



D3.1 Community Resilience and Cohesion

Community resilience is an important asset for protecting and enhancing health and wellbeing in relation to natural disasters and climate change. It is also a protective factor for mental wellbeing.

Characterisation of impact on community resilience and cohesion

Intensity	Likelihood	Duration	Intensity	Likelihood	Duration
Positive impacts/opportunities			Negative impacts		
★★★★ / ★★★★★	✓	S to L	★★★★ / ★★★★★	? / ✓	S to L

Confirmed
 Probable
 Possible
 Major
 Moderate
 Minimal
 Short term
 Medium term
 Long term

? How does climate change impact on community resilience?

Positive impacts / opportunities

- Building on and sustaining the expansion of community-led action and mutual aid developed during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Community solidarity can benefit health and wellbeing and aid recovery from natural disasters
- Community-led action on climate change can build trust and social capital, and enhance a sense of control and resilience, which are protective factors for mental wellbeing
- Skills development linked to sustainable living and decarbonisation

Negative impacts

- Disruption and damage to community relationships and cohesion
- Loss or damage of community assets e.g. community meeting places and places of cultural or historic significance
- High temperatures can reduce social participation
- Divisions can arise in communities from how resources to tackle climate change are allocated
- Displacement due to flooding, or internal/external migration may disrupt community relationships and cohesion



Pathways of impact arise from

- Higher temperatures
- Increased winter rainfall
- Reduced summer rainfall
- Water scarcity
- Extreme weather: rainfall/storms/wind
- Extreme weather: heat
- Flooding
- Sea level rise
- Psychosocial and behavioural factors

“Community life, the places where people live, and having social connections and a voice in local decisions, are all factors that make a vital contribution to health and wellbeing and help buffer against disease” (Stansfield, South and Mapplethorpe, 2020).

Networks and organisations that can effectively mobilise people to action through reciprocal, supportive, trusting relationships and opportunities to participate are recognised components of community resilience that support both community and individual wellbeing (Davies et al., 2019).

This section considers how climate change may affect the social capital aspect of community resilience (inclusive of community cohesion). Other community capitals such as green infrastructure and wellbeing are addressed in other sections including; Section D5.6 on Natural Environments and Biodiversity; Section D4 on Mental Health and Wellbeing; Section D7.2 on Education and Section, and D6.2 on Economic Development and Skills. Community involvement and participation in decision-making is addressed in the Summary Report.

Negative impacts on community resilience

Negative impacts of climate change on community resilience have been identified in the HIA arising from both direct impacts from extreme weather and natural disasters, and indirect impacts such as displacement and conflict over resources.

Natural disasters can disrupt community relationships and damage social cohesion (HM Government, 2017; Int. 6¹). Family and community relationships may be adversely impacted as acute climate events could result in the loss of family dwellings, community meeting places and historic places, leading to reduced opportunity for social interaction (Torres and Casey, 2017) and therefore may reduce social cohesion (HM Government, 2017). Additionally, high temperatures can reduce social participation (Kownacki et al., 2019).

Community cohesion is recognised as an important asset for community resilience and recovery in the wider disaster literature (Chandra et al., 2011) and having a sense of “community solidarity” can help young people recover from a disaster (Williams, 2020). Stakeholders identified that divisions could arise in communities from how resources to tackle climate change are allocated and between those who support climate change mitigations/adaptations (such as flood defences) and those against planned interventions (Int. 2, N1, W1). The potential for divisions arising from climate change activism amongst younger people was perceived as potentially causing friction within communities and in schools (W2).

In addition, climate related human mobility has the potential to undermine social cohesion (Warner, 2018), and those who migrate may face societal stigma, marginalisation and social isolation (Torres and Casey, 2017). Shifts in population arising from community relocation, displacement due to flooding, or internal/external migration in response to climate change were seen by stakeholders as possible challenges to community cohesion (W1, W2, Ints. 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, N2) and these areas are covered in more depth in Sections D5.3 on Flooding, D3.2 on Population Displacement and P6.1 on Coastal Communities.

The role of access to resources, and how decisions are made to allocate them, was a common theme linked to community resilience during stakeholder engagement. One interviewee felt that community cohesion may be negatively impacted if there is competition for scarce resources (Int. 2). Communities may or may not have the resources to adapt socially and economically to the disasters caused by climate change (Int. 6). Voluntary services were highlighted by stakeholders as a core community element of resilience in emergencies and there was concern about capacity to respond if they face funding cuts (W2).

1 Evidence from stakeholders is referenced in the appraisal sections as W1 and W2 for insights from participatory workshops, and Int.1 etc for evidence from expert interviews.

Opportunities to enhance community resilience

Community resilience can have a preventive effect as it helps communities to cope with current situations and prepares people for future climate related disasters (Cianconi et al., 2020). Hayes and Poland (2018) state that *“changing climates can stimulate civic action to strengthen climate change mitigation and adaptation outcomes while also encouraging altruism, compassion, and growth”* (p. 7). The same authors also highlight examples of community action that both tackle climate change and build community resilience and cite research findings that the growing awareness of climate change has the potential to lead to *“mitigation and adaptation behaviours that support community and build psychosocial resilience”* (p. 3). A recent report on effective engagement with the public on climate change adaptation highlighted the importance of avoiding generating a sense of powerlessness and instead *“pointing to practical examples that people can relate to and building efficacy”* as critical to engagement and building resilience (Climate Outreach, 2020).

