



DISASTER RISK IN A TIME OF ERODING HUMAN RIGHTS

How shrinking civic space and
'legal' injustice undermine inclusive
DRR

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Executive summary

This report examines how the erosion of human rights is becoming a major driver of disaster risk. It argues that restrictions on rights, through shrinking civic space, discriminatory laws, or digital surveillance, weaken the systems designed to protect people before, during, and after crises. Rather than existing alongside disaster risk, the weakening of rights actively shapes who is exposed, who is protected, and who is left behind.

The analysis draws on global policy frameworks, legal and civic trends, and secondary literature. It highlights a growing recognition of rights-based approaches in disaster risk reduction (DRR), but also shows that these commitments are rarely embedded in operational tools, funding models, or programme delivery. In many countries, civic restrictions are making it harder for communities (especially those already at risk) to organise, contribute to preparedness planning, or access emergency support. Discriminatory laws and legal invisibility further marginalise specific groups, limiting access to services and creating barriers to recovery. The increasing use of digital surveillance and automated decision-making adds new risks, particularly where these technologies lack transparency, accountability, or safeguards against bias.

The report takes an intersectional approach, showing that the erosion of rights does not affect all people equally. Legal status, ethnicity, gender identity, and other factors interact to shape exposure, exclusion, and access to protection.

The report concludes with practical steps that governments, UN agencies, donors, civil society, and researchers can take to protect and restore the enabling conditions for inclusive DRR. These include reviewing discriminatory laws, protecting civic freedoms, addressing digital harms, and treating civil society as a key actor in risk governance.

Inclusive DRR cannot be achieved without the protection of human rights. This report outlines where those protections are weakening and what can be done to reverse that trend.

Structural drivers of risk and their impact on inclusive DRR

The three main sections that follow explore how rights erosion is unfolding across civic, legal, and digital domains. These areas are rarely examined together within DRR research or practice, and are often overlooked entirely. Yet they influence core aspects of risk governance, including who is recognised, who can participate, and who receives protection. The table below sets out these domains and outlines how they may contribute to exclusion within DRR systems.

Domain of rights exclusion	What it involves	Impact on DRR
Civic space	Restrictions on protest, civil society activity, freedom of voice	Reduced participation, weaker accountability, lower public trust
Legal systems	Discriminatory laws, criminalisation of identity, legal invisibility	Exclusion from services, fear of seeking help, limited legal recourse
Digital technologies	Surveillance, data misuse, lack of oversight in automated systems	Privacy risks, biased or incomplete decision-making

Introduction

This report focuses on the erosion of human rights as a structural risk that directly undermines disaster protection and recovery. It argues that civic restrictions, legal discrimination, and digital surveillance are not separate from DRR, they shape how risk is governed, who is included in planning, and who receives support when disaster strikes.

While international frameworks increasingly refer to rights-based approaches, there remains a wide gap between these commitments and their application in practice [2]. The Sendai Framework, the Paris Agreement, and the Sustainable Development Goals all contain language on inclusion, but these references often remain vague and are rarely supported by enforceable rights mechanisms [2,3]. Rights are treated as guiding principles rather than structural foundations for risk reduction [3].

With the midterm review of the Sendai Framework complete, new attention on the Early Warnings for All initiative, and initial discussions beginning around what will follow in 2030, this is a critical moment to examine how rights are treated in DRR. Governments, civil society organisations, and UN actors have called for stronger integration of rights into disaster policy, yet the underlying causes of exclusion remain poorly addressed.

Inclusive DRR depends on structural conditions that allow people to be heard, recognised, and protected. When these conditions are missing, efforts to reduce disaster risk become narrower, less trusted, and less effective. The following chapters examine how this erosion is taking place, and what can be done to respond.

