

Session 16

Labour Organizing and the Climate Crisis





Session snapshot

► Session 16

- Focuses on the issues around the climate crisis and their relationships with the right to organize and to collective bargaining.
- It provides concise accounts of what drives this contemporary crisis and what can possibly avert its worst effects in the foreseeable future. At the center of the much-needed actions are workers and trade unions with both practical and strategic roles in addressing the climate crisis primarily through the lens of Just Transition, in the workplace and beyond.



► Session 16

- The session can be delivered like a typical lecture, with opportunities for questions and answers to promote interaction with the participants.



Estimated
duration:
90 minutes



Required materials:
**Usual presentation
equipment and
accessories**





Facilitator's guide points



1. Introduce Session 16 by emphasizing that another consequential area to link up with FOA is the worsening climate crisis affecting practically everyone, including workers. Use the Overview content as guide for the introductory remarks.



2. After the introduction, immediately proceed to Activity M5-2. This exercise seeks to enable a grounded and somehow “personalized” approach to starting the session and facilitating the further discussion points throughout.





3. During the Session Proper, the following topics will be tackled:

- a) The Climate Crisis**
- b) Freedom of Association and Workers' Right to Climate Justice**
- c) Role of Trade Unions and Workers in Advancing Climate Justice**



4. Be mindful of the Key Learning Points as internal guide on messaging.





5. Deliver the optional exercise contained in the discussion point on the decent work and human rights issues and challenges.



6. Occasionally engage the participants. Checking whether they have any questions or comments is one handy method of engagement.



7. Conduct the recap exercise at the end of the session.





Learning objectives



Global Warming

Learn the **basic terms and concepts related to global warming** and climate change that underpin the current climate crisis



Climate Crisis

Identify **ways that the climate crisis affects workers** and their labour rights



Key drivers

Understand the **key drivers of the climate crisis and the role of workers and trade unions in addressing it**, particularly through the lens of Just Transition



Strategies

Determine and discuss **practical strategies for workers and trade unions to advance climate justice**, including through FOA and collective bargaining



Definition of key terms



Biodiversity loss

Refers to the decrease in biodiversity – or the number of genes, species, individual organisms in a species, and biological communities – found in a given geographical area, or Earth as a whole. This loss in the variety of life can lead to the breakdown in the functioning of a particular ecosystem, possibly upsetting the balance in other connected ecosystems, and affecting human activity that depends on that ecosystem.



Circular economy

Refers to models of production and consumption that minimizes waste, reduce pollution, promote sustainable uses of natural resources, and help regenerate nature. They can be employed at various stages of a product's lifecycle, including design, manufacturing, distribution, and disposal.



Climate change

Refers to long-term shifts in the Earth's temperature and weather pattern that are warming the atmosphere, ocean, and land. Climate change is affecting the balance of ecosystems that support life, biodiversity, and health, and causes more extreme weather events, sea level rise, and coastal erosion.

Climate crisis

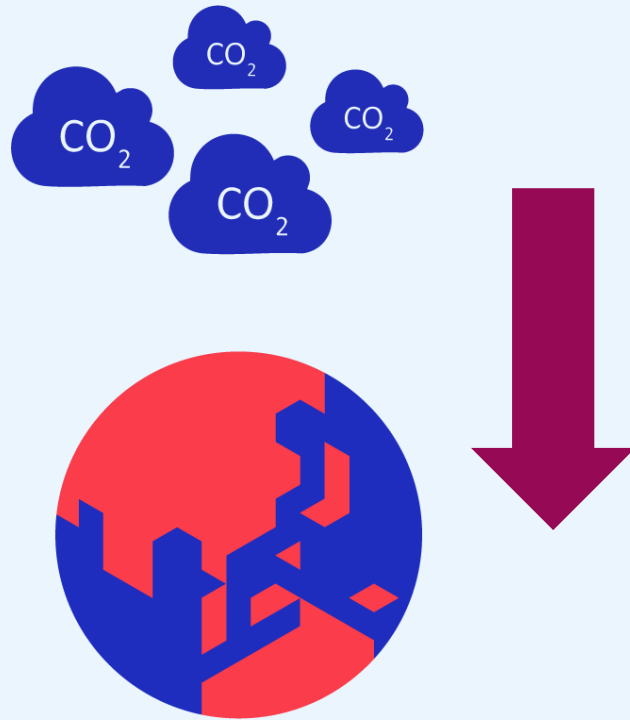


Refers to the serious problems being caused, or are likely to be caused, by climate change, including extreme weather events and hazards, ocean acidification, sea level rise, biodiversity loss, food and water insecurity, health risks, economic disruption, displacement, and violent conflict.



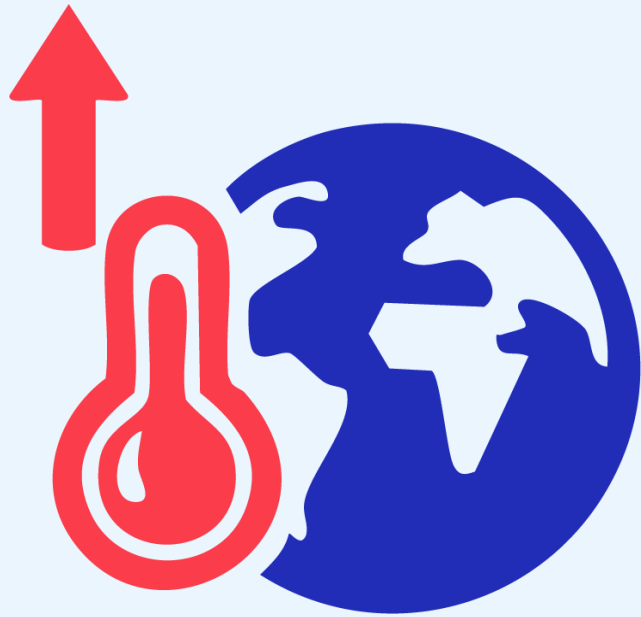
Climate justice

Means putting equity and human rights at the core of decision-making and action on climate change. At its core is the concept of *historical responsibility*, which suggests that the countries, industries, and businesses that have become wealthy from activities that emit the most greenhouse gas emissions have the responsibility to help mitigate the impacts of climate change on those affected, especially the most vulnerable countries and communities, who often have contributed least to the crisis.



