

LRF Equalities Partnership Consultation Findings & Implications

I. Introduction

Emergencies – from the COVID-19 pandemic to flooding, terror incidents, fire, or the cost-of living crisis – do not affect all communities equally. People already facing structural inequality often face the greatest harms. While the organisations that support marginalised communities during crises play a vital role in promoting community wellbeing and resilience and offer valuable insights into what more inclusive responses to shocks can look like in practice, they are rarely included in official resilience planning or decision-making.

To remedy this, London Resilience has commissioned Protection Approaches to create an Equalities Partnership within the London Resilience Forum, following findings from the Equalities Engagement report published in 2024 with the recommendation to do so. Based on 80 consultations with equalities groups working with/for marginalised groups in London as well as resilience stakeholders, the report put forward the recommendation that an Equalities Partnership comprised of equalities organisations should be created, to centre the voices of marginalised groups in emergency planning and response efforts within the London Resilience Forum. The London Resilience Forum is a multi-agency group responsible for ensuring London can respond effectively to emergencies – from terror attacks and natural disasters to public health crises and large-scale evacuations. Members include emergency services like the Metropolitan Police and London Fire Brigade, alongside voluntary groups such as the British Red Cross and LCEP.

The Partnership will bring together interested equalities groups to support LRF members in ensuring that their emergency preparedness and response efforts centre the priorities, perspectives and needs of marginalised groups in London. The partnership will build upon existing efforts such as the work of the London Communities Emergencies Partnership (LCEP) and the Faith and Belief Sector Panel to ensure that communities most affected by emergencies are central to London's resilience planning.

This brief report outlines the findings of consultations with 80 equalities groups and resilience stakeholders to understand how the Equalities Partnership can enable and support more inclusive and intersectional emergency preparedness and response efforts across the capital. It also identifies the implications of these findings for the structure, aims, outputs and terms of reference of the Partnership – and how they can be achieved to ensure equalities groups are key partners in resilience and preparedness in London.

II. The consultation

The consultation conducted by the project team consisted of a series of interviews, workshops as well as written submissions to an online questionnaire, and engaged with equalities and resilience stakeholders to ensure the partnership supported both their needs and capacities. ↩

We defined equalities groups as collectives or organisations whose primary purpose is to support, represent, or advocate for marginalised communities and/or groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

During the consultation the project team spoke with representatives from groups working with/for people with disabilities, people living with complex mental and physical health needs, people in or at-risk-of debt, as well as groups working with LGBTQI+, youth, elderly, Roma/Gypsy, carers', women, migrant, refugee and racialised groups to understand how the partnership can best centre their priorities, perspectives and needs.

In addition to consultations with equalities stakeholders, we also conducted consultations with key actors in the resilience space, including London Resilience staff as well as representatives from the emergency response sector, including from the Fire Brigade, London Councils, Met Police, National Health Service, Thames Water and the United Kingdom Health Security Agency. Consultations were complemented by ongoing conversations with key voluntary, community and faith actors, including LCEP and the Faith and Belief Sector Panel, to ensure the partnership supports and complements their important efforts in the resilience space.

III. Consultation findings

Risks facing marginalised groups in times of emergency:

Marginalised groups already facing systemic inequalities are likely to suffer worse outcomes in times of emergency or crisis. In the consultation, equalities groups reported six recurring and interconnected risks facing the communities they support:

1. Extreme financial precarity

Financial instability was one of the most pressing concerns raised. Pre-existing lack of community wealth and resources leaves equalities groups and the communities they serve unable to respond effectively or mitigate impacts when crises hit. Many reported widespread income and job loss during emergencies, leaving people unable to afford basic needs such as housing and medication. Groups working with communities from underprivileged socioeconomic backgrounds also warned that people are often pushed toward high-risk or illegal lenders, driving them deeper into financial and legal insecurity and further eroding their resilience.

2. Inability to access critical emergency guidance

Community members who experience inequalities are often unable to access critical emergency guidance, either due to lack of outreach from emergency planners and responders, digital exclusion or inability to access technological devices, or the lack of availability of accessibly presented information such as translated material, Braille, British Sign Language, large print, easy read and plain English. This particularly affected groups that are often isolated such as the elderly and migrants, or those who had distinct accessibility needs such as people with disabilities.

