

CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE WORLD OF WORK

VIOLENCE AT THE SYSTEMIC EDGE



CLIMATE IMPACTED WORKERS AT THE SYSTEMIC EDGE

A *systemic edge* is a site where general conditions take extreme forms.

Climate-impacted migrant workers are at a systemic edge: they are pushed out of their livelihoods and their homes and enter employment far below decent work standards.

Equidem has found that climate change has created previously unseen types of violence in the world of work.

We must take urgent action to understand, mitigate, adapt, and promote resilience to the impacts of climate change on workers at risk, especially women workers and others facing intersecting forms of discrimination.

As climate change accelerates, shifting working conditions for billions of workers worldwide, the actions we take now to safeguard climate-impacted migrant workers can establish a foundation for just transitions for all working people.

CLIMATE CHANGE IS DRIVING NEW FORMS OF GENDERED VIOLENCE IN THE WORLD OF WORK

Climate change is shifting working conditions across sectors, creating new forms of gendered violence in the world of work.

Equidem's hybrid model of expert and rightsholder participatory research is uncovering forms of violence in the world of work linked to climate change. These include repeated practices and acts that are already resulting in or are likely to result in physical harm to workers.

ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) defines violence and

harassment in the world of work as unacceptable behaviors and practices, whether a single occurrence or repeated that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH).

Under ILO Convention 190, the term GBVH means violence and harassment directed at persons because of their sex or gender, or affecting persons of a particular sex or gender disproportionately, and includes sexual harassment.

CLIMATE INDUCED FORMS OF VIOLENCE THAT IMPACT WOMEN



GENDERED VIOLENCE

Women are the vast majority of workers in the sector and are therefore disproportionately affected by violence.



GARMENT SECTOR



CLIMATE-RELATED ACTS THAT INFLICT HARM

Women race to meet production targets for long hours under heat stress conditions without enough water and toilet breaks, leaving them dehydrated and heightening heat impacts. During 2023 protests in Bangladesh, garment workers highlighted systematic denial of sanitation and health services.

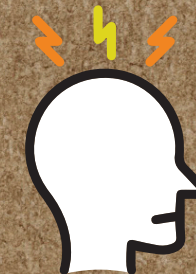
HARMS EXPERIENCED BY WORKERS



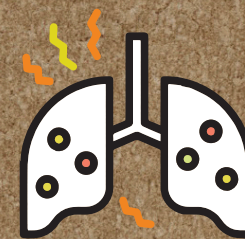
Heat Stress



Dehydration



Headaches



Respiratory Issues



Cardiovascular Issues

CLIMATE INDUCED FORMS OF VIOLENCE THAT IMPACT MEN



CONSTRUCTION, RENEWABLES & PLATFORM-BASED FOOD DELIVERY SECTORS

Men are the vast majority of workers in these sectors and are therefore disproportionately affected by violence.

Construction workers in Qatar have limited access to water. In order to reduce breaks, teams of workers receive frozen buckets to share, forcing them to wait for water to melt and take turns before drinking.



Workers perform strenuous physical labour for extended hours outdoors in extreme heat without adequate access to water and toilets.

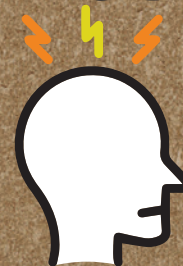
HARMS EXPERIENCED BY WORKERS



Heat Stress



Dehydration



Headaches



Respiratory Issues

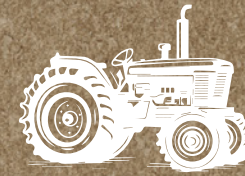


Cardiovascular Issues

CLIMATE INDUCED FORMS OF VIOLENCE THAT IMPACT WOMEN & MEN WORKERS



Both men and women
are employed in the
agricultural sector



AGRICULTURE SECTOR

Workers perform
strenuous physical labour
for extended hours
outdoors in extreme heat.



