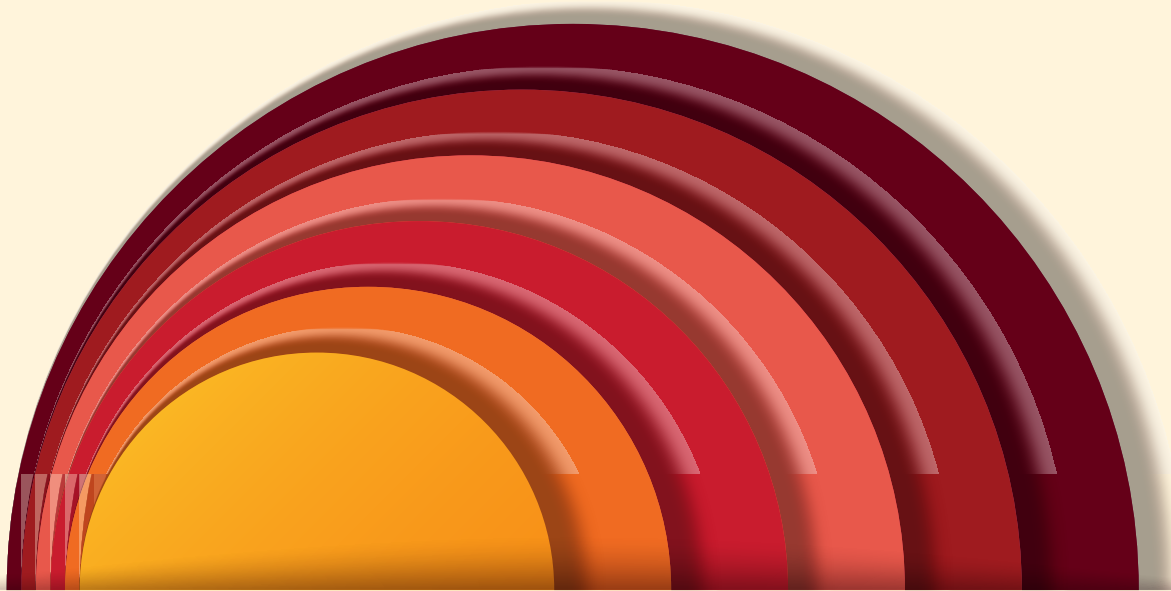




**#COP28**  
**FRONTLINES BRIEFING**

**Trade unions demand a labour  
inclusive Just Transition Work  
Programme at COP28**

# ITUC COP28 priorities:



A decision on the Just Transition  
Work Programme that places  
labour issues at the centre

Guarantees human rights, labour  
rights and inclusive participation

Raises mitigation ambitions  
and creates quality jobs  
with just transition

Delivers on adaptation needs, social  
protection plans and funding

Delivers the finance for the  
Loss and Damage facility

Provides the urgently needed climate  
finance to invest in just transition

# A New Social Contract to save the planet

## INTRODUCTION BY LUC TRIANGLE, GENERAL SECRETARY ITUC

Unprecedented extreme weather events have had a major impact across all continents, breaking heat records in Africa, Asia-Pacific, the Americas and Europe in 2023. Since mid-March 2023, ocean temperatures have risen to levels previously unseen over the 40 years of satellite monitoring, and the repercussions are causing unprecedented disruption to communities and economies around the world.<sup>1</sup>

Workers and their families are affected in multiple ways, both in their jobs, where they work in extreme temperatures and unadapted environments, and also in their livelihoods, where they are vulnerable to bearing the brunt of businesses being forced to close as a result of climate-related disruption.<sup>2</sup> Many are forced to migrate when they are displaced from their traditional livelihoods or when decent work opportunities at home vanish as a consequence of climate disruption.<sup>3</sup>

Scientists have documented and predicted these developments. According to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC AR6), avoiding warming of 1.5 °C is only possible if massive and immediate cuts in greenhouse gas emissions are made:

*“Projected CO2 emissions from existing fossil fuel infrastructure without additional abatement would exceed the remaining carbon budget for 1.5°C.”*

Therefore, deciding on policies and measures that enable us to stay within the remaining carbon budget and keep the temperature rise under 1.5°C is the biggest challenge facing the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) scheduled to take place in Dubai in December 2023.

**Trade unions demand a well-managed, just transition away from fossil fuels with employment guarantees. We need comprehensive just transition policies with a focus on the labour dimensions.** The items on the agenda for COP28 signify crucial areas that can deliver this. The Global Stocktake, Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP), the Mitigation Work Programme (MWP), the Glasgow-Sharm El-Sheikh work programme on the global goal on adaptation and the related climate finance issues, including the Loss and Damage fund and the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) all present vital opportunities for real action towards the Paris Agreement goals.

