



## ***Care at the Core: ASEAN Leadership in Advancing Gender Equality through the Care Economy***

**12 March 2025 11:30-12:45**

**Conference Room A, GA Building**

**United Nations Headquarters, New York**

### **Concept Note**

#### **1. Background**

Globally, women undertake a disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work, providing three-quarters of all unpaid care hours. This burden significantly impacts women's participation in the labor market, with 606 million women—41 per cent of those currently not in the workforce—excluded due to unpaid care responsibilities, compared to only 41 million men<sup>1</sup>. Women who do enter the paid workforce often face additional barriers such as the "motherhood employment penalty," reduced wages, and limited leadership opportunities due to caregiving responsibilities.

The global trend is mirrored in the ASEAN region, where women typically spend more than double the time spent by men on these tasks<sup>2</sup>. Recognizing the profound implications of unequal care responsibilities for gender equality, economic growth, and social resilience, ASEAN has taken bold steps to address this issue. Beginning with the commissioning of a joint ESCAP-ASEAN report on addressing the care economy<sup>3</sup>, the ASEAN Community has increasingly recognized the importance of valuing and investing in the care economy. This recognition was further reinforced with the endorsement of the ASEAN Comprehensive Framework on the Care Economy in 2021, followed by the Jakarta Roundtable on Building a Caring Economy in January 2023 and a major Regional Forum on Care Work in July 2023 hosted by ASEAN Committee on Women, the ASEAN Secretariat and ESCAP.

Lao PDR's leadership as the 2024 ASEAN Chair has been pivotal in advancing the care economy agenda. Under the theme *"Strengthening Care Economy and Resilience Towards ASEAN*

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<sup>1</sup> ESCAP (2024) [Investing in Our Common Future: Building a 'Caring Society'](#)

<sup>2</sup> UN Women (2024) [ASEAN Gender Outlook](#)

<sup>3</sup> ESCAP (2021) [Addressing Unpaid Care Work in ASEAN](#)



*Community Post-2025*,” the **Third ASEAN Women Leaders’ Summit** catalyzed groundbreaking progress with the endorsement of the **“ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening the Care Economy and Fostering Resilience Towards the Post-2025 ASEAN Community<sup>4</sup>,”** which reaffirms ASEAN’s commitment to strengthening the care economy and fostering resilience toward the post-2025 ASEAN Community. The Declaration calls on governments to implement a comprehensive set of policies that address care infrastructure, social protection, care services, and employment. This Declaration was subsequently adopted by ASEAN leaders at the 44th and 45th ASEAN Summits, marking a historic milestone in regional cooperation on care.

To operationalize the Declaration, a comprehensive Guidance Note has been developed to support member states in implementing its provisions. This Guidance Note offers actionable strategies and policy frameworks tailored to the ASEAN context, making it an essential tool for advancing gender-responsive care policies across the region. The Guidance Note highlights Lao PDR’s pivotal contributions and mark the transition of ASEAN leadership on care to Malaysia, the ASEAN Chair for 2025, which will continue advancing the care economy agenda.

The Declaration and its accompanying Guidance note serve as a source of inspiration and a practical model for other regions seeking to address care challenges. It exemplifies how regional consensus can galvanize action on care economy reforms, demonstrating the value of collective leadership in shaping transformative solutions. By incorporating evidence-based approaches and actionable policy recommendations, the Declaration provides a blueprint adaptable to diverse contexts, offering critical lessons for advancing gender equality and care economy investments worldwide.

Organized by Lao Women’s Union, the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (KPWKM) of Malaysia, ASEAN, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and Oxfam, this side event offers a unique global platform to spotlight ASEAN’s leadership, foster South-South cooperation, and advance interregional learning on care economy solutions. CSW69, a pivotal moment for assessing progress on gender equality 30 years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, provides an unparalleled opportunity to elevate ASEAN’s contributions as a model for achieving SDG 5.4 and driving transformative change in the global care economy.

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<sup>4</sup> ASEAN (2024) [ASEAN-Declaration-on-Strengthening-the-Care-Economy-and-Fostering-Resilience-towards-ASEAN-Community-Post-2025](#)



## 2. Objectives

The objective of this side event is to serve as an interactive platform for key stakeholders to examine ways to accelerate progress and adopt policies that value and invest in the care economy. This includes accelerating progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 5 (“achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”) and target 5.4 (“recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate”).

Specifically, the side event will aim to:

1. **Highlight ASEAN’s leadership** in advancing the care economy as a driver of gender equality, resilience, and inclusive development.
2. **Raise awareness** of the ASEAN Declaration on Care Economy and its alignment with SDG 5.4 and broader ASEAN priorities.
3. **Spotlight actionable tools** for member states, including the Guidance Note and the Lao PDR Case Study, to facilitate the implementation of care economy initiatives.
4. **Facilitate South-South exchange** and interregional learning by showcasing good practices and fostering collaboration among ASEAN member states and global partners.
5. **Advocate for sustainable financing** and multi-stakeholder partnerships to operationalize the care economy agenda.

The outcome of this event is to showcase the region’s progress in addressing the care economy, inspiring stakeholders to take bold action toward gender equality and sustainable development.

## 3. Participants

The side event will bring together government officials, experts and professionals working towards achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the economic landscape, in addition to the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development. Participants will include representatives



from governments, development partners, civil society organizations, academia and other relevant stakeholders.