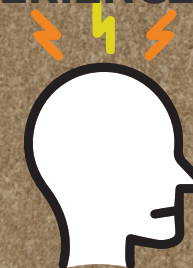
HARMS EXPERIENCED BY WORKERS



Heat Stress



Dehydration



Headaches



Respiratory
Issues



Cardiovascular
Issues

RISING HEAT AND CLIMATE-RELATED VIOLENCE

As temperatures rise across the globe, industrial practices of driving workers to meet unreasonable production and service targets inflict widespread physical harm, including death. When air temperature and humidity are high, it's harder for the body to cool itself down with sweat. This can lead to overheating, which can trigger extreme physical harm, including respiratory and cardiovascular issues, and even death.

“The heat is extreme in the summer. Sometimes the temperatures are as high as 45 degrees. The temperature inside the mall fluctuates between 20 and 24 degrees Celsius. Throughout the day, we experience this temperature shift at least 30 to 40 times, and it makes us sick.”

- Ahmed, a Pakistani delivery service worker employed by a subcontractor for a food delivery company in the UAE

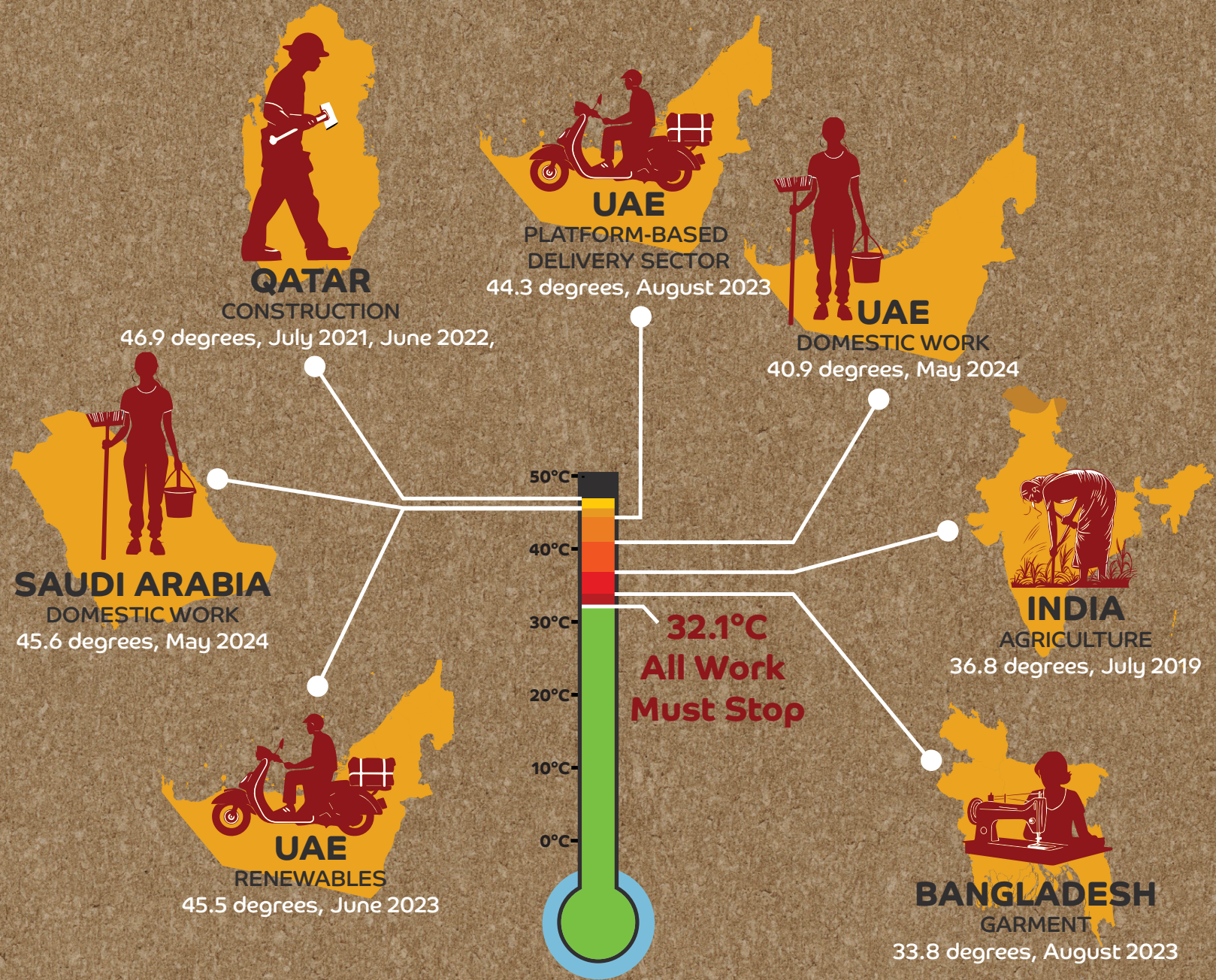
According to the ILO, the internationally agreed upon safe wet-bulb temperature is below 30 degrees Celsius, and the highest limit is 35 degrees Celsius. Between 30 and 35 degrees Celsius, the body undergoes hyperthermia, which