Human rights and DRR: The missing link in practice

Despite repeated calls for rights-based approaches in DRR, the role of human rights remains inconsistently addressed in both global policy and practice [2,3]. International frameworks such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Paris Agreement, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include references to rights and inclusion, but these references are often broad and aspirational [3]. The Sendai Framework, for example, affirms the importance of inclusivity and the engagement of all stakeholders, yet it does not explicitly ground these principles in international human rights law [6,7]. The Paris Agreement makes a brief reference to rights in its preamble but lacks binding obligations in this regard [8]. The SDGs go further in some respects, with Goal 16 focusing on peace, justice, and strong institutions, but the direct connections between human rights and risk reduction are rarely made clear [9,10].

Academic research and practitioner literature have consistently underscored the need to anchor DRR efforts in a clear rights-based framework [6,7]. This includes recognition of people's right to safety, participation, information, and non-discrimination in disaster contexts [7]. Civil society organisations and legal advocates have argued that without such grounding, efforts to reduce risk will continue to leave the most marginalised behind [11]. There is growing consensus that effective risk reduction must include not only technical preparedness and infrastructure investment but also the protection of rights that enable people to access those systems and to challenge their exclusion when it occurs [12].

However, in practice, this 'rights' framing remains weak. Operational guidance documents produced by implementing agencies often prioritise technical solutions or capacity-building activities without examining the underlying rights

environment that shapes who benefits [12]. Similarly, many donor frameworks treat rights as secondary considerations, or address them through stand-alone safeguards rather than integrating them into the core of project design and delivery [6,12]. This has implications not only for inclusion but also for accountability and long-term sustainability.

The absence of strong, enforceable rights commitments within the operational landscape of DRR means that marginalisation often persists unchecked and unchallenged. In many cases, those most exposed to disaster risks lack legal recognition, access to information, or the freedom to organise and participate in decision-making processes [7,11]. As a result, the protective systems that DRR efforts rely on are often inaccessible to the very groups they aim to support [7].

Understanding how human rights are weakened in practice means looking closely at the systems and environments that shape risk. Civic space, legal protections, and digital governance each influence whether people can participate safely, access support, or challenge exclusion. The erosion of rights in these areas is not always visible, but it has far-reaching effects on who is protected and who is not.

Shrinking civic space and its Implications for DRR

The ability of individuals and communities to engage freely in civic life is a key enabler of inclusive DRR [13]. Civic space allows people to organise, express their concerns, challenge decisions, and participate in shaping the systems that affect them [13]. However, over the past decade, this space has narrowed significantly in many countries. Reports from CIVICUS, UN Special Rapporteurs, and other monitoring bodies have documented widespread restrictions on civil society organisations (CSOs), the curtailment of public protest, the criminalisation of dissent, and increasing controls on the funding and activities of non-governmental actors [14,15,16].

This contraction is not limited to any one region. It has been observed in both high-income and lower-income countries, in democracies and authoritarian settings alike [14]. Often justified under the banner of national security, public order, or counter-terrorism, these restrictions tend to have disproportionate impacts on groups already facing exclusion [14,16]. Indigenous organisations, women's groups, LGBTQIA+ networks, disability rights coalitions, and refugee-led initiatives are among those most affected [14]. The result is a fragmented civic landscape in which many at-risk communities have fewer opportunities to influence the policies and decisions that directly shape their vulnerability to disasters.

In the context of DRR, this shrinkage has concrete and far-reaching implications

[17,18]. Where civil society is constrained, local risk knowledge is less likely to be recognised or acted upon [18]. Communities may be excluded from early warning systems, preparedness planning, or recovery programmes because the mechanisms for their participation no longer exist or have been weakened [18]. When grassroots groups cannot safely operate or access funding, the range of voices involved in DRR policy and practice narrows [17]. This undermines the very principle of inclusive risk governance promoted in global frameworks.