Decarbonization

Refers to the overall reduction of the amount of greenhouse gas emissions that a society produces. This entails changing many if not all, aspects of the economy, from how energy is generated, to how goods and services are produced and delivered, to how infrastructure is designed, and how lands are managed. It requires the rethinking of current economic models that are focused on growth at all costs.



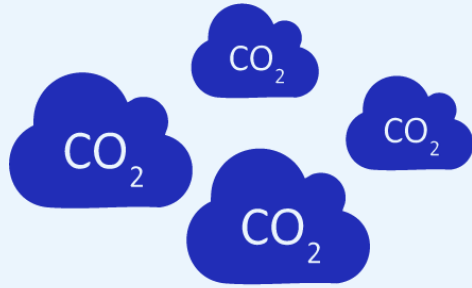
Global warming

Refers to the increase in Earth's average surface temperature that happens when the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere increases.



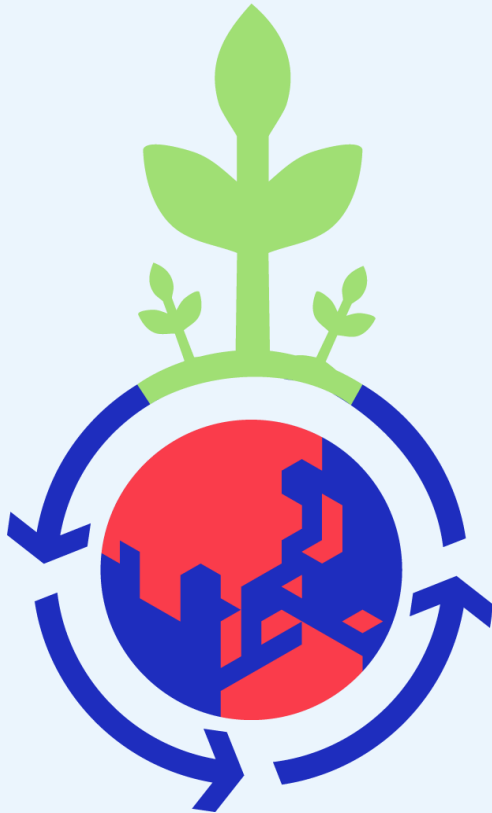
Green jobs

Refer to decent jobs that contribute to protecting and restoring the environment and addressing climate change. These are jobs that can be found in both the production of green products and services like renewable energy, recycling, ecosystem protection, and other activities that promote environmentally friendly processes.



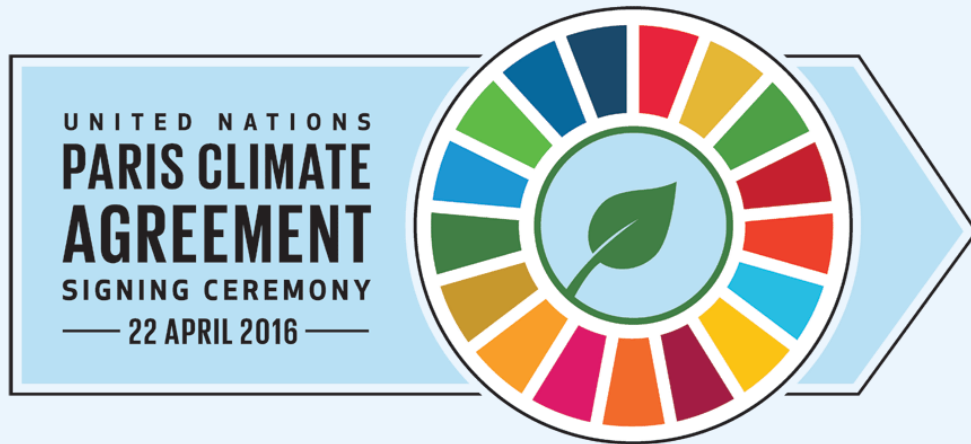
Greenhouse gases

Gases that trap heat from the sun in Earth's atmosphere, keeping it warm, causing global warming and climate change. The main greenhouse gases released by human activities are carbon dioxide and methane.



Just Transition

Refers to the transition towards environmentally sustainable economies in a way that is fair and inclusive to everyone concerned – workers, enterprises, and communities – by creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind. It aims to maximize the social and economic opportunities of climate and environmental action, while minimizing and carefully managing any challenges, including through effective social dialogue and stakeholder engagement and respect for the fundamental principles and rights at work.



Paris Agreement

Refers to the legally binding international treaty that aims to limit global warming to well below 2.0°C, preferably to 1.5°C, compared to pre-industrial levels. It is a landmark achievement in international cooperation as it is a binding agreement on climate change, and provides the instruments for developed nations to assist developing nations in their climate adaptation and mitigation efforts.



Renewable energy

Refers to energy derived from natural sources that are replenished in human timescales - like biomass, geothermal, solar, hydro, ocean, and wind. Unlike fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas, which causes 75 percent of the harmful greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change, renewable energy is cheap, clean, sustainable, and generates more jobs. Transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy is considered the key strategy to address the climate crisis.