**Strong conclusions on the Global Stocktake must lay the foundations for the next round of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) that finally start delivering the progress that is needed, according to the IPCC reports.** The global trade union movement, with its affiliates in more than 167 countries representing

<sup>1</sup> <https://phys.org/news/2023-06-ocean-chartshere-humans-ecosystems-world.html>

<sup>2</sup> [How an era of extreme heat is reshaping economies](#)

<sup>3</sup> [How an era of extreme heat is reshaping economies](#)

200 million workers, will hold governments accountable on this issue. In this over-heating world, there is no more time left for delay.

The global economic model has failed working people. The power and greed of huge global corporations have captured governments, who act against the rights and security of their own workers. In global supply chains, 94 per cent of the global workforce remains a hidden labour force whose continuing exploitation and oppression is facilitated by obscure business contracts.

The world is three times richer than 20 years ago, yet 70 per cent of people are denied universal social protection, 84 per cent of people say the minimum wage is not enough to live on, and 81 per cent of countries have permitted violations against the right to collectively bargain. This signifies inequality by design.

It is time for a New Social Contract between workers, governments and business; one which includes fundamental universal labour guarantees for all workers. In practice, a New Social Contract would ensure that rights were respected, jobs were decent and guaranteed minimum living wages and collective bargaining rights, social protection was universal, due diligence and accountability drove business operations, and that social dialogue ensured just transition measures. Only a commitment as holistic as this could ensure the climate policy measures needed to effectively prevent the devastating impact of this runaway climate emergency. This is the task that the many trade union delegates at COP28, together with our social partners and civil society allies are defending at COP28 in Dubai.

I wish them the strength to deliver on this task!

## Trade union demands for COP28

### DECIDE ON A JTWP THAT PUTS LABOUR ISSUES AT THE CENTRE

At the UNFCCC COP27 climate negotiations in Sharm El-Sheikh in November 2022, governments decided to establish a work programme on just transition (JTWP) to discuss pathways to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement.<sup>4</sup> At COP28, a decision on the implementation of the JTWP must be adopted. The global labour movement urges parties to respect the mandate of the Paris Agreement that makes the importance of the labour focus of a just transition clear:

*“Taking into account the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities”.*

We also highlight the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) recently renewed commitment to just transition and its formal endorsement of the ILO Guidelines for the implementation of just transition policies and measures that offer the international normative framework for just transition – inclusive of all its elements.<sup>5</sup> The ILO is the UN agency that brings together governments, employers and workers of 187 Member States, to set labour standards,

<sup>4</sup> ITUC Statement on the UNFCCC just transition work program: [ITUC Statement UNFCCC JTWP.pdf](#)

<sup>5</sup> ILO (2015). “[Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all.](#)” and ILO Bureau for Workers’ Activities – ACTRAV (2021) [User’s manual to the ILO’s Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all](#)

develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all women and men.

The global labour movement proposes the following definition of a just transition that can be used to guide the work at UNFCCC:

**A just transition secures the future and livelihoods of workers and their communities during the transition to a low-carbon economy, effectively limiting global temperature rises to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels.**

**Just transition plans should be co-created with workers and their trade unions to provide and guarantee decent work, social protection, training opportunities and job security for all workers affected by global warming and climate change policies.**

**Plans must be underpinned by the fundamental labour rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining and facilitated through social dialogue between workers and their unions, employers and governments as established by the ILO.**

**A just transition requires guarantees for intra-, intergenerational and gender equity, racial justice, respect for the rights of Indigenous peoples, impacted communities and migrants and promotes and protects human rights and ILO fundamental labour rights.**

Engaging in social dialogue to produce just transition plans with organised workers from all economic sectors (formal and informal), at all policy levels (company, sector, national and global) representing all workers (documented/undocumented migrants; refugees at work; marginalised workers) will enable governments to design better and more ambitious climate policies supported by workers, their families, and communities. Proper funding at the relevant level will guarantee the effective implementation of these policies.

The decision at COP28 on the JTWP must include the following priorities:

- The JTWP should have a **standalone mandate** with a central focus on the **workforce dimension of just transition**. The **JTWP should be open-ended**, with decisions on a regular basis based on work to be developed in between SB sessions. To ensure that the structure and process are fit for purpose in

a rapidly evolving context, regular review is suggested with, for example, a first review of the functioning and deliverables in CMA7 (2025).

