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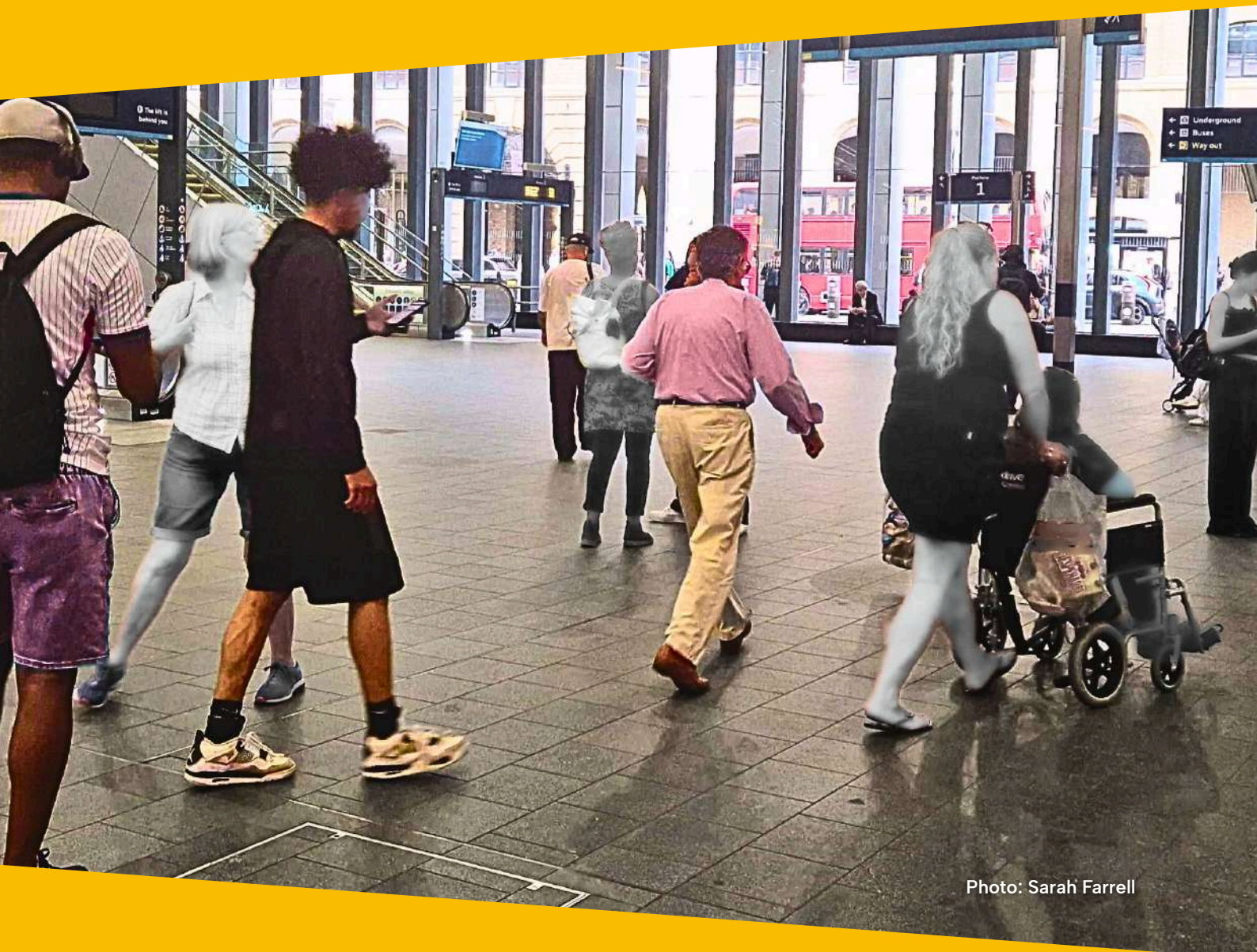


Photo: Sarah Farrell

Invisible women

Why women and marginalised groups should be central to UK funders' climate resilience strategies

July 2025



Single parent mothers, disabled teenagers and migrant women simply don't have the microphone when it comes to planning our climate response in the UK.