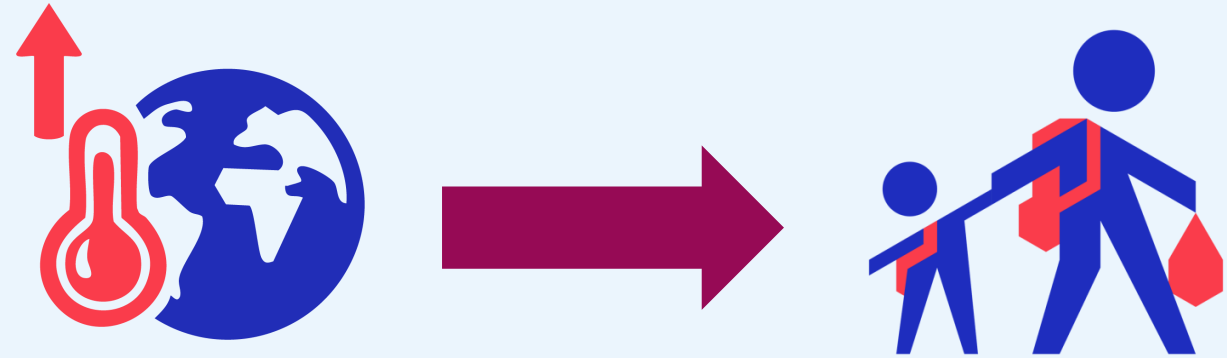
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)



The UNFCCC is an international environmental treaty adopted in 1992 to combat the climate crisis. It is the parent treaty of both the Paris Agreement and the Kyoto Protocol. The UNFCCC Secretariat is the UN entity tasked with the global response to the threat of climate change, including the yearly organizing of the Conference of the Parties (COP), providing technical expertise and analysis of climate change information, and maintaining the registry of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC).

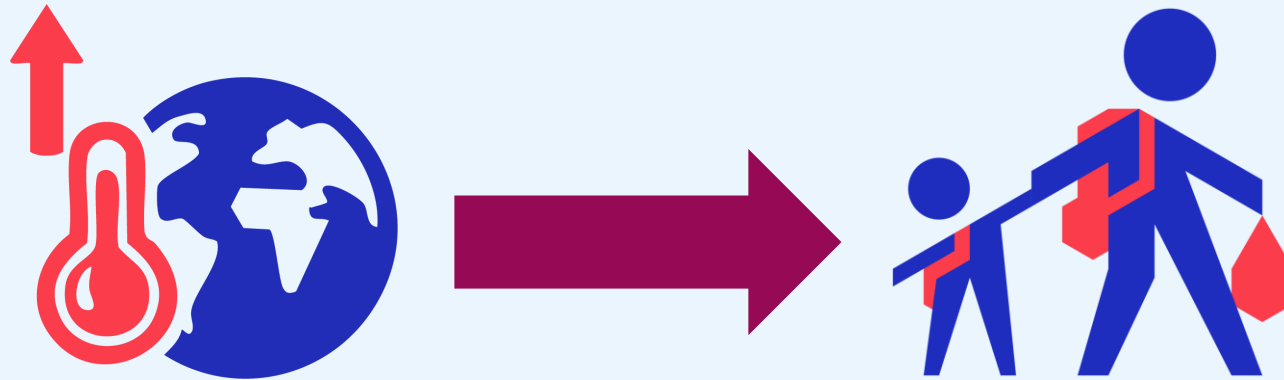


Key learning points



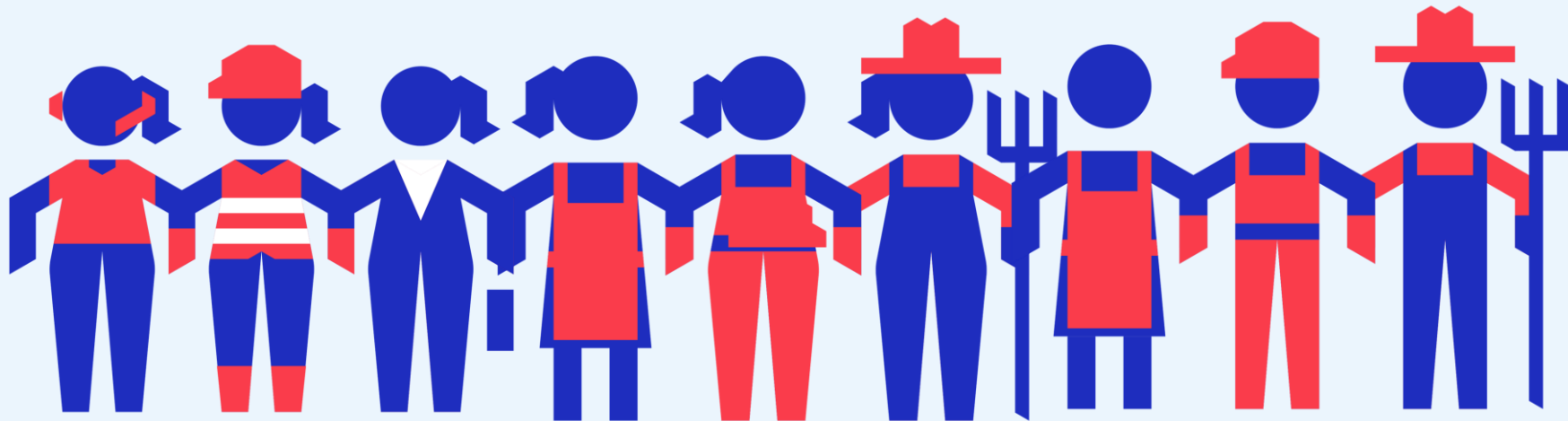
There is a profound impact of the climate crisis on the global workforce, underscoring the necessity for innovative solutions and systemic changes to be undertaken by unions to achieve climate justice and ensure a just transition.

Greenhouse gases from fossil fuels drive global warming, resulting in adverse effects on workers, such as job displacement and unsafe working conditions.

