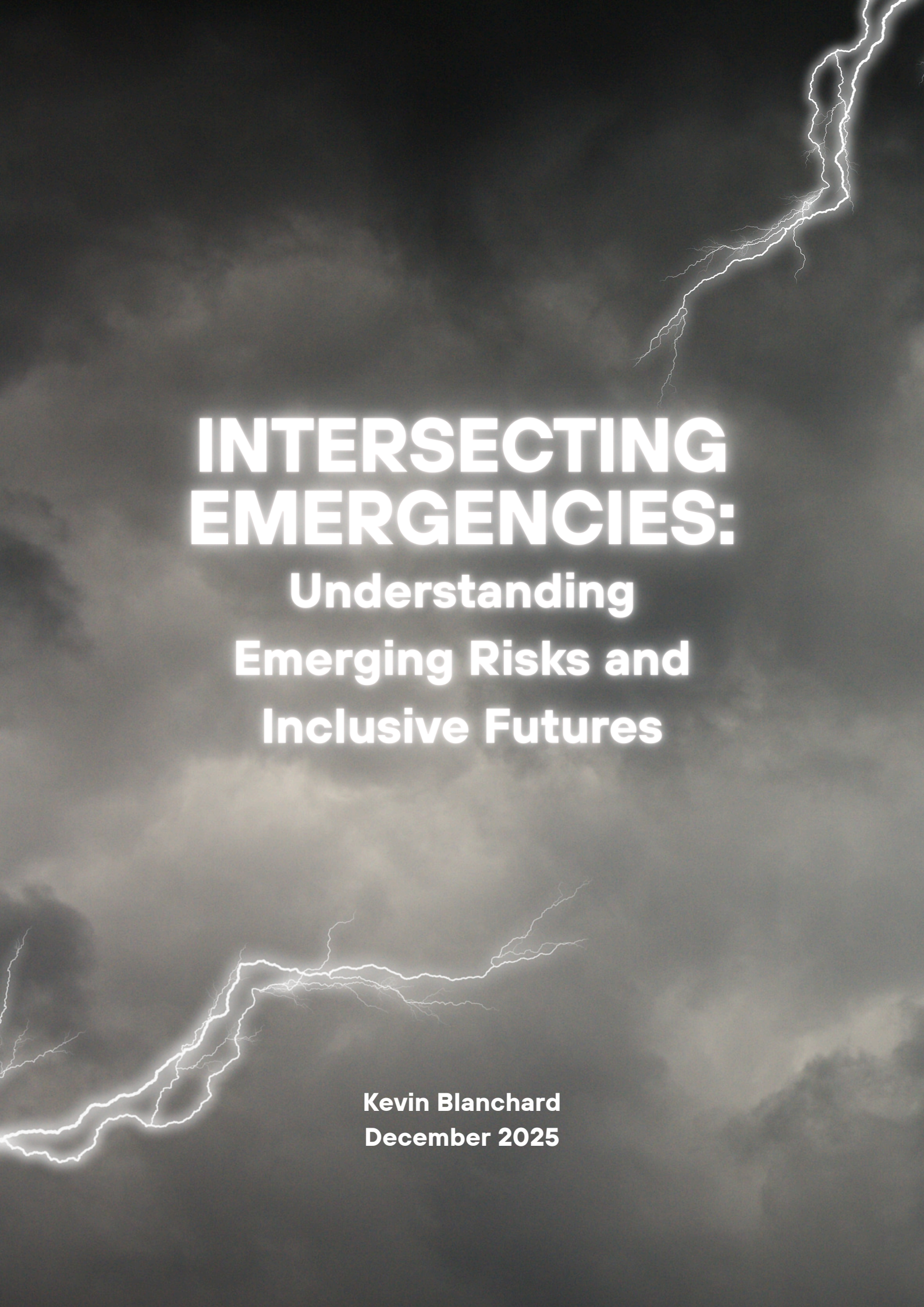

INTERSECTING EMERGENCIES:

Understanding Emerging Risks and Inclusive Futures

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This report brings together the DRR Dynamics research outputs from 2025, including work on digital exclusion, eroding rights, politicised governance, and community level case studies.

