



Climate Vulnerable Forum
Foro de Vulnerabilidad Climática
Forum de la Vulnérabilité Climatique

28 April 2016

PRESS RELEASE

MAJOR NEW CLIMATE THREAT: RISING HEAT IN THE WORKPLACE

GENEVA – 28 April 2016: Emerging economies face as much as 10 per cent losses in working hours because of deteriorating thermal conditions in the workplace due to climate change, according to a new report released today.

The estimated losses imply adverse consequences of a similar scale to economic output, or GDP, for a wide range of developing countries, including India, Indonesia and Nigeria, as highlighted by the report.

Strengthening current plans for greenhouse gas emission cuts under the Paris Agreement on climate change would, according to the study, significantly reduce the economic and public health impact of escalating workplace heat.

The findings were presented at International Labour Organization (ILO) headquarters in Geneva, together with the 43-nation Climate Vulnerable Forum, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), ILO, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Organization of Employers (IOE), UNI Global Union, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), ACT Alliance, and with the support of the World Health Organization (WHO).

The release marked International Workers' Memorial Day, with the report calling excessive workplace heat a well-known occupational health and productivity danger behind growing risks of heat exhaustion, heat stroke and, "in extreme cases", death.

The joint study, "Climate Change and Labour: Impacts of Heat in the Workplace" is based on updated research into labour-related effects for different economies exposed to increasingly extreme thermal conditions because of climate change.

More than one billion employees and their employers and communities in vulnerable countries already grapple with such severe heat in the workplace, the report finds, and the impact of climate change on labour is not being adequately accounted for by international and national climate or employment policies. For one country, the report found that reductions to total available working hours due to climate change had already reached an estimated 4 per cent by the 1990s, highlighting the immediacy of the challenge.



Highly exposed zones include the Southern United States, Central America and the Caribbean, Northern South America, North and West Africa, South and South East Asia, according to the report. Especially vulnerable are Least Developed Countries, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and emerging economies with high concentrations of outdoor labour and industrial and service sector workers operating in ineffectively climate-controlled conditions.

Even with the stronger 1.5-degree Celsius limit settled on under the Paris Agreement, key regions would face almost an entire month of added extreme heat each year by 2030 (2010-2030), the report finds. Such heat reduces work productivity, increases the need for work breaks and elevates risks to health and occupational injuries—effects that also entail lower productive output on a "macro-scale" according to the study.

Speaking at the report's launch, Cecelia Rebong, Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the UN, said the impact of heat in the workplace adds "another layer of vulnerability to developing countries already reeling from the adverse impacts of climate change." The need to limit global warming was "urgent and critical", she added.

According to the report, "when it is too hot, people work less effectively out-of-doors, in factories, the office or on the move due to diminished ability for physical exertion and for completing mental tasks."

"Governments and international organizations have long put in place standards on thermal conditions in the workplace. But climate change has already altered thermal conditions," and "additional warming is a serious challenge for any worker or employer reliant on outdoor or non-air conditioned work." Levels of heat are already "very high" even for acclimatized populations, it noted.

Technical development of the joint report was based on research of the High Occupational Temperature Health and Productivity Suppression (Hothaps) program of the Ruby Coast Research Centre, Mapua, New Zealand, led by Tord Kjellstrom.

The study was supported with funding under the International Climate Initiative by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB) through the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

Download the full report here: <http://www.thecvf.org/climate-labour-impacts/>

Additional quotes

Cecelia Rebong, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations "Excessive heat puts exposed working populations at greater risk from heat-induced stresses and undermines growth by compromising productivity. Vulnerable groups need significant support to tackle rising heat in the workplace, but there are also limits and costs associated with adapting to the heat. All of these underscore the urgent and critical need to limit global warming to the minimum in accordance with the goals, including the 1.5° C goal, set out in the Paris Agreement that 175 nations signed only last week."

Maria Luisa Silva, UNDP Geneva Director "We embarked on this report to give recognition to this specific and serious concern, and to begin the conversation on how to respond and deal with it. The challenges have to be addressed by governments, employers, employees and other relevant international organizations if we want to be able to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030."

Philip Jennings, General Secretary of UNI Global Union "Today on International Workers' Memorial Day, we pay tribute to workers round the world who have lost their lives on the job. It's often the poorest workers who pay the ultimate price. Workers who are being exposed to extreme heat need to have access to a cooling environment,

shade, water, protective clothing and enough time for rest breaks. This is particularly true for people who do physical work, for example out in the fields, mines and factories. Imagine working in a shoe manufacturer in Vietnam or a clothing factory in Bangladesh when it is 35°C. Governments, and employers have to take this issue of the cauldron of a warming planet seriously and develop some effective policy responses and practical measures to protect workers. We know the challenges and we know what needs to be done to make it happen."

Sharan Burrow, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation "A rise in temperature risks the health of workers and the productivity in work environments where the heat is debilitating - climate action is urgent to protect workers now and in the future. Climate change is real, and action to halt its devastating impact is in our hands. "

Saleemul Huq, Chair of the Expert Advisors Group to the Climate Vulnerable Forum and Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development "It is the people of vulnerable countries like Bangladesh who stand to lose the most as the planet warms. Those who work in the fields may ruin their health just by trying to put a meal on the table. If we are to take sustainable development seriously, we have to scale up climate action across the board and fund real ways of adapting communities to these new everyday extremes."

Moustapha Kamal Gueye, ILO Green Jobs Programme "The findings of the report highlight the importance of occupational safety and health policies as important dimensions in the responses to climate change."

John Nduna, ACT Alliance General Secretary "Climate change impacts all aspects of society, therefore it is through partnership and joint collaboration among all actors, including civil society, that we will reach shared understandings of the issues to be addressed, and subsequently shared solutions."

Mrs. Dina Ionesco, Director of Migration, Environment and Climate Change Division for the IOM "When people are forced to take breaks and work less, or face serious health and injury risks because of extreme heat, families, incomes and food security suffer. These became factors that are driving people to move. As the effects of global warming become more extreme, migration can be a strategy to adapt to these changes."

Notes for editors

Founded in 2009, the Climate Vulnerable Forum is an international partnership of 43 nations from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Pacific working to tackle global climate change through collaboration on common goals, communications and the sharing of expertise and experience.

Participating members of the Forum: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Barbados, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Comoros, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Fiji, Ghana, Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Kenya, Kiribati, Madagascar, Malawi, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Mongolia, Morocco, Nepal, Niger, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines (Chair), Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Senegal, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tanzania, Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Viet Nam and Yemen.

Full report:

Climate Change and Labour: Impacts of Heat in the Workplace
Climate Change Workplace Environmental Conditions, Occupational Health Risks, and Productivity – An Emerging Global Challenge to Decent Work, Sustainable Development and Social Equity
<http://www.thevcvf.org/climate-labour-impacts/> (English, Pdf, 1mb)

Links:

www.thevcvf.org
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Partners:

United Nations Development Programme
International Labour Organisation
International Organization for Migration
World Health Organization
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ACT Alliance
International Organization of Employers
International Trade Union Confederation
UNI Global Union

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The Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) is a Member State led initiative. UNDP hosts a global support project to assist the CVF's South-South cooperation activities.



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Resilient nations.*