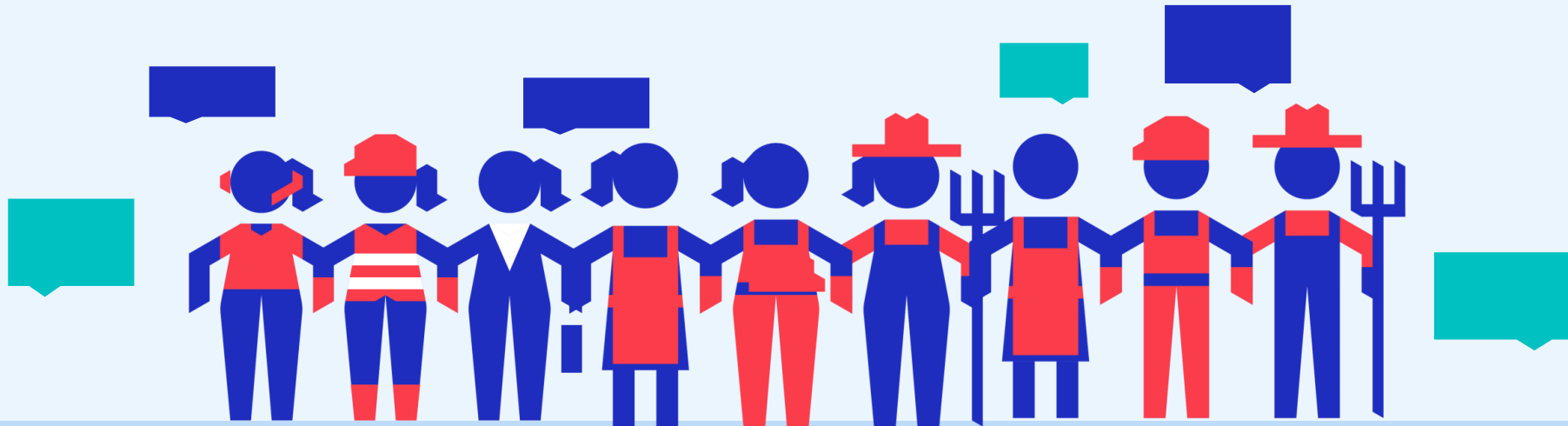


Greenhouse gases from fossil fuels drive global warming, resulting in adverse effects on workers, such as job displacement and unsafe working conditions.

Trade unions and worker-led initiatives have a critical role in addressing these challenges.
Cases for best practices must be sought out to come up with better propositions on the climate problem.



Ultimately, workers must circle back to emphasize the importance of organizing, collective bargaining, community-based approaches, and the active involvement of workers in promoting sustainable practices. There is no choosing between precarious jobs or a dead planet. **Workers must play a central role in advocating for a fair transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy, ensuring that workers and communities are not left behind in the pursuit of climate justice.**





Activity

ACTIVITY M5-2: World Café: Impacts of climate change on workers



Methodology

World café provides an opportunity to build and synthesize different but interrelated ideas on a given topic or issue through engaging participants in providing their insights across themes assigned to the set of “tables” in the “café.” It is an effective exercise in reaching consensus over particular aspects of a given topic or issue while giving room for unresolved questions subject to further discussion that can span beyond a training session.



Timing

It is best to conduct this activity prior to the facilitation of the entire session using the Discussion Notes. But to provide context, the facilitator may provide brief introductory remarks on the broad topic of climate change, including by sharing its definition as provided in the Definition of Key Terms.

ACTIVITY M5-2: World Café: Impacts of Climate Change on Workers



Mechanics

1. Divide the participants into three groups by asking them to count from one to three. Assign a table for each group and request them to proceed to their assigned table.
2. Ask the participants to identify a *barista*, the person who will stay at the table throughout the exercise as the rest travel around for table discussions. He/she/they will also be the one to provide a short recap of the inputs provided by the participants from the preceding round of table discussion.

ACTIVITY M5-2: World Café: Impacts of Climate Change on Workers



Mechanics

3. Assign a particular sector for each table around which the discussion on the impacts of climate change should revolve. Subject to adjustment/s as deemed needed by the facilitator, the proposed sectors are as follows:

- Table 1: Workers in the formal economy (local)
- Table 2: Workers in the informal economy (local)
- Table 3: Migrant workers including seafarers

ACTIVITY M5-2: World Café: Impacts of Climate Change on Workers



Mechanics

4. Start the table discussion when all the groups and their initial tasks are already settled. Provide them the following questions that can guide their table discussions:

- What specific changes in the conditions of workers in your assigned have you observed, documented, studied or directly experienced, which you could attribute to climate change?
- How are these changes affecting different types of workers in your assigned sector? For instance, what are the differences among women, men and other persons of diverse SOGIESC?

ACTIVITY M5-2: World Café: Impacts of Climate Change on Workers



Mechanics

5. Inform the participants that they have 10-15 minutes for every round of table discussion. Moderate the discussion as necessary to accommodate as much participation and idea sharing from everyone as possible.
6. After each round of table discussion, ask the participants (except for the barista) to proceed to the next table for the continuation of the discussion but over a different assigned sector. Complete with the third round of table discussion.

ACTIVITY M5-2: World Café: Impacts of Climate Change on Workers



Mechanics

7. Remind the baristas to keep the synthesis concise at every table transition of the participants. As much as possible, avoid repeating similar insights already shared and request the participants to build on the existing ones by giving another perspective or angle, or adding new inputs.
8. After all the three table discussions, proceed a plenary sharing. Each barista is given 5 minutes to briefly highlight the thematic points raised by the participants. Give a quick rejoinder or feedback after each sharing by the barista, keeping in mind the time allotment. Further discussions can be made during the lecture proper using the Discussion Notes.

