# Churches demand just transition at COP30 to safeguard vulnerable communities and workers



As the world gears up for the 30th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30) in Belém, Brazil, scheduled for November, churches across the globe are stepping forward to advocate for a Just Transition in response to the dual crises of climate change and socioeconomic inequality. Peralta, speaking at a recent conference, conveyed the urgency of these intertwined issues, stating, “The climate emergency and rising socioeconomic inequalities have emerged as the defining challenges of our time.” Churches are mobilising to ensure that the shift to a low-carbon economy prioritises the needs and rights of the most vulnerable communities.

Central to the discussions at COP30 will be the Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP), which is expected to undergo a crucial review in 2026. This programme uniquely links socioeconomic justice with climate action, according to Peralta, emphasising its importance in the broader context of the Paris Agreement. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that the transition from fossil fuels could risk approximately 6 million jobs while simultaneously generating up to 24 million new positions by 2030. With climate change impacting about 70% of global economic sectors, there is an urgent need for coordinated efforts to mitigate its effects on livelihoods.

In line with these objectives, the World Council of Churches (WCC) has prioritised addressing the climate crisis. During the WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, church representatives issued a statement demanding an expedited shift to renewable energy sources and an immediate phase-out of fossil fuels and nuclear projects. Their endorsement of the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty highlights a commitment to advancIng renewable energy while safeguarding workers’ rights and community welfare. The WCC asserts that no worker, community, or country should be left behind in this transformative process.

Churches are responding to this challenge through three principal avenues. First, they are advocating for communities adversely impacted by "green" energy projects. For instance, a visit by WCC representatives in 2022 to the Indigenous Sami communities in Norway revealed concerns over how wind farms violated their traditional reindeer herding rights—a scenario described by Sami youth as "green colonization." This serves as a stark reminder that well-intentioned environmental initiatives can inadvertently perpetuate injustices.

Secondly, churches are transforming their internal operations by adopting sustainable practices. Initiatives range from utilising solar energy to engaging in sustainable agriculture, showcasing a proactive stance towards environmental responsibility. Pierre Martinot-Lagarde of the International Labour Organisation echoed this sentiment, noting, "If work is a relationship then it must involve care. Work that cares will help ensure a sustainable future for all," during the "World of Work" event in Rome.

Lastly, churches are advocating for systemic economic reform, calling for a debt jubilee and tax justice to effectively fund climate action. Initiatives such as the “Turn Debt into Hope” and “Zacchaeus Tax” campaigns champion progressive tax measures that could alleviate the burdens on those most affected by climate impacts. The emphasis is on climate finance prioritising grants over loans, which often exacerbate existing economic strains.

The broader economic context indicates that while the shift toward renewable energy brings opportunities, it also carries significant challenges, particularly for workers in high-emission sectors. According to the OECD, an estimated quarter of existing jobs may undergo substantial changes due to climate policies. Those in low-skilled positions, especially in rural areas, are projected to face the most adverse effects. High-skilled urban workers may benefit disproportionately, potentially eroding political support for necessary climate actions.

Moreover, projections from the ILO suggest that rising global temperatures will lead to work-related heat stress, jeopardising productivity equivalent to the loss of 80 million full-time jobs by 2030. This impact will not be evenly distributed; southern Asia and western Africa are expected to bear the brunt of these losses, particularly in agriculture and construction sectors.

In summary, the upcoming COP30 represents a critical juncture for integrating socioeconomic justice with climate initiatives. The collaborative efforts of faith organisations, especially churches, aim to create pathways that ensure the transition to a green economy is equitable and just. As the urgency of climate action intensifies, it is vital to heed the call for a Just Transition that uplifts and protects vulnerable communities while fostering sustainable economic growth.