can impact the brain and heart. According to the ILO, all work must stop if the wet bulb temperature rises beyond 32.1 degrees Celsius due to extreme health risks.

“Thirty-five degrees [wet bulb] is about survivability, everyone will die. But before that, we have severe impacts on liveability, and the most vulnerable can die.” -

Professor Ollie Jay, Director, The Heat and Health Research Incubator, University of Sydney

**SECTORS WHERE
WORKERS WERE
MADE TO WORK
ABOVE THE
SAFE WET-BULB
TEMPERATURE
of 32.1°C**



WORKERS DESCRIBED THE IMPACTS OF EXTREME HEAT ON THEIR BODIES

"I picked up a delivery from Diera City Centre at around 1 pm and was on my way to Naif. While nearing the area, I felt dizzy. I parked my bike. While taking out the bottle from the container, I felt awkward and collapsed. People around there carried me to the shade, sprayed water on my face, awoke me and brought me back to consciousness. The medics diagnosed that it was a heat stroke."

—Sahil, an Indian worker, employed by a subcontractor for a food delivery company in the UAE

"This job causes very serious health issues. Sometimes I am made to stand more than 10 hours in the scorching sun, and this gives me a constant headache all the time. I take pain killers to cool it down which isn't good for my health."

—Nathan, a Kenyan worker employed as a security guard by a subcontractor in the renewables sector in the UAE

"We did our duty for one year and six months outside the stadium premises. During the summertime, from April to August, in Qatar, the temperature is 45 to 55 degrees outside. We did our duty with no cabin and not even a sun sheet. On the other hand, in the winter season, from September to March, it is cold with heavy wind. The company forced us to be outside to do our work."

—Shafiq, a Bangladeshi security guard employed by a subcontractor on Al Rayyan Stadium in Qatar

"Everyone is experiencing health risks related to the climate. Seasonal changes significantly impact those of us with asthma and kidney stones. Joint pain from uric acid is common in this environment."

—Shankar, an Indian electrical maintenance worker employed in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

