

Support for effective and inclusive Trade Unions in Bangladesh

Trade Union Position Paper

**Climate change implications and the status of
just transition in the informal economy
(Rickshaw puller, Transport, Platform economy)**

This position paper is developed by the trade unions with the technical support of the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies – BILS. This is the outcome of extensive consultations with stakeholders, including national trade union centers, labour rights support national and international organizations and other social partners. It reflects the collective insights and consensus achieved through a series of discussions.



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1. Introduction

The informal transport sector, encompassing rickshaw pullers, bus workers, and platform-based transport drivers, forms a critical backbone of Dhaka's urban mobility and economic activity. However, these workers are disproportionately affected by climate change, exacerbating vulnerabilities and threatening employment security. This position paper highlights the pressing issues, trade union (TU) roles, and actionable strategies to ensure a just transition towards climate-resilient and equitable practices in the sector.

The impacts of climate change, such as extreme heat, erratic rainfall, and urban flooding, pose significant risks to the informal transport sector. These challenges are further compounded by limited social protections and inadequate access to green infrastructure. Trade unions have a pivotal role to play in advocating for the rights of workers, building resilience, and ensuring that the transition to sustainable practices is equitable and inclusive.

2. Core issues

2.1 Climate change impacts

- ★ Rising temperatures and extreme weather events increase health risks, reduce working hours, and lower earnings.
- ★ Air pollution and urban environmental degradation threaten the health of transport workers, leading to chronic respiratory diseases and other health concerns.
- ★ Increased flooding and waterlogging disrupt transportation networks, causing frequent vehicle breakdowns and maintenance challenges.
- ★ Shifts towards green transportation policies, including bans on traditional rickshaws and the transition to electric vehicles, threaten job security for informal workers who lack access to capital for upgrading their transport modes.
- ★ Unpredictable monsoons and extreme heat waves make working conditions unbearable, leading to increased occupational health risks and productivity losses.
- ★ Rising expenses for vehicle maintenance and personal protective measures further strain their already limited incomes. Frequent repairs due to climate-related wear and tear exacerbate financial pressures on workers who lease or own their vehicles.
- ★ Exposure to heat, air pollution, and waterlogging-related diseases significantly increases medical expenses. Respiratory issues, dehydration, and vector-borne diseases like dengue are prevalent among workers.

2.2 Job security and transition challenges

- ★ Informal transport workers operate without formal contracts, leaving them vulnerable to job loss and exploitation by vehicle owners and service providers.
- ★ Regulatory changes, such as restrictions on certain types of transport, disproportionately affect workers without offering viable alternatives or compensation mechanisms.
- ★ The transition to eco-friendly transportation lacks proper planning, reskilling programs, and financial support for affected workers, limiting their ability to adapt to emerging industry trends.
- ★ Women and marginalized workers face additional barriers in securing sustainable employment, exacerbating socio-economic inequalities within the sector.
- ★ The informal nature of the sector limits access to financial credit or investment opportunities necessary for business sustainability.

2.3 Barriers to climate resilience

- ★ Limited access to financial resources prevents workers from upgrading their vehicles, purchasing protective equipment, or investing in alternative livelihoods.
- ★ Lack of awareness and education about climate adaptation strategies leaves workers unprepared to cope with changing environmental conditions.
- ★ Absence of social protection schemes (such as health insurance, pension plans, and unemployment

benefits) increases vulnerability, making it difficult for workers to recover from climate-induced economic shocks.

- ★ Poor urban infrastructure, including inadequate drainage systems and insufficient public transport facilities, exacerbates the negative impacts of climate change on transport workers.
- ★ The absence of emergency preparedness programs leaves transport workers vulnerable to disasters and displacement.

3. Challenges for trade unions

3.1 Organizing informal workers

- ★ The fragmented and unregulated nature of the informal economy makes worker organization difficult, limiting collective bargaining power.
- ★ Many informal workers are unaware of their labor rights or hesitant to join trade unions due to fear of repercussions from employers or regulatory bodies.
- ★ The lack of institutional support for unionizing informal workers creates barriers to mobilization and advocacy efforts.