### Reference Map

1. Information on churches' role in advocating for Just Transition at COP30.
2. Data on job impacts of the transition to renewable energy.
3. OECD insights on socioeconomic challenges during the climate transition.
4. Broader employment trends and projections related to climate change.
5. ILO predictions on productivity losses due to climate change.
6. ILO's job creation potential in a green economy.
7. Examination of challenges faced by displaced workers from high carbon-intensity sectors.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/from-romes-jubilee-for-workers-to-cop30-churches-champion-just-transition> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/a15badc1-93ba-4a3a-b763-66b183d93f67> - This article discusses the significant impact of the global shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy on the job market. It highlights that while the transition to a net-zero carbon economy is creating new employment opportunities, it also leads to job losses in traditional energy sectors. The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) reports that in 2022, there were 13.7 million jobs in renewable energy globally, with solar power accounting for a substantial portion. The International Energy Agency (IEA) projects a net increase of 5.7 million energy-related jobs by 2030, despite a decline in fossil fuel jobs. The article emphasizes the challenges workers face, including job location shifts, varying pay scales, and union representation, and underscores the need for strategic labor market policies to manage these changes effectively.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/a7daf32e-a614-4066-9640-e70a5a0c0f81> - The OECD has advised governments to improve the pay and ensure job security for workers displaced from high-emission sectors to gather political support for a transition to net-zero emissions. Noting that over a quarter of current jobs will be significantly impacted by climate policies, the OECD warns that without intervention, low-skilled workers and rural households will face the greatest challenges during the transition. In contrast, high-skilled urban workers will benefit the most, posing fairness issues and risking loss of political support. Highlighting recent European election trends against green policies and union demands in the UK for job guarantees, the OECD emphasized the need for support for affected workers, who often face a significant and lasting drop in income. Recommendations include implementing temporary wage insurance and improving wages and working conditions in green-driven jobs. Currently, about 20% of the OECD workforce is in green-driven roles, but these jobs often lack union representation and job security.
4. <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/news/press-releases/2024/07/oecd-employment-at-record-high-while-the-climate-transition-expected-to-lead-to-significant-shifts-in-labour-markets.html> - The OECD Employment Outlook 2024 highlights that while aggregate employment effects of the climate transition are estimated to be limited in the short run, significant shifts and disruptions are expected. Jobs will be lost in shrinking greenhouse gas-intensive industries, while many others will be created in expanding low-emissions activities. About 20% of the OECD workforce is employed in green-driven occupations that will likely be positively impacted by the climate transition. High-skill green-driven jobs usually pay higher-than-average wages, but low-skill green-driven jobs tend to have worse job quality than other low-skill jobs, suggesting that these sectors may be a relatively unattractive option for low-skilled workers.
5. <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/increase-heat-stress-predicted-bring-productivity-loss-equivalent-80> - The International Labour Organization (ILO) projects that global warming will lead to an increase in work-related heat stress, resulting in productivity losses equivalent to 80 million full-time jobs by 2030. The agricultural sector is expected to be the most affected, accounting for 60% of global working hours lost due to heat stress. Other sectors at risk include construction, environmental goods and services, refuse collection, emergency and repair work, transport, tourism, sports, and certain industrial jobs. The impact will be unevenly distributed, with southern Asia and western Africa projected to lose approximately 5% of working hours by 2030, corresponding to around 43 million and 9 million jobs, respectively. Lower-middle- and low-income countries are expected to suffer the most significant economic losses due to limited resources to adapt effectively to increased heat.
6. <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/24-million-jobs-open-green-economy-0> - The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that transitioning towards a green economy could create 24 million new jobs by 2030. This includes 2.5 million jobs in renewables-based electricity, offsetting some 400,000 jobs lost in fossil fuel-based electricity generation. Additionally, 6 million jobs can be created by transitioning towards a 'circular economy,' which includes activities like recycling, repair, rent, and remanufacture, replacing the traditional economic model of 'extracting, making, using, and disposing.' The ILO emphasizes that while measures to address climate change may result in short-term employment losses in some cases, their negative impact can be reduced through appropriate policies, such as synergies between social protection and environmental policies that support both workers’ incomes and the transition to a greener economy.
7. <https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/the-cost-of-job-loss-in-carbon-intensive-sectors-evidence-from-germany_6f636d3b-en.html> - This OECD working paper examines the cost of involuntary job displacement for workers in high carbon-intensity sectors in Germany. The study finds that displaced workers from high carbon-intensity sectors have, on average, higher earnings losses and face greater difficulties in finding new employment compared to those in low carbon-intensity sectors. This is primarily due to human capital specificity, the regional clustering of carbon-intensive activities, and higher wage premiums in carbon-intensive firms. The paper also notes that workers displaced in high carbon-intensity sectors are older, face higher local labor market concentration, and have fewer outside options for finding jobs with similar skill requirements. Women, older workers, and those with vocational degrees, as well as workers in East Germany, experience particularly high costs in case they are displaced from high carbon-intensity sectors.