

2024 ASEAN DECLARATION ON STRENGTHENING THE CARE ECONOMY AND FOSTERING RESILIENCE TOWARDS THE POST-2025 ASEAN COMMUNITY

Adopted in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 9 October 2024

WE, the Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (hereinafter referred to as “ASEAN”), namely: Brunei Darussalam, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Republic of Indonesia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the Republic of the Philippines, the Republic of Singapore, the Kingdom of Thailand, and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, hereby declare our commitment to strengthening the care economy and fostering resilience towards the post-2025 ASEAN Community;

UPHOLDING the commitment of ASEAN to promote gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls enshrined, inter alia, in the Declaration on the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN Region (1988), Ha Noi Declaration on the Enhancement of Welfare and Development of ASEAN Women and Children (2010), ASEAN Human Rights Declaration and the Phnom Penh Statement on the Adoption of the AHRD (2012), Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Elimination of Violence Against Children in ASEAN (2013), ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2015), Kuala Lumpur Declaration On Ageing: Empowering Older Persons in ASEAN (2015), Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace and Security in ASEAN (2017), Declaration on the Gender-Responsive Implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development (2017), ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of Rights of Migrant Workers (2017), ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2018), ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework (2021-2025), ASEAN Guidelines on Gender Mainstreaming into Labour and Employment Policies Towards Decent Work and All (2020), ASEAN Comprehensive Framework On Care Economy (2021), the ASEAN Declaration on Gender Equality and Family Development (2023), and the ASEAN Policy Brief on Gender Mainstreaming Approaches to the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (2023), among others;

REITERATING our specific commitment to operationalise the ASEAN Comprehensive Framework on the Care Economy (2021) and align our actions with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 5 on Gender Equality, Target 4 to recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work, and SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, Target 5 on Decent Work for All, Target 8 on labour rights and safe and secure working environments for all workers;

UNDERSTANDING that the “Care Economy” entails consumption of goods and services necessary for the physical, social, mental and emotional well-being of care-dependent groups and includes both “paid care work”, namely, care jobs in such sectors as health, education, personal care of dependents and domestic work, as well as “unpaid care work”, which includes domestic and care giving services within households, such as cooking, cleaning, shopping and looking after children, older persons, persons with disabilities, unwell people or other adults requiring care, as well as unpaid community and voluntary services;

AFFIRMING our collective determination to recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work as a foundational pillar of human life, societal well-being, and economic growth, and acknowledging its contribution to overall human development, economic production, and as public goods and services;

ACKNOWLEDGING that addressing unpaid care and domestic work is crucial in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, as it often impacts whether women enter into and stay in employment, and on the quality and remuneration of the jobs they perform and considering that these forms of work are often undervalued and disproportionately carried out by women and girls, which perpetuates gender inequality and discrimination;

NOTING that most paid care workers are women, including migrant workers, working in the informal economy under poor conditions with low wages and are often not provided with sufficient and accessible legal and social protections that ensure their safety and dignity;

RECOGNISING the particular importance of addressing the specific issues relating to healthy ageing, and persons with disabilities, including the unpaid work that is predominantly being performed by women, the work of paid carers in providing aged care, and care for persons with disabilities, the particular needs of women themselves as they age and require aged care support and services;

ACKNOWLEDGING that developing comprehensive care systems requires the recognition, reduction, redistribution, reward and representation of care work more equitably between women and men, as well as among states, communities, the market and families, which is critical to unleashing opportunities for women's economic and political participation and empowerment, as well as the opportunities for education and personal growth of girls, which will directly contribute to inclusive growth and human development in the region, including through strategies recognised in the Action Agenda on Mainstreaming Women's Economic Empowerment in ASEAN (2017), the ASEAN Guideline on Gender Mainstreaming into Labour and Employment Policies Towards Decent Work For All (2020), ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework (2021), and the Declaration on Building a More Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Future: Unlocking Women's Entrepreneurship in ASEAN (2022);

UPHOLDING the principles of substantive equality and social justice in all care related policies and initiatives, ensuring inclusivity and equitable access to care services and support mechanisms;

COMMITTING to enhancing regional dialogue, inter-ministerial and inter-governmental collaborations, and engagement with national and local governments, the private sector, NGOs, and all relevant agencies to address care economy needs at all levels;

DO HEREBY RESOLVE to:

1. **ADOPT** a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach through inter-ministerial collaborations and the development of coordinated, multi-stakeholder strategies that introduce initiatives across the four gender-responsive and care sensitive policy categories described in paragraph 5 sub-sections (a) to (d) below;
2. **UTILISE** regional and international dialogues, as well as developing regional guidelines to facilitate the sharing of good and promising practices in order to identify and adopt innovative approaches to valuing and investing in the care economy and addressing unpaid care and domestic work;
3. **SUPPORT** research and data collection in accordance with relevant national law on issues related to the care economy and the distribution of care work across different demographics to drive evidence-informed analysis, planning, policy-making, decision-making, and strategy and programme formulations, including exploring valuation of care work in national accounts and unpaid care and domestic work in national development plans, statistics, economic policies and financial budgeting;

4. **CONTINUE TO INCLUDE** the voices and valuable perspectives of care givers and care recipients in all relevant processes and empower community-based initiatives on care work to foster local solutions and a sense of ownership and empowerment among caregivers and care recipients;
5. **IMPLEMENT** care economy initiatives, based on the national context of each ASEAN Member State, that support unpaid and paid care workers in both the public and private sectors, and in both the formal and informal economies, including through legislations, policies and programmes as well as care responsive statistical systems, gender-responsive planning and budgeting, and monitoring and evaluation:
 - a. **Care infrastructure**, which includes access to water, sanitation, safe transport, utilities, housing, safe accommodations/shelters, cooking fuels, time- and energy-saving devices and physical care infrastructure (such as schools, hospitals, health clinics, nursing and care homes) that are easily accessible to communities;
 - b. **Care-related social protection**, including social assistance programmes (such as cash transfers, old age pensions, cash-for-care, vouchers, tax benefits or universal basic income), social welfare schemes (such as public works programmes, subsidies, vouchers and school meals for children of income-poor households), social insurance programmes (including universal health coverage, pension systems and disability or sickness allowances), and measures to reduce vulnerability during crises, including from climate change, disasters and pandemics;
 - c. **Care services** that are available, accessible, affordable and of proper quality such as childcare, respite care, long-term care, psychosocial support, mental health, and legal services for care workers who experience violence and exploitation, care for vulnerable groups, including care for older persons, persons with disabilities, those living in remote and at-risk areas, reproductive and health care services and paid domestic work, and home and community-based care services;
 - d. **Employment related care policies**, such as promoting policies on salary, allowances, social insurance, maternity and paternity leave, parental leave, leave to care, mental wellbeing and health leave, special leave and protection (legal protection) for care workers, especially ones who experience sexual harassment, violence and domestic violence, flexible work, childcare, paid sickness and health care access, recognition and formalisation of migrant and informal sector workers, decent working conditions for paid care workers and other supportive workplace policies (such as career breaks, sabbaticals, severance pay, employer funded or contributory social protection schemes);
6. **ENCOURAGE** the equal sharing of caregiving responsibilities, including by raising awareness, challenging traditional gender and social norms, gender roles, and encouraging individuals, especially men and boys to understand the role of care-giving responsibilities and the value and importance of care-giving as well as recognising and valuing the important role of men and boys' involvement in caregiving;

7. **ADDRESS** the specific needs of migrant workers in care economy, a large number of whom are women, in accordance with the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (2017), and taking into consideration the national laws, regulations and policies of each ASEAN Member State, by facilitating safe migration through legal pathways, ensuring access to social protection and strengthening cooperation among ASEAN Member States towards the portability of social security benefits for migrant workers, and enhancing access to justice for care workers, including migrant workers and domestic workers, by establishing mechanisms that address their specific legal needs and protect their rights;
8. **EXPLORE** opportunities to harness technology, including new digital technologies, and digital platforms to accelerate, develop and strengthen the digitally enabled care economy to transform the delivery of care services that generate and expand decent work opportunities for care workers;
9. **ADDRESS** the disproportionate impact of inter-linked crises and threats – such as cost-of-living and food insecurity crises, pandemics, natural and other disasters, as well as climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution – on unpaid and paid care workers, recognising the particular impact these crises are having on women and girls and other vulnerable groups, which impacts the ability of the ASEAN Community to build resilience to future crises;

ENGAGE relevant ASEAN Sectoral Bodies in the three ASEAN Community pillars together with all relevant agencies, women's organisations, NGOs, academic institutions, private sector, and community partners in ASEAN to strengthen collaboration on the implementation of this Declaration, and task the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women (AMMW), with the support of the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW) and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), among others, to undertake measures to implement this commitment, including mobilising appropriate resources, build capacities, and systematic review of the implementation.

Adopted on this Ninth Day of October in the Year Two Thousand and Twenty-Four in a single original copy in the English Language.