Case study evidence highlights the consequences. In post-cyclone Mozambique, for instance, restrictions on press freedom and civil society mobilisation limited public scrutiny of recovery efforts, reducing transparency and trust [18,19]. In parts of South Asia, local organisations responding to monsoon flooding reported increased difficulty obtaining permits and approvals for relief distribution, particularly when serving marginalised groups [20,21]. In Latin America, Indigenous communities have documented how environmental defenders working to prevent deforestation and mitigate climate-linked hazards face increasing threats and intimidation, disrupting locally led risk management strategies [22]. In parts of the United States, advocacy organisations supporting migrant farmworkers during wildfire seasons have reported increased surveillance and reduced access to funding, hindering outreach efforts and limiting the inclusion of undocumented workers in disaster preparedness plans [23].

The relationship between civic space and DRR is often overlooked in programme design and risk assessments. Yet the ability to speak, organise, and act collectively is fundamental to identifying risks, holding authorities to account, and designing responses that reflect diverse needs and experiences [13]. Where civic space closes, these functions are compromised.

Understanding this dynamic is essential for strengthening the enabling environment for DRR. A functioning and protected civic sphere is not a luxury or an add-on [13,18]. It is an essential part of building just, inclusive, and effective approaches to reducing disaster risk.

Legal injustice: Discriminatory laws as structural risk drivers

Legal systems play a significant role in shaping who is protected before, during, and after disasters [7,11]. While often considered outside the scope of traditional DRR policy, national laws can directly influence the conditions that place people at risk. When these laws discriminate against specific populations or restrict access to basic services, they act as structural drivers of vulnerability [24].

Across many contexts, laws continue to criminalise certain identities, behaviours, or family structures [7]. These include laws that target same-sex relationships, gender expression, migration status, and informal settlements [25]. Across a wide range of contexts, legal systems continue to embed exclusion into the everyday lives of marginalised groups [11,25]. Laws that criminalise consensual same-sex relationships remain in place in over 60 countries, reinforcing stigma and deterring individuals from seeking assistance in crisis settings [26]. In many regions, stateless people and undocumented migrants face legal barriers to accessing essential services such as healthcare, shelter, and education, leaving them particularly vulnerable during disasters [27]. Similarly, punitive approaches to informal housing make it harder for people living in unregistered settlements or slums to access recovery aid or be included in relocation or planning processes [28]. These legal restrictions do not only reflect broader social discrimination; they also shape who is recognised, protected, and supported when disaster strikes.

While often passed under the justification of public morality, order, or national security, the practical effect of these laws is to exclude individuals and groups from systems designed to keep people safe [29].

Legal frameworks that discriminate in this way do not simply create isolated cases of injustice, they establish patterns of exclusion that carry over into emergency response and recovery [30]. For example, during disasters, marginalised groups may avoid seeking help from authorities for fear of arrest, deportation, or exposure [7,31,32]. Healthcare workers or shelter providers may be legally prohibited from offering services to certain populations [31]. In contexts where identity documents are a legal requirement for accessing aid, stateless persons, refugees, or trans people with mismatched documents may be left unserved [27]. Even where laws are not strictly enforced, their presence often creates a chilling effect, discouraging participation and increasing mistrust in public institutions.

These dynamics are not theoretical. Legal advocacy organisations and human rights monitoring bodies have documented numerous examples where discriminatory laws have undermined equitable disaster response [33].

These laws are often embedded within broader legal and policy systems that already overlook or undervalue the needs of certain populations [33]. Disaster laws may lack explicit non-discrimination clauses or may defer entirely to existing national legal frameworks, many of which are not rights-based [11,33]. As a result, DRR practitioners may find themselves operating in legal environments that actively undermine inclusion, even where international guidance calls for the opposite [7,11].

Addressing this challenge requires more than simply acknowledging the problem. It involves recognising that the law itself is a source of risk for many people [7].

Legal reform is not always within the remit of DRR actors, but awareness of legal barriers can shape programme design, advocacy strategies, and partnerships. Collaboration with legal aid providers, human rights institutions, and civil society networks is one way to bridge this gap. Donors and international agencies also have a role to play in promoting legal frameworks that protect rights rather than restrict them.

In short, laws that criminalise or exclude do not disappear during crises. They follow people into disaster settings and shape who is seen, who is served, and who is left behind. Without examining the legal environment, efforts to build inclusive DRR will remain incomplete.