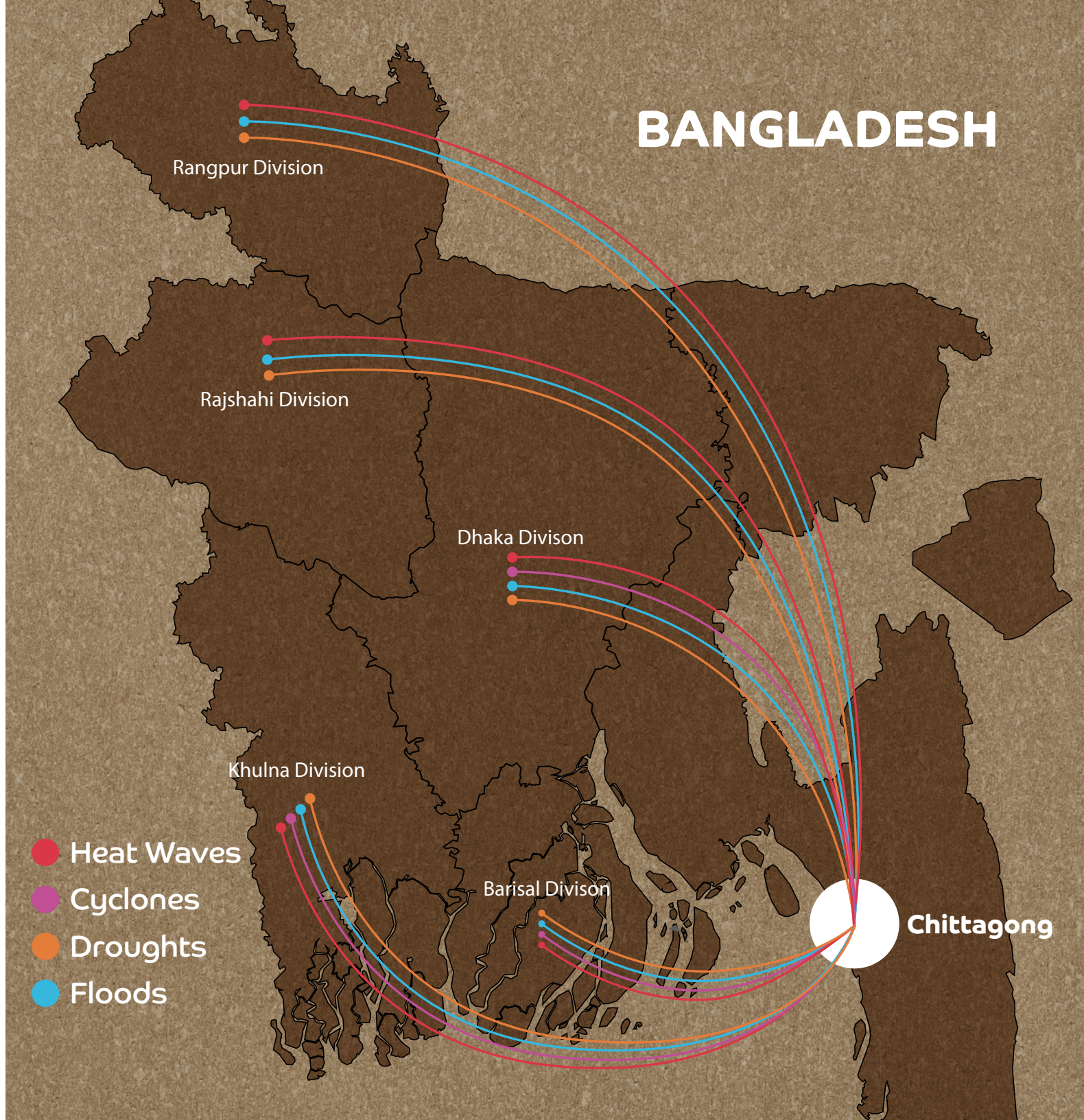
**CLIMATE
CHANGE IS
DISRUPTING
LOCAL
ECONOMIES
AND DRIVING
INTERNAL AND
INTERNATIONAL
MIGRATION**

Since 2020, Equidem investigations of internal and international migration corridors have systematically tracked migration from climate impacted areas in Africa and South Asia—including the experiences of more than 700 women and men who have migrated for employment from climate-impacted areas of Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda, Zimbabwe; and Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, The Philippines, and Sri Lanka.

Climate-impacted migrant workers migrate for employment due to the impacts of droughts, heatwaves, floods, cyclones, and associated famine and disease outbreaks on their lives and livelihoods.

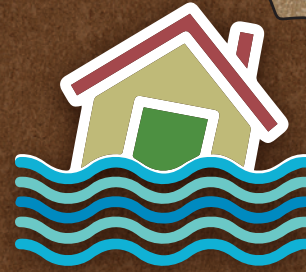
Equidem research has traced these migration corridors from Africa and Asia into the agriculture, construction, domestic work, garment, hospitality, platform-based delivery services, and renewables sectors in South Asia and the Gulf. These migration corridors provide a window into the experiences of climate-impacted migrants in informal and formal sector employment across the globe.