It shows how these emerging risks are intersecting with social inequality and reshaping inclusive approaches to disaster risk reduction. It illustrates these trends through examples from Central Asia, global public health, and politicised disaster governance, and sets out what this means for future policy and practice in 2026.

Introduction

The disaster risk context in 2025 is not new in the sense that disasters have always been shaped by social, political, and economic conditions [1]. What has changed is the speed and intensity of today's political and cultural shifts [2,3,4,5,7]. Many countries are experiencing a move towards far-right politics, rising populism, and a narrowing of civic space [2,3]. These developments coincide with a prolonged cost of living crisis, greater geopolitical tension and conflict, and the continuing after-effects of covid on public health systems and social protection [3,4,5]. Together, these trends are altering how risks are created and how communities are able to respond when hazards occur.

These pressures overlap with climate impacts and digital transformation, reinforcing and multiplying each other [7]. The result is a risk landscape that is more unpredictable and interconnected than in previous years. Marginalised groups often feel these pressures first, whether through reduced access to services, restricted rights, targeted discrimination, or exclusion from decision making [6.7]. Disasters therefore continue to reflect underlying inequality, but the current political and cultural context is shaping this in new and deeply consequential ways.

This report concludes the 2025 series on intersectionality and emerging risks. It brings together lessons from the year's research to show how these intersecting pressures are reshaping what inclusive disaster risk reduction needs to look like. It also outlines the direction of work for 2026, where questions of rights, governance, and participation will remain central.

How inequality shapes risk

Hazards only become disasters when they interact with conditions that make people more exposed and less able to cope [8]. This has long been understood in disaster studies, yet it remains important to restate because the current risk environment continues to deepen existing inequalities rather than reduce them [2,3,5]. Earthquakes, floods, pandemics, and heatwaves may be triggered by physical hazards, but the scale of loss and disruption that follows depends largely on the unequal distribution of resources, rights, and decision making power [3,5]. In this sense, emerging risks are not arriving in a neutral landscape, they are meeting systems already shaped by discrimination, economic insecurity, and limited access to services [2,3,5].

Digital exclusion, political marginalisation, and weakened health systems are now interacting with climate impacts in ways that compound disadvantage. People who lack access to secure internet, affordable data, or digital devices are less likely to receive warnings or information, and are more visible to surveillance while being less able to benefit from digital services [4]. Where rights are restricted, groups such as LGBTQIA people, migrants, refugees, and ethnic minorities face barriers in seeking protection or accessing relief [5]. Climate change adds further pressure as livelihoods are disrupted, mobility increases, and competition for resources becomes more intense. These pressures sit alongside long standing issues such as disability exclusion, age discrimination, and precarious employment, which continue to shape who is most at risk when hazards occur [9].

The accumulation of risk is therefore not evenly distributed. People whose rights are already limited, or whose ability to participate in public life is constrained, are more likely to experience multiple and overlapping vulnerabilities [4,9]. They are also more likely to be absent from the processes that determine preparedness, planning, and response. As a result, emergency measures often fail to address the needs of those already facing discrimination, and can sometimes reinforce it [5]. This becomes particularly visible when digital systems are used to allocate support, when identification requirements exclude people without documents, or when displaced communities are relocated to areas with fewer services and protections [4,5,9].

For inclusive disaster risk reduction to respond to emerging risks, it must engage directly with the social and political conditions that shape vulnerability. This means recognising that risk is produced through decisions about whose rights are respected, whose needs are prioritised, and whose voices are heard. It also requires acknowledging that disasters have different consequences for different groups, not because hazards discriminate, but because societies do.