Surveillance, digital control and securitised risk governance

Digital tools are now part of most DRR systems [34]. These include data collection, identity checks, location tracking, and artificial intelligence (AI) and while these systems can improve how decisions are made, they also carry risks [34]. In particular, surveillance and digital control may reduce trust, discourage participation, and place already marginalised groups at greater risk [35]. While these systems offer potential benefits for early warning, needs assessments, and crisis communication, they also introduce new risks. In particular, the use of surveillance and digital control in the name of safety or efficiency can undermine trust, limit participation, and place already marginalised groups at greater risk [35].

Reports by organisations such as Privacy International [36], and the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy [37] have documented the expansion of surveillance practices in humanitarian and disaster settings. These include the widespread use of biometric registration, location tracking of displaced populations, drone surveillance of high-risk areas, and partnerships with private companies to analyse social media or mobile data [35,36,37]. These systems are often introduced without adequate consultation, oversight, or meaningful consent.

While often presented as neutral tools for improving coordination or targeting aid, surveillance measures frequently reflect existing power imbalances [34]. Groups with irregular legal status, such as refugees, migrants, or people without formal documentation, may be especially vulnerable and in some cases, data collected for humanitarian purposes has been shared with security agencies or immigration enforcement, leading to fear and disengagement from life-saving services [34]. In others, affected communities have reported that surveillance technologies were used to monitor behaviour, restrict movement, or suppress protest following disasters [34].

For marginalised groups, the implications go beyond privacy concerns. Surveillance can reduce trust in public authorities, particularly in contexts where policing or border control is already experienced as hostile [7,11,34]. It can also disrupt the ability of communities to organise, advocate, or communicate safely during crises with some regions, digital surveillance being used to monitor activists or community leaders involved in disaster response and environmental protection, creating additional barriers to civic engagement in risk governance [38].

AI-powered systems bring further complexity [34]. Predictive analytics and algorithmic tools are increasingly used in disaster preparedness and response planning, including for resource allocation and vulnerability mapping [34]. However, without clear safeguards, these systems risk embedding existing biases. If training data reflects structural inequalities or excludes certain populations, the outputs may reinforce those exclusions. For example, if informal settlements or unregistered populations are not visible in official datasets, AI systems may deprioritise them in risk assessments or recovery planning [34].

Concerns about these technologies are not limited to hypotheticals. Research has shown that automated systems used in social protection and crisis assistance programmes have sometimes led to wrongful exclusions, delays, or privacy violations [39]. For LGBTQIA+ individuals, ethnic minorities, or those without state-recognised identities, being misclassified or overlooked by automated processes is not uncommon [34]. These harms are compounded when there is limited recourse or when affected individuals are unaware that such systems are even being used.

The challenge is not the use of digital tools in itself, but the way in which they are governed. DRR actors are often placed in difficult positions, balancing a need for information with limited capacity to ensure ethical data practices [40,41]. Yet failure to consider the rights implications of digital systems can erode the very goals of inclusive and people-centred risk reduction and the tools intended to improve access and efficiency can easily end up reinforcing surveillance, exclusion, and control [41].

Digital surveillance and control, especially when embedded in securitised approaches to risk, can harden the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion [34,40,41]. As disaster risks grow more complex and technology plays an increasing role in response, protecting digital rights becomes inseparable from the broader project of equitable risk governance [41]. Without these protections, technological solutions risk becoming another layer of structural risk.

Systemic impacts of rights erosion on risk governance

When rights are weakened in legal, civic, and digital systems, the foundations of disaster risk governance are affected. Exclusion becomes more likely, and participation, trust, and protection are all reduced [11]. When people are denied the freedom to organise, the legal recognition to access services, or the privacy to engage safely with institutions, their ability to participate in risk governance is undermined [17]. These restrictions are not simply barriers to engagement. They are active forces that shape who is visible in DRR systems, who receives support, and who remains excluded [17].