#### 4. Modality/Structure of Event

The side event will be convened in person at the United Nations Headquarters in New York and will use an interactive format to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, good practices and lessons learned. Participants may ask questions during the Q&A session(s) and/or share their observations and experiences through brief interventions.

#### 5. Programme

<p>11:30- 11:40</p>	<p><b>Opening Remarks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H. E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) - pre-recorded</li> <li>• H. E. Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)</li> <li>• H. E. Datuk Dr. Maziah binti Che Yusoff, Secretary General, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, Government of Malaysia</li> </ul>
<p>11:40- 12:00</p>	<p><b>ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening the Care Economy and Fostering Resilience towards ASEAN Community Post 2025</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview of its vision, objectives, and adoption process <i>Ms. Soukphaphone Phanit, Permanent Secretary, Lao Women’s Union</i></li> <li>• Declaration Guidance Note: Strategies for member states to operationalize the ASEAN Declaration on Care <i>Ms. Cai Cai, Chief, and Ms. Channe Lindstrøm Oguzhan, Social Affairs Officer, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section, Social Development Division, ESCAP</i></li> <li>• TransformCare Investment Initiative in the ASEAN Context <i>Christine Arab, Regional Director for UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific</i></li> </ul>



12:00-12:40	<p><b>Panel Discussion: Regional Leadership and Partnerships for Transformative Care Policies</b></p> <p>Moderator: <i>Brenda Chikwe Mofya, Head of New York Office, Oxfam International</i></p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Lao PDR:</b> Forward-looking initiatives that value and invest in the care economy in Lao PDR <i>Dr Ninpaseuth Xayaphonesy, Director General, Department of Women’s Development, Lao Women’s Union</i></li> <li>• <b>Cambodia:</b> Leveraging whole-of-government approaches to drive policy and public investment in the care economy <i>Mr. The Chhun Hak, Director General, Ministry of Women's Affairs</i></li> <li>• <b>Indonesia:</b> Presentation on successful care economy initiatives <i>Ms. Nannie Hadi Tjahjanto, Chair, Indonesia’s Congress of Women</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Q&amp;A</b></p>
12:40-12:45	<p><b>Closing Remarks</b> by Ms Thamma Phetvixay, Vice-President, Lao Women’s Union</p>

## 6. Useful Links

**ASEAN (2024)** [ASEAN-Declaration-on-Strengthening-the-Care-Economy-and-Fostering-Resilience-towards-ASEAN-Community-Post-2025](#)

**United Nations (2024)** [Transforming Care Systems: UN System Policy Paper](#)

### UNESCAP

ESCAP Case Study Reports on the Care Economy: [Lao PDR \(forthcoming\)](#) [Cambodia](#), [Indonesia](#), [the Philippines](#), and [Uzbekistan](#)

[ESCAP and ASEAN \(2021\) ASEAN Comprehensive Framework on Care Economy](#)

[ESCAP \(2021\) COVID-19 and the Unpaid Care Economy in Asia and the Pacific](#)

[ESCAP \(2021\) Addressing Unpaid Care Work in ASEAN](#)



[ESCAP \(2023\) Regional Forum on Care Work in ASEAN Countries Meeting Report](#)  
[ESCAP \(2024\) Investing in Our Common Future: Building a “Caring” Society](#)  
[ESCAP \(2024\) Policymaker’s Toolkit on Valuing Unpaid Care and Domestic Work](#)

## Oxfam

Oxfam (2020) [Oxfam’s time to care report](#)

Oxfam (2020) [Household care Survey Toolkit link](#)

Oxfam (2016) [Rapid Care Analysis Toolkit](#)

Oxfam (2021) [Care Principles and Care-Responsiveness Barometer: Guidelines and toolkit for international financial institutions \(IFIs\)](#)

Oxfam (2021) Care Principles & [Barometer](#)

Oxfam (2021) [Care Policy Scorecard Toolkit](#)

## 7. Contact

**Lao Women’s Union (LWU)** was established in 1955 as part of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic system. Its mission is to mobilize and unite Lao women for active participation in national protection and development effort. LWU works to safeguard the rights and interests of women and children, promote gender equality policies, and support women's advancement in socio-economic development.

*Ms. Soukphaphone Phanit, Permanent Secretary of the Lao Women's Union and Chair of the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC)*

### **Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (KPWKM) of Malaysia**

[Contact tbc](#)

The **United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP)** provides an inclusive intergovernmental platform for governments and other stakeholders in the region to accelerate the implementation of global gender equality commitments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the outcomes of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

*Ms. Channe Lindstrøm Oguzhan, Social Affairs Officer, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section, Social Development Division, ESCAP [lindstromoguzhan@un.org](mailto:lindstromoguzhan@un.org)*



## ASEAN

Contact tbc

## Oxfam

Oxfam works with partners to transform the unequal power relations, structures, norms and values that cause poverty and inequality, including gender-based violence and injustice. Oxfam offers its continued support in promoting a care economy and strengthened social protection in Asia and the Pacific.

*Ms. Phetvilay Phommessay, Program Coordinator, Gender and Inclusion program, Oxfam in Laos [phetvilay.phommessay@oxfam.org](mailto:phetvilay.phommessay@oxfam.org) and Ms. Chaipasird Phunphouvanna, Program Manager-Gender and Inclusion, Oxfam in Laos [chaipasird.phunphouvanna@oxfam.org](mailto:chaipasird.phunphouvanna@oxfam.org)*