



equidem

November 14, 2025

Putting Labour Justice at the Heart of Climate Finance

Equidem Statement for COP30, Belém, Brazil

As COP30 convenes in the Amazon, states, development banks, and corporations will decide how trillions in climate finance are mobilised to shape the “green economy.” The choices made here will determine not only the pace of decarbonisation, but also the kind of work, livelihoods, and societies that will emerge in its wake.

At this turning point, Equidem calls for climate finance that funds freedom, not exploitation, finance that recognises that a just transition is not only about clean energy, but about the people who build, power, and sustain it.

1. Climate Finance Without Labour Justice Is Climate Injustice

Over [US\\$1 trillion](#) in public and private climate finance is expected to flow in the coming years to build renewable energy infrastructure, expand critical mineral mining, and digitise logistics systems for energy efficiency. Yet without enforceable labour protections, this capital risks entrenching the very exploitation that has defined global supply chains for decades.

Equidem’s [research](#) across the renewable energy, digital platform, and care sectors shows that the so-called green transition is being built on a foundation of human rights abuse:

- Migrant workers [constructing solar parks](#) in the Gulf face wage theft, passport confiscation, and twelve-hour shifts in 48°C heat with little shade or rest.

- Platform and data workers [designing AI systems](#) to optimise renewable operations face algorithmic surveillance, severe mental health pressures, and denial of basic labour protections.
- And across the [global care economy](#), one of the largest and most feminised labour sectors, migrant women workers, many of them displaced by climate impacts, perform essential low-carbon labour while facing chronic underpayment, excessive hours, and heightened risks of violence and exploitation.

These are not anomalies; they are structural outcomes of a global system that treats cheap, unprotected labour, whether in energy, data, or care, as the fuel of transition. If climate finance is channelled through the same corporate and financial architectures that produced the fossil economy's injustices, then "net zero" will be achieved on the backs of workers denied dignity and rights.

2. The Missing Architecture: Labour Conditionalities and Worker Voice

While states have repeatedly affirmed their commitment to "just transition" principles, through the Paris Agreement, ILO guidelines, and COP27 declarations, implementation has remained largely rhetorical. Existing climate finance mechanisms, whether concessional funds, green bonds, or loss-and-damage facilities, continue to channel billions without requiring even the most basic safeguards for labour rights.

This gap is not technical; it is political. By treating decent work as peripheral rather than foundational, global finance risks reproducing the same patterns of exploitation that powered the fossil economy. A transition built on weak labour standards is neither just nor sustainable.

To course-correct, labour justice must be hard-wired into every layer of climate finance governance, from fund design to project delivery.

In this context, Equidem calls for a climate finance architecture centred on the below core pillars:

A. Embed binding labour conditionalities in all climate finance disbursements.

No public or private fund should underwrite projects that fail to guarantee freedom of association, safe and fair working conditions, gender equality, and living wages. Compliance with ILO core labour standards and human rights due diligence processes must be a non-negotiable prerequisite.

B. Institutionalise worker voice and representation.

Trade unions and worker organisations must be included as equal partners in climate governance, from national just transition taskforces to the boards of multilateral funds. Workers and their representatives must be seen as co-architects of the just transition.

C. Establish independent monitoring and grievance mechanisms.

Workers and communities affected by these projects must be able to report abuses safely and seek remedy through transparent, independent systems that protect against retaliation. Without accountability, “just transition” risks becoming a slogan rather than a safeguard.

D. Ensure transparency across global value chains.

Investors and states must mandate disclosure of labour conditions in renewable, digital, and mining supply chains. Transparency is not merely a governance tool; it is the first defence against exploitation in economies built on subcontracting and opacity.

3. Reclaiming the Role of the State

Many states in the Global South face crushing debt burdens and shrinking fiscal space to pursue a just transition. Yet, when climate finance does arrive, it too often flows through opaque public–private partnerships or intermediary banks that prioritise profit margins over people. The result is a transition managed by markets, not by mandates for justice.

COP30 must reimagine the role of the state, especially in the Global South, not as a passive recipient of finance, but as an active guarantor of rights and dignity. Climate governance cannot be outsourced; it must be reclaimed as a public function grounded in accountability to workers and local communities.

To make this real, states must:

- **Legislate and enforce binding labour protections** across all climate-related projects, ensuring that every renewable energy site, mining operation, and digital infrastructure investment upholds decent work, equal pay, and safe conditions.
- **Direct public procurement and concessional finance** toward enterprises that respect human rights, gender equality, and freedom of association, establishing a rights-based standard for what qualifies as “green.”

- **Negotiate cross-border protections for migrant and informal workers** who power the green economy. Climate transitions are already reshaping migration patterns, workers move across borders to build solar parks, mine lithium, and maintain power grids. Without bilateral and regional labour agreements, these workers remain vulnerable to exploitation, debt bondage, and deportation when they seek justice. Embedding labour protections in trade, migration, and investment treaties is essential to ensure that the energy transition upholds rights and equity across borders.

4. Towards a People-Centred Green Transition

Equidem's field research reveals a simple truth: the green transition cannot succeed if it reproduces the same hierarchies and exploitation that defined the fossil economy. Renewable energy should be a pathway out of precarity, not a new frontier for it.

A truly people-centred transition means:

- **Strengthening community and worker-led governance.**
Just transition plans must be shaped by those most affected by them, workers, local communities, and grassroots organisations. When climate projects are designed with their participation, they become more accountable, context-sensitive, and sustainable.
- **Recognising care and informal work as climate work.** Women in agriculture, waste, and domestic sectors already sustain low-carbon economies through their daily labour yet remain invisible in climate finance frameworks. Recognising and investing in these sectors is essential to building equitable resilience.
- **Ensuring skills, social protection, and just transition guarantees.**
Workers in high-emission sectors need access to retraining, income support, and social protection as industries transform. Climate finance must include dedicated funds for these guarantees so that no worker is left behind in the shift to a green economy.
- **Redirecting climate finance toward public and community ownership.**
Large-scale private investment alone cannot deliver justice. Expanding public and cooperative ownership of renewable infrastructure ensures that the benefits of decarbonisation, like energy access, jobs, and profits, flow back to workers and local communities rather than to shareholders alone.

5. Conclusion: Building a Green Economy Worth Working For

At COP30, leaders have a critical opportunity to determine what kind of economy will emerge from the global transition ahead.

If climate finance continues to reward companies that exploit workers while marketing sustainability, then the transition will be neither green nor just. But if we choose to embed labour rights and worker voice at the heart of climate governance, we can build a green economy that is truly worth working for.

Equidem calls on all states, development banks, and corporations to commit to:

- Linking every dollar of climate finance to respect for international labour standards;
- Including worker and civil society representatives in the governance and monitoring of climate finance frameworks; and
- Ensuring that migrant, informal, and platform workers who drive the transition are included as equal partners in its design and implementation.

A climate-resilient world cannot rest on precarious work. The path to net-zero must run through workplaces where rights, wages, dignity, and freedom of association are non-negotiable and where labour rights are recognised as central to addressing the climate crisis at COP30 and beyond.