

## **AROSP<sup>1</sup> Position Paper on Zero-Draft ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Care Economy and Resilience towards ASEAN Community Post-2025**

The Asian Round Table on Social Protection (AROSP) Southeast Asia Group welcomes the ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Care Economy and Resilience towards ASEAN Community Post-2025.

We support and strengthen our commitment to the ASEAN Declaration on the care economy, emphasizing the critical need for regional collaboration and strategic planning to effectively address systemic challenges in care work across Southeast Asia. Crucially, such a declaration would formally recognize and standardize this undervalued sector of care work, and significantly improve labor rights and protections for predominantly female care workers engaged in both formal and informal employment. It would also address gender disparities by formally acknowledging the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, improving the quality of care services, and affirming the societal value of unpaid care work. Additionally, the declaration would promote a cultural shift in the perception of care work, encourage cooperative strategies among ASEAN countries for sharing resources and best practices, and address common challenges like aging populations, migration of care workers (both domestically and transnationally), and the need for sustainable care systems. Ultimately, a unified declaration would affirm ASEAN's commitment to enhancing the formalization status of care workers and the well-being of care recipients, thereby fostering economic, social, and gender equity across the region.

The purpose of this position paper is to identify gaps in the current ASEAN care economy policy, propose specific amendments, and issue a call to action. This initiative is driven by the insights and needs of trade unions and informal worker organizations under AROSP, aiming to promote justice, equality, and prosperity in the ASEAN community.

The related international legal framework to support workers with care responsibilities includes:

- The Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention (ILO, 1952, no. 102), that establishes worldwide-agreed minimum standards for all nine branches of social security, including family benefit and maternity benefit
- Other relevant labor standards, such as:
  - the Convention (no.156 and Recommendation (no. 165) on Workers with Family Responsibilities (ILO,1981), that promote equal opportunities and equal employment treatment to men and women with family responsibilities
  - Convention (no.189) and Recommendation (no.201) on Decent Work for Domestic Workers, that define basic labour rights, working conditions and social security guidelines - including maternity protection.
  - Convention on Maternity Protection (ILO, 2000, no. 183), that identifies five core areas of maternity protection for all employed women, including : (i) maternity leave (ii) cash and medical benefits (iii) health protection at the workplace for mothers and children (iv) employment protection and non-discrimination and (v) breastfeeding arrangements.
  - the Recommendations on Social Protection Floor (ILO, 2012, no.202), that promotes universal essential health care and basic income security throughout the life cycle; and

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<sup>1</sup> Asian Round Table on Social Protection (AROSP) is a network of grassroots workers' organisations, trade unions, NGOs, and scholars in Asia that work on the issues of formal and informal workers. AROSP serves as a platform to provide mutual help, facilitate information sharing, and help organisations build their understanding on social protection. As a regional network, it aims to support and consolidate the regional struggle for social protection for the poor across various sectors in Asia.

- The recommendation on the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy (ILO, 2015, no. 204), that emphasises the need of providing social security and maternity protection to all workers in the informal economy.

## Call for action

### 1. Recognise care services and social protection as rights of all workers without exception/discrimination.

It's crucial to not only promote but also formally recognize the rights of all workers to “quality, accessible, adaptable and acceptable care services in order to participate in the labour market”.<sup>2</sup> The informal economy in the ASEAN region is extensive, encompassing an estimated 244 million people, or roughly 78.6% of the workforce aged 15 and older. Workers in the informal economy often find themselves excluded from social protection systems that support care provision, including maternity protections, healthcare coverage, and benefits for children, disability, sickness, and pensions. Referred to as the “missing middle,” these workers fall through the cracks of social protection policies: they are neither covered by social insurance schemes that require contributions nor eligible for targeted social assistance programs designed for the most disadvantaged.

