

How can COP26 address climate change and modern slavery?

From the Modern Slavery Strategy Implementation Group's International Task Force Group civil society organisation (CSO) members.

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The world is experiencing climate breakdown and an era where the provision of human rights and dignity is stalling. Something is broken and the status quo will not fix it. In our joint statement with MSSIG, we make the case for radical approaches that will protect people and planet.

Climate action at the Conference of Parties (COP26) needs to happen fast, and it also needs to be participatory and fair to achieve sustainable, more equal, and resilient societies. According to [the IPCC](#) (the United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change) limiting global warming to 1.5°C rather than 2°C could reduce the number of people exposed to climate-related risks and susceptible to poverty by up to several hundred million by 2050.

Climate change is costly, deadly and hits hardest those who are least responsible for causing it. [The Climate Vulnerable Forum](#) estimates that developing countries could face financial losses of US\$4 trillion per year by 2030. Low-income countries are exposed to some of the most severe climate impacts, have the least capacity to adapt and find it hardest to recover from the loss and damage caused by devastating floods, droughts, heatwaves, cyclones, and rising sea levels.

In many cases these conditions lead to people being forced to migrate and leave the lands or the jobs that can no longer provide them with a living¹. In an increasing number of cases this makes them open to exploitation, trafficking and modern slavery². The [World Bank](#) predicts that as many as 143 million people will migrate within their own borders in just three regions of the world by 2050 unless action is taken to address climate change. 30.1 million weather-related displacements took place in 2020, including 9.8 million affecting children according to IDMC and UNICEF UK.

This is the decade in which we must collectively limit climate change and make our societies more equal and just. Otherwise, we will emerge from the global pandemic locked into a climate and poverty emergency in which already marginalised people become exploited though forced, child slavery and forced marriage, and trafficking.

COP26 is an important test of the Paris Agreement and an opportunity for governments of the world to raise their ambition in response to the climate crisis.

¹ Migrants and their vulnerability to Human Trafficking, Modern Slavery and Exploitation. Available at https://www.google.com/url?q=https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/migrants_and_their_vulnerability.pdf&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1622548209764000&usq=AOvVaw3UVDxZevkhPW9LL4pukipM p60

² Murky Waters, WalkFree, Available at: <https://www.walkfree.org/reports/murky-waters/>

1. Mitigation Ambition - to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C,

The world has already experienced over 1°C of warming, and is on course with the aggregated current governmental commitments (Nationally Determined Contributions – NDCs) to a devastating 3°C or more of warming.

COP26 must commit to deliver on the Paris Agreement: it must deliver NDCs and long-term strategies that are consistent with pursuing efforts to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C. These efforts must be equitable and benefit vulnerable and marginalised people, including people in, or vulnerable to, modern slavery.

COP26 must commit to support the world's economies (especially developed nations) to transition rapidly away from using fossil fuels in accordance with the Paris Agreement.

2. Adaptation Finance

Finance to support developing countries to adapt has stagnated at only 20% of overall climate finance for many years. COP26 must reaffirm the global commitment to providing \$100 billion USD annually to support climate action in developing countries and work towards a new post-2025 financial goal that considers the needs and aspirations of developing countries, including for resilience and adaptation.

COP26 must ensure that governments commit to 50% of climate finance to be allocated to adaptation; and ensure that support is accessible and responsive to the needs and rights of women, children, and other marginalized groups, including people who are in, or vulnerable to, climate-induced migration, trafficking and modern slavery.

COP26 must scale up and champion locally-led adaptation that strengthens the decision-making power of affected people, particularly marginalised groups (including people who are in, or vulnerable to, trafficking and modern slavery, including women, children, people with disabilities, indigenous peoples, etc.), and strengthens local structures, processes, and institutions.

3. Loss and Damage

Loss and damage, a framework known as the Warsaw Mechanism, acknowledges the existence of climate change impacts that are beyond the remit of adaptation. Investing in affordable and accessible risk management including social safety nets, risk transfers and resilience affirms the universal commitment for the protection of people's right to life, and the value of ecosystems and the means to support life and livelihoods that will help avert loss and damage (including climate-induced migration, trafficking and modern slavery) from climate-related risks.

COP26 must unlock the loss and damage negotiations and address the social, cultural, and economic losses and damage caused by impacts now and in the future, as well as irreversible losses from climate change. This includes agreeing resources to provide technical assistance (known as the Santiago mechanism).

COP26 must establish new and additional sources of finance for loss and damage, and explore a range of options including cancellation of debt during times of crisis, shifting subsidies, and a climate damages tax.

4. A Just Transition

Keeping the world to 1.5°C average global warming means reducing greenhouse gas emissions 45% below their 2010 levels by 2030; and reaching 'net zero' emissions by 2050³.^[1] This transition needs to be fair, to be “just”. That means that transitions need to respect the fundamental rights of all those involved, particularly the most vulnerable.

This “Just Transition” is articulated in the Paris Agreement, which clearly states that “Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity.”⁴^[2]

In order to respond to the climate crisis the Just Transition needs to be built into economic recovery planning from the COVID-19 pandemic. This requires ensuring that the expansion of low-carbon energy and infrastructure does not harm people or the environment. At COP26 governments need to ensure that as well as providing transition support to workers in traditional carbon intensive industry, they ensure commitment from the renewable energy industry and not turn a blind eye to the use of forced labour and modern slavery in their operations.

5. Conclusion

COP26 must deliver on the vision of a global, just and transformational recovery that integrates, defends and expands human rights; and reduces inequality by prioritizing the needs of the most affected, marginalised and discriminated people. An integrated social, economic, and environmental response is needed that builds the resilience of vulnerable populations to climate impacts and modern slavery.

³ IPCC Report <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

⁴ Paris Agreement: https://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/convention/application/pdf/english_paris_agreement.pdf