Time and again, it is invisible women who are leading the grassroots work of building resilience within their communities.

It's now time to fund them.

This is a shorter, edited summary of the full report that can be accessed [here](#).

Executive summary

It is widely accepted that women and girls are disproportionately affected by climate change, accounting for **80% of people displaced by climate-related disasters around the world**.^{1,2} This is because women are more exposed to climate-related risks than their male counterparts, acting as 'shock absorbers' during climate-induced disasters.

Less attention has been paid to what this looks like from a UK perspective. However, many of the factors affecting women on the frontlines of the climate crisis internationally are also present in the UK, and will become more prevalent as climate change continues to make extreme weather more likely and more extreme.³ This includes:

- An increased propensity of women towards poverty, unemployment and food insecurity;
- The amount of time women spend in the home – and therefore exposed to the physical and mental health impacts of climate change;
- A lack of inclusion in decisions relating to climate change, which is actively hampering progress in building resilience towards it.



Recommendation:

Environmental funders can help to build domestic climate resilience in the UK by working to dismantle the structural inequalities that make women and other minoritised groups disproportionately exposed to climate change.

This includes shifting their focus, funding and power towards women-led and women-focused community-based organisations and supporting gender-responsive policy development.

Women and poverty in the UK: an overview

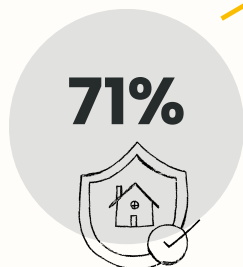
People living in poverty are disproportionately exposed to climate-related risks, because they often lack the resources, social protections and agency required to avoid, adapt to or recover from the costs and impacts of climate change.

Climate change is contributing to the rising cost of living in the UK



Source: [ECIU](#)

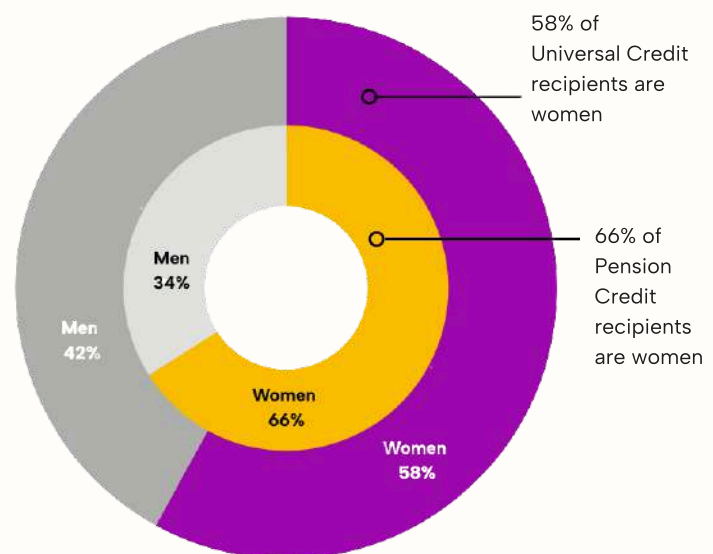
added to the average household food bill in 2022 and 2023 due to extreme weather impacts



Source: [Moneysupermarket.com](#)

Home insurance policies have hit a five-year high in the UK, rising by a staggering 71% since 2019