3. Deteriorations in physical and mental health

Loss of access to social and medical care during crises was reported as significantly affecting both the physical and mental health of groups who face systemic inequalities. Those living in support homes are particularly vulnerable to being overlooked in planning for and responding to emergencies, while individuals with health conditions such as diabetes or heart problems suffer from the unavailability of essential medical support and equipment. For example, diabetics may be unable to access snacks in evacuation centres which they need to regulate blood sugar and avoid life-threatening medical crises, while those with complex heart conditions may not be able to access defibrillators when needed. The social isolation that often accompanies emergencies, as well as the stress they cause, also triggered mental health crises, which were compounded by the withdrawal of usual social and medical support networks.

4. Barriers to accessing and using safe shelter and evacuation or community spaces

Groups who experience inequalities faced significant barriers in accessing and using safe shelters or emergency centres in times of emergencies. Those facing systemic inequalities will often have fewer options to access safety; for example, people with disabilities will often require distinct support to move to safe spaces, while others might be impacted by the lack of resources, strong support networks or wider community wealth in ways that limit the support they can access from their own communities. Even when people were able to reach safe spaces, many found it difficult to use them. The absence of mobility aids as well as accessible changing spaces, toilets and signage in various languages and formats was reported as particularly disadvantaging the elderly, people with physical and mental disabilities, migrants, new arrivals and single parents during emergencies.

5. Fear and mistrust of state officials and directives

For many groups, including those with irregular migration status, LGBTQI+ people, racialised groups, and sex workers, historical experiences of discrimination shaped how they responded to emergencies. Such groups often fear reaching out to state services for support due to worries that they might get into legal trouble or that their concerns won't be taken seriously; this significantly impacts, for example, willingness to report hate incidents to authorities and consequently impairs the support communities are able to access. Many communities are sceptical of advice, guidance, or orders given by the state or statutory services due to their communities' historical

experiences of discrimination, sometimes resulting in individuals ignoring evacuation orders, refusing vaccinations, or contradicting official guidance during life-threatening emergencies.

6. Exposure to active violence

Higher rates of hate incidents and crimes were reported by consultees in times of crisis and emergency, all while having less access to redress as resources are redirected to respond to crises. For example, East and Southeast Asian communities reported experiencing a sharp rise in racist attacks during COVID-19, against the backdrop of rising far-right and anti-immigrant protests that were often reinforced by mainstream political discourse, thus creating more hostile and unsafe environments. For already marginalised communities, emergencies therefore not only brought disaster-related risk but also heightened exposure to identity-based violence and intimidation.

Pathways to inclusive preparedness and response in the work of the Partnership

As part of our consultations, we spoke with equalities groups, LRF members and wider resilience stakeholders to identify how the Equalities Partnership can advocate for and facilitate more inclusive and effective preparedness and response efforts in a meaningful and practical manner. Consultees identified six pathways:

1. Building bridges between equalities groups and emergency responders

Equalities groups stressed that the Equalities Partnership should play an active convening role to connect communities and resilience actors. They recommended that the Partnership facilitate clear, formal mechanisms to ensure equalities knowledge and lived experience inform crisis planning and response. This could include supporting the development of shared definitions of emergencies, mapping and communicating available support from agencies, and helping establish a designated equalities point of contact within LRF members. They also suggested that the Partnership work to improve equalities groups' understanding of LRF structures and roles, and coordinate engagement across boroughs, equalities groups, and emergency responders.

2. Facilitating the provision of accessible communications before, during and after emergencies

Accessible communications were identified as a cornerstone of inclusive preparedness and response by all equalities groups that were consulted. Equalities groups consulted highlighted that the Equalities Partnership should advocate for, and support LRF members in, developing accessible emergency guidance and information to ensure all Londoners are supported before, during and after emergencies. This includes providing information in large print, Braille, British Sign Language, audio, easy-read, plain English, and language translations. Equalities groups also stressed that the Partnership should create a reciprocal communication loop that functions at all stages of emergency preparedness and response. This would entail sharing accessible updates from LRFs to communities, gathering ground-level intelligence to feed back to LRFs, and visibly demonstrating how community advice is acted on.

