

Why young workers are leaving fossil fuel jobs—and what to do if you feel like 'climate quitting'

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Are you frustrated with your employer's lack of commitment to sustainability? Maybe "[climate quitting](#)" is for you. Climate quitting

means leaving your job due to concerns about your employer's impact on the climate or because you want to work directly on addressing climate issues.

If you're contemplating leaving your job over [climate](#) concerns, you're not alone. [Half of Gen Z employees](#) (people born between the late 1990s and early 2010s) in the UK have already resigned from a job due to a conflict in values. And [48% of people aged 18–41](#) say they are willing to take a pay cut to work for a company that aligns with their sustainability values.

Oil and [gas companies](#) in particular are [finding it difficult to attract new talent](#), in part because they have been [losing credibility](#) amid the growing climate crisis. This trend of climate quitting only adds to the industry's talent challenges.

Our research has involved interviewing dozens of people—including many who are still in the early stages of their careers—who have left the oil and gas industry because of their environmental concerns. The industry is often blamed for its contribution to the climate crisis, making it an ideal case to study climate quitting—despite its own efforts to [downplay its role](#) in global warming.

Leaving your job is never an easy decision, and the climate quitters we spoke to revealed that they had actually enjoyed many aspects of their jobs. They were paid well, found their work intellectually rewarding and had opportunities for [career development](#) and travel. So, what is motivating people to quit their jobs over climate concerns?

The urgency of the climate crisis

Based on the results of a [survey from 2022](#), people aged 16–29 are the age group most prone to feeling "very worried" about climate change.

Interviews from our ongoing research confirmed this trend.

Most of the people we interviewed talked about the accelerating pace and urgency of tackling the climate crisis. Many mentioned the [International Energy Agency's 2021 Report](#), which proclaimed that new oil and gas exploration must stop immediately if we are to meet our climate targets.

But our interviewees report that their employers' actions and priorities did not align with this sense of urgency to transition. Some reported that their employers were ignoring these warnings—even [rolling back their prior climate commitments](#).

One of our interviewees said, "I really did not want it on my conscience that I was making the world worse, that I was using the talents and skills that I acquired for many years of study to make the world worse and bring us on the brink of a climate disaster."

Organizational hypocrisy

A [study we carried out in 2021](#) found that many companies in the energy sector go for clean rhetoric instead of green action and dilute their responsibility to take climate action. Our interviewees witnessed hypocrisy too, or a difference between what their corporate employers publicly announced regarding the clean energy transition and what they prioritized internally.

Some [research](#) has found that oil and gas employees are often able to live with this dissonance. But the people we interviewed reported a growing sense of discomfort and value conflict at work, which ultimately got them thinking about leaving.

This comes as no great shock. A [study from 2012](#) found that when

employees in the oil and [gas industry](#) perceived their employers to be only pursuing environmental actions or claims in order to present a climate-friendly public image, they lose trust and identification with their employers.

Failure to create change from within

Our prior research finds that people often join organizations [with the specific goal](#) of trying to get their employers to better address climate change and sustainability, by [taking on new roles](#) such as sustainability managers. However, many of the interviewees from our unpublished [research](#) ultimately decided to quit following their failed attempts to affect change from within. Some had joined sustainability task forces at work, while others tried to move into roles that were focused on the clean energy transition. But, by and large, they did not feel that they were having the impact that they desired.

This is probably because most oil and gas companies dedicate only a [small fraction](#) of their investments and operations towards fossil fuel alternatives. This means there are few internal opportunities for climate-conscious employees.

Taking on a climate job

[Research](#) finds that it's often easier for oil and gas employees with climate concerns to overcome their sense of value conflict and dissonance by changing their own minds rather than changing their jobs. But with new opportunities in the renewable [energy sector](#), there is increasingly a place for energy experts to go.

The career trajectories of our [interviewees](#) conform with grave predictions for talent in the fossil fuel industry. A [survey of 10,000](#)

[energy professionals](#) in 2022 found that 82% of respondents would consider switching out of oil and gas within the next three years. Half of these people said they hoped to move into renewables.

If you're considering this type of move, there is a growing community of organizations with the mission to mobilize for climate quitting—including [Work on Climate](#), [Terra.do](#) and [My Climate Journey](#) . They provide mentoring, support networks, job boards and training to help people move into climate jobs.

It may be time for oil and gas firms to finally reconsider their business decisions in the wake of employees' concerns about the climate crisis and in pursuing value alignment in their work.

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