The majority of Universal Credit and Pension Credit recipients are women

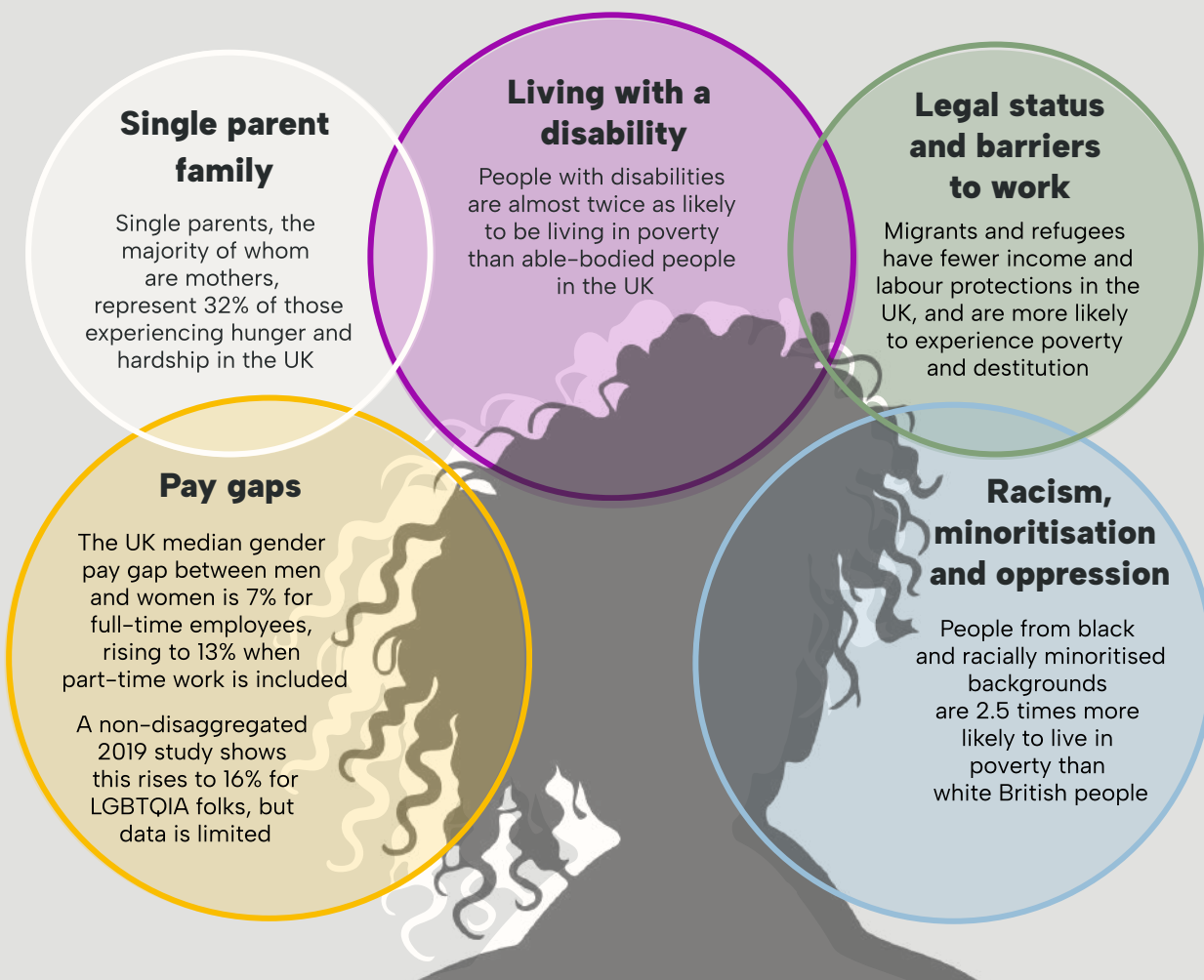


Sources: [GOV.UK](#)

Poverty particularly affects women in the UK, because they are:

- **More likely to be in part-time employment than men** (36% vs 14%) and likely to have lower salaries.⁴
- **Spending almost twice as much time doing unpaid domestic and care work compared to men** (12.65% of their time compared to 6.97% of men's time).⁵
- **More likely to be heads of single-partner households**, with 85% of lone-parent families being headed by a single mother in 2023, compared to 15% by a single father.⁶

Across the UK, women are dealing with the impacts of multiple, intersecting, structural inequalities. This also means they are more exposed to poverty and hardship – even before accounting for the impacts of increasing climate change.



Data sources: [The Trussell Trust \(2024\)](#), [ONS](#), [Pink News](#), [APPG on Migration](#),

Visual: [Impatience Earth](#)

How poverty and discrimination impact climate risk

“ We have seen in the last couple of years that the country is not prepared for the impacts of climate change...The threat is greatest for the most vulnerable: we do not have resilient hospitals, schools, or care homes. Public and private institutions alike are unprepared.

