



CLIMATE CHANGE & HUMAN RIGHTS GUIDANCE NOTE

22 May 2023

The aims of this document are:

- to provide FNET members with a conceptual framework for tackling climate change through a human rights lens
- for FNET members to use this document to develop work with sustainability teams to incorporate human rights into sustainability strategies.
- to give FNET members a starting place resource to support work on Just Transition.
- This document has two sections; the first gives an overview of how some climate related risks might affect people connected with food supply chains, and the second part gives an overview of Just Transition and how companies can integrate human rights into climate change management plans.

PART A: What is the relationship between Climate Change and Human Rights?

“Human-induced climate change is the largest, most pervasive threat to the natural environment and societies the world has ever experienced”ⁱ

About a third of greenhouse gas emissions caused by humans are linked to food systems, with the majority of emissions coming from agriculture and land use, and followed by refrigeration and transportation of food, industrial processes related to packaging, and food waste managementⁱⁱ. In 2021, the UN Human Rights Council voted that a right to a clean environment is a human right and stressed in COP27 talks in 2022 to respect all human rights in climate actionⁱⁱⁱ.

How might climate change affect human rights in the food supply chain?

Below are some areas where there is increased likelihood of impact on people’s rights throughout the supply chain as a result of climate change.

Working conditions (Extreme heat)

- Temperatures above 24–26°C are associated with reduced labour productivity.
- At 33–34°C, a worker operating at moderate work intensity loses 50 per cent of his or her work capacity. Exposure to excessive heat levels can lead to heatstroke and other health conditions such as kidney injury, sometimes with a fatal outcome.
- The agricultural sector is expected to be the worst affected, accounting for 60% of working hours lost to heat stress in 2030^{iv}

Risk to life/damage to infrastructure (extreme events e.g. flooding & monsoons)

- Geographical areas will be impacted differently - for example the South Asian monsoon is estimated to increase in strength with up to 20 per cent more rain falling on eastern India and Bangladesh by 2050. But less rain is expected in sub-Saharan Africa with estimates of 10 per cent less rainfall by 2050. ^v
- The number of people flooded per year is expected to increase by between 10 and 25 million per year by the 2050s^{vi}

Loss of farm livelihood/food shortages (changing weather patterns)

- Fundamental changes to existing food production geographies – for example crop yields in central and south Asia are predicted to drop by 30% by 2050s and fish stocks migrating towards the poles will impact fishing, fishing communities and the biodiversity of the oceans.vii
- Rising sea-levels will impact coastal communities and their livelihoods and increased water salination in significant food production areas such as rice in coastal areas of Bangladesh.viii

Water shortages and droughts^{ix}

- Climate change impacts patterns of weather and water around the world, causing shortages and droughts in some areas and floods in others.
- Around 1.1 billion people globally do not have full access to water.
- 2.7 billion people are water scarce for at least one month of the year.
- Annually 2 million people (mostly children) die from diarrheal disease.
- 2.4 billion people have inadequate sanitation, which increases exposure to cholera and typhoid fever, and other water-borne diseases.
- By 2025, two thirds of the world's population may face water shortages.

Migration, Social unrest, conflict, and violence

As effects of climate change are felt, populations move. Either to escape the impacts of continued extreme weather events, food, water or job insecurity, increased conflict as a result of resource scarcity.

- There will be an estimated 200 million climate migrants by 2050, which would mean that by 2050 one in every 45 people will be displaced as a result of climate change^x.

Compounding Effects

Climate change impacts will also have a compounding effect on people's lives. For example, extreme weather occurrences may create flooding, resulting in low crop yields, then reducing income for workers, whilst also creating reduced access to clean water and increased disease. Some of these effects may be felt globally i.e. reduction of availability in global food supply chains, or increased food prices in another part of the world, and also locally on communities^{xi}. Some people have "heightened vulnerability" to the impacts of climate change. Climate change can be seen to amplify existing human rights issues.

Factors that increase vulnerability of people to the effects of climate change^{xii}

- Children – More vulnerability to disease and exploitation than adults
- Indigenous Peoples – High dependence on nature and land rights
- Women – Exacerbates ongoing gender inequality
- Workers – More demanding physical working conditions & increased income precariousness
- Disabled and the elderly - Lower physical resilience, & more limited access to resources

Climate change in the UK

The UK is already beginning to see the effects of climatic change and the Meteorological Office^{xiii} predicts that by 2050 summers will be between 1-6 degrees warmer and 60% drier, and winters will be between 1-4.5 degrees warmer and 30% wetter. In some instances, companies are seeing earlier (or sudden) harvests, failed crops and extreme heat which has implications for agricultural worker contracts and working conditions.