Shrinking civic space creates clear patterns of exclusion and limits the ability of communities and civil society organisations to raise concerns, share local knowledge, or contribute to decision-making [17]. Discriminatory laws block access to basic services and legitimise the exclusion of certain groups during crisis response. Surveillance and data systems, if unregulated, create environments of mistrust and insecurity that deter people from engaging with the institutions that are meant to support them [39]. These forces are mutually reinforcing. Together, they contribute to a risk governance landscape in which inclusion becomes conditional, selective, or absent altogether.

In this context, participation is often the first casualty. Inclusive DRR frameworks stress the importance of involving all stakeholders, especially those most at risk. But where public assembly is restricted, or where registration processes filter out people without legal status or formal identification, participation is constrained in practice [42]. A rights-based approach requires more than just open invitations to consultative meetings, it requires structural conditions that allow people to speak freely, access information, and challenge decisions without fear of harm [41].

The effects on protection are equally significant. Humanitarian and disaster response systems rely on assumptions about who can safely access support. For individuals living under discriminatory laws, this assumption often does not hold. Trans people, sex workers, migrants without papers, or others criminalised by law may avoid shelters, clinics, or registration sites for fear of exposure or punishment [43]. As a result, their needs go unmet, and their risks increase. These are not isolated gaps in service delivery, they are predictable outcomes of exclusionary legal and social frameworks [43].

An intersectional lens is essential in understanding these dynamics. Exclusion is rarely experienced along a single axis with a person's ability to engage with DRR systems shaped by the interaction of multiple factors, including legal status,

ethnicity, gender identity, age, disability, and language [43]. For example, a stateless woman with a disability may face overlapping legal, social, and physical barriers to participation in preparedness planning. A young queer refugee may be visible to surveillance systems but invisible to service providers. These intersections shape not only vulnerability, but also the degree to which people are able to access protection and shape the policies that affect their lives.

The literature confirms these patterns. Studies have shown that DRR initiatives which fail to account for intersecting identities often reinforce the very inequalities they seek to address [44]. Programmes that treat communities as homogenous units risk privileging dominant groups while leaving others behind and conversely, inclusive efforts grounded in rights and responsive to intersectionality tend to have higher uptake, better outcomes, and stronger community support [44].

The consequences of human rights erosion are not limited to individual harm, they distort the foundation upon which inclusive DRR must be built.

Policy and practice recommendations

The erosion of human rights poses a significant challenge to inclusive and effective DRR. As the previous chapters have shown, rights-based approaches are often undermined by shrinking civic space, discriminatory legal frameworks, and unregulated digital systems. Yet these challenges are not inevitable. They reflect choices made in policy and practice, and they can be addressed through deliberate and sustained action.

It is also important to recognise, that implementing rights-based DRR is not straightforward. Many governments, institutions, and civil society actors operate in environments where homophobia, transphobia, racism, and the suppression of freedom of speech are embedded in law or public discourse. In some contexts, the separation between the executive, judiciary, and security sectors is blurred, limiting accountability and the protection of dissent [45]. Financial constraints, donor conditionalities, and political instability may further restrict the space for inclusive practice. These realities shape what is possible and often carry risks for those pushing for change. Progress may therefore be uneven and context-specific, requiring long-term commitment and careful navigation.

The recommendations that follow are offered with these complexities in mind. They are aimed at strengthening the enabling environment for inclusive and rights-based DRR. They are grouped according to key actor groups and draw on existing evaluations, secondary research, and civil society input.

For governments:

Governments have the central responsibility for ensuring that DRR systems protect all people equally. Achieving this is complex, particularly in environments where resources are limited, civil liberties are under pressure, or public discourse is hostile to certain groups. Nonetheless, governments can take meaningful steps within their national contexts to reduce exclusion and strengthen rights protections:

- Review laws and policies that discriminate on the basis of identity, migration status, residence, or access to public services, and consider reforms that reduce exclusion in disaster settings.
- Ensure that disaster legislation, preparedness plans, and recovery frameworks include clear non-discrimination and participation clauses, supported by systems of accountability.
- Safeguard civic space by protecting the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association, even during periods of crisis or emergency.
- Make public communication, early warning systems, and relief services accessible, inclusive, and trusted by groups who may face discrimination, surveillance, or past exclusion.
- Strengthen grievance and oversight mechanisms, such as ombuds offices or independent commissions, to monitor exclusion in disaster response and promote corrective action.