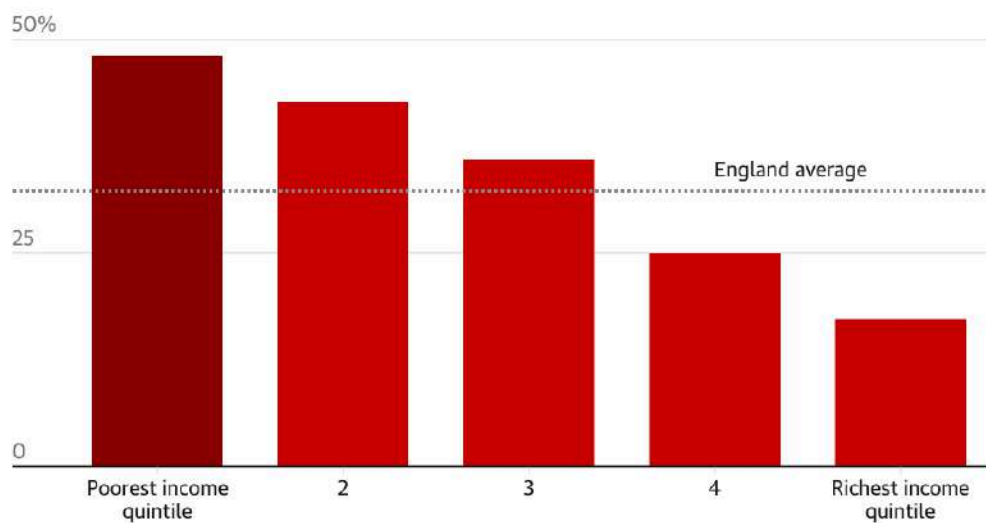
We can see our country changing before our eyes. People are having to cope with more regular extreme weather impacts. People are experiencing increasing food prices. People are worried about vulnerable family members during heatwaves...Failing to act will impact every family and every person in the country. ⁷

– [Baroness Brown, Climate Change Committee](#)

The risks that climate change pose in the UK are not insignificant. 92% of low-income households are currently facing climate-related risks, and 98% of Local Authorities reported at least one climate-related hazard in their area in 2023 – with extreme heat, flooding and heavy rainfall being the most common incidents recorded.⁸ These climate-related risks are especially acute for people with disabilities,⁹ homeless people, and those living in ‘transition’ accommodation, which includes prison populations,¹⁰ people awaiting the results of asylum decisions and those escaping domestic abuse. **Women are over-represented amongst these groups, accounting for 60% of homeless adults living in temporary accommodation in England.**¹¹

Low-income householders are more likely to live in buildings at risk of overheating

% of homes at high risk of overheating in England, by income quintile



Guardian graphic ([link](#)) Source: Resolution Foundation analysis of English Housing Survey 2023 to 2024, Energy Follow Up Survey

These risks disproportionately affect minoritised groups, especially women who experience the intersecting impacts of gender, race, poverty, disability and other forms of structural inequality.

Data shows that black and racially minoritised people in the UK are:

- **Four times more likely to live in climate-vulnerable communities** than white people¹²
- Exposed to **higher levels of flood risk**¹³ and **risks of extreme heat**¹⁴
- **Facing increased exposure to air pollution**^{15,16}, and to chemicals and pollutants from **proximity to waste incinerators**¹⁷

The impacts of UK climate policy design on women and marginalised communities



The social impacts of initiatives that are supposed to be climate positive are being overlooked...disabled communities are struggling to access the same shops they would have done before because of low emissions zones, and traffic is being redirected away from privileged clean air zones into predominantly ethnically diverse and working class community areas...the whole point of consultation processes is to engage communities, but they're being designed to do the exact opposite.



The social and economic impacts of climate-related policymaking are not being effectively factored into policy design, in part due to the underrepresentation of women and marginalised people in decision-making spaces (see page 10). This is not only placing cost burdens on those who are least able to afford them, but it is also creating space in which divisive, anti-climate rhetorics are able to take hold.

The fact that the experiences of women and other marginalised groups have not been sufficiently accounted for in climate-related policy development is in part a result of their exclusion from this historically male-dominated workforce, which has also lacked the representation and experience of people from low-income households and those living with disabilities.