Overview of emerging risks

These emerging risks now shape disaster risk in more complex and interconnected ways. They influence how people access services, how information circulates, and how governments frame vulnerability, response, and recovery [4,5,6]. Each area brings specific challenges for inclusive disaster risk reduction, yet all of them reinforce a wider pattern in which marginalised groups carry the greatest impacts of change and uncertainty.

Public health risks

Public health has remained a central concern since covid, but the focus has shifted towards weakened health systems, reduced social protection, and the long term consequences of disrupted services [10]. Infectious disease is only one aspect.

Many countries continue to face under-resourced healthcare, shortages of skilled staff, and uneven access to treatment, particularly in rural or marginalised communities [4,10]. For people living with long term health conditions, interruptions to medication, shortages of essential supplies, and reduced clinic hours can rapidly turn a hazard into a life threatening emergency. Continuity of care becomes highly fragile during crises, and those already relying on overstretched services face the greatest disruption [11].

Outbreaks and health emergencies also intersect with discrimination [10]. Groups facing stigma, including people living with HIV, gender and sexual minorities, migrants, and sex workers, may hesitate to seek healthcare or may be refused support [10,11]. During pandemics or local outbreaks, public messaging can also reinforce prejudice. These experiences amplify vulnerability long before a hazard occurs. In this context, public health cannot be treated as a parallel sector to disaster risk reduction. It is a significant driver of vulnerability and a foundation for resilience [3,4].

AI and digital risks

Digital technologies are increasingly central to risk monitoring, allocation of assistance, and decision making [4]. At the same time, digital exclusion remains widespread [12]. Limited access to devices, internet, and digital skills means that early warning information, vital service updates, and emergency contacts are not equally shared [4,12]. Digital identification systems, while intended to improve targeting, can exclude people without documentation or those whose identities do not align with legal categories [13].

Data-driven decision making also raises concerns about discrimination [4]. Algorithmic systems may reproduce biases found in the data they rely on, which can produce unequal outcomes in areas such as welfare distribution, disaster relief, relocation schemes, or eligibility for support [4,11]. Automation can also reduce human oversight, making it harder to challenge decisions or identify harmful patterns. Surveillance technologies, including those used for border control or public order, can further marginalise communities that are already targeted by law enforcement or political rhetoric [4,5]. As digital processes expand, the potential for exclusion grows unless these systems are governed transparently and with strong community participation.

Cascading climate impacts

Climate change continues to alter the scale and pattern of disaster risk, but its impacts are increasingly cascading across sectors and regions [14]. Rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, and more frequent extreme events affect

agriculture, infrastructure, health, and livelihoods at the same time. Slow onset changes, such as drought, glacial melt, and sea level rise, gradually erode resources and force people into precarious forms of work or migration that increase exposure to hazards [14].

These processes are rarely confined within national borders. Water scarcity, crop failure, and climate-related displacement create pressure in neighbouring regions and, in some cases, contribute to social tension or conflict [7]. Communities with limited ability to adapt, whether due to poverty, discrimination, or restricted access to land, are placed in increasingly vulnerable positions long before a disaster is formally recognised [7,14]. As climate impacts escalate, the traditional distinction between sudden and slow disasters becomes less useful. Both are shaped by the same structural inequalities and both demand inclusive, long term approaches.

Politicised governance

Political conditions are shaping disaster risk in increasingly direct ways [3,5,15]. Shrinking civic space, restrictions on civil society, and more polarised public debate have weakened the ability of communities to advocate for their rights or challenge harmful decisions [5]. In some contexts, new legislation limits protest, movement, or public expression, while surveillance and disinformation influence how people understand hazards and how governments justify emergency measures [5].

Populism and far-right politics have contributed to a narrative in which some communities are treated as threats rather than rights-holders [3,5]. Refugees, migrants, ethnic minorities, and LGBTQIA groups may be targeted during crises or excluded from assistance [5]. Emergency planning can become less transparent, and in some cases, rights are suspended under the justification of protecting national security. These conditions shape how disasters are prepared for and how recovery is prioritised, often leaving the most marginalised with the least influence over decisions that affect their safety and well-being [15].