ACTIVITY M5-2: World Café: Impacts of Climate Change on Workers



Materials

- Markers/pens
- Metacards
- Cartolina/Manila paper
- Adhesive tape

Notes on transition to online session

This activity can also be done online using online teleconferencing platforms allowing breakout rooms, such as Zoom. Inputs can be collated virtually, too, through online tools such as [Lucidspark](#). Otherwise, the baristas can use typical tool for notetaking like Microsoft Word and show to the participants via screensharing.



Session proper

Session 16

What is Climate Crisis

**Freedom of Association and Right to
Climate**

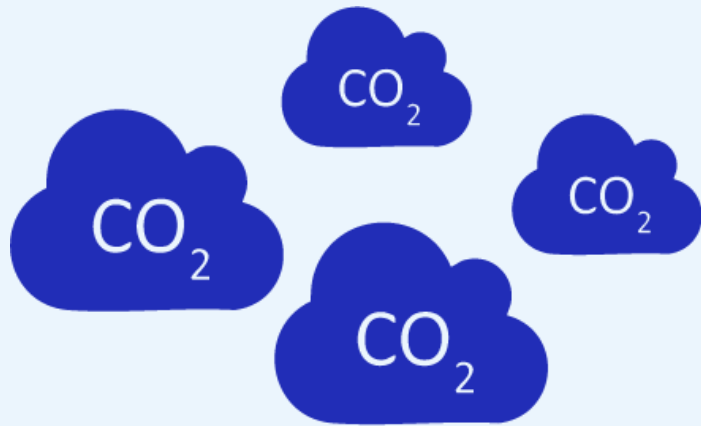
**Role of Trade Unions and Workers in
Advancing Climate Justice**

Climate Crisis

There is overwhelming evidence of the climate crisis, and the debate whether climate change is true or a hoax is already settled: it is *here* and it is here *now*.



Greenhouse Effect and Global Warming



- Greenhouse gases (GHGs) naturally keep Earth habitable.
- Main GHGs: carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), and industrial gases (e.g., CFCs).
- **Excess CO₂ from burning fossil fuels acts like the machine, trapping too much heat and driving global warming.**

Greenhouse Effect and Global Warming

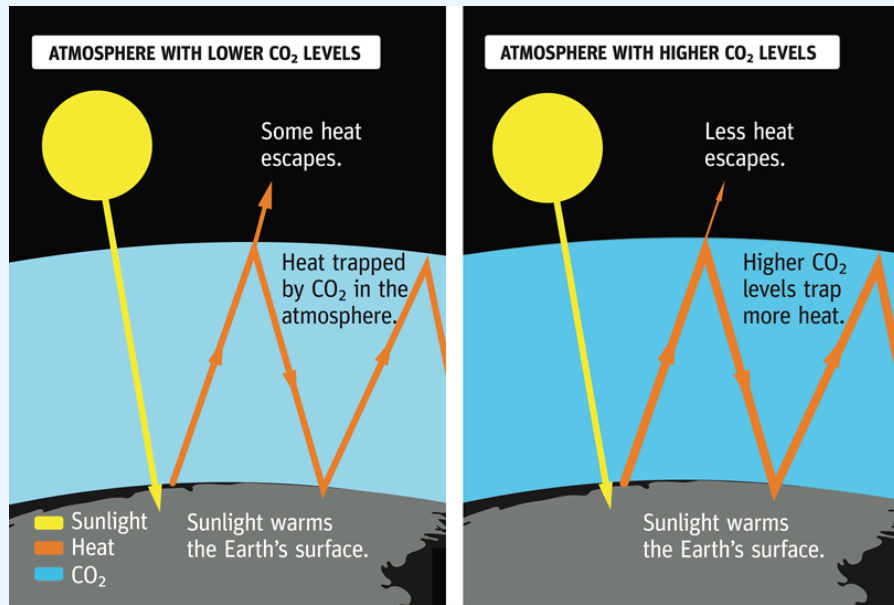


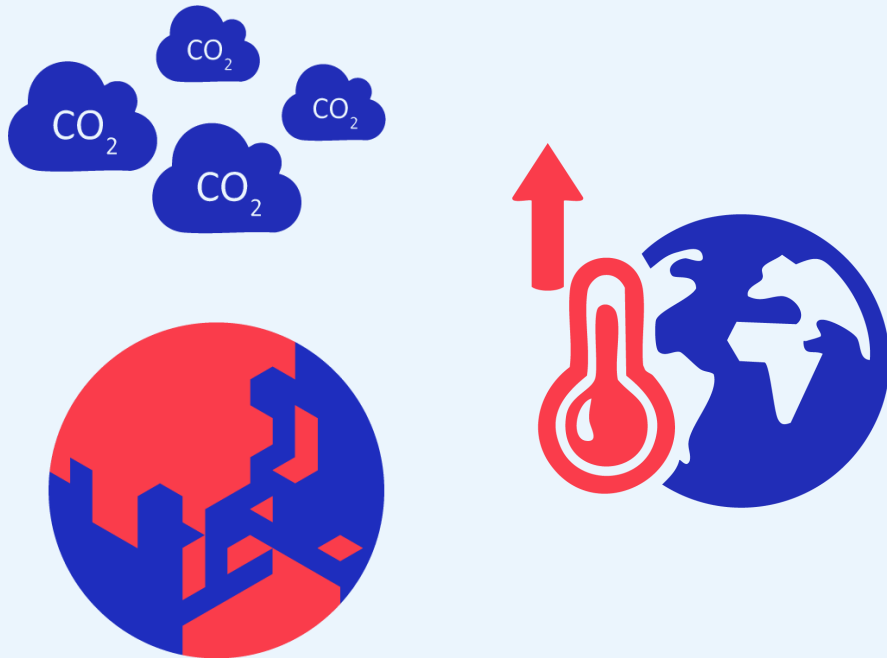
Illustration of how GHGs work.