For UN agencies:

UN bodies are influential in setting global standards and supporting policy implementation at national and regional levels. Operating in politically sensitive environments, they often walk a careful line, but there are still ways to reinforce rights-based approaches to DRR:

- Integrate clear rights language and human rights commitments into DRR guidance, tools, and frameworks, building on existing UN standards and obligations.
- Strengthen collaboration across DRR, humanitarian, development, and human rights units, so that rights are not treated as peripheral to risk governance.
- Where possible, support governments in reviewing legislation and policies for inclusion and rights compatibility, especially where civic engagement is restricted or heavily regulated.
- Offer technical assistance on incorporating intersectionality and non-discrimination into risk analysis, planning, and monitoring, while being mindful of data protection and informed consent.

For donors:

Donors operate within their own political constraints and risk appetites, but they remain well placed to shape the terms of engagement in DRR funding. To support inclusive approaches in practice, they can:

- Make respect for human rights a visible and measurable requirement across DRR funding portfolios, not only in social or development programming.
- Provide sustained, flexible funding to organisations and networks that work on rights-based DRR, especially those led by communities who are often marginalised.
- Fund legal empowerment, civic education, and digital rights work as part of risk reduction and preparedness strategies, not only during humanitarian response.
- Prioritise DRR proposals that include mechanisms for participation, independent feedback, and monitoring by affected populations, and provide funding to implement these mechanisms meaningfully.

For civil society:

Civil society actors often operate in politically restricted or underfunded environments. Despite this, many continue to lead efforts to defend rights and ensure that DRR reaches those who are too often excluded. To sustain and deepen this work:

- Strengthen alliances and coalitions that elevate the voices and expertise of women, LGBTQIA+ people, disabled people, youth, migrants, and others disproportionately affected by disaster risk.
- Document and share evidence of exclusion and community-led responses, using this to influence policy and hold institutions to account where possible.
- Invest in data security, digital literacy, and responsible data practices, particularly in contexts where surveillance is a known risk.
- Use advocacy, litigation, or other appropriate strategies to resist laws and policies that restrict civic space or block participation in emergency and recovery efforts.

For academic and research institutions:

Academic institutions have relative autonomy and can influence both policy and practice through research, teaching, and convening. To better support inclusive and rights-based DRR:

- Prioritise research that explores how rights, governance, and inequality intersect with disaster risk, with attention to structural and systemic factors.
- Engage with affected communities using participatory methods that recognise local knowledge and lived experience as central to risk understanding.
- Analyse the effects of legal, civic, and digital systems on exclusion in DRR, and share findings in formats that are accessible to practitioners and decision makers.
- Integrate rights-based and intersectional approaches into DRR education and professional development, ensuring future practitioners are equipped to recognise and address exclusion.

Taken together, these actions can help shift DRR from a technical response to a more inclusive, accountable, and rights-affirming approach, one that better reflects the realities faced by those most at risk.

Conclusion

Disaster risk reduction cannot succeed if it is disconnected from the protection of human rights. The systems designed to reduce harm before, during, and after crises rely on trust, access, and fairness. Where rights are weakened, those foundations begin to crack. The result is risk reduction that fails to reach those who need it most and recovery efforts that reinforce, rather than reduce, inequality.

This report has shown how structural issues, including the shrinking of civic space, the persistence of discriminatory laws, and the expansion of unregulated surveillance, undermine inclusive DRR. These are not side issues or background conditions. They are central to how risk is created, distributed, and addressed. When people are unable to speak freely, move safely, or access services without fear, they are more likely to be exposed to hazards and less likely to recover from them.

