



The Time Has Come to Take Care Seriously in Climate Policy

A Care Centred Just Transition Mechanism

The Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP) is one of the negotiation tracks that delivered some of the most significant wins for social justice in Belém (CAN International 2025). This, of course, includes the decision to develop a just transition mechanism, which draws inspiration from the Belém Action Mechanism, an effort led by civil society to build principles of social justice into the institutional architecture of just transition implementation globally (CAN International and Women and Gender Constituency 2025). However, another important outcome is the inclusion of care in the final JTWP text. This short brief describes the post COP30 moment, highlighting the opportunity it presents, to more thoroughly integrate care in climate policy, especially in the development of the just transition mechanism.

As the dust (and ashes) from COP30 settle there is one issue that warrants a bit more press than it has received: That issue is care. This brief describes the post COP30 moment, highlighting the opportunity it presents, to more thoroughly integrate care in climate policy, especially in the development of the just transition mechanism.

Care at COP30

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Constituency 2025). However, another important outcome is the inclusion of care in the final JTWP text.

Just transition frameworks often prioritize formal employment in carbon-intensive sectors such as energy, manufacturing, and transport. This narrow focus has frequently overlooked the foundational role of care work in sustaining human wellbeing and ecological balance (Jones-Renaud *et al.* 2024). Care systems encompass the policies, services, resources and social relations that enable the provision, access and valuation of care across societies. Their ability to absorb shocks, support health and social reproduction, and strengthen community ties makes them indispensable for climate resilience, climate adaptation and the pursuit of more just and sustainable economies. However, care systems remain structurally undervalued and underfunded, particularly in contexts marked by gender inequality and



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informality. Informal workers—especially those in care roles—remain largely invisible in climate policy and financing, despite representing the majority of the global workforce (Pucheta *et al.* 2023).

UNRISD, along with other advocates for taking care seriously in climate policy, went to Belém armed with evidence of this foundational role that care plays and arguments for why climate policy should take it seriously (UNRISD 2025). Numerous panels on the topic convened experts and frontline activists, to show just how essential care is to ensuring a truly just transition. In Belém we saw the bridging of climate and care agendas by fostering dialogue among researchers, policymakers, and care organizations to identify entry points for integrating care into national just transition plans, international climate finance, and green recovery strategies. Many scholars and activists amplified what becomes obvious the moment you take care seriously: Care is climate infrastructure. Care workers are essential to just transition.

Research suggests that climate change exacerbates care burdens and weakens care systems, while also showing how robust care systems can enhance climate resilience and adaptation (Jones-Renaud *et al.* 2024, Phalatse *et al.* 2024). And a new report on Just Transition and Care by UNRISD and the Just Transition and Care Network invites us to rethink the just transition framework based on the experiences, perspectives and demands of care workers (both waged and unwaged) and their organizations (Barca *et al.* 2025). The first care pavilion at a COP event found its roots at the Eco Amazônia space and community centre, hosting debates, convening key stakeholders and offering a breath of fresh air for weary conference attendees in the middle of two intense weeks of climate negotiations.

These efforts contribute to a growing movement to reframe just transition agendas through the lived experiences and demands of

care workers and their organizations, and to recognize care systems as essential to sustaining life, wellbeing and resilience in the face of intersecting social and ecological crises. They seek to reclaim the original emancipatory spirit of just transition by highlighting care as a strategic pillar of climate justice. Feminist, Indigenous, peasant, and climate justice movements have long argued that care systems—comprising caregiving labour, infrastructures, and community networks—are central to socioecological transformation (Razavi 2011). The panels and side events in Belém were, of course, just one iteration of a long trajectory of organizing, evidence gathering and advocating for climate policy makers to take care seriously.