Source: [Exploratorium](#)

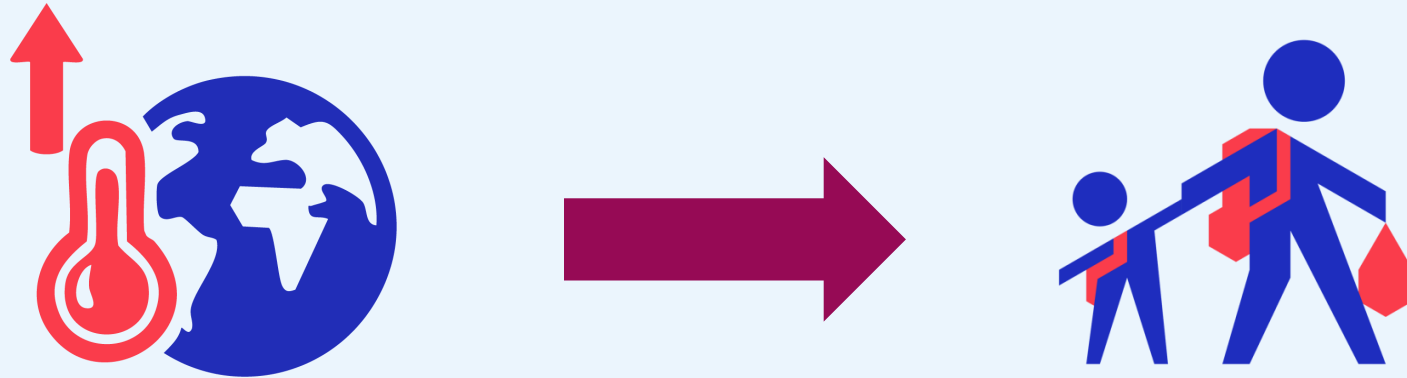
A warming planet would mean:

- Melting ice in the poles, leading to rising sea levels and the displacement of seaside communities and island dwellers.
- Heating the ocean, resulting in various consequences, including coral bleaching, marine ecosystem disruption, and stronger typhoons (hurricanes).
- Massive soil erosion and degradation, leading to weaker crop yield and food production, among other effects.

Greenhouse Effect and Global Warming



- The problem isn't the existence of GHGs but their **excessive volume**.
- **Urgent action is needed to reduce emissions and protect life on Earth.**



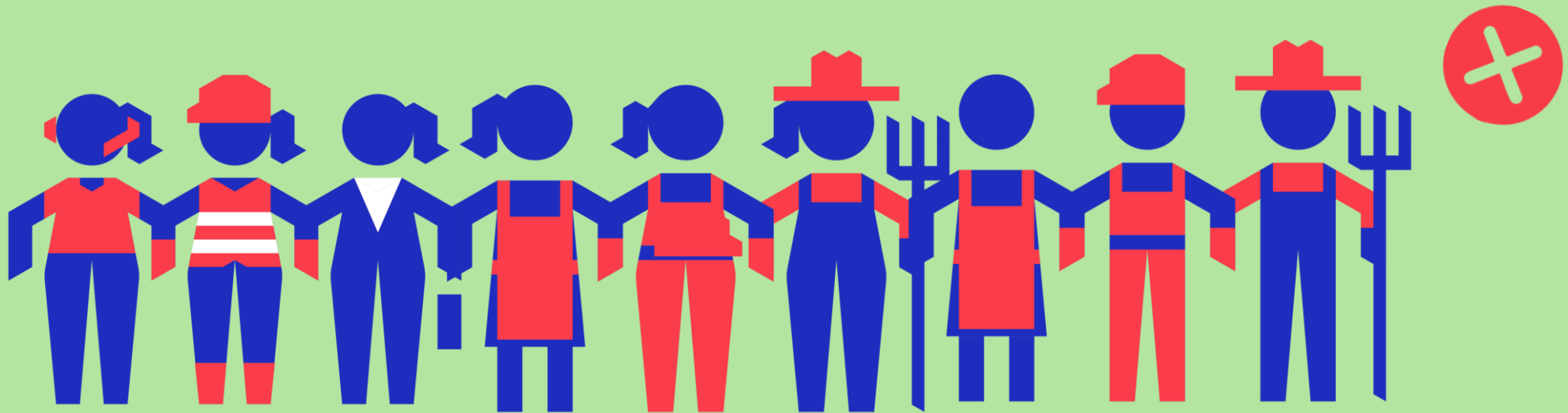
There is a profound impact of the climate crisis on the global workforce, underscoring the necessity for innovative solutions and systemic changes to be undertaken by unions to achieve climate justice and ensure a just transition.

Greenhouse gases from fossil fuels drive global warming, resulting in adverse effects on workers, such as job displacement and unsafe working conditions.

Freedom of association and right to climate justice

There is overwhelming evidence of the climate crisis, and the debate whether climate change is true or a hoax is already settled: it is *here* and it is here *now*.

The challenge to stop global warming is not only for governments or corporations. **In fact, this challenge largely belongs to the workers who are at the heart of industrialization.**



