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Just transitions: protection, financing and who gains

What dated ILO policy examples reveal about protection during economic change, fiscal choices and the gap between roadmaps and demonstrated outcomes.

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Transition plans and present protection

The ILO's May 2025 Global Accelerator roadmap warns that responses to climate, digital and demographic transitions may increase poverty, informal employment and inequality, creating risks of social instability. Eighteen countries had joined the Accelerator by that date, committing to integrate policy efforts on decent jobs, social protection and just transitions with enhanced financing and collaboration across ministries, social partners, the UN, development partners and international financial institutions.

Salient One analysis

These commitments, as framed by the ILO under the Global Accelerator framework, establish policy intentions rather than enforceable guarantees. The roadmap's framing of social exclusion risks acknowledges that transition processes can generate adverse distributional effects before protective institutions are in place. Whether present protection reaches affected populations depends on domestic implementation, fiscal capacity and institutional delivery, none of which a country's accession to the Accelerator establishes. The gap between joining a multilateral initiative and delivering usable protection is precisely what outcome evidence must examine.

Employment gains and displaced workers

The ILO roadmap identifies green investments as offering job creation potential, citing Namibia and Uzbekistan in renewable energy and the Philippines in greening transportation and construction. In energy-sector transitions, Colombia, Indonesia and Viet Nam are described as strengthening social protection and employment policies for affected coal-industry workers. Indonesia specifically “plans to expand unemployment protection during the acceleration of renewable energy development, while Paraguay and Uzbekistan focus on green skills development through vocational education”.

Salient One analysis

Planned job creation in emerging green sectors does not establish protection for workers bearing adjustment costs in declining industries. The mechanism by which displaced workers access new employment involves skills matching, geographic mobility, timing gaps and labour-market power asymmetries that aggregate investment figures cannot capture. Indonesia's planned unemployment protection expansion and Paraguay's and Uzbekistan's proposed green skills actions remain intentions whose effect depends on eligibility design, benefit adequacy and actual programme operation. Without delivery and outcome evidence, job-creation potential cannot be distinguished from realised transitions for affected workers.

Financing and distributional costs

The ILO roadmap frames fiscal space as a product of macroeconomic policy choices, calling for evidence-based dialogue between finance ministries and central banks on one side and labour ministries and social partners on the other, to converge towards job-rich growth with social protection. It cites Senegal as having reallocated fossil fuel subsidies to its family benefits programme in 2023, following a fiscal space analysis and financing options assessment. Policy coherence across economic and environmental sectors is described as crucial to unlock financing, with climate finance potentially creating decent jobs and extending universal social protection.

Salient One analysis

Fiscal policy trade-offs involve distributional choices about who bears transition costs and who captures new investment. Senegal's reported subsidy reallocation illustrates a mechanism by which environmental and social fiscal objectives can be aligned, but the ILO synthesis does not provide evidence on the reallocation's scale, the affected households' prior dependence on subsidised energy, or whether family benefits reached those households. The convergence the roadmap envisions between macroeconomic and social policies presupposes political settlements that the document cannot establish. Competing interpretations exist: subsidy reform can reduce household purchasing power before compensatory benefits materialise, and the sequencing determines whether protection is usable when needed.

Protection for informal and seasonal workers

The ILO agriculture brief identifies that qualifying conditions in contributory schemes, such as minimum thresholds for employment duration or working hours, can effectively exclude large groups of agricultural workers including seasonal workers, day labourers and casual workers, even where legislation does not explicitly exclude them. Agricultural workers often have irregular and low earnings that limit contributory capacity, with seasonal production creating income patterns poorly adapted to standard monthly contribution requirements.

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The exclusion mechanism operates through design features that appear neutral but interact with employment patterns to deny coverage. Minimum-duration thresholds and monthly contribution schedules assume stable, year-round employment that seasonal and casual agricultural work does not provide. The ILO brief's reference to the Republic of Korea, where agricultural workers may pay contributions quarterly and are exempted while receiving disaster relief, illustrates an adaptation mechanism that aligns contribution schedules with income variability. Whether such design modifications reach intended beneficiaries depends on implementation, employer compliance and workers' awareness, which the brief identifies as requiring detailed assessment involving social partners.

Social dialogue and accountability

The ILO agriculture brief states that access to complaint and appeal mechanisms may be limited or absent in rural areas, with workers facing long distances, administrative delays, capacity constraints and costs including transportation, documentation fees, lost earnings and legal assistance. It also recommends detailed assessments of agricultural workers' circumstances involving social partners and relevant stakeholders. Separately, the Global Accelerator roadmap describes countries' commitment to collaboration among ministries, employers' and workers' organisations, civil society and development partners.

