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Climatic Precarity in Southeast Asia: Work, Risk and Exploitation under Climate Change

Convener:

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Abstract

Southeast Asia is a region experiencing rapid economic development and high levels of vulnerability to climate change. As such, it is increasingly recognised that ‘existing environmental inequalities in terms of exposure to ill-health and localised degradation are not reproduced or exacerbated, while aiming to alleviate a global environmental threat such as climate change’ (Newell and Mulvaney, 2013: 133). Viewed thus, ‘the world of work is intimately connected with the natural environment’ (ILO, 2019: 16), leading to growing interest in a precarity frame to observe their intersections. Not only does ‘climate change exacerbate precariousness, ‘disrupting all work and intensifying and extending individual risk’ (Newman and Humphrys, 2019: 1), it does so in ways that exacerbate risk for the poorest and most precarious workers. Yet despite this, industrial sustainability thinking has generally had little to say about workers. This panel directly addresses this theory-policy-practice gap by advancing a ‘climate precarity’ frame (Natarajan et al., 2020) to highlight how climate change is co-produced by industrial working conditions and environmental risk. In doing so, we centre workers’ participation in planning and decision-making as key to supporting both adaptation and mitigation policy. Focusing on a range of industries, from agriculture to the garment sector, we will evidence how labour precarities – rapid turnover, high productivity, low security manufacturing associated with workplace precarity, stress, and violence (Gibbs, 2019) – are linked also to vulnerability to climate change impacts, including excessive workplace heat, urban and peri-urban disasters such as floods, and economic precarities linked to the failure of family farms.

Format

Single session paper panel (1 x 90 min.): 3-4 presenters