Furthermore, AROSP supports the development of transformative care policy packages aligned with the ILO 5R Framework for Decent Care Work. These packages should encompass time (leave policies), benefits (income security), rights, and services to support the right to care and be cared for while promoting gender equality and decent work. For maximum effectiveness, these policy packages should be rights-based, gender-responsive, and integrated. They should also be universal, founded on principles of solidarity, and encourage representation and social dialogue. Additionally, embracing a life-cycle approach, these policies should include a range of services from care leave and breastfeeding entitlements to childcare and long-term care for all workers with family responsibilities.<sup>3</sup>

### 2. Extend maternity protection to workers in informal employment, particularly the self-employed

Maternity protection in the region is generally the responsibility of employers or covered through social insurance, and most schemes only benefit formally employed women.<sup>4</sup> Some countries, like Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam, offer maternity cash benefits to self-employed women who contribute to the government’s social insurance schemes. Singapore is the sole country providing non-contributory maternity benefits. The lack of comprehensive maternity benefits forces many women, especially those in informal employment, to work during pregnancy and quickly return postpartum, risking their health and that of their newborns. Moreover, without universal healthcare, substantial out-of-pocket costs remain a burden during childbirth.<sup>5</sup>

Universal maternity protection, including paid leave, maternal care, and cash benefits, would guarantee income security for all women workers, particularly those in informal employment, greatly improving maternal and child health across the region. Furthermore, it is urgently necessary to enhance the quality

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<sup>2</sup> ILO and WIEGO. 2020. [Labour and human rights frameworks promoting childcare for all workers](#). ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief Series: Childcare for workers in the informal economy

<sup>3</sup> International Labour Organization (2022) Care at Work: Investing in Care Leave and Services for a more gender equal world of work [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/care-economy/WCMS\\_838653/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/care-economy/WCMS_838653/lang-en/index.htm)

<sup>4</sup> International Labour Organization (2019) Regional Study on Extending Social Security to Informal Workers in ASEAN <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Regional-Study-on-Extension-of-Social-Security-to-Informal-Workers-in-ASEAN.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Bezbaruah, s. (2024). Maternity Protection for Women Workers in the Agrifood Sector in Southeast Asia. <https://www.amrcentre.org/sites/default/files/SEA%20Report.pdf>

and availability of maternity facilities to ensure that pregnant women in remote and underserved areas, such as mountains, inland, and coastal regions, have access to care equivalent to that in urban centers.

### **3. Expand quality child care and child allowances or family benefits for all workers**

Only a few countries in the region provide universal childcare services. Brunei Darussalam, the Philippines, and Thailand offer universal pre-primary education systems for children aged 3 and above. In contrast, Singapore and Vietnam provide targeted pre-primary services. Additionally, Singapore offers targeted childcare services for children aged 0-2 years.<sup>6</sup> However, these services typically operate for only a few hours each day, limiting their practical utility for working parents.

Women in informal employment urgently need quality public childcare services located conveniently near their homes in low-income areas or close to their workplaces, and available during their work hours. In particular, domestic workers, often deprived of sufficient labor rights and social protections, struggle to secure adequate care for their dependents. Migrant and live-in domestic workers are frequently compelled to leave their children with relatives or friends, due to a lack of supportive government-provided public care services.<sup>7</sup> This highlights the pressing need for better public care solutions that cater to the needs of informal care workers such as domestic workers.

Furthermore, in the region, most children lack access to social protection measures like child or family benefits. This limited coverage is often due to the absence of comprehensive schemes, overly restrictive targeting, and constrained access to contributory programs<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, incorporating child allowances or family benefits into a universal social protection framework is essential to ensure that all workers and their families receive adequate support.

### **4. Recognise long-term care rights as integral to universal social protection and healthcare**

Formal long-term care (LTC) services are limited in the region, leaving a significant number of older individuals without coverage. Only Brunei Darussalam and Singapore have implemented statutory provisions for public long-term care for older persons. Additionally, legal obligations requiring family members to care for their elderly relatives are found to be in place in four countries: Cambodia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam. This legal requirement often places a disproportionate burden on women, who typically bear the brunt of caregiving responsibilities. Older women are especially vulnerable, as they generally live longer, are more likely to have limited savings and pensions, and are more frequently expected to care for family members.