3. Clarity of roles and responsibilities within partnership

Groups stressed the importance of clarity around the roles and expectations of equalities organisations within the Partnership. Understanding how they can support inclusive emergency preparedness and response and what their work within the partnership would entail would improve coordination and effectiveness – and it would also enable equalities organisations to plan ahead and engage where it would create the most benefit.

4. Facilitating inclusive planning and response design

Equalities groups and resilience actors consulted pointed to the importance of moving beyond one-size-fits-all approaches to emergency preparedness and response. Consultees were clear that a key role for the Partnership will be advocating for the perspectives and needs of marginalised groups to be built into emergency planning before crises hit. This could include convening scenario planning and response design sessions with equalities groups, so they are aware of wider emergency planning efforts and prepared to support the communities they work with when emergencies occur. The Partnership could also facilitate early sight of emergency plans so groups can provide feedback and ensure plans are inclusive and fit for purpose.

5. Signposting available financial aid pathways

Financial support during crises was seen as vital to preventing long-term harm. Equalities groups recommended that the Partnership could work to develop a financial aid signposting directory to support equalities groups in availing resources to the communities they work with in times of emergency – and for those financial aid programmes to have low barriers to access. They also suggested that the partnership could advocate for funding to go to mutual aid groups as they often serve as lifelines during emergencies; supporting these networks would help reduce reliance on unsafe lenders, illegal debt-givers and would also strengthen wider community resilience.

6. Building LRF capacity to engage meaningfully and implement equalities advice

Equalities groups noted that in order for LRF engagement to result in meaningful impact, LRF members need to be supported with the capacity, resource, skills, knowledge and structures they need to implement change. This can include the provision of trauma-informed, disability-informed, culturally-competent and anti-racist training as well as expanding organisational capacity to engage effectively on equalities. Equalities groups also stressed that the LRF should deliver support directly to communities – for example providing accessible emergency communications and shelters, facilitating scenario planning sessions and supporting victims of hate – rather than relying on signposting alone, and that stronger coordination with government is needed to ensure resources reach those most at risk.

7. Playing policy advocacy role

Finally, equalities groups highlighted the need for systemic change to enable the development and amendment of policies that place marginalised groups at the heart of London's resilience. They called on the partnership to take an active advocacy role,

ensuring that lessons from local crises inform wider policy reform and that national strategies are responsive to the needs of marginalised communities.

What Equalities' groups need to engage with the Partnership

During the consultation process, the project team was keen to understand what equalities groups would need from the Partnership in order to partake in and/or engage with it, especially given the limited capacity and resource that equalities groups often work to. This section outlines the four main needs outlined by equalities groups:

1. Sustainable and adequate funding

Funding is important for equalities organisations to engage with the Equalities Partnership on the long-term; equalities groups consulted as part of this work stated that it would be impossible for them to deeply engage with the partnership or support the work of the LRF without being adequately resourced to do so. Funding needs to enable the expansion of organisational capacity to contribute to the design, implementation and evaluation of inclusive emergency preparedness efforts, without compromising the equalities groups' core mission of advocating for their communities' rights.

2. Capacity building support

For equalities organisations to engage effectively with the London Resilience Forum through the Partnership, they would require capacity-building and operational preparedness support in three key areas. First, they require support to deepen their understanding of LRF systems and decision-making processes, so they can identify how best to engage and contribute to them. Second, they need capacity-building assistance to conduct robust risk assessments that illuminate the distinct risks facing the communities they work with during emergencies, and they also need assistance and funding to put together community emergency plans to enable them to respond and provide support accordingly. Finally, they require support to strengthen their own organisational capacities to guide their communities and mitigate adverse impacts in times of crisis; this includes training in both technical and soft skills, as well as in core emergency preparedness principles. LCEP could be quite well-positioned to deliver this capacity-building support to equalities groups, given their core work on providing capabilities and skills training to community groups and their demonstrated track record in improving charities' confidence to plan for the needs of those most at-risk in emergencies.

3. Evidence of impact and sincere engagement

Equalities groups noted that they have been frequently consulted on how emergency preparedness and response efforts can better centre the priorities of the groups they support, but they have seen less evidence of the findings of such consultations being implemented. Feeling valued, seeing their expertise embedded in emergency plans, and receiving recognition for their role were all seen as vital to sustaining effective long-term engagement.