WORKERS FROM CLIMATE IMPACTED AREAS IN BANGLADESH FIND EMPLOYMENT IN THE GARMENT SECTOR IN CHITTAGONG AFTER DROUGHTS, HEATWAVES, FLOODS AND CYCLONES DISRUPT LOCAL LABOUR MARKETS AND ECOSYSTEMS.



**WORKERS IN
UTTAR PRADESH
WORK IN AREAS
IMPACTED BY
DROUGHTS,
FLOODS, DISEASE
OUTBREAKS, AND
HEAT WAVES**

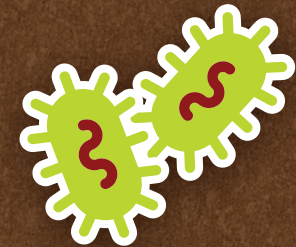
UTTAR PRADESH INDIA



FLOODS

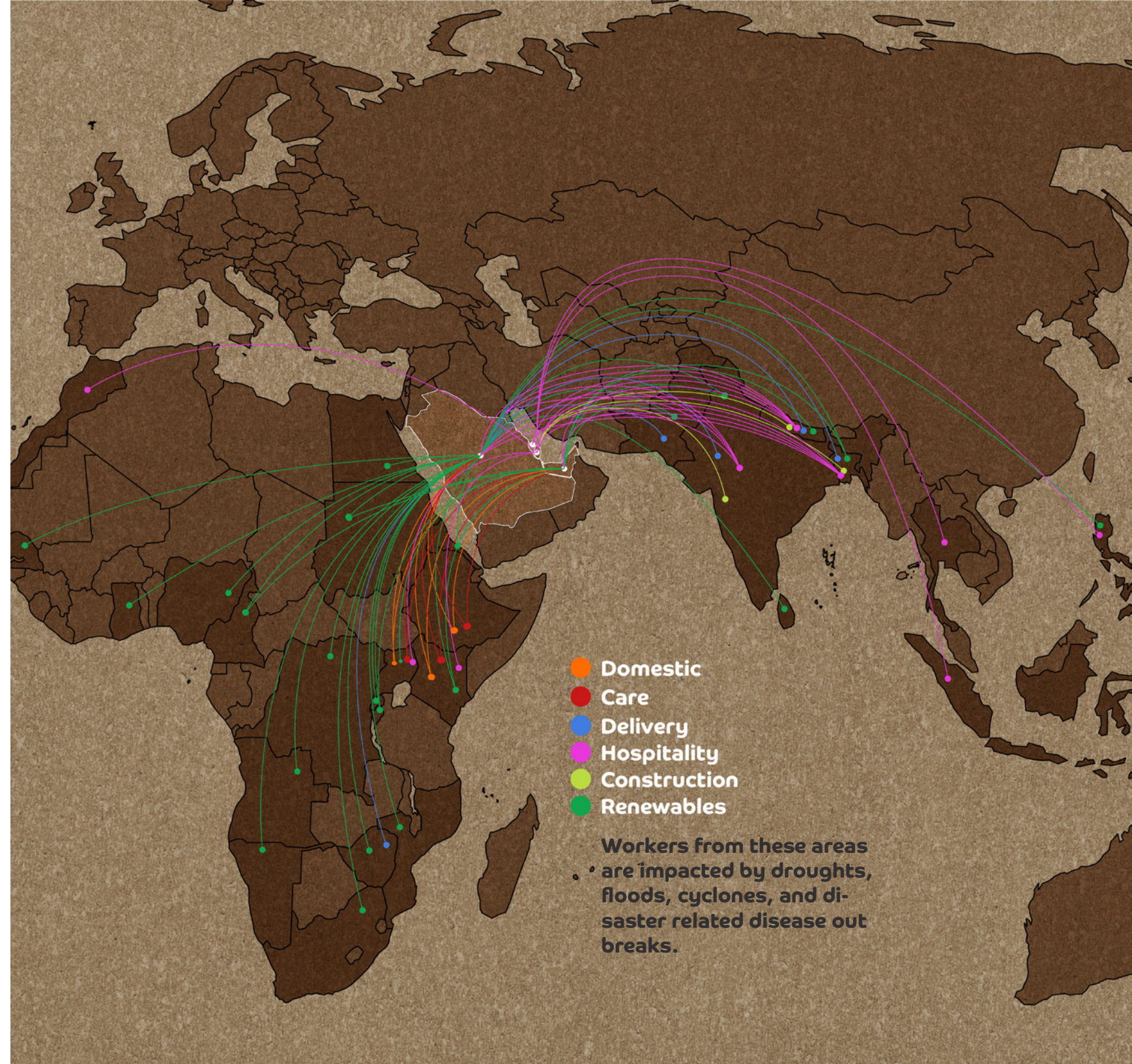


HEAT WAVES



Disease Outbreak

**WORKERS
FROM CLIMATE
IMPACTED AREAS
OF ASIA AND
AFRICA MIGRATE
FOR EMPLOYMENT
IN THE
CONSTRUCTION,
DOMESTIC WORK,
HOSPITALITY,
RENEWABLES AND
FOOD SERVICE
DELIVERY SECTORS
TO THE GCC**



**CLIMATE
IMPACTED
MIGRANT
WORKERS FIND
EMPLOYMENT
IN INDUSTRIES
WHERE WORKING
CONDITIONS
FALL FAR BELOW
DECENT WORK
STANDARDS**

Workers migrating for employment from areas where climate change is disrupting local economies and driving displacement find employment in the construction, domestic work, platform-based delivery, garment and renewables sectors—sectors wherein Equidem has documented extensive rights violations. Climate-driven barriers to finding employment at home heightens pressure for workers to stay in unjust and dangerous employment, including forced labour conditions and rampant violence.









“My supervisor is always approaching ladies sexually and if I refuse his advances, he might not give me my weekly off which I feel is unfair.” -









—Grace, a worker from East Africa employed by a subcontractor as a security guard in the renewables sector in the UAE









“If a worker does not listen to the officer or is found resting during work, the officer gets angry and sometimes he slaps in anger. Once a worker who worked with me burnt his hand and was sitting and resting. Then the supervisor came and slapped him without asking anything and shouted abuses at him. This mostly happens with new workers.”









- Kabir, an Indian migrant worker employed packing solar equipment for a company in the UAE