Freedom of Association and Right to Climate Justice

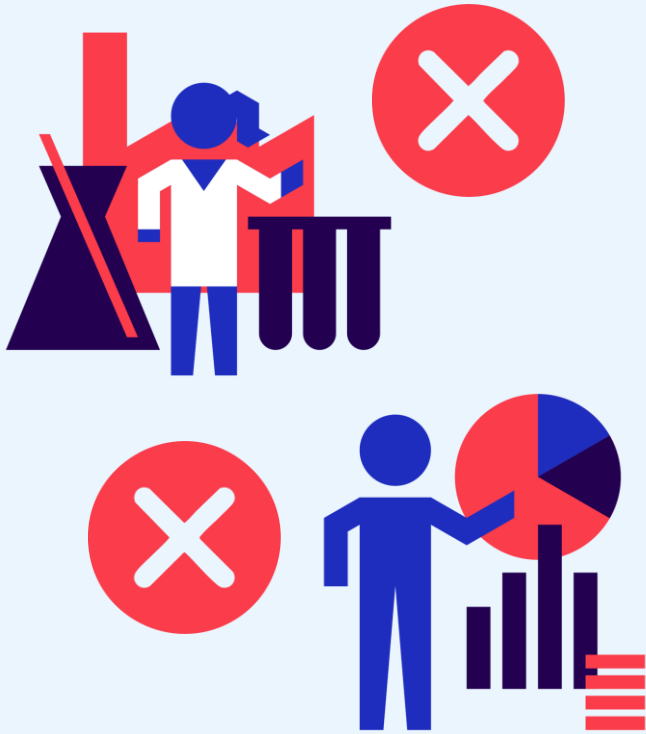
- International agreements and frameworks such as the Paris Agreement, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), recognize the centrality of labour in transitioning to low-carbon economies.



No jobs on a dead planet; workers-led just transition is the way

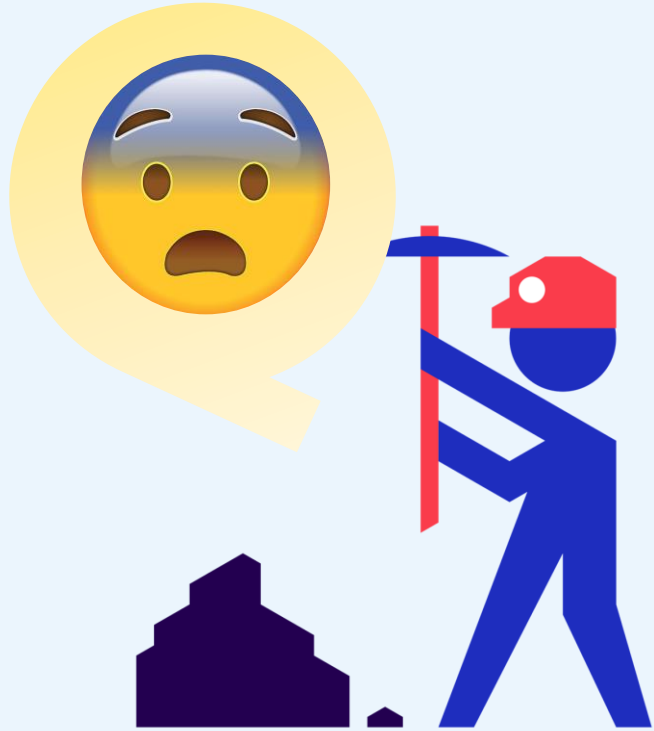


Pandemic as a dead planet example



- The Covid-19 lockdowns showed how quickly jobs can vanish, hitting minimum wage and informal workers hardest.
- Extreme weather will make work conditions harsher and more precarious, forcing many to choose between unsafe work and starvation.
- Workers' fight for better wages must go hand in hand with demands for fair conditions and a sustainable, just transition.

Just transition: a case study of coal to solar demic as a dead planet example



- As fossil fuels are phased out, coal workers fear job losses—they're defending livelihoods, not pollution.
- Climate justice demands systems change: not just switching from coal to solar, but transforming social systems to ensure no one is left behind.
- The ILO, building on ITUC advocacy, defines just transition as maximizing the benefits of climate action while managing its challenges through social dialogue and protecting labor rights.

https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_emp/%40emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_432859.pdf

Box 1:

The ILO Just Transition Guidelines

Adopted: 2013; published 2015 as a non-binding framework.

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**The ILO Just
Transition
Guidelines**
Adopted: 2013;
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as a non-binding
framework.

- Build strong social consensus through dialogue & consultation.
- Respect and uphold fundamental rights at work.
- Address gender aspects of environmental policies.
- Ensure coherence across economic, social, and environmental policies.
- Support creation of decent jobs, skills development & protect organizing rights.
- Adapt policies to national contexts – no “one size fits all.”
- Foster international cooperation.

Box 1:
**The ILO Just
Transition
Guidelines**
Adopted: 2013;
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framework.

Key policy areas identified include:

- (I) Macroeconomic and growth policies;
- (II) Industrial and sectoral policies;
- (III) Enterprise policies;
- (IV) Skills development;
- (V) Occupational safety and health;
- (VI) Social protection;
- (VII) Active labour market policies;
- (VIII) Rights; and
- (IX) Social dialogue and tripartism.

Role of trade unions and workers in advancing climate justice

Workers and unions can leverage their structural power to influence outcomes and decisions. While the climate crisis impacts everyone, its effects are not distributed equally. A significant portion of the adverse effects falls on workers, particularly in developing countries, where the climate crisis is most devastating.

Box 2:

Case study of Chili Farmers

Case study of Chili Farmers

Heat Wave and Extreme Weather Conditions

Challenges faced by the Chili Farmers'

- Chili farmers are facing year-by-year declines in harvests due to rising temperatures.
- Wild chilies can tolerate heat up to 43°C, and hotter summers often mean spicier chilies.
- But extreme heat waves are now stunting production — even chilies are reaching their heat tolerance limits.

Heat Wave and Extreme Weather Conditions

Climate Change & Collective Action

Chili farmers have not yet engaged in collective bargaining with governments and clients.

Without urgent action, ongoing heat waves may force farmers to **switch to other crops**.

The future of chili farming — and enjoyment of chilies — is uncertain.

Case study of Chili Farmers

Heat Wave and Extreme Weather Conditions

Wider Implications for Workers

If chilies, which thrive in heat, can't survive extreme warming, what about workers exposed to heat daily?

Example: During the 2022 European heat wave, 61,000 people died, many of them older adults lacking protection.

