⁵.

During displacement, LGBTQIA+ people may face discrimination in accessing emergency shelters and housing. Traditional shelter systems can be hostile environments for LGBTQIA+ individuals, particularly for transgender and non-binary people, due to strict gender segregation and lack of awareness or respect for their identity and needs⁶. Studies have shown that LGBTQIA+ youth in the U.S. are 120% more likely to experience homelessness compared to their heterosexual peers, making them particularly susceptible to the impacts of climate-related disasters⁷. In Mozambique, during Tropical Cyclone Eloise, LGBTQIA+ communities were among the hardest hit due to pre-existing conditions of homelessness and social stigma, which left them without adequate protection or support during the disaster⁸. In 2019, Cyclone Idai devastated parts of Mozambique, and the worst-affected groups

included LGBTQIA+ individuals, particularly lesbians living in poorly constructed shelters⁹. These shelters were not only inadequate in protecting them from the storm but also exposed them to heightened risks of sexual violence and corrective rape¹⁰.

Furthermore, during the Mt. Merapi volcanic eruption, the Waria community, a gender non-conforming group in Indonesia, faced similar challenges. They were categorized strictly within the male-female binary by relief agencies, which excluded them from official shelters. As a result, they were forced to find informal accommodation, further exposing them to risks¹¹.

In cases of cross-border displacement, LGBTQIA+ individuals face additional legal and social challenges. Immigration and asylum processes often do not adequately take into account the unique persecution faced by LGBTQIA+ people and refugees, and as a result, their claims and needs may not be appropriately addressed or prioritized¹². Upon arrival in Kenya, LGBTQ+ migrants frequently experience harassment, violence, and discrimination. A survey of LGBTQ+ refugees in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya revealed that 93% had been verbally abused, 83% had suffered physical assaults, and 88% had been denied assistance from the police¹³. In many African countries, where anti-LGBTQIA+ laws are prevalent, crossing borders to seek refuge can lead to further persecution and exclusion, making these individuals doubly vulnerable as both climate refugees and members of a marginalized group¹⁴.

In addition, the intersection of climate change and the Russia-Ukraine war has intensified the vulnerabilities of LGBTQIA+ communities, leaving them increasingly exposed to

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Behal, 2021

⁸ Kunene, 2021

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Overington, 2024.

¹² The Climate Reality Project, 2021

¹³ Mann, *et al*, 2024

¹⁴ Overington, 2024

environmental and social risks. The war has diverted Ukraine's resources from climate action, exacerbating the marginalization of LGBTQIA+ individuals who already face discrimination. This has led to heightened exposure to pollution and climate-related health issues. Additionally, LGBTQIA+ refugees fleeing the conflict encounter dual challenges: discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity and the broader stigma associated with being a refugee. This combination makes it difficult for them to access essential services, such as shelter and healthcare, particularly in regions where LGBTQIA+ rights are not fully recognized. The compounded stress from these overlapping crises significantly impacts their mental health and overall well-being¹⁵.

2.2. Climate Change, LGBTQIA+ Rights and Economic Security

Economic security is a critical aspect of resilience in the face of climate change, yet LGBTQIA+ individuals often face heightened economic vulnerabilities that can be exacerbated by environmental changes¹⁶. Here's how climate change impacts the economic stability of the LGBTQIA+ community: Many LGBTQIA+ individuals are employed in sectors that are highly susceptible to climate change impacts, such as agriculture, tourism, and informal sectors, where job security is often low. Disruptions due to extreme weather events, ecological shifts, or economic downturns in these sectors can lead to loss of income and employment, disproportionately affecting these workers¹⁷.

Moreover, the social exclusion and discrimination that LGBTQIA+ communities face often limit their access to emergency services, healthcare, and recovery resources during and after climate disasters¹⁸. For example, during Hurricane Katrina, LGBTQIA+ families experienced unequal distribution of aid due to a lack of legal recognition, further exacerbating their vulnerability¹⁹. A transgender woman was jailed after using a women's bathroom in an emergency shelter, highlighting the discrimination that LGBTQIA+ individuals face even in disaster recovery contexts²⁰. During Typhoon Haiyan in 2013 in the Philippines, transgender individuals were reportedly denied access to gender-appropriate shelters, forcing them to seek refuge in less safe conditions²¹. Following the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004, the Aravani community in India, which does not conform to the traditional gender binary, faced severe discrimination during disaster relief efforts²². Their deaths were not officially recorded, they were ineligible for government compensation, and they were excluded from evacuation shelters²³. In the Philippines, the Bakla community, another gender non-conforming group, faced harassment and denial of access to relief supplies following climate-related disasters²⁴.

LGBTQIA+ Rights as a Wedge Issue in International Collaboration

LGBTQIA+ rights often create tensions in international collaborations, especially between regions with differing views on sexual and gender minorities²⁵. African nations, where same-sex relationships are frequently criminalized, typically hold conservative stances, while European

¹⁵ Brown *et al*, 2023.

¹⁶ Climate Fact Checks, 2023

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁸ Reta, 2022

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ McGinn, 2022.

²¹ Castro, 2019

²² Overington, 2024

²³ *Ibid*.

²⁴ *Ibid*.

²⁵ Brown, 2023

countries advocate for LGBTQIA+ rights as part of their human rights agenda. This divergence leads to friction in global forums, complicating efforts to address broader issues like climate change and geopolitical crises²⁶. The lack of consensus on LGBTQIA+ rights hampers cooperation, diverts resources from critical areas such as climate resilience and economic stability, and deepens the marginalization of LGBTQIA+ communities, particularly in regions where their rights are already under threat. This further weakens the potential for effective global responses to interconnected crises, exacerbating the vulnerabilities of marginalized populations.