Taken together, these emerging risks represent a shift towards a more complex and unequal risk landscape. They make inclusion not only a question of fairness, but a practical requirement for effective disaster risk reduction.

Insights from the 2025 outputs

The publications released during 2025 show that emerging risks are already shaping how communities experience disasters, and that these effects are concentrated among groups with limited rights, weak social protection, or reduced access to essential services. Though each report addressed a different angle of emerging risk, taken together they reveal a consistent pattern: digital, political, public health, and climate pressures rarely operate alone. Instead, they reinforce one another and deepen the underlying inequalities that drive disaster risk.

Work on artificial intelligence and digital exclusion highlighted the growing influence of data-driven decision making within disaster planning, relief allocation, and risk assessment. Although these systems are often framed as objective, they rely on data that can overlook informal workers, undocumented people, displaced communities, and others who are already marginalised. This means that early warning systems, assistance programmes, and preparedness measures may miss the people most at risk. The expansion of automated processes also raises questions about human oversight and about whether individuals and communities can challenge decisions that affect their safety or access to support.

The briefing on the Pamir Kyrgyz offered a concrete illustration of how digital exclusion intersects with geography, language, and livelihood. Communities resettled from high-altitude regions are now living in places with limited connectivity, far from central services and often outside the reach of national information systems. Digital platforms that are assumed to improve warnings, registration, or relief are simply not available here. At the same time, the pressures of resettlement, declining pastoral livelihoods, and climatic shifts affect their exposure to hazards and their ability to recover from crisis. The example shows that digital solutions cannot compensate for deeper structural drivers of vulnerability, particularly where communities are geographically and politically marginal to national systems.

The analysis of human rights and disaster risk points to the way political conditions shape vulnerability long before a crisis. Restrictions on civil society, limits on public participation, and policies that reduce the rights of minorities all influence who can prepare, who can advocate for change, and who is exposed to harm. When rights are weak, people may be deterred from seeking support in emergencies, especially if they belong to groups that face discrimination, surveillance, or legal penalties. The report draws attention to situations where emergency responses reinforce unequal treatment through identification requirements, shelter policies, or security measures that overlook or exclude those who do not fit official categories.

Research on populism and post-truth politics shows how public narratives shape

the political environment in which disasters unfold. The increasing use of divisive rhetoric, misinformation, and scapegoating changes how governments and communities view groups such as migrants, refugees, LGBTQIA people, and informal workers. During crises, this can influence who is prioritised, whose experiences are believed, and whose safety is treated as expendable. As political debate becomes more polarised, inclusive approaches may be dismissed as political rather than necessary, which makes it harder to sustain rights-based models of preparedness and recovery.

Across these reports, there are clear links to gendered and intersectional climate impacts. Slow-onset climate change affects livelihoods and mobility, pushing people into precarious work or displacement. These pressures are most severe where inequality is already present, such as among women, informal workers, minority ethnic groups, and those living in rural or environmentally fragile areas. The combined effects of climate disruption, limited services, and political marginalisation leave communities with reduced capacity to cope with hazards, and with fewer routes into decision making about how recovery should be planned.

Together, the 2025 outputs show that emerging risks are acting through systems that already produce inequality. LGBTQIA communities may avoid shelters due to fear of discrimination. People living with HIV face disrupted treatment during emergencies, while public health systems struggle to maintain continuity of care. Those without digital access cannot rely on systems that assume online communication. Groups exposed to polarising politics may be treated as threats rather than rights holders when disasters occur. In each case, vulnerability is shaped less by the hazard itself and more by the legal, political, digital, and social conditions surrounding it.