These inequalities are only set to widen as the impacts of climate change worsen, and as more policies are put in place to address them – often placing prohibitive costs on women and others living in poverty, and preventing them from participating in and benefiting from the UK's low-carbon transition.





**...we have to be honest
about the fact that,
fundamentally, many funders
and policymakers think
communities are not smart
enough to make decisions
about their own lives.**

How climate change impacts women's health



Gender issues are present everywhere. They may have different ways of showing up, but the repression and marginalisation of women is not specific to a particular part of the world. It's time that we recognised this in the UK too.

As well as living in homes and areas that are disproportionately affected by climate-related issues such as damp and extreme heat, **women and children – as well as other vulnerable groups such as the elderly and people with disabilities – are also more likely to spend time in the home.**¹⁸ This means that as well as being disproportionately affected by the economic costs of climate change, **women are more likely to suffer the mental and physical implications of climate-related hazards**, including through their propensity towards caregiving roles, which amongst other things, makes it harder to evacuate or recover during climate-related emergencies.

Women's health is also disproportionately affected by extreme weather events. For example, **women going through perimenopause and menopause are less able to regulate their body temperatures during heatwaves.**¹⁹ Heat also has a disproportionate impact on those taking gender-affirming medication, who are likely to experience heightened impacts of temperature spikes on account of their already heightened exposure to heat stress and thermal discomfort.²⁰

This may explain in part why there were almost **two times as many excess deaths among females (2,159) than males (1,115) during the UK's 2022 heatwaves**²¹ – a number that is expected to rise as climate change continues to affect a growing aging population that is particularly vulnerable to extreme heat.²²



Women are also disproportionately exposed and susceptible to the impacts of climate-related hazards. For example, exposure to Endocrine Disruptor Chemicals (EDCs) and ‘forever chemicals’ – which are found in industrial chemicals, pollutants and plastics – can be increased by climate-related events such as floods, which can cause chemicals in sewerage systems to spread throughout communities. These chemicals can build up in fatty tissue, disrupt the hormonal and reproductive systems, cause cancers and cause harm to babies in the womb.²³

Furthermore, women in the UK – particularly women with disabilities and carers – are likely to experience **increased or more severe domestic abuse as the impacts of climate change worsen.** This is because climate shocks drive social isolation and create the conditions under which domestic abuse can take place, including through exacerbating economic pressures and forcing people to spend more time in their homes. This was the case during the COVID-19 pandemic,²⁴ and is likely to be the case the wake of certain climate shocks such as storms, floods and temperature increases, which have all been linked to increases in intimate partner violence in other countries,^{25,26} in part as a result of heightened stress levels and a lack of food availability.



Recommendation:

We must learn the lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, by accounting for gender, wealth and racial disparities when designing climate resilience and climate funding strategies for the UK.



The costs of exclusion



In the west and the UK, the environmental sector is still very professionalised, which means that you end up with able white men at the helm, in negotiations, leading policy development and conversations on climate more generally.

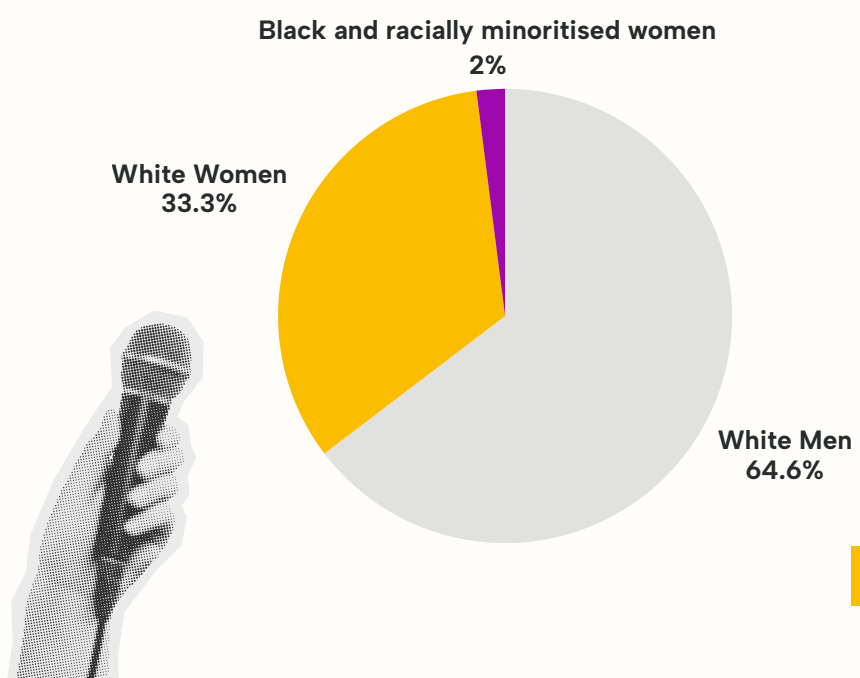
Women in the UK continue to be systematically excluded from decision-making processes, including those relating to environmental policy development. **Only 26.8% of government ministers responsible for climate change policies globally are women**²⁷ – an issue which came to the fore at the COP26 Climate Conference in Glasgow in 2021, **where men occupied 10 out of the 12 leadership positions in the UK team**, and where women were more likely to be employed as event organisers and advisors than as leaders.

