

Getting the 'Short Straw': Precariousness, Marginalisation and Climate Change

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The world is experiencing an environmental crisis. As it is, environmental degradation impacts most harshly on marginalised people living in poverty and carving out precarious existence in the most arduous of conditions. With regards to climate change, they have contributed least to its emergence, but whether they live in a small island state that is sinking into the sea, the dust-bowls of Somalia, the slums of Rio de Janeiro, or homeless of the streets of metropolitan cities in the West, they experience its most harmful outcomes.

In this presentation, I examine the precarity caused by climate change in the lives of marginalised peoples across the world. I then consider what can be done to reduce the global carbon footprint, limit reliance on fossil fuels and build sustainable communities. I also ask what social workers can do to help in what is a global, geopolitical and environmental disaster. Using the insights of green social work, I argue that green social workers can ensure that environmental justice is included in everyday practice routines. This requires that environmental justice is mainstreamed as part of social justice in the field and integrated into any social work curriculum in the academy. Practice, policy, training and research need to be transformed if the lives of marginalised people are not to be undermined by environmental degradation and the exploitation of the earth's resources, whether living or inanimate.