Hazards alone do not determine who suffers most. It is the systems in place, and the choices made within them, that shape outcomes. A focus on infrastructure, forecasts, and funding models is not enough. DRR must also pay attention to whose voices are included, whose lives are protected, and whose rights are upheld in the process.

This is not a call for perfection, nor a one-size-fits-all approach. It is a call for deliberate choices. Risk reduction policies and programmes must be designed with rights in mind from the start, not added later as an afterthought. Governments, donors, UN agencies, civil society, and researchers each have a role to play in creating an environment where inclusive DRR is possible and sustainable.

This is not a call for perfection or for a single model that works everywhere. It is a call for more deliberate choices. Rights must be considered from the beginning, not added later as safeguards once systems are already established. Every actor involved in disaster risk reduction, including governments, donors, UN agencies, civil society organisations and researchers, has a role to play in creating environments where inclusion is both possible and lasting.

Glossary of terms

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

The process of identifying, assessing, and reducing the risks of disasters through policies, strategies, and practices that aim to minimise harm to people, property, and the environment.

Inclusive DRR

An approach to disaster risk reduction that ensures the meaningful participation and protection of all groups. This includes those who are marginalised or at heightened risk, such as migrants, disabled people, LGBTQIA+ communities, or stateless individuals.

Rights-based approach

A way of designing policies and programmes that puts the protection of human rights at the centre. In DRR, this involves ensuring safety, access to information, participation in decision-making, and protection from discrimination.

Intersectionality

The idea that different forms of discrimination can combine and overlap. These may be based on gender, race, legal status, disability, sexuality, or other factors. Intersectionality helps explain how exclusion is experienced differently by different people and why some are more likely to be left out of disaster planning and response.

Structural risk

Risks that are created by systems such as laws, institutions, or social structures, rather than by hazards themselves. For example, a person denied access to a shelter because of their legal status faces a structural risk.

Civic space

The environment that allows people and organisations to take part freely in public life. This includes speaking out, organising, protesting, receiving funding, and participating in decisions that affect them, without fear of punishment.

Shrinking civic space

The increasing restriction of freedoms such as speech, assembly, and civil society activity. In DRR, this makes it harder for communities to organise, share knowledge, challenge poor decisions, or influence how risk is governed.

Legal discrimination

Laws or policies that unfairly target or exclude people based on who they are or how they live. This may include criminalising same-sex relationships, informal housing, or lack of identity documents. These laws create barriers to safety and support.

Legal invisibility

A situation in which people are not recognised by the state in legal terms. This includes stateless individuals, undocumented migrants, or people with identities that do not match their documents. Legal invisibility often prevents access to services, protection, or aid.

Surveillance

The collection or monitoring of people's personal information. This is often done using digital tools such as biometric databases, mobile location tracking, drones, or social media analysis. In disaster settings, surveillance can create fear, reduce trust, and make people avoid seeking help.

Digital control

The use of digital technologies to manage, restrict, or shape people's behaviour during crises. This may include data sharing with police or immigration agencies, the use of algorithms to make decisions, or systems that monitor people's actions or communications.

Automated systems / AI in DRR

Technology-based tools such as artificial intelligence or predictive models that are used to plan for or respond to disasters. These tools can help with early warning or targeting resources, but they may also exclude or misidentify people if they rely on biased or incomplete data.

Digital divide

The gap between those who have access to digital tools and services and those who do not. This divide affects who can receive alerts, register for aid, or be seen in official systems used for disaster response.

Rights erosion

The steady decline or removal of civil, political, or social rights. This can happen through changes to laws, increased surveillance, restrictions on protest or speech, or by limiting access to legal support.

Securitised risk governance

A style of disaster management that focuses on control and security, often at the cost of inclusion and participation. This approach can reduce civic freedoms and increase the risks faced by already-marginalised groups.

Non-discrimination clause

A part of a law or policy that states people must not be excluded or treated unfairly based on who they are. In DRR, such clauses help ensure equal access to emergency services, shelter, information, and recovery support.

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