These efforts have at times seemed to be an uphill battle, but curiously, recognizing the immeasurable value of care to our societies and its importance for climate policy, was not, in fact, the biggest sticking point in the JTWP negotiations. Raising almost no eyebrows, care slipped into the final text of the Just Transition Work Programme, which recognizes: “The importance of education systems and skills development, including through upskilling and reskilling that respond to labour market needs, of labour rights and social protection systems, and of consideration of the informal sector, the care economy, unemployed people and future workers for ensuring just transitions” (UAE JTWP 2025, 3).

According to one representative of the UNFCCC Women and Gender Constituency, this is the first time the word care has appeared in an approved text negotiated under the UNFCCC framework. There were plenty of heated issues in JTWP negotiations, from the lack of direct mention of fossil fuels, to attempts to erase the word gender all together. But in the case of the inclusion of care, it is as if its time had finally come.

Care everywhere

Indeed, the time to take care seriously is long overdue. And when one starts paying attention, it is clear that care is not only central to COP negotiations. As many have noted, the COVID-19 pandemic rendered the importance of essential care work so visible, ignoring it requires active avoidance (Bolis *et al.* 2020, UN Women 2025). Initiatives like [the Global Alliance for Care](#) have further pushed the issue into public debates. Beyond general public awareness, institutional and legal architecture is shifting in important ways to make care more visible and valued as well.

In November 2022, [the Buenos Aires Commitment](#) was adopted at the fifteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, which was organized by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Regional Office for the Americas and the Caribbean of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Government of Argentina. This commitment sets out a roadmap for building a society based on care and committed to gender equality. And in August 2025, the Latin American and Caribbean region made even bolder strides by adopting the [\(Tlatelolco Commitment\)](#), in which Member States of ECLAC established a Decade of Action (2025-2035) to build a care society.

With its [Advisory Opinion 31/25](#) in June 2025, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights recognized care as an autonomous human right. For the first time, an international tribunal has declared that every person has the right to receive care, to provide care under dignified conditions, and to care for themselves. “This recognition reflects a growing regional commitment to care as a pillar of equality and social justice within the Inter-American system, marking a paradigm shift in how societies value and organize care,

and setting a precedent for similar initiatives in other regions” (UNRISD 2025).

In July 2025, at the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, investment in care was recognized as a key condition for sustainable development. This affirms the conclusions of the IDRC-supported briefing paper on climate finance for care, which further argues that care must be recognized as climate infrastructure (Williams 2025). It calls for reforms to global climate finance mechanisms—including the Green Climate Fund (GCF), Adaptation Fund (AF), and the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD)—to explicitly fund care systems and include care actors in governance and decision-making. This realization was even underscored by Vlad Arnaoudov of the Adaptation Fund, who [explained](#) how social protection (institutional architecture that supports care) is increasingly integrated into adaptation projects, even when not explicitly stated in mandates. Project evaluations show improvements in equity, income diversification and resilience among marginalized groups. The Fund is updating its results framework to track social protection outcomes more systematically and is contributing to global guidance on climate-responsive social protection.

As [the gender equality and climate policy scorecard](#) being developed by UN Women reveals, this round of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) has seen increased attention to integrating issues like care and gender into climate policy processes. Some 45 percent of NDCs analyzed show an incorporation of national gender equality machinery within existing national climate change coordination mechanisms (UN Women 2025). And the as Gender and Climate Focal Point from the Cambodian Government, Vichetratha Khlok [affirmed](#), based on her involvement in the development of Cambodia’s NDC 3.0: “investing in care is climate action.”

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The way forward

As multiple discussions at COP30 made clear, investing in care increases climate resilience, and care workers have strategic and essential contributions to make to just transition efforts. But it's not only about adding care to conventional ways of understanding the economy. It must be financed, yes, but we must not fall into the trap of treating care like a bill we can just tack onto the list of debts owed. Care is a lens, and a set of priorities that can guide full system transformation.

The development of the just transition mechanism is an opportunity to integrate care into climate policy. The fact that care is also in that JTWP text offers a lever to push efforts towards the full system transformation that we need, making care the ordering principle.

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