3.2 Resource constraints

- ★ Trade unions lack the financial and human resources to effectively campaign for climate resilience, labor rights, and social protections.
- ★ Limited access to government and donor funding restricts capacity-building initiatives and limits the ability of unions to provide financial assistance to affected workers.
- ★ Dependence on voluntary participation and limited membership fees reduces the financial sustainability of trade union activities.
- ★ Technical expertise is required to guide green transitions effectively. Investing in TU capacity-building programs can address this gap.

3.3 Stakeholder collaboration

- ★ The absence of a coordinated approach among government agencies, businesses, and labor organizations hampers progress in developing comprehensive just transition policies.
- ★ Conflicting interests between environmental policies and labor protections create challenges in policy negotiations, requiring strong advocacy and coalition-building efforts.
- ★ Engaging international bodies in supporting just transition programs remains a challenge due to bureaucratic complexities and differing policy priorities.

3.4 TU's inherent weaknesses

- ★ No unity and cooperation among TUs
- ★ TUs work in comfort zone, not interested in taking challenges or programs
- ★ TU leaders do not have enough knowledge about climate change and climate change related issues
- ★ Lower participation of youth workers
- ★ Lack of ethical standard of the TU leaders
- ★ TU executives work as leader not organiser

4. Trade Union barriers and their impact on unionization

Barrier	Description	Impact on unionization
Low awareness	Many informal workers are unaware of the existence, role, and benefits of trade unions. This lack of awareness prevents them from joining or actively participating in union activities.	Fewer workers seek union representation, leading to weaker collective bargaining power and difficulty in securing labor rights.

Barrier	Description	Impact on unionization
Legal exclusion	Informal workers, such as rickshaw pullers and day laborers, are not protected by formal labor laws. Many legal frameworks do not recognize them as employees, limiting their ability to unionize.	Without legal backing, unions cannot negotiate fair wages, job security, or workplace protections, leaving workers vulnerable to exploitation.
Funding issues	Trade unions often struggle with limited financial resources, making it difficult to organize events, provide legal support, or lobby for policy changes. Contributions from informal workers are often inconsistent.	Insufficient funds weaken the union's ability to advocate effectively, provide member benefits, and sustain long-term campaigns for better working conditions.

5. Trade union roles and responsibilities

5.1 Advocacy for just transition

- ★ Push for policies that integrate informal workers into national labor frameworks and social protection schemes, ensuring legal recognition and employment rights.
- ★ Engage in policy dialogues with government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations to ensure a fair transition to green transport and climate-resilient employment strategies.
- ★ Advocate for inclusive planning that involves workers in decision-making processes, ensuring that climate and labor policies align with workers' needs and aspirations.
- ★ Promote sector-specific labor standards that protect transport workers from environmental hazards and provide compensation for climate-related damages.
- ★ Lobby for the inclusion of informal workers in financial assistance programs for green vehicle adoption.

5.2 Capacity building

- ★ Provide education and awareness programs on climate resilience, labor rights, and alternative livelihood opportunities through trade unions and community organizations.
- ★ Organize training and reskilling initiatives to help workers transition into emerging green jobs, including electric vehicle operation, renewable energy-related employment, and public transport management.
- ★ Strengthen organizational structures within trade unions to effectively represent informal transport workers in policy discussions and negotiations with stakeholders.
- ★ Establish legal aid and counseling services for transport workers facing unfair labor practices, contract disputes, or climate-related job displacement Monitoring and evaluation.

5.3 Expanding access to financial and social protections

- ★ Establish microfinance programs tailored for informal transport workers to support climate adaptation strategies.
- ★ Advocate for government-subsidized insurance schemes that protect workers from sudden income losses due to climate-induced disruptions.
- ★ Push for housing assistance programs for transport workers living in flood-prone urban slums.