### **5. Recognise and support the roles of cooperatives and social solidarity economy (SSE) entities in care provision**

There is a critical need to recognize and enhance support for social solidarity economy (SSE) entities such as cooperatives, social enterprises, fair trade groups, self-help groups, and workers' associations. These entities not only provide gainful employment to women but also improve their access to maternity benefits and broader social protections. Integrating advocacy for care work with solidarity-based initiatives for livelihood recovery can bolster food and income security for women workers. Implementing community solutions such as gardens, kitchens, laundry stations, and early childcare centers can significantly alleviate the burden of unpaid care work typically shouldered by women. Additionally, involving men and boys in sharing childcare and household duties can further alleviate the multiple responsibilities faced by

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<sup>6</sup> International Labour Organization (2022)

<sup>7</sup> WIEGO and Networks Position Paper on ILO report on Decent Work and care economy to be presented at 112th Session of the International Labour Conference

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.socialprotection-toolbox.org/files/inequality/documents/Social-Outlook-brief-B3.pdf>

women, particularly within SSE entities that focus on promoting gender equality and economic empowerment for women.

## 6. Enhance the voice and participation of workers organisations in the regional dialogues

Worker organizations, including trade unions and organizations representing workers in informal employment such as domestic and care workers, are crucial and should be highlighted in regional dialogues, for example, in ASEAN dialogues on care economy strategies and policies. Their participation ensures that their specific needs and challenges are incorporated into policy development and enhances their role in policy implementation and monitoring. This involvement directly contributes to improving conditions for care workers.

## 7. Solidarity with global networks of organizations of workers in the informal employment

The right to care is recognized as a labor right, and it represents a global issue that must be addressed at the International Labour Conference (ILC). AROSP supports the global network of workers in informal employment, expressing solidarity with care workers and urging the provision of quality care services for all.

### Specific Recommendations/Proposed amendments to the draft “ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Care Economy and Resilience towards ASEAN Community Post-2025”:

Provision	Proposal
<p><b>Paragraph 6:</b> NOTING that most paid care workers are women, are frequently migrants, are often working in the informal economy under poor conditions and for low pay and are often not provided with sufficient protections in the law to ensure they are safe and can earn a wage that ensures they can live with dignity</p>	<p>Noting “that most paid care workers, are frequently migrants, are often working in the informal economy under poor conditions and for low pay” and are not provided by sufficient <b>labour and social protections</b> in the law to ensure they are safe and can earn a wage that ensure they can live with dignity; <b>and that migrant and live-in care workers face significant gaps in public care services for their dependents left behind, which leaves these family members without adequate support</b></p>
<p><b>Paragraph 7:</b> UPHOLDING the principles of non-discrimination and social justice in all care-related policies and initiatives, ensuring inclusivity and equitable access to care services and support mechanisms;</p>	<p>UPHOLDING the principles of non-discrimination, social justice, <b>rights-based approaches, universal access, solidarity, representation, and social dialogue</b>, ensuring <b>affordability</b>, inclusivity, and equitable access to all care-related policies and initiatives.</p>
<p><b>Paragraph 8:</b> COMMITTING to enhancing regional dialogue, inter-ministerial collaborations, inter-governmental ownership and engagement with national and local governments, the private sector, NGOs, and civil society to address care needs at all levels;</p>	<p>COMMITTING to enhancing regional dialogue, inter-ministerial collaborations, inter-governmental ownership and engagement with national and local governments, the private sector, NGOs, <b>trade unions, organisations of workers in informal employment</b>, and civil society to address care needs at all levels;</p>
<p><b>Paragraph 11:</b> COMMITTING to foster the implementation of gender-responsive policies and programs that</p>	<p>COMMITTING to foster the implementation of <b>rights-based</b> and gender-responsive policies and programs that that support unpaid caregivers,</p>