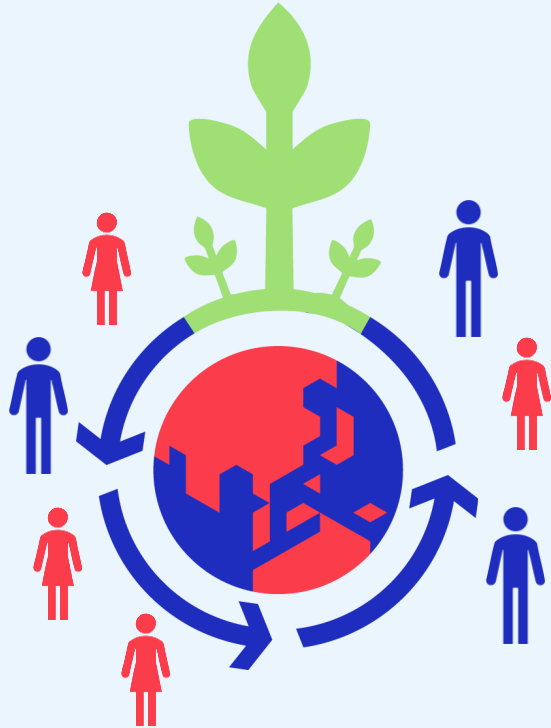
- **Workers, unions, and the labour movement must innovate.**
- **Prioritize climate justice to protect livelihoods and adapt to a changing climate.**

Case study of Chili Farmers

3-step approach diagram

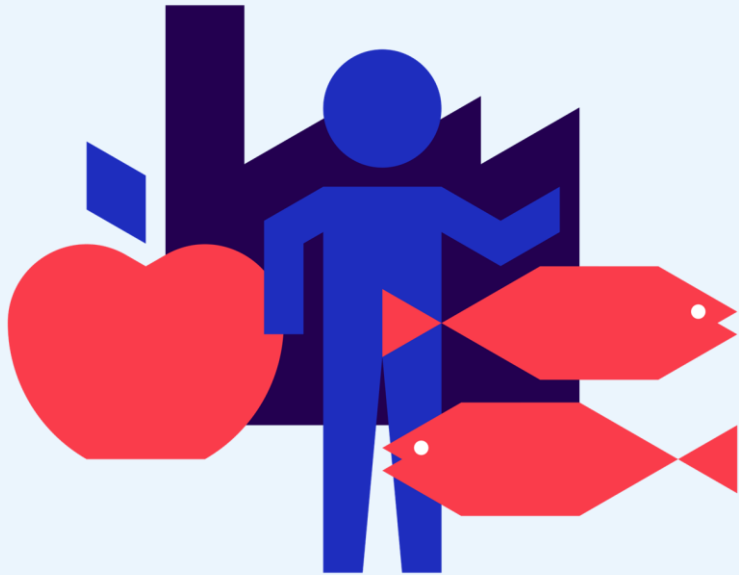


Organizing Workers for Climate Action



Organizing must be central to climate action, uniting workers across industries around shared climate impacts.

Alliance-building: workers-led just transition



A notable success story in sustainable practices is how fish workers worldwide have embraced sustainable fish production. Previously an unregulated industry, fish production has shown how worker-led transitions can lead to sustainable practices. **Shifting away from destructive fishing methods—such as dynamite fishing, bottom-trawling, and dredging—has proven effective through community-based approaches.**

Alliance-building: workers-led just transition

- While **government regulations** can prohibit harmful fishing practices, constant vigilance is needed to enforce these laws at sea.
- **Coast guards and sea guards play a critical role in monitoring compliance**, while marine conservation advocates educate fishing communities about the harms of unsustainable practices.
- **Marine scientists contribute by recommending processes to rehabilitate damaged marine ecosystems** and by advocating for the decarbonization of large fishing industries.

CBA/CNA and legal frameworks

- The final tool for unions in advancing climate justice is their negotiating power through **collective bargaining/negotiation agreements (CBAs/CNAs) and legal frameworks.**
- Climate bargaining can serve as a **means to promote just transition measures in workplaces.**
- Many workplace agreements on climate action focus on health and safety regulations. However, while these regulations are essential, climate negotiations must address more than just health and safety issues.

CBA/CNA and legal frameworks

Among the many other practical areas for climate adaptation in work conditions which can be negotiated and covered in CBAs/CNAs are the following:

- Flexible work schedule or arrangement
- Prolonged breaks
- Additional social protection schemes
- Sustainable processed an materials
- Workplace support during disasters and emergencies
- Compensable working hours when work is stopped due to extreme heat
- PPE enhancement
- Activation and strengthening of OSH and related committees ‘



Recap exercises

1. Which of the following greenhouse gases is primarily responsible for global warming?

- a) Oxygen (O₂)
- b) Carbon dioxide (CO₂)
- c) Helium (He)

TRUE OR FALSE

2. The "Work 4.0" initiative by IG Metall is aimed to directly respond to the challenges brought about by Industry 4.0.

3. According to scientists, what is the primary cause of increasing greenhouse gas levels?

- a) Deforestation
- b) Fossil fuel burning
- c) Agricultural practices

4. This refers to shifting from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources in a way that maximizes social and economic opportunities from climate action while minimizing challenges through effective social dialogue and respect for labour rights, ensuring that workers and communities are not left behind.

- a) Sustainable development
- b) Harm reduction
- c) Just transition

5. Give one way by which workers and unions can advance just transition in their workplace.



Recap exercises

Answer keys

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a) Sustainable development

b) Harm reduction

c) Just transition

5. Give one way by which workers and unions can advance just transition in their workplace.

Any of the following:

Unions can (a) organize around climate issues in their workplace, (b) negotiate climate justice provisions through their CBAs, (c) form alliances with communities and other institutions to lead a fair transition, (d) advocate and lobby for national legislations that adapt/mitigate/address the climate crisis