The key insight across the year’s work is that inclusion is not an optional add-on to disaster risk reduction. It is essential for understanding how risk is produced, how disasters unfold, and who is placed in harm’s way. Emerging risks are making this clearer, not because they introduce entirely new problems, but because they intensify old ones while exposing the limits of existing policy and practice.

What this means for inclusive DRR practice and governance

The insights gathered through the 2025 outputs point to a shift in how inclusive disaster risk reduction needs to be understood. Inclusion has often been framed as a principle, a specialised theme, or an additional activity that complements

technical measures. The evidence presented across this year's work shows that inclusion is a necessary condition of effective risk reduction. Emerging risks are shaping vulnerability at the level of rights, social protection, political participation, and digital access. Unless these conditions are addressed directly, the technical work of disaster preparedness and response cannot achieve its intended outcomes.

Current approaches to DRR are struggling to keep pace with the challenges set out in this report. Many strategies remain focused on hazards rather than the social systems through which hazards become disasters. As a result, policy tends to concentrate on early warning, infrastructure, and emergency planning without adequately considering the political context in which these measures are delivered. This becomes especially problematic where rights are restricted, where access to services is unequal, or where groups are excluded from participation in local or national decision making. In such contexts, technical interventions may reach communities unevenly or reproduce inequalities that already exist within society.

The need to recognise rights, community knowledge, and locally grounded solutions is now more urgent. Marginalised groups often develop informal systems of support, early warning, and crisis coping that operate outside formal structures, particularly in places where official systems are distrusted or difficult to access. These approaches should be seen as assets rather than informal side notes. Strengthening inclusion requires listening to those with direct experience of discrimination or exclusion and integrating their perspectives into governance, planning, and resource allocation.

Several gaps remain clear. First, the governance of digital systems often lacks transparency and accountability. Decisions about data use, automation, and surveillance are not always subject to community scrutiny, leaving little room to challenge outcomes that disadvantage certain groups. Second, planning processes do not consistently assess how political changes, legal restrictions, or reductions in civic space influence the feasibility of inclusive action. Third, resource allocation often prioritises nationally visible interventions rather than investing in local organisations that already support marginalised groups.

Inclusive DRR therefore requires a reworking of how risk is understood and managed. It means embedding the protection of rights into preparedness and response. It means strengthening community-based organisations and recognising their role as critical actors rather than secondary partners. It also means ensuring that resource allocation reflects the realities of those most exposed to emerging risks. Without these steps, exclusion will remain a structural feature of disaster risk rather than an issue that DRR seeks to address.

Directions for action in 2026

The analysis in this report shows that emerging risks are shaping vulnerability in ways that require disaster risk reduction to move beyond technical preparedness and focus more clearly on rights, governance, and participation. The next phase of work should build on the evidence gathered in 2025 by examining how these structural issues can be addressed through policy and practice, rather than simply documented.

A central priority for 2026 will be the continued erosion of human rights and the implications this has for safety, access to services, and participation during crises. As more countries adopt restrictive legislation or limit civic activity, it becomes harder for marginalised communities to advocate for protection or challenge harmful decisions. Understanding how these political shifts influence DRR will be essential for shaping effective and inclusive interventions.

Another key theme will be civic space. Civil society, grassroots organisations, and community-led groups are critical in supporting people before, during, and after disasters, yet many face increasing pressure. The 2026 series will need to explore how civic space is changing, how communities are adapting, and what forms of support are required from governments and international organisations to protect community action in a more polarised environment.

Digital transformation in emergencies will also continue to demand attention. The rapid expansion of AI, automation, and digital systems within DRR presents both opportunities and risks. Future work should examine how to govern these technologies in ways that strengthen equity, ensure transparency, and avoid reinforcing existing forms of exclusion.

Taken together, these themes suggest that the next phase should move towards practical guidance and policy pathways that help governments, agencies, and civil society adapt to an increasingly complex risk landscape. The focus will need to remain on inclusion as a foundation for effective disaster risk reduction rather than a separate area of work.