Exploratory questions: What are some of the climate-related human rights issues facing your supply chains?

- Where will food production be affected by climate change and which populations will be affected?
- Who will feel impacts; farmers, processing, transport workers?
- What are your current policies for workers already experiencing extreme climatic impacts e.g. extreme heat in South Africa and using different working schedules to mitigate effects.
- Do you know if there are problems regarding access water or food for personal consumption in areas of flooding and drought.
- Are you already thinking of relocating supply chains and what would responsible exit look like?
- Are some of the food producers already diversifying production? What is the expected impact on their livelihoods.

PART B: Just Transition

“Just Transition” was born out of the Paris Agreement and the ILO has since defined it as “A just transition for all towards an environmentally sustainable economy ... needs to be well managed and contribute to the goals of decent work for all, social inclusion and the eradication of poverty.”^{xiv}

In 2022, the landmark agreement on funding of loss and damage at COP27 is further progress “towards achieving justice, equality, accountability, and non-discrimination within climate action”^{xv}

The UK has made legally binding targets to reach net zero by 2050 and many companies are delivering this via a Just Transition approach^{xvi}.

Action towards a Just Transition

In Just Transition; A Business Guide lays out three stages of action to implement a Just Transition^{xvii}

- 1) *Engage* – “Ensure social dialogue with workers and their unions, and potentially government; consult broadly with key stakeholders such as communities
- 2) *Plan* “Collaborate to produce concrete, time-bound, enterprise and sectoral plans for just transition, including emissions reductions”.
- 3) *Act* “Deliver plans and advocate for broader action to promote just transition”.

There are also 3 categories of a “Just Transition”^{xviii},

- a) The transition away from business as usual and high-emission actions
- b) The transition into a greener economy through the development of new technologies and different modes of production/supply chains
- c) The transition to Net Zero which is an ongoing move away from fossil fuels and offsetting where necessary.

The importance of engagement is clear in each stage of this process and the establishment of effective “worker voice” channels as an essential component of a Just Transition process.

Assessing severity^{xix}

The UNGPs indicate that companies should focus on the impacts that cause the greatest harm to people (when impacts are not able to all be addressed at once). Initially companies need to prevent and mitigate those human rights impacts that would be most severe.

Severity refers to:

- Scope: how widespread would the impact be in terms of the number of people affected?
- Scale: how serious would the impact be on the rights concerned?
- Irremediability: how easy would it be to set things right?

Questions to understand the impact of climate change on the people in your company and supply chains

- Does your company consider the impacts on people as well as the business as part of its climate risk management strategy?
- How does your company define who is in the scope for assessment – i.e. direct supply chain, logistics and impacts on the communities where production/processing occurs?
- What are some of the complexities in your supply chain from a climate change perspective and how do you prioritise them?
- What information are you collecting via sustainability and human rights risk assessments that can be used to help understand impact and risk?
- How are you engaging with workers and other stakeholders to build their experiences into your understanding? What processes do you have for information to feed into decision-making?
- How are you working with your suppliers on income diversification? What additional support can you offer?
- Which workers are you looking at? Tier 1 level, or are there greater risks or vulnerabilities felt by e.g. small-scale farmers, and how do you understand their risks?
- Do you know who the most vulnerable people in your supply chain might be? How do you work with stakeholders to understand the risks and potential mitigation/adaptation strategies?
- How do you weight the risks to people and the risks to the business when developing mitigation or adaptation plans?

What would a joined-up / Just Transition approach look like in your company?

- Monthly meetings between Climate and HR Teams
- Combined risk assessment tools
- Climate and human rights impact assessments
- Climate and Human Rights Strategy
- High-level buy-in from senior managers

Resources

Data sources and Risk Assessment Tools

- **WWF water risk filter** (and they also have a biodiversity risk filter) (2022) <https://riskfilter.org/water/home>
- **Environmental performance index (EPI)** (2022) <https://epi.yale.edu/>
- **ND-GAIN** (July 2022) <https://gain.nd.edu/our-work/country-index/>
- **UNICEF Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI)** (Aug 2021) <https://data.unicef.org/resources/childrens-climate-risk-index-report/>