Stakeholders in the HIA identified opportunities for enhancing community resilience arising from climate change. Participants in the HIA felt that working together to tackle climate change can build community cohesion and enhance resilience (W2, Int.5). When communities act together it can cause feelings of control and ownership and acting in solidarity as a community or voluntary group can generate positive feelings as well as valuable social capital (W1, Ints. 1, 5). However, it was also identified that positive outcomes are dependent on local community responses, local government, economic resources, corporate actors and the provision of support or opportunities (Int.1). Examples were given of local communities working together to protect or restore their local environments such as Cardiff Rivers group who focus on clearing rivers (W2). It was recognised that volunteering and helping the community can improve friendships and mental health and wellbeing in terms of doing something beneficial for the local environment (W2).

Research studies have found that collective action against natural disasters can strengthen community resilience and cohesion (HM Government, 2017; Torres and Casey, 2017). Adaptation efforts prior to disasters may also strengthen community ties by offering opportunities for volunteering within the community, promoting interaction and trust (Torres and Casey, 2017). Disaster research shows that citizens tend to become more cohesive and engage in pro-social behaviour in disaster situations (Davies et al. 2019; Whittaker et al. 2015). Motivation behind participation comes from shared values and a culture of responsibility to one's community and society (Davies et al. 2019; Twigg and Mosul, 2017).

Specific natural disasters or extreme weather events such as flooding were also seen by stakeholders as having potential for positive impacts for community resilience. This was linked to the enhanced community connections and social networks created by people working together to resolve the issues created by a disaster (Ints. 7, 9, 12). Interviewees gave examples from the 2020 flooding in Wales where communities were observed to work together to react to the negative impacts, e.g. by starting fundraisers, in order to help their community (Ints. 9, 12). Dependent on community reaction, there can be increased community cohesion, resilience, local pride, and sense of belonging (Ints. 7, 9).

Practical skills for the public to take action and adapt to climate change

Stakeholders identified that practical skills, many of which were perceived as being lost, are important in mitigating and adapting to climate change (W1; W2). These included examples of food growing and repairing of household items (W1; W2). An opportunity also was identified by stakeholders to educate individuals on the behaviours required to protect health and wellbeing in certain climate change related weather events such as flooding. For example, not driving through roads affected by flooding (W2). The grey literature recognises that developing capability, knowledge and skills are fundamental to expanding behaviours that support mitigation and adaptation to climate change (House of Lords Environment and Climate Change Committee, 2022; Williams and Gould, 2022).

The triple challenge: cumulative impacts with COVID-19 and Brexit

The COVID-19 pandemic created a surge of community-led action and mutual aid, where local organisations and people volunteered their time and pooled resources to support people in their local areas (Benton and Power, 2021; Grey et al., 2022; South et al., 2020; Taylor-Collins et al., 2021). A cross sectional study found that community cohesion acted as a protective mechanism against both health anxiety and stress during the first national lockdown in the UK (Svensson and Elntib, 2021). There was a significant increase in people over 16 agreeing that they *“have a sense of community”* in Wales between 2016/17 (50%) to 2021/22 (64%) (Welsh Government, 2022), indicating a possible impact from community mobilisation and support during the pandemic. A study by Public Health Wales has identified opportunities to build on and sustain the community-led action during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to create more resilient communities throughout Wales, and to adapt to future crises, including climate change (Grey et al., 2022).



Population groups affected

- **Whole population**



Relevant statistics

- **64% of people aged over 16 in Wales reported agreed there was a sense of community within their local area in 2021/22** (Welsh Government, 2022).
- **Younger adults aged 16-24 are less likely to agree that there is a sense of community (58%) compared to older adults (77% in ages 65-74 and 80% for those aged 75+) (2020/21)** (Welsh Government, 2022).
- **78% of people aged over 16 in Wales in 2021/22 said that they “had plenty of people to rely on” and this was fairly consistent across the age bands** (Welsh Government, 2022).
- **Younger adults are more likely to report loneliness in Wales; 10% of those aged 65 and over report being lonely, compared to 13% of those aged 45-64 and 15% aged 16-24 (2021/22)** (Welsh Government, 2022).
- **29% of people aged over 16 in Wales reported volunteering in 2021/22, either formally or informally, and this is consistent across age bands** (Welsh Government, 2022).



Key Policy Documents

- **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015):** has a goal of “A Wales of cohesive communities”, and “involvement” as a way of working.
- **Welsh Government (2020) Connected Communities:** a strategy for tackling loneliness and social isolation and building stronger social connections.
- **Social Care Wales (n.d.) Supporting the development of community resourcefulness:** a practice framework for developing community resourcefulness and resilience.
- **Civil Contingencies Act (2004):** Local Resilience Forums are responsible for co-ordinating local responses to threats and emergencies including community preparedness and resilience to emergencies (Auditor General for Wales, 2023).

Reference for this document:

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