5.4 Strengthening stakeholder collaboration

- ★ Encourage partnerships between trade unions, civil society organizations, international donors, and governments to address climate justice concerns in the informal transport sector.
- ★ Facilitate data-sharing agreements between labor unions and research institutions to improve evidence-based advocacy efforts.
- ★ Promote public-private collaborations for piloting climate-resilient transport models that ensure employment security.

5.5 Monitoring and evaluation

- ✱ Establish mechanisms to track the impact of climate change on informal transport workers through regular surveys and field research.
- ✱ Develop data-driven advocacy strategies to push for evidence-based policy changes that reflect workers' real-world experiences and vulnerabilities.
- ✱ Collaborate with research institutions and labor organizations to assess the effectiveness of just transition programs and identify gaps in implementation.
- ✱ Develop early warning systems to help transport workers anticipate and prepare for climate-related disruptions in their work environment.

6. Policy recommendations for Trade Unions

6.1 Strengthening legal protections for informal transport workers

- ✱ Advocate for the formal recognition of informal transport workers in national labor laws and policies.
- ✱ Push for legally binding contracts, fair wages, and social security benefits, including pensions and health insurance.
- ✱ Demand that informal transport workers be included in occupational safety and health regulations.

6.2 Enhancing social protection and worker benefits

- ✱ Develop and promote social security schemes tailored to informal transport workers, including health insurance, accident compensation, and unemployment benefits.
- ✱ Advocate for affordable housing initiatives for transport workers in climate-vulnerable areas.
- ✱ Push for government-subsidized insurance and financial assistance programs to mitigate income losses due to climate-related disruptions.

6.3 Capacity building and skill development

- ✱ Establish training and reskilling programs for transport workers to transition to emerging green jobs.
- ✱ Develop digital literacy programs to ensure that informal transport workers can access new opportunities in the platform economy.
- ✱ Provide educational programs on labor rights, climate adaptation, and financial literacy.

6.4 Promoting climate resilience and green transition

- ✱ Advocate for public investments in climate-resilient urban infrastructure, including flood-resistant roads and shaded waiting areas.
- ✱ Push for government incentives to support the transition to green transportation, including subsidies for electric vehicles.
- ✱ Promote worker-led cooperative models to allow informal transport workers to collectively invest in climate-friendly business ventures.

6.5 Strengthening trade union organization and worker representation

- ✱ Expand trade union membership among informal transport workers through outreach and engagement campaigns.
- ✱ Develop gender-sensitive policies to promote the inclusion and protection of women workers in the transport sector.
- ✱ Strengthen partnerships between trade unions, government agencies, and international labor organizations to create a unified voice for informal transport workers.

6.6 Ensuring fair and equitable technological integration

- ✱ Advocate for fair labor standards and protections for workers engaged in platform-based transport services.

- ★ Push for transparent pricing models and fair commission structures for ride-hailing and digital transport service workers.
- ★ Ensure that workers have a say in the digital transformation of the transport sector through collective bargaining agreements.

6.7 Expanding financial inclusion and access to credit

- ★ Promote microfinance and cooperative lending programs for informal transport workers to support vehicle upgrades and business expansion.
- ★ Advocate for financial literacy programs to help workers better manage income fluctuations and savings.
- ★ Work with government and financial institutions to develop low-interest loan schemes specifically for informal workers affected by climate change.

6.8 Strengthening multi-stakeholder engagement and advocacy

- ★ Facilitate cross-sector partnerships with civil society organizations, research institutions, and environmental groups to advocate for sustainable urban mobility policies.
- ★ Organize policy dialogues and public forums to ensure that the concerns of informal transport workers are included in climate and labor policies.
- ★ Build alliances with international labor organizations to advocate for global support in ensuring just transitions for transport workers in developing economies.

6.9 Address the inherent issues of the TUs

- ★ Regular effective dialogue among TUs
- ★ Work for workers, not for political parties
- ★ Work as organiser, not as leader
- ★ Regular training of youth organisers/leaders
- ★ Dedicated mentality

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