

Climate Justice

The 2020 *North Carolina Climate Risk Assessment and Resilience Plan* discusses in great detail the inequalities that will occur in NC due to climate change if nothing is done. Unfortunately, the solutions proposed lack substantive change and lack input from the communities most at risk.

Here is a summary of key Climate Justice issues from the *North Carolina Climate Risk Assessment and Resilience Plan*.

Climate justice refers to the deep inequities posed by climate change impacts. Racial disparity in climate change impacts is in large part attributed to centuries of structural racism. Different populations may be vulnerable to climate change for different reasons. In North Carolina, structural racism resulted in many African American, as well as Hispanic and Indigenous communities, being pushed to less historically desirable lands such as floodplains or near industrial sites or highways where air pollution is high. The impacts of climate changes are piled on top of centuries of environmental, social, economic, or health burdens, that many minority communities still experience today.

Nearly half a million North Carolina residents speak English less than “very well.” Individuals with limited English proficiency encounter barriers to receiving information critical to their health and safety. For many immigrant communities where both documented and undocumented immigrants may live, risk of deportation and a historical mistrust of government officials may limit access to emergency services, recovery programs, and resilience resources. Many Native American communities have strong cultural and/or economic relationships with land or specific sites which could be altered by climate change.

Flooding: Vulnerable communities may be concentrated in areas exposed to inland flooding for many reasons. Land values and historic patterns of racial housing discrimination have resulted in concentrations of communities of color, especially African Americans, living in flood prone areas. In addition low-income households, seniors, people with disabilities, and people with chronic illnesses may have less access to transportation, making evacuation or mobility difficult during a flood. Individuals with low incomes have less ability to pay for hotels in the event they are evacuated and may have insufficient insurance coverage or resources to rebuild.

Extreme Heat: Individuals exposed to extreme heat are vulnerable to heat-related illness, and poverty and structural racism exacerbate that risk. Urban heat sinks are hottest where there is a lack trees and parks in a city, and lack of air-conditioning can be deadly in a heat wave. In rural areas, the number of mobile homes and the labor intensity of agriculture are likewise associated with increased heat-related illness.

Housing Disparities: Housing conditions in North Carolina predispose vulnerable communities to greater impacts of climate change. The lack of affordable housing strains household resources, especially for those who are very low-income, and are more likely to experience long-term dis-

placement and homelessness as a result of climatic events. The inability to remain in secure housing can affect a person's ability to attend and perform well in school or in a job. Housing and infrastructure in low-income and minority neighborhoods tends to be older and less weatherized to cope with climate hazards, and mobile homes are especially vulnerable to the increased extreme storms and tornadoes resulting from climate change. These underlying housing and neighborhood conditions reflect social inequalities and magnify climate injustices

Social Networks: Many vulnerable communities have strong family, ethnic, faith-based, cultural, and community ties. Day-to-day social connections can form the basis for communal and household recovery and resilience. In these instances, bonding social capital is particularly critical because vulnerable communities may lack easy access to government aid and external assistance. Instead, social groups provide avenues to recovery. On the other hand, displacement and disruption caused by climate change can physically dismantle the social ties that comprise these sources of support.