(3) Best Practices by Region:

United States

In the U.S., several states and cities have implemented inclusive climate policies that consider the specific needs of LGBTQIA+ communities. For example, New York City has integrated LGBTQIA+ considerations into its climate action plan by ensuring that emergency shelters are accessible and safe for transgender and non-binary individuals. Additionally, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has been encouraged to revise its policies to be more inclusive of LGBTQIA+ individuals, particularly after critiques regarding the unequal distribution of aid following disasters like Hurricane Katrina²⁷.

Europe

The Netherlands has been recognized as a leader in integrating LGBTQIA+ perspectives into its climate action policies. A key example of this is the country's involvement in the EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality, which focuses on the synergies between gender equality and climate action. In February 2024, the Netherlands co-hosted a seminar with Slovenia to discuss best

practices in embedding gender equality within climate and energy policies. The Dutch approach specifically highlighted the importance of gender mainstreaming and intersectionality in ensuring a just transition under their Climate and Energy Programme (2022-2025). This initiative emphasizes the need for policies that address the unique challenges faced by marginalized communities, including LGBTQIA+ individuals, ensuring that they are not left behind in the transition to a sustainable and equitable future²⁸.

(4) Policy Recommendations

This policy brief, in alignment with SDGs 1, 3, 4, 7, 10, 13, and 17, proposes targeted climate action recommendations. These recommendations distinguish between actions European states should implement domestically and actions they should support in Global South partner countries.

The goal is to address the intersecting challenges of climate change and LGBTQIA+ rights while promoting equity, resilience, and justice.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Reta, 2022

²⁸ European Commission, 2024

Policy recommendations

- i. European states should fund and support climate literacy programs in their countries and in Global South partner nations. These programs should educate LGBTQIA+ communities and broader societies on climate change impacts and mitigation strategies²⁹. These programs should promote empathy and tolerance towards LGBTQIA+ individuals, reducing stigma and fostering inclusive societies, aligning with SDG 4. They should also provide training sessions for LGBTQIA+ leaders and organizations in disaster preparedness and resilience, particularly in Global South countries, to build adaptive capacities in line with SDG 13.
- ii. European states should ensure LGBTQIA+ representation in their domestic climate policymaking and leadership structures. For Global South partner countries, European states should advocate for and fund the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ voices in international climate discussions and partnerships. These European States should collaborate with local civil society organizations to indirectly amplify LGBTQIA+ perspectives, recognizing the challenges of direct representation in countries with hostile laws, supporting SDG 10.
- iii. European states should embed anti-discrimination clauses into their own environmental and climate laws to protect LGBTQIA+ communities. Additionally, they should use diplomatic channels and development aid to encourage partner countries in the Global South to adopt policies that prevent discrimination in climate-related funding and resource allocation, aligning with SDGs 10 and 16.
- iv. European states should operationalize and support inclusive financial mechanisms, such as the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, and Loss and Damage Fund, ensuring they benefit marginalized communities, including LGBTQIA+ individuals in the Global South³⁰. Dedicated crisis response funds should provide emergency financial aid for evacuation, healthcare, and temporary housing during climate crises, addressing immediate vulnerabilities. These funds should promote economic stability and resilience among LGBTQIA+ individuals, particularly in Global South countries, in line with SDGs 1 and 13.
- v. European states should foster equitable global partnerships in line with SDG 17. These partnerships should, first, facilitate access to green technologies, such as solar power and sustainable farming methods, for LGBTQIA+ communities in underprivileged areas³¹, and secondly; support the development of innovative tools, like mobile apps tailored for emergency preparedness and resource allocation for LGBTQIA+ individuals in the Global South, aligning with SDG 7.

Implementing these targeted and collaborative recommendations will ensure that states, in the spirit of global citizenship, can advance global equity, enhance climate resilience, and address the unique challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ communities in navigating the polycrisis.

²⁹ Hoyer et al., 2023.

³⁰ UNFCCC, 2022.

³¹ Zeppini *et al.*, 2014

(5) Conclusion

This policy brief has highlighted the critical intersection between LGBTQIA+ rights and climate change, demonstrating how environmental challenges exacerbate the vulnerabilities of marginalized communities. The key findings underscore the disproportionate impacts of climate change on LGBTQIA+ individuals particularly in areas such as displacement, health, economic security, and social inequalities. These insights have led to the development of comprehensive recommendations, including the need for inclusive policy-making, enhanced legal protections, and targeted support systems that address the unique needs of LGBTQIA+ communities.

As the global community continues to grapple with the multifaceted crises of our time, it is imperative that policymakers prioritize the integration of LGBTQIA+ perspectives into climate action. This is not

only a matter of justice but also of resilience, ensuring that all communities are equipped to face the challenges ahead. By adopting the proposed policy interventions, governments can foster more equitable and effective responses to the polycrisis, contributing to a more just and sustainable future for all.

Looking forward, further research is needed³² to explore the specific impacts of climate change on LGBTQIA+ communities in different regions, particularly in the Global South. Additionally, ongoing policy development should focus on creating frameworks that not only protect but also empower LGBTQIA+ individuals, ensuring their active participation in climate resilience efforts. By continuing to build on these foundations, we can move towards a future where both human rights and environmental sustainability are upheld, leaving no one behind in the fight against climate change.

³² Homer-Dixon, *et al*, 2022

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