<p>support unpaid caregivers, particularly women, including social protection measures, respite care services, and flexible work arrangements; ensure inclusivity and promote effective decision-making and policymaking by actively including the voices and perspectives of care givers in all relevant processes, recognising their valuable insights and experiences; support implementation in all ASEAN Member States policies and programs that support the recognition and valuation of unpaid care and domestic work, in alignment with the ASEAN Comprehensive Framework on the Care Economy and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; strengthen cooperation among ASEAN Member States towards the portability of social security benefits for migrant workers, ensuring their protection and regulation across the region; and foster ASEAN Member States to invest in accessible and affordable universal healthcare, childcare centers, and social protection schemes, with a particular emphasis on older persons, persons with disabilities, and vulnerable populations;</p>	<p>particularly women, including social protection measures, respite care services, and flexible work arrangements; ensure inclusivity and promote effective decision-making and policymaking by actively including the voices and perspectives of care givers in all relevant processes, recognising their valuable insights and experiences; support implementation in all ASEAN Member States policies and programs that support the recognition and valuation of unpaid care and domestic work, in alignment with the ASEAN Comprehensive Framework on the Care Economy and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; strengthen cooperation among ASEAN Member States towards the portability of social security benefits for migrant workers, ensuring their protection and regulation across the region; and foster ASEAN Member States to invest in <b>transformative care policy packages that include leave, income security (universal basic income, where possible), access to rights, and public services. These packages should enable the right to care and be cared for, promote gender equality and decent work, and cover all stages of life.</b> This includes investing in <b>universal</b> healthcare, <b>maternity protection</b>, childcare, <b>long-term care services</b>, and social protection, with a particular emphasis on <b>maternity and child</b>, older persons, persons with disabilities and vulnerable populations.</p>
<p><b>Declaration Provision #4:</b>  PROMOTE the implementation of policies that cater to various care responsibilities of workers in both the public and private sectors, as well as in formal and informal economies, in particular those issues that impact the lives of women, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Supporting work-life balance, including equitable maternity and paternity leave policies, adequate paid sick leave and comprehensive health insurance to offset healthcare expenses and provide financial security during illness, with policies designed so that they that do not disproportionately affect the hiring of female labour;</li> <li>b. Encouraging workplace flexibility and implement work-from-home policies to enable workers to effectively balance work with their caring responsibilities, including by investing in telecommuting infrastructure and providing capacity-building opportunities, particularly for mothers with young</li> </ol>	<p><b>IMPLEMENT</b> policies that cater to various care responsibilities of workers in both the public and private sectors, as well as in formal and informal economies, in particular those issues that impact the lives of women, including:</p> <p><i>Additional measures under Provision #4:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>e. Extending maternity protection to workers working in the informal employment especially vulnerable workers such as agricultural workers, street vendors, waste pickers, home-based workers, victims of layoffs, etc., through inclusive social insurance and social assistance</b></li> <li><b>f. Investing in accessible, affordable and quality public childcare services and daycare centers for older people near the workers' homes in low-income neighborhood or close to their workplaces, available during their work hours</b></li> </ol>

<p>children, to support remote work arrangements; and</p> <p>c. Addressing and reducing the gender pay gap, including by ensuring fair compensation and recognition for care work;</p>	
<p><b>Declaration Provision #5:</b>  UTILISE national budgets and, where possible, explore public-private partnerships, to drive the inclusive, equitable and accountable development of the care economy and the protection of those providing services in the care economy, including by:</p>	<p>UTILISE national budgets and, where possible, explore public-private partnerships, <b>cooperatives and Social Solidarity Economy models for care provision</b>, to drive the inclusive, equitable and accountable development of the care economy and the protection of those providing services in the care economy, including by:</p>
<p>a. Increasing funding for universal social protection for all, starting with social protection floors, and design social protection programming that addresses the needs of caregivers;</p>	<p>a. Increasing funding for universal social protection <b>across the life-cycle</b>, starting with social protection floors, and design social protection programming that addresses the needs of caregivers;</p>
<p>b. Investing in services and infrastructure that will ensure accessible, affordable and inclusive care services, with a focus on leaving no one behind, including universal healthcare, aged care, child-care, with a particular emphasis on ensuring that women and other vulnerable populations (such as older people and people with disabilities) are supported;</p>	<p>b. Invest in services and infrastructure that will ensure accessible, affordable, inclusive and gender friendly care services, with a focus on leaving no one behind, including universal healthcare, <b>maternity protection</b>, childcare, and <b>long-term care services</b>, with a particular emphasis on ensuring that women and other vulnerable populations (such as older people and people with disabilities) are supported;</p>
<p>e. Ensuring budgets are designed and monitored to address women's care needs, including work-life balance measures, care infrastructure in rural areas, improved conditions for care workers, and expanded care services for children and older persons;</p>	<p>e. Ensuring budgets are designed and monitored to address women's care needs, including work-life balance measures, care infrastructure in rural areas and <b>workplaces</b>, improved conditions for care workers, and expanded care services for children and older persons;</p>
<p><b>Declaration Provision #6:</b>  PROMOTE gender equality by challenging traditional gender norms, encouraging the equal sharing of caregiving responsibilities, and recognising and valuing the important role of men in caregiving;</p>	<p>PROMOTE gender equality by challenging traditional gender norms, encouraging the equal sharing of caregiving responsibilities, recognising and valuing the important role of men in caregiving, and <b>reviewing and removing policies that place disproportionate care responsibilities on women</b></p>
<p><b>Declaration Provision #7</b>  ADDRESS the specific needs of migrant care workers, a large number of whom are women, by strengthening cooperation among ASEAN Member States towards the portability of social</p>	<p>ADDRESS the specific needs of migrant care workers, a large number of whom are women, by strengthening cooperation among ASEAN Member States towards the portability of social security benefits for migrant workers, ensuring their</p>