		Abuse of vulnerability	Deception	Restriction of movement	Isolation	Physical and sexual violence	Intimidation and threats	Retention of identity documents	Withholding of wages	Debt bondage	Abusive working and living conditions	Excessive overtime
ILO Forced Labour Indicators												
I N F O R M A L	 Agriculture (India)	●		●		●	●		●	●	●	
	 Domestic work (SA, UAE)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●
F O R M A L	 Construction (Qatar)	●	●	●		●	●	●	●		●	●
	 Nursing (UAE)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●
	 Renewables (UAE)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●
	 Platform-based food delivery (UAE)	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	 Garment sector (Bangladesh)	●		●		●	●		●		●	●
	 Hospitality (Qatar)	●	●	●		●	●		●		●	●

Forms of violence	 Domestic work (SA, UAE)	 Agriculture (India)	 Construction (Qatar)	 Renewables (UAE)	 Plat-form-based food delivery (UAE)	 Garment sector (Bangladesh)	 Hospitality (Qatar)	 Nursing (UAE)
Acts that result in physical harm								
Work pressure heightening risks of deadly accidents					●			
Physical abuse	●		●	●		●		
Exposure to toxic chemicals			●	●			●	●
Exposure to excessive heat or cold	●	●	●	●	●	●		
Low wages leading to calorie deficits	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Overwork in high stress environments	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

Forms of violence	 Domestic work (SA, UAE)	 Agriculture (India)	 Construction (Qatar)	 Renewables (UAE)	 Plat- form-based food delivery (UAE)	 Garment sec- tor (Bangla- desh)	 Hospitality (Qatar)	 Nursing (UAE)
Acts that result in physical harm								
Pressure to meet targets/ complete work leading workers to skip meal, water, and toilet breaks	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Overwork during pregnancies						●		
Requiring work-ers to work while sick	●	●	●	●	●	●		
Failure to pro-vide paid sick leave	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Failure to pro-vide adequate health insurance	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Illegally over-crowded accom-modations			●	●	●			