Background Information

- **ILO – Working on a warmer planet: The effects of heat stress on labour productivity and decent work** https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_711919.pdf
- **Shift - Climate Action & Human Rights: How the UN Guiding Principles can help companies respect human rights when responding to climate change (Feb 2023)** <https://shiftproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Climate-Report-Feb-28-2023.pdf>
- **Global Business initiative – Human rights and climate change** <https://qbihr.org/business-practice-portal/business-human-rights-and-the-climate-crisis>
<https://qbihr.org/business-human-rights-and-the-climate-crisis>
- **UNHCR – short film on human rights and climate change** <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/climate-change-and-disasters.html>
- **World Benchmarking Alliance** <https://www.worldbenchmarkingalliance.org/just-transition/>
- **Business Fights Poverty** <https://businessfightspoverty.org/climatejustice/#04b61c67aa84a>
- **Climate Justice Framework - guide to inform business action to put people at the centre of climate action.** The Climate Justice Playbook for Business: How to Centre Climate Action in Climate Justice <https://pardot.bcorporation.net/climate-justice-playbook-for-business-2021>

Just Transition

- **Just Transition: A Business Guide – from The B Team** <https://bteam.org/assets/reports/Just-Transition-A-Business-Guide.pdf>
- **IHRB – Just Transitions For All; Business, Human Rights and Climate Action**

[https://www.ihrb.org/uploads/reports/Just Transitions For All - Business%2C Human Rights%2C and Climate Action - IHRB Nov2020.pdf](https://www.ihrb.org/uploads/reports/Just%20Transitions%20For%20All%20-%20Business%20Human%20Rights%20and%20Climate%20Action%20-%20IHRB%20Nov2020.pdf)

- **European Commission - The Just Transition Mechanism**
https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/finance-and-green-deal/just-transition-mechanism_en
- **What is Just Transition?** <https://bteam.org/assets/reports/Just-Transition-A-Business-Guide.pdf>

Cross-Sector

- **Integrating human rights into environmental, social and health impact assessments. A practical guide for the oil and gas industry.**
<https://www.ipieca.org/resources/good-practice/integrating-human-rights-into-environmental-social-and-health-impact-assessments-a-practical-guide-for-the-oil-and-gas-industry/>

Organisations

- **Fairtrade International** <https://www.fairtrade.org.uk/Get-Involved/Current-campaigns/Fairtrade-and-Climate-Justice/>
- **Anti-slavery International** [https://www.antislavery.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/ASI ViciousCycle Report web2.pdf](https://www.antislavery.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/ASI-ViciousCycle-Report-web2.pdf)

References ^{xx}

ⁱ [https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/10/climate-change-greatest-threat-world-has-ever-faced-un-expert-warns#:~:text=NEW%20YORK%20\(21%20October%202022.price%2C%20a%20UN%20expert%20said.](https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/10/climate-change-greatest-threat-world-has-ever-faced-un-expert-warns#:~:text=NEW%20YORK%20(21%20October%202022.price%2C%20a%20UN%20expert%20said.)

ⁱⁱ <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/climate-issues/food>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/11/cop27-urgent-need-respect-human-rights-all-climate-change-action-say-un-experts>

^{iv} https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_711919.pdf

^v IOM Migration Research Series No.31: Migration and Climate Change – download report at [IOM Migration Research Series No. 31: Migration and Climate Change | International Organization for Migration](#)

^{vi} IOM Migration Research Series No.31: Migration and Climate Change – download report at [IOM Migration Research Series No. 31: Migration and Climate Change | International Organization for Migration](#)

^{vii} IOM Migration Research Series No.31: Migration and Climate Change – download report at [IOM Migration Research Series No. 31: Migration and Climate Change | International Organization for Migration](#)

^{viii} <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/agricultural-and-resource-economics-review/article/climate-change-salinization-and-highyield-rice-production-in-coastal-bangladesh/D118AAC97F779EB26F97DE207A5803CE>

^{ix} <https://www.worldwildlife.org/threats/water-scarcity>

^x IOM Migration Research Series No.31: Migration and Climate Change – download report at [IOM Migration Research Series No. 31: Migration and Climate Change | International Organization for Migration](#)

^{xi} <https://shiftproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Climate-Report-Feb-28-2023.pdf>

^{xii} <https://shiftproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Climate-Report-Feb-28-2023.pdf>

^{xiii} <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/climate-change/effects-of-climate-change#:~:text=UK%20winters%20are%20projected%20to,wetter%20summers%20are%20also%20possible>

^{xiv} <https://www.oecd.org/environment/cc/g20-climate/collapsecontents/Just-Transition-Centre-report-just-transition.pdf>

^{xv} <https://www.universal-rights.org/blog/cop27-human-rights/>

^{xvi} <https://www.cbi.org.uk/articles/uks-top-five-business-groups-call-for-a-just-transition-to-net-zero-by-2050/>

^{xvii} <https://bteam.org/assets/reports/Just-Transition-A-Business-Guide.pdf>

^{xviii} <https://shiftproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Climate-Report-Feb-28-2023.pdf>

^{xix} <https://shiftproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Climate-Report-Feb-28-2023.pdf>

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