The scope should include all relevant sectors (energy, agriculture, transport, etc.) and consider all socio-economic dimensions of the climate crisis and its impacts on workers and communities.

This includes a strong focus on the gender dimension and role of Indigenous peoples.

- Climate policy solutions must be founded on **meaningful and effective social dialogue** with social partners (unions, employers and governments) at all policy levels, and enabled by freedom of association and collective bargaining, as established by ILO fundamental rights.
- The **right to social protection** is of crucial importance to protect people

from economic and social distress caused by the absence or a substantial reduction of income from work due to various eventualities which increasingly include impacts of the climate emergency.<sup>6</sup> The JTWP should build on the work done in the context of the UN Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions, launched in September 2021 by the UN Secretary-General and formally endorsed by G20 Leaders at the Delhi Summit on 9-10 September 2023. The aim of the Accelerator is to direct investments to help create at least 400m decent jobs, primarily in the green, digital and care economies, and to extend social protection coverage to the over four billion people currently excluded. It offers an operational tool to pursue the objectives of the JTWP at the global level.

- A system of annual **monitoring and reporting to the COP**, with participation from party and non-party stakeholders should be implemented. Active engagement of trade unions, as workers' representatives, should be included, along with a recognition of their role in just transition policy as a means of delivering climate justice. All relevant stakeholders should be engaged.
- An **expert committee with representatives of social partners and relevant stakeholders** to provide the parties with independent information, advice and input on measures and policies for just transition should be established. Workers' representatives must be recognised and have a seat at the table in all discussion bodies

overseeing just transition issues at the expert level. This includes their representation in the Katowice Committee of Experts on the Impacts of the Implementation of Response Measures (KCI).<sup>7</sup>

- The **annual high-level ministerial round tables on just transition** should give guidance on the implementation of the JTWP and its coordination with other work streams at the UNFCCC. They should ensure that decisions of the JTWP have sufficient levels of commitment and urgency from involved parties. The ministerial round tables should be organised with appropriate observer participation.
- The JTWP should **provide and receive input to and from all relevant work streams inside the UNFCCC**, including the Mitigation Work Programme, the Forum on Response Measures (including the KCI) and the climate finance processes, including the work of the Standing Committee on Finance and the NCQG, the Gender Action Plan and the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples' Platform.
- Recognise the mandate of UN processes outside the UNFCCC on just transition, most importantly the role of **the ILO as the recognised tripartite body and the ILO Guidelines on Just Transition**, which provide the foundational UN definition for just transition, as well as a framework for implementing just transition by all actors.
- Actively engage with and learn from the wide range of initiatives and processes taking place outside the UNFCCC,

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ilo.org/secsoc/lang--en/index.htm>

<sup>7</sup> A good example of observer participation is the Facilitative Working Group (FWG) that activates and supports the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP). This Working Group consists of 14 representatives: seven country representatives and seven Indigenous representatives (one from each of the seven world regions)

including national-level tripartite bodies, such as the Scottish Just Transition Commission, the Spanish Just Transition agreements, the German Coal Commission, Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs), and global sector-level initiatives, such as the Maritime Just Transition Task Force.

## GUARANTEE HUMAN RIGHTS, LABOUR RIGHTS AND INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION

The full and comprehensive protection of human rights is required to engender support and trust within and across societies and to implement the crucial climate policies the world urgently needs. It must, therefore, be noted that **labour rights are human rights**.<sup>8</sup> They are an integral part of the ILO's Just Transition Guidelines and are enabling rights for achieving a just transition.

The protection of human and labour rights is particularly important this year, with COP28 taking place in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The ITUC's **Global Rights Index 2023** denounced the exclusion of migrant workers from labour protections in the UAE, where migrant workers represent 89 per cent of the workforce.<sup>9</sup> The ITUC campaigns against the *kafala* system (that operates in many Gulf States to monitor and control migrant workers) and for trade union rights to be recognised and implemented in all the countries where the *kafala* system is used. Without freedom of association and the right to organise, migrant workers in the UAE and in other destination countries have no agency to negotiate over their occupational safety and health conditions, including protections from working in extreme heat. The conditions of the *kafala* system, and other temporary labour migration schemes,

coerce migrant workers to toil in dangerous conditions exacerbated by climate change. Climate change and a lack of decent work and social protections also increasingly push workers to migrate.

