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Heat, work and the price of delay

Waiting for a single settled climate forecast can postpone decisions whose consequences are already tangible. Five new publications examined this week connect working time, irrigation, financial risk and the long-term response of the climate system. The central finding is that institutions need different standards of evidence for a reversible trial and a decision that creates decades of exposure.

The International Labour Organization's Ghana study, released on 29 October, projects lost working time equivalent to about 550,000 full-time jobs in 2040 under its low-emissions scenario. That is an annual hours equivalent, not a prediction of redundancies. The model does not estimate the effect of a particular adaptation programme. Its relevance is to safe working time and earnings, including whether a worker can afford to take a protective break.

Research published on 30 October in Brazil's São Francisco River Valley shows how irrigation arrangements have changed growers' experience of risk. Interviewed grape producers identified intense rain as more harmful than extreme dryness. Their experience shows why regional weather exposure must be considered alongside the institutions supplying water. It does not describe all farmers or establish that irrigation guarantees future security.

A 29 October financial-risk commentary argues for examining disruptive possibilities beyond central estimates. Severe scenarios still need credible mechanisms and explicit assumptions. They should not be treated as equally likely forecasts or used indiscriminately to withdraw finance.

Two new climate-model studies sharpen the timing question. A 3 November paper finds that the warming level at which emissions cease affects subsequent warming in one Earth-system model. A 30 October coupled ice-sheet study finds stronger atmospheric restraint on East Antarctic loss, while West Antarctica remains vulnerable. Their idealised and very long-term experiments cannot establish a local coastal forecast or overturn the value of reaching net zero promptly.

The immediate proposition is a limited workplace trial within existing institutional powers: measure heat, compare protection and payment arrangements, and examine health, earnings and disruption together. Employers, worker representatives and competent labour authorities have distinct roles. For Kenya and other jurisdictions, local exposure and income evidence would determine the arrangement; Ghana's figures cannot supply it. Poor uptake, transferred income losses or weak protection would change the assessment. Nothing in the evidence establishes an approved programme or a promised financial return.

Complete edition and sources