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Complaint and appeal routes can become unusable when pursuing them costs workers more time or money than they can afford. The agriculture brief's examples of travel costs, lost earnings and administrative delays explain how formal access can coexist with practical exclusion. Its recommendation for participatory assessments offers a way to identify such barriers. The roadmap's collaboration commitments provide a related policy intention, but neither passage establishes whether affected workers influenced a particular scheme or obtained an effective remedy.

Digital systems and access

The ILO roadmap states that the digital transition offers opportunities for job creation, productivity enhancement and improved efficiency, accessibility and inclusivity of social protection and skills development, but presupposes that individuals' political, cultural and personal rights, including confidentiality of private information, are protected. The roadmap also notes that countries including Albania, Indonesia, Paraguay and Uzbekistan aim to strengthen social protection systems for climate shocks through investments in data systems and actuarial models.

Salient One analysis

The roadmap links digital opportunities to protection of personal rights and confidentiality. This supports a conditional interpretation: faster administration alone does not establish acceptable or inclusive protection. Planned investments in data systems could support responses to climate shocks, but their delivery effects and handling of personal information require separate evidence. The cited passages do not describe safeguards in operation or demonstrate that the planned systems improved access. Assessing those outcomes would require evidence beyond the roadmap's statements of opportunity and intent.

Measuring gains, losses and delivery

The ILO roadmap calls for understanding diverse actors and their economic relations across sectors and value chains to identify concrete measures such as automatic registration, tax and social contribution collection, improved working conditions and skills programmes, with lessons expandable to other sectors. The ILO agriculture brief recommends detailed assessments of different groups of agricultural workers and their employers to understand contributory capacity, employment patterns, land and production realities and available infrastructure.

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Discriminating policy intent from effect requires evidence on who gains and who loses from specific measures, when protection becomes usable and whether delivery channels reach intended populations. The ILO's recommended sectoral assessments could generate such evidence if they track coverage changes, benefit receipt and exclusion rates across worker categories. However, the roadmaps describe proposed measures and intended benefits, not observed outcomes. A before-after description of policy changes does not establish that affected workers experienced improved protection, and the absence of evaluation results in these extracts leaves the question of whether evaluations were conducted explicitly unknown.

Limits of the available evidence

Both documents are ILO policy syntheses: the May 2025 Global Accelerator roadmap and the agriculture brief. The roadmap describes country plans and commitments as of May 2025, including Indonesia's planned unemployment protection expansion and Senegal's reported 2023 subsidy reallocation. The agriculture brief identifies legal and administrative barriers to agricultural workers' coverage and references design adaptations such as the Republic of Korea's quarterly contribution option.

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These two ILO documents are policy syntheses from the same institution, rather than independent corroborating evaluations. Indonesia's dated plan to expand unemployment protection does not prove current implementation, and Senegal's reported reallocation does not establish measured outcomes for affected families. The agriculture brief describes exclusion mechanisms and a contribution-timing example; those descriptions do not verify current practice in every scheme. Establishing improved protection would require evidence of delivery, benefit receipt and outcomes for affected groups beyond the selected passages. Missing results here do not establish that evaluations never occurred.

Sources and attribution

1. From commitment to action: The Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions
   May 2025 · Retrieved 6 November 2026

   Used for: Transition plans and present protection, paragraphs 1, 2; Employment gains and displaced workers, paragraphs 1, 2; Financing and distributional costs, paragraphs 1, 2; Social dialogue and accountability, paragraphs 1, 2; Digital systems and access, paragraphs 1, 2; Measuring gains, losses and delivery, paragraphs 1, 2; Limits of the available evidence, paragraphs 1, 2.

   International Labour Organization. 2025. From commitment to action: The Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions. WSSD2 policy brief, May 2025. https://doi.org/10.54394/DMGP1834. Licensed under CC BY 4.0. CC BY 4.0

   ILO-authored narrative in the selected passages only. Excludes charts, photographs, logos, references and third-party material. Country roadmaps and plans reflect the May 2025 publication and do not establish implementation or outcomes.

   Adapted from ILO material; changes have been made. This adaptation was not prepared, reviewed or endorsed by the ILO.

2. Extending social protection coverage to workers in the agricultural sector and their families: Lessons from international experience
   28 April 2026 · Retrieved 6 November 2026

   Used for: Protection for informal and seasonal workers, paragraphs 1, 2; Social dialogue and accountability, paragraphs 1, 2; Measuring gains, losses and delivery, paragraphs 1, 2; Limits of the available evidence, paragraphs 1, 2.

   International Labour Organization. 2026. Extending social protection coverage to workers in the agricultural sector and their families: Lessons from international experience. Social Protection Spotlight Brief. Geneva: ILO. https://doi.org/10.54394/00034206. Licensed under CC BY 4.0. CC BY 4.0

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