IV. Implications of findings for the Partnership

Findings from the consultations have several implications for how the Partnership should be set up, what it should do and how it should engage with key stakeholders:

1. The Partnership must be funded and resourced to support equalities engagement

First and foremost, the Partnership must be well-resourced to support meaningful engagement from equalities organisations with the London Resilience Forum.

The Partnership should have as a priority securing adequate financial support for equalities groups to participate in design, implementation, evaluation, and capacity-building, to ensure thoughtful interventions and impact on the long-term.

2. The Partnership's terms of reference need to be clear on aim, objectives and roles

Equalities organisations are already over-stretched and over-consulted; for their engagement to be sustainable and effective, the Partnership must have clear aims, objectives, roles and modes of engagement with the LRF. Based on consultations, the equalities partnership must have a clear aim of influencing decision-making within the London Resilience Forum towards increased inclusion, and must establish clear communication mechanisms and structures with LRF members to do so.

3. The Partnership should act as a bridge between equalities groups, emergency responders and borough-level emergency planning and response

A central role of the Partnership will be to connect equalities organisations with emergency responders, as well as authorities at both the regional and borough levels to ensure coordination on response. The Partnership should aim to engage borough councils and local structures to ensure that equalities considerations are embedded both at the London-wide level and in local preparedness and response planning. Coordinating with existing networks and structures like LCEP and the Faith and Belief Sector Panel will be critical to building those connections and working partnerships.

4. Accessibility has to be embedded across all Partnership outputs and processes

In order to truly prioritise the perspectives and needs of marginalised groups in London, the Partnership should support resilience actors, including the LRF and GLA, to embed accessibility across all their work. Accessibility should also be applied to how the Partnership engages with equalities groups themselves, including providing accessible venues, digital participation options, and support for those with specific needs.

5. The Partnership should establish a clear feedback loop with LRF members and emergency planners

The Partnership will need to establish and implement a clear and transparent communication process and feedback loop between equalities partners, LRF partners and key stakeholders, to ensure equalities groups know how they can support LRF members, and to also ensure that their advice is reflected visibly in LRF decisions.

Transparency on how/whether equalities recommendations have shaped plans and responses, as well as barriers to doing so, will be central to building trust and ensuring the Partnership is seen as impactful.

6. The Partnership should advocate for, or facilitate capacity-building for both the LRF and equalities organisations

Consultations highlighted the need for capacity-building activities both for equalities groups and LRF partners. LRF members need to receive adequate support, resource and training to deliver culturally competent, trauma-informed and anti-racist support to marginalised groups in times of crisis. At the same time, equalities organisations need support to strengthen their own emergency preparedness; this can be done by providing training on risk assessment, digital systems, and scenario planning, as well as LRF systems and processes. Building this dual capacity will ensure both statutory agencies and equalities groups can collaborate effectively during crises. To ensure resource and expertise are leveraged efficiently to support capacity-building, the Partnership will need to coordinate and work with entities like LCEP and the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership (VCSEP) that work in the resilience space.

7. Advocacy needs to be a core function of the Partnership

Beyond operational planning, the Partnership has a critical role in advocating for inclusive policy design and implementation. This would ensure that the Partnership is working towards strengthening overall emergency preparedness and response systems towards increased inclusion, rather than only plugging gaps as they emerge. By identifying opportunities for inclusive policy and practice, amplifying the voices of marginalised communities, and championing reforms that embed equity into resilience policy, the Partnership can influence change at regional and national levels in ways that are sustainable and impactful.

8. The Partnership needs to be sustainable and complimentary to existing structures

The Partnership must be designed with sustainability in mind and with a clearly defined role that complements, rather than duplicates, the work of existing bodies such as LCEP and the Faith and Belief Sector Panel. The Partnership will need to focus on supporting LRF members to embed inclusivity and intersectionality into preparedness and response, while some other findings that came out of the consultation – like the need for capacity-building training – might sit more naturally with LCEP given their longstanding work in this area. Delineating the roles of different networks and partnerships and understanding how they can complement one another will be essential to avoid duplication, bolster sector capacity, strengthen collaboration and ensure the Partnership's work is truly sustainable and impactful over time.