Forms of violence	 Domestic work (SA, UAE)	 Agriculture (India)	 Construction (Qatar)	 Renewables (UAE)	 Plat- form-based food delivery (UAE)	 Garment sec- tor (Bangla- desh)	 Hospitality (Qatar)	 Nursing (UAE)
Acts that result in psychological harm								
Verbal abuse	●		●	●		●	●	
Confinement and surveillance in work places and/or residences	●		●	●				●
Confiscation of phones	●							
Racism at work	●		●	●			●	●
Threats of physical harm	●			●				
Threats of salary reduction	●		●	●	●	●		
Threats of termination			●	●	●	●		









Forms of violence	 Domestic work (SA, UAE)	 Agriculture (India)	 Construction (Qatar)	 Renewables (UAE)	 Platform-based food delivery (UAE)	 Garment sector (Bangladesh)	 Hospitality (Qatar)	 Nursing (UAE)
-------------------	--	--	---	---	---	--	--	--

Acts that result in psychological harm

Overwork in high stress environments	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Forcing workers to complete work outside drop description under threats of termination (e.g. cleaning toilets)								●
Inability to leave employer and change jobs	●	●	●	●	●	●		●

Acts that result in sexual harm

Rape	●							
Unwanted sexual touching	●					●	●	●
Sexual harassment	●					●	●	●

Forms of violence	 Domestic work (SA, UAE)	 Agriculture (India)	 Construction (Qatar)	 Renewables (UAE)	 Plat- form-based food delivery (UAE)	 Garment sector (Bangladesh)	 Hospitality (Qatar)	 Nursing (UAE)
Acts that result in economic harm								
Debt bondage		●						
Payments below living wages	●		●	●	●	●	●	
Withholding wages	●		●	●	●		●	
Algorithmically monitored and penalty-based wage deductions					●			
Commission-based low wages					●			
Discriminatory wages	●	●	●	●				●
Unpaid or underpaid overtime		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Delayed payments		●	●	●				
Non-payment or underpayment of severance			●	●	●	●	●	●

TOWARDS A JUST TRANSITION

Just transitions must include mitigation, adaptation, and resilience, but right now climate financing is overwhelmingly focused on mitigation.

Adaptation requires us to look at the ongoing and intensifying negative impact that women workers at the systemic edge are facing now, and how this is driving GBVH and structural inequality. This creates a benchmark for the adaptation that will be required globally.

