

Rethinking Climate Adaptation: Labour Rights and Care Economy in Pakistan's Just Energy Transition

In collaboration with FES Pakistan

Pakistan stands at the intersection of climate vulnerability, energy transition, labour informality and gender inequality. As the country expands renewable energy and advances its climate commitments under the Paris Agreement and Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC 3.0), the transition presents opportunities for green employment and sustainable development. However, it also raises critical questions about workers' rights, livelihood security, social protection and the equitable distribution of transition costs and benefits.

Pakistan's labour market faces the challenges of informality, limited social protection coverage and low female labour force participation. These structural challenges make workers particularly vulnerable to climate related disruptions and economic restructuring. Agricultural labourers, daily wage earners, home-based workers, domestic workers and communities dependent on climate-sensitive livelihoods face heightened risks from floods, heatwaves, droughts and other environmental hazards. Meanwhile, the restructuring of fossil fuel-based energy generation and expansion of renewable energy require proactive planning to ensure that emerging green jobs provide decent working conditions, employment security and equal opportunities.

The care economy is a critical but often overlooked dimension of this transition. Women disproportionately undertake unpaid care and domestic work, while limited access to childcare, healthcare, eldercare and disability support constrains their economic participation. Climate shocks and energy poverty further intensify these responsibilities, increasing women's time poverty and reducing their ability to access employment, skills training and emerging green economic opportunities. Care work, both paid and unpaid, must therefore be recognised as essential social and economic infrastructure that sustains households, communities and the wider economy.

Despite progress in climate governance, renewable energy development and social protection, Pakistan's climate, energy, labour and care policies largely operate in separate institutional spaces. This fragmentation limits the effectiveness of adaptation measures and risks reproducing existing inequalities in the transition to a low-carbon economy.

A recent [FES position paper](#) sharpens this concern. It argues that Pakistan's energy transition, marked by surging solar power and fossil fuel phase-outs, is not merely a technical or climate challenge but fundamentally a labour governance challenge. Without deliberate, worker-centred policies, the [shift to renewables risks](#) deepening inequality, expanding informality, displacing vulnerable workers and excluding women from the emerging green economy. Pakistan has the policy foundations, but it lacks the integrated governance mechanisms needed to translate ambition into an equitable outcome.

Another [FES position paper](#) proposes a gender-responsive, worker-centred approach that integrates climate adaptation, decent work and the care economy into Pakistan's just energy transition. It positions Adaptive Social Protection (ASP) as a potential governance bridge connecting climate resilience, livelihood security, labour-market transformation and access to essential care services. Building existing social protection infrastructure, including the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), the approach seeks to move beyond reactive poverty alleviation towards a system that anticipates climate shocks, protects livelihoods and enables inclusive participation in the green economy.

This *Policy Roundtable* will explore how Pakistan can integrate climate adaptation, labour protection and care provision into a coherent and just energy transition framework. Specifically, it will:

- Examine the implications of climate change and energy sector restructuring for informal workers, vulnerable livelihoods and employment quality;
- Examine why Pakistan's energy transition is fundamentally a labour governance challenge, and how the absence of integrated governance mechanisms risks deepening inequality, expanding informality, displacing vulnerable workers and excluding women from the green economy;
- Highlight the role of unpaid care work and care infrastructure in shaping women's economic participation, climate resilience and access to green jobs;
- Explore how Adaptive Social Protection can connect climate-risk preparedness, shock-responsive assistance, livelihood recovery and employment support;
- Identify institutional, financing and governance arrangements to strengthen worker participation, gender equality and social dialogue in transition planning; and
- Develop practical policy recommendations for integrating decent work and care investment into climate adaptation and energy transition strategies.

The discussion will provide a platform to policymakers, researchers, development practitioners, labour organisations, women's rights advocates and social protection institutions to examine the connections between climate adaptation, labour and care by bringing together Pakistan's policy context, relevant research and international experiences to identify feasible approaches for coordinated action across sectors and levels of government. The panel will also draw on the position papers' practical recommendations for government, trade unions, employers and development partners.

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