Exclusion hampers environmental progress, not only because it is widely understood that those most affected by climate-related issues must play a role in addressing them, but also because the inclusion of women has proven to lead to better, more effective and more inclusive environmental policies. **For example, studies have found that increased representation of women in parliament correlates with a reduction in carbon emissions on account of more stringent climate change policies,**²⁸ **and countries with higher female representation in parliament are more likely to ratify treaties and adopt policies that address climate change impacts.**²⁹

Whose voices are heard when it comes to action on climate change?

A year long study of climate decision-making meetings in Bristol (2021) showed that white men spoke 64% of the time

Source: [University of Bristol](#)

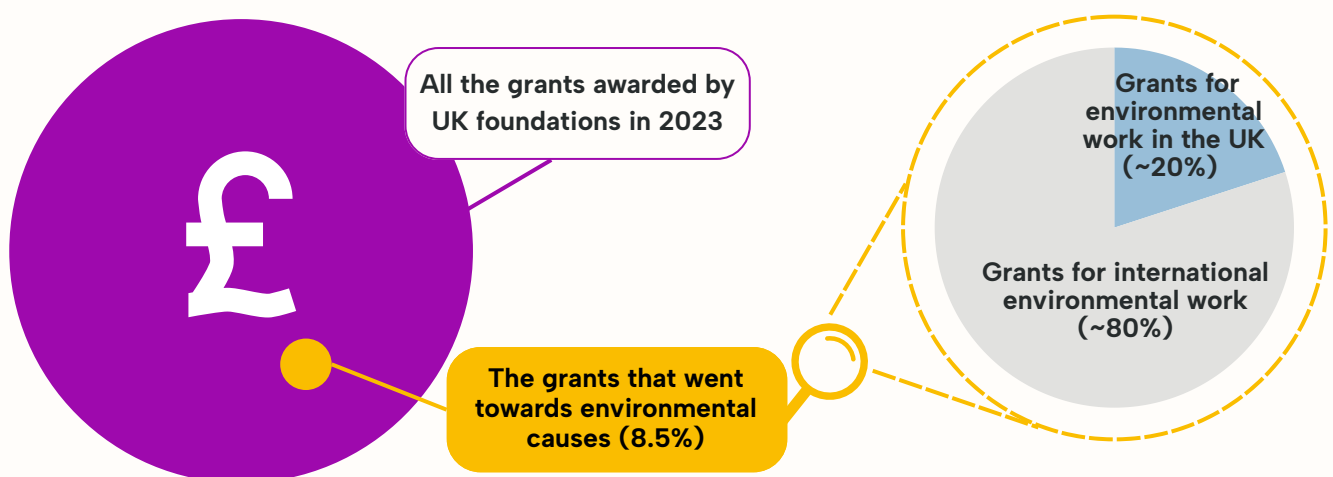


The domestic funding landscape

“ *The fact we don't know about it [the state of adaptation funding in the UK] is linked with the fact that we haven't focused on it.*

Environmental grantmaking in the UK has almost tripled in recent years,³⁰ but has not necessarily focused on supporting movements and organisations that are working to adapt to or build resilience towards the impacts of climate change.