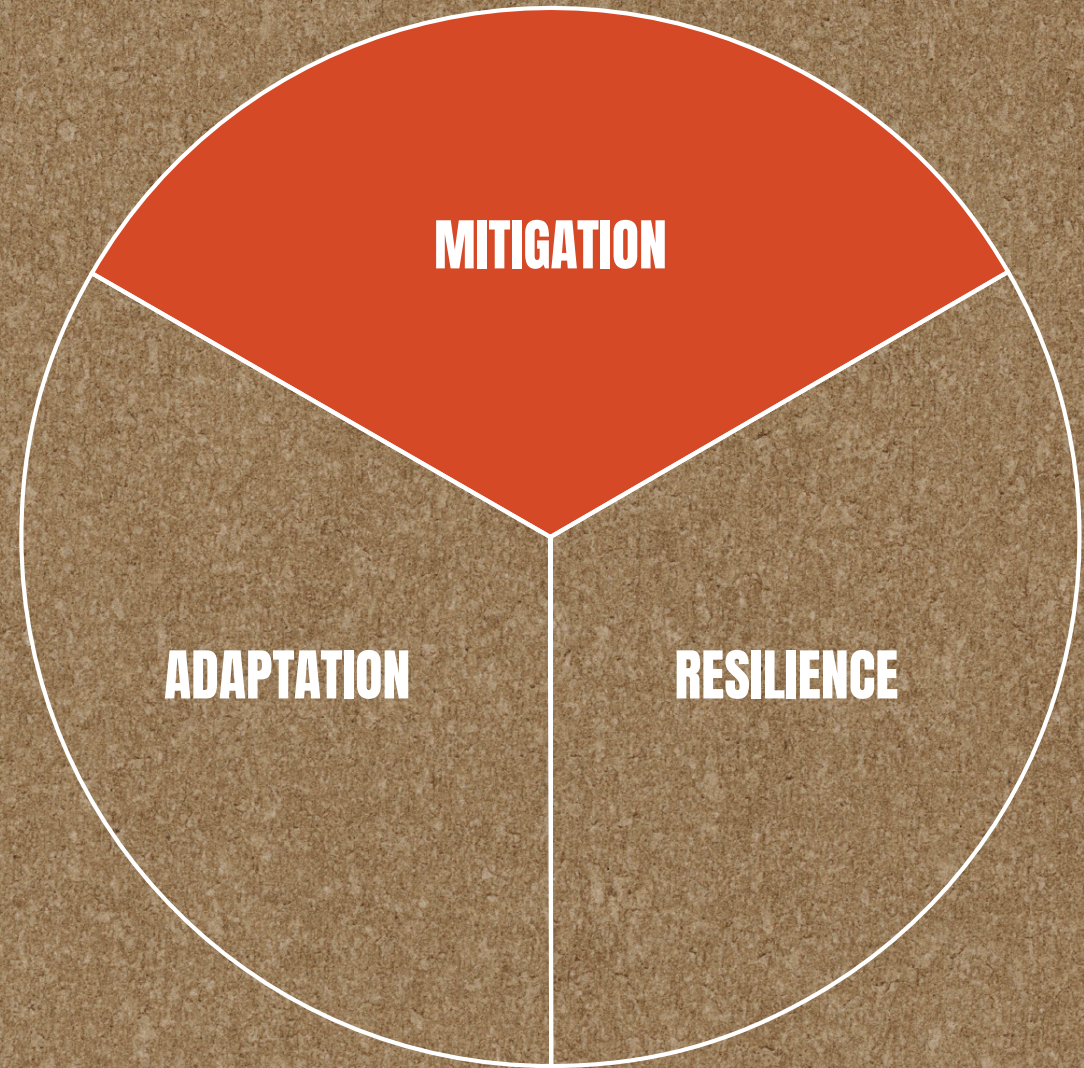
Resilience requires us to ensure that impacted workers have the capacity to recover from climate impacts. This requires shifting the path dependency between climate impacts and unchecked workplace violence and entrenched structural inequalities. We need to get these systems in place now, not

only for women workers but to ensure a just transition for all.

Recommendations

- Support research to map the climate-driven spectrums of violence, especially GBVH, across industries and sectors. These spectrums of violence need to be both industry and location specific, and identify specific climate-related risk factors for violence.
- Support initiatives that draw together current data on climate impacts as well as future projections in order to understand and advance frameworks to address climate-related GBVH and other forms of violence for workers at the systemic edge, especially women workers. These systems will in turn raise the floor for all other workers.

**JUST TRANSITIONS
MUST INCLUDE
MITIGATION,
ADAPTATION,
AND RESILIENCE,
BUT RIGHT
NOW CLIMATE
FINANCING IS
OVERWHELMINGLY
FOCUSED ON
MITIGATION.**





Equidem is a human and labour rights not-for-profit working globally to promote the rights of marginalised communities, accountability for serious violations, and building the human rights movement. Our team of worker activists, investigators and policy experts expose injustice, provide solutions for the most intractable human rights challenges and work closely with other grassroots and global civil society to empower the individual and the community.

Phone: +44 (0) 204 537 1165

Kemp House, 160 City Road
London, EC1V 2NX United Kingdom

info@equidem.org

www.equidem.org

<https://x.com/EquidemOrg>

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/equidemorg/>

<https://www.instagram.com/equidemorg>

<https://www.tiktok.com/@equidemorg>

Registered Charity in England and Wales 1199107 and US 501(c)(3) equivalence.