Recommendations

The findings presented across this report point to a need for DRR actors to respond to emerging risks not only through new technical measures, but by addressing the social and political conditions that turn hazards into disasters. The following recommendations bring together the implications of the year’s outputs in a way

intended to inform governments, international agencies, and civil society organisations. They focus on actions that can be taken now while recognising that many of the most significant drivers of risk are structural and long term.

For governments

- Strengthen rights protection so that emergency measures do not undermine the safety or agency of marginalised communities. Legal recognition, protection from discrimination, and access to justice are essential components of preparedness and response.
- Embed inclusive planning within DRR strategies by involving groups who are most exposed to emerging risks. Participation needs to be continuous, not limited to consultations after decisions are made.
- Ensure accountability in governance by increasing transparency in decision making, especially in relation to surveillance, digital data use, and emergency powers. Oversight of these areas should not be suspended during crises.
- Invest in basic services, including health, social protection, and access to information, recognising that these services reduce vulnerability long before disasters occur.

For international agencies

- Support marginalised groups directly through programme design, funding decisions, and partnership choices. Working with organisations led by affected communities strengthens the legitimacy and reach of DRR measures.
- Invest in digital inclusion rather than assuming that digital systems will automatically improve risk reduction. This includes affordable access, digital literacy, and governance of data and algorithmic tools to prevent exclusion.
- Develop anticipatory action that addresses structural drivers of risk such as precarious labour, displacement, and weak health systems. Preparedness should consider how emerging risks affect livelihoods, rights, and access to essential services.
- Strengthen research and monitoring on rights erosion, politicised governance, and digital harms so that DRR strategies reflect the changing nature of vulnerability.

For civil society

- Advocate for rights protection during emergencies, including non-discrimination in shelters, access to healthcare, and safeguards against harmful uses of personal data. Rights advocacy is a core DRR activity, not a separate agenda.
- Strengthen community-based monitoring to document how policies and technologies affect different groups. Community evidence can help identify exclusion, influence decision making, and hold institutions accountable.

- Build coalitions that include hyper marginalised groups whose experiences may be overlooked even within broader inclusion efforts. These coalitions can help bridge gaps between local knowledge and national planning.
- Share learning across movements working on public health, digital rights, climate justice, and social protection. Emerging risks cut across these areas, and collaboration is necessary to respond to them effectively.

For academia and research institutions

- Focus research on how emerging risks interact with inequality, rights, and governance, and not only on hazards or technical forecasting. This includes analysing the political and cultural shifts that shape vulnerability and response.
- Develop participatory and community-led approaches that centre the knowledge of people most affected by exclusion. Research should support the visibility of groups whose experiences are often absent from formal assessments.
- Strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration that links climate science, digital studies, public health, and social research. Emerging risks cross sectoral boundaries and require combined expertise.
- Produce outputs that are accessible to practitioners, policymakers, and affected communities. This means communicating findings in clear language and formats that support action rather than remaining within academic audiences.
- Document locally grounded and informal practices that contribute to resilience. These systems are often overlooked, yet they offer practical and context-specific lessons for inclusive disaster risk reduction.

Taken together, these recommendations emphasise that risk reduction is inseparable from the protection of rights and the ability of communities to participate in decisions that affect their safety. Emerging risks make these priorities more urgent, not less, and require the DRR community to treat inclusion as a central requirement for effective action.

Closing reflection

The changing risk landscape highlighted throughout this report shows that emerging threats are becoming an inclusion challenge rather than a technical one. Digital transformation, political polarisation, public health pressures, and accelerating climate impacts are reshaping who is placed at risk and who is able to access support. Future policy will need to treat rights, participation, and social justice as central to disaster risk reduction, not as complementary themes. Without this shift, technical measures will continue to address symptoms while the underlying drivers of vulnerability remain in place.

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