Where funding is being provided within the UK, it is dominated by larger environmental NGOs.³¹ As such, **many grassroots organisations legitimately feel that they cannot compete for funding on a level playing field with larger, national charities**, even though smaller local charities and community-based groups are often best placed to support the most vulnerable in society and to shape national and local policy, on account of their in-depth knowledge of local communities.³²



Data source: [Environmental Funders Network \(2024\)](#)

Where environmental work is being funded at a community level in the UK, it is primarily focused on building sustainability and reducing emissions rather than building community resilience towards the impacts of climate change. This is also reflected in the limited resources that UK funders direct towards women's rights organisations. [Care International](#) found that **just 0.2% of funding provided by UK funders to climate-impacted communities reaches women's rights organisations**, despite these organisations being critical agents of change when it comes to addressing core vulnerabilities to climate change, and addressing climate impacts more directly.³³

UK funders: what you can do



1. Focus on tackling injustice

Shift your **focus funding and power** towards **anti-patriarchal, inclusive, woman-led and women-focused organisations**. Prioritise those that work with and centre marginalised communities, including through **supporting racial justice and women's rights intermediaries** to develop funding streams that focus on building community resilience towards the impacts of climate change.

For example: recognising the importance of relationship-building by funding and supporting access to community land and community spaces, which can support community-based organising and convening, whilst enabling low-cost, low impact food growing.

2. Shift your funding practices

Prioritise **providing flexible, unrestricted, multi-year grants**, whose application, review and monitoring and evaluation processes are **co-created with those they are intended to support**, and whose **timelines reflect the length of time needed to deliver community-based change**.

Please note that contributors to these processes should be paid for their time, to ensure that recommendations are not skewed by input from larger organisations who have more capacity and resources to contribute.

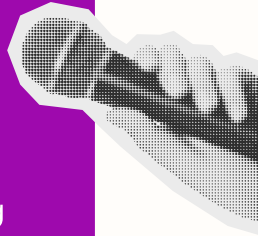


UK funders: what you can do

3. Champion (fund) new voices

Prioritise work that enables those most impacted by climate change in the UK to play a role in addressing it, including through cultivating new leadership.

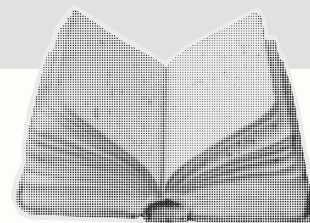
For example: supporting work that nurtures new female, non-binary, queer, disabled and racialised leaders, and work that enables the UK's most affected communities to engage with and contribute towards policy development, including disaster response planning (for example, through supporting community engagement with Local Authorities who have a legal responsibility to carry out this work).



4. Help build the inclusive evidence base

Support research, advocacy and policy-development that seeks to understand and amplify the experiences of women and other minoritised groups, and ensures that understanding is translated into inclusive and gender-responsive policies, including in relation to fuel poverty and food accessibility.

For example: funding knowledge exchanges between community-based / voluntary sector organisations and the professional environmental movement, and supporting community research projects, run by local organisers, which centre the concerns and experiences of local people and connect them with policy makers and consultations.



Recommendations in action

1) AWETHU School of Organising

A transformative educational initiative dedicated to empowering individuals and communities through political education and tools for grassroots organising.

2) Land in Our Names (LION)

A grassroots collective of Black and People of Colour (BPOC) working to reconnect BPOC to land, and to address inequalities in access to land and food across the UK.

3) Women's Environment Network

A UK-based environmental charity working on issues that connect women, health, equity and environmental justice.

4) Civic Power Fund

A pooled fund (intermediary) that supports grassroots community organisers working with and representing excluded communities in the UK, and organisations led by women and people of colour.

5) The Brixton Project (Community Research Exchange)

A pilot research initiative exploring different approaches towards bottom-up decision-making, centering the concerns of local people.

6) The Baobab Foundation

A black and member-led foundation working to achieve long-lasting systems change through resourcing, mobilising and organising community action, with a focus on racial and disability justice.

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