<p>security benefits for migrant workers, ensuring their protection and regulation across the region and enhancing access to justice for care workers, including migrant workers, by establishing mechanisms that address their specific legal needs and protect their rights;</p>	<p>protection and regulation across the region and enhancing access to justice for care workers, including migrant workers, by establishing mechanisms that address their specific legal needs and protect their rights; <b><i>support their organizing and collective bargaining, ensure that migrant care workers (domestically and transnationally) have access to public care services and/or child allowance for their dependents left behind</i></b></p>
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Signatories:

Organisations;

1. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA), Cambodia
2. Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers Democratic Union - C.CAWDU, Cambodia
3. Cambodian Labour Confederation (CLC), Cambodia
4. Cambodian food and services workers' Federation - CFSWF, Cambodia
5. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Union (CATU), Cambodia
6. Coalition of Cambodian Farmers Community- CCFC, Cambodia
7. Sedane Labour Resource Center (LIPS), Indonesia
8. Perkumpulan INISIATIF, Indonesia
9. Confederation of Indonesia People Movement (KPRI), Indonesia
10. Institute for Women's Empowerment – IWE, Indonesia
11. Informal Worker Advancement Association ( IWAA), Laos
12. Oxfam in Laos, Laos
13. Monitoring Sustainability of Globalisation (MSN), Malaysia
14. Young Chi Oo Workers Association, Myanmar
15. Foundation for Labour and Employment Promotion (HomeNet Thailand), Thailand
16. Solidarity for People's Education and Lifelong Learning (SPELL), Philippines
17. Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research (EILER), Philippines
18. Homenet Philippines, Philippines
19. PATAMABA Workers in the Informal Sector Enterprise (WISE), Philippines
20. LAKAS NG KABABAIHAN PARA SA SAMBAYANAN-LAKAS, Philippines
21. Center for Development and Integration (CDI), Vietnam
22. Center for Health Consultation and Community Development (CHD), Vietnam
23. Oxfam in Vietnam, Vietnam
24. Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment (iSEE), Vietnam
25. Hong Kong Women Workers' Association (HKWWA), China
26. Hong Kong Social Security Society (HKSSS), China
27. Asia Monitor Resource Centre - AMRC
28. HomeNet Southeast Asia (HNSEA)
29. Asian Solidarity Economy Council (ASEC)
30. International Young Christian Workers Asia Pacific
31. Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)
32. Bangladesh Occupational, Safety, Health and Environment Organization, Bangladesh

33. Textile Garments Workers Federation, Bangladesh
34. CWE Centre for Workers Education, India
35. Bandhkam Mazdoor Sangathan, India
36. Garment Labour Union, India
37. Home-Net, Nepal,
38. Ageing Nepal,
39. National Campaign for Women Right Nepal,
40. Women Workers Protection Union Nepal,
41. Social Protection Civil Society Network (SPCSN), Nepal
42. Labour Education Foundation, Pakistan
43. Homenet Pakistan - HNP, Pakistan
44. Free Trade Union Development Centre, Sri Lanka
45. Lanka Estate Workers' Union, Sri Lanka

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53. Mr. Son Pham (Tinh Than Foundation), Vietnam
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55. Dr. Nguyen Thi Lan Huong, Research Center on Vocational and Social Protection Issues, Vietnam
56. Ms. Nastasia L. Tysmans, (StreetNet International)
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