The ITUC demands that governments include explicit language on human rights and labour rights protection for all workers, regardless of status, in all pertinent COP28 decisions. The respect and promotion of labour and human rights is particularly relevant for the negotiations on the Global Stocktake, Article 6 (dealing with carbon markets and non-market approaches), mitigation, climate finance, loss and damage and on adaptation.

## ADAPTATION NEEDS SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS

Trade unions support the demands of developing countries who want a stronger focus on adaptation. While social protection measures are relevant for climate mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage, there is an urgent need to scale up social protection in adaptation. More than four billion people in the world do not have any kind of social protection. The most vulnerable in both low- and high-income countries need health care, unemployment benefits, and other social protection benefits to deal with the impact of a climate crisis that endangers their livelihoods. To this end, the UN and ILO have established a 'Global Accelerator' to help ensure global financing with a target to create 400m jobs and extend social protection to four billion people currently without coverage.<sup>10</sup> These jobs must meet the conditions of decent work which, coupled with universal social protection, enables greater resilience in the face of the climate crisis. Universal social protection is

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ilo.org/declaration/lang--en/index.htm>

<sup>9</sup> The ITUC joined other civil society organisations and signed the 'Letter to COP28 Participating Governments Regarding Human Rights and Climate Concerns in the UAE'

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_821167/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_821167/lang--en/index.htm)

a crucial and integral part of a just transition and must include migrant workers in both their destination and origin countries. (see also point 1 on the JTWP).

**The ITUC demands governments make explicit reference to the need for all national plans to include comprehensive and universal social protection systems in the decisions taken at COP28 that refer to the ‘Glasgow-Sharm El-Sheikh work programme on the global goal on adaptation’.**

## CLIMATE FINANCE

Negotiations at COP28 need to make progress on a new global climate finance agreement, the New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance (NCQG) that determines the finance provided by high-income countries to developing countries to address climate change. The NCQG will replace the much criticised US\$100 bn goal which high-income countries are yet to fully deliver on. The increased amount recognises the increased urgency of the climate crisis, and the massive under-investment in the green economy to date. The NCQG will be agreed at COP29 in November 2024, which means that COP28 presents an important opportunity to make sure governments are clear on what is needed. The global trade union movement makes the following demands of governments:

- The NCQG should align with just transition principles, including social dialogue with workers and stakeholder engagement with other affected communities throughout the climate finance cycle, including feasibility, implementation, and evaluation. All institutions involved in climate finance must then adopt just transition policies in line with the NCQG standard and

contribute new and additional funding. This must include national development agencies engaged in bilateral aid, multi-lateral development banks, sovereign funds, and private sector financial institutions including pension funds. The overall funding targets must be based on climate needs, not politics.

- The overall amount of climate finance must be based on the actual needs of low-income countries and fully integrate labour-impact assessments that ensure the climate and employment proofing of jobs and workplaces.
- All countries must have the right to decide where climate finance must involve public funding, including for key infrastructure and services. No country should be forced to accept privatisation as a condition of climate financing. The NCQG must commit to sufficient public finance flows to fund key infrastructure and services outlined in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) and wider climate action policies and plans.
- Public finance must represent the long-term foundation, with private finance providing secondary support. Public finance should be delivered through Official Development Assistance (ODA) grants, concessional finance through reformed Public Development Banks, reform of Special Drawing Rights, and mechanisms for debt relief, restructuring and cancellation to ensure that the financial burden of climate change does not fall on low-income countries.<sup>11</sup> The NCQG should take account of commitments on loss and damage as appropriate.
- The historic decision at COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh to create a Loss and Damage

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ituc\\_ffd\\_statement\\_2023\\_en.pdf](https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ituc_ffd_statement_2023_en.pdf)



Fund needs to be operationalised in a meaningful way at COP28. This includes commitments to its funding and to its transparent and participatory management that includes the participation of civil society. Action on Loss and Damage must be understood to go beyond relief, rehabilitation, and recovery from disasters and must include support for safe migration, enhanced permanent regular pathways for migration, resettlement and family unification and social protection for affected workers.

- **The Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs)** signify a new form of climate finance. JETPs are country-specific and negotiated on a

government-to-government basis with bilateral, private, philanthropic, and sometimes multilateral finance. Thus far, the negotiations with donors have involved a near-complete lack of social dialogue and insufficient transparency about the terms and conditions of these deals. They are also typified by little to no money earmarked for a just transition for workers and a strong emphasis on privatisation. The overwhelming majority of finance for JETPs is awarded in the form of loans and a very small proportion is given as grants. The global trade union movement rejects all JETPs that do not entail credible social dialogue and contribute to the further indebtedness of the recipient countries.




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