Heat Stress and Labour Productivity: ILO Report

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The International Labour Organisation (ILO) in its report **'Working on a Warmer Planet: The Impact of Heat Stress on Labour Productivity and Decent Work'** revealed that rising **heat stress** due to **climate change** could lead to the loss of **80 million** jobs by **2030**.

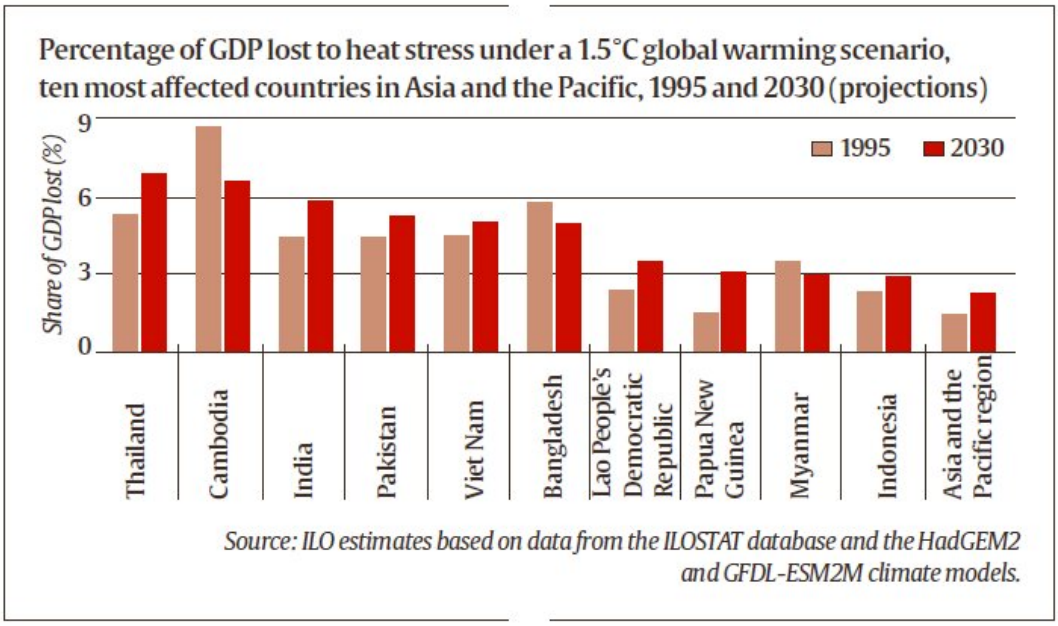
> The report makes its projections based on a global temperature rise of **1.5°Celsius** by the end of the century.

Heat Stress

- It refers to **heat in excess** of what the body can tolerate without suffering physiological impairment.
- It generally occurs at temperatures **above 35°C**, in high **humidity**.
- Excess heat during work is an **occupational health risk** as it restricts workers
  - **Physical functions** and capabilities,
  - Work **capacity** and thus, **productivity.**
- Extreme heat can cause heat-related illnesses, such as **heat stroke** and **exhaustion,** increase **mortality**, and exacerbate existing health conditions.
- According to **the World Health Organisation** heat stress linked to climate change is likely to cause 38,000 extra **deaths** a year worldwide **between 2030 and 2050.**

Key Findings

- **Economic Loss: 2% of total working hours** worldwide is projected to be lost (costing the global economy **$2.4 trillion**) every year, either because it is too hot to work or because workers have to work at a slower pace.



- **Affected Sectors:**
  - **Agricultural workers,** especially women, who make up the bulk of the 940 million laborers in the sector will be most affected.
    - Agricultural sector is projected to account for **60%** of global working hours lost due to heat stress by the year 2030.
  - **Construction sector** will also be severely impacted with an estimated **19%** of global working hours lost by 2030.
  - Other sectors like **environmental goods and services,** refuse collection, emergency, repair work, **transport, tourism, sports** and some form of **industrial work** will be worst affected by rising heat.
- **Affected Regions:**
  - The regions losing the most working hours are expected to be **southern Asia and western Africa,** where approximately **5%** of working hours are expected to be lost in 2030.
  - According to ILO, India lost 4.3% of working hours in 1995 because of heat stress, and it is projected to lose **5.8%** of its **working hours** in **2030,** which corresponds to **34 million jobs.**
    - Most of the impact in India will be felt in the **agricultural sector** and more **working hours** are expected to be lost in the **construction sector**, where heat stress affects both male and female workers.

- **Social Consequence:**
    - It could lead to more **inequality** between low and high income countries and **worsening working conditions** for the most vulnerable.
    - Heat stress will affect **millions of women** who make up the majority of workers in subsistence agriculture, as well as men who dominate the construction industry.
    - The social consequences of heat stress may include **increasing migration,** as workers leave rural areas to look for better prospects.

Way Forward

- Design, finance and implement **national policies** to address heat stress risks and protect workers.
- Adequate **infrastructure** and improved **early warning systems** for heat events, and improved implementation of **international labour standards** such as in the area of occupational safety and health to help design policies to tackle heat-related hazards.
- Employers and workers are best placed to **assess risks and take appropriate action** at the **workplace** so that workers can cope with high temperatures and continue to do their jobs.
- **Employers** can provide **drinking water,** and **training** on recognizing and managing heat stress.
- **Social dialogue** can play a crucial role in reaching consensus on indoor and outdoor working methods, adapting working hours, dress codes and equipment, use of new **technologies,** shade and rest breaks.