

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 men¹. 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 tasks². 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 economy³, 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 Community Post-2025,"* the **Third ASEAN Women Leaders' Summit** catalyzed groundbreaking progress with the endorsement of the **"ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening the Care Economy**

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

² UN Women (2024) [ASEAN Gender Outlook](#)

³ ESCAP (2021) [Addressing Unpaid Care Work in ASEAN](#)

and Fostering Resilience Towards the Post-2025 ASEAN Community⁴,” 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.

⁴ 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

11:30-11:40	<p>Opening Remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• H. E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) - pre-recorded• 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) <i>Delivered by Ms. Cai Cai, Chief of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion, Social Development Division, ESCAP</i>• H. E. Datuk Dr. Maziah binti Che Yusoff, Secretary General, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, Government of Malaysia
11:40-12:00	<p>ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening the Care Economy and Fostering Resilience towards ASEAN Community Post 2025</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overview of its vision, objectives, and adoption process <i>Ms. Soukphaphone Phanit, Permanent Secretary, Lao Women's Union</i>• 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>• TransformCare Investment Initiative in the ASEAN Context <i>Dr. Jemimah Njuki, Chief of Economic Empowerment Section, UN Women</i>
12:00-12:40	<p>Panel Discussion: Regional Leadership and Partnerships for Transformative Care Policies</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lao PDR: Forward-looking initiatives that value and invest in the care economy in Lao PDR

	<p><i>Dr Ninpaseuth Xayaphonesy, Director General, Department of Women's Development, Lao Women's Union</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cambodia: 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> <p>Q&A</p>
12:40-12:45	Closing Remarks by Ms Thamma Phetvixay, Vice-President, Lao Women's Union

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, or MWFCF) of Malaysia is a governmental body in Malaysia, entrusted with the formulation and execution of policies and initiatives aimed at fostering the well-being and development of women, families, and communities. The Ministry's Vision is to be the leading force in community development towards collective prosperity, and its Mission is to build a prosperous society inclusively and fairly through social innovation and productive welfare. The key objectives of KPWKM include strengthening marriage and family institutions for social stability, empowering women and mainstreaming gender equality to achieve shared well-being, ensuring the rights and welfare of children to reach their full potential, supporting persons with disabilities, the elderly, and other specific groups to enhance their quality of life, and improving strategic partnerships with stakeholders for an effective and comprehensive support system. Through these efforts, MWFCF plays a critical role in promoting social justice and equality, while contributing to the broader goal of sustainable development in Malaysia.

Ms Nazifah Jusoh, Principal Assistant Secretary, International Relations Division, MWFCF, nazifah.jusoh@kpwkm.gov.my

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

ASEAN

Comprised of 10 Member States, ASEAN is an intergovernmental organization that aims to accelerate economic growth, social progress, and cultural development in the region through joint endeavours in the spirit of equality and partnership to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of Southeast Asian nations.

Mr. Miguel Musngi, Assistant Director & Head of the Poverty Eradication and Gender Division, Human Development Directorate, ASEAN Secretariat miguel.musngi@asean.org

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 Phommesay, Program Coordinator, Gender and Inclusion program, Oxfam in Laos phetvilay.phommesay@oxfam.org and Ms. Chaipasird Phunphouvanna, Program Manager-Gender and Inclusion, Oxfam in Laos chaipasird.phunphouvanna@oxfam.org

8. Speakers' Bio

MC



Ms. Channe Lindstrøm Oguzhan

Social Affairs Officer
Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section
Social Development Division
ESCAP

Ms. Channe Lindstrøm Oguzhan's career spans decades within the United Nations system. Her roles have encompassed significant contributions to sustainable urban development, humanitarian coordination, and refugee protection with UN agencies such as UN-Habitat, OCHA, and UNHCR. She currently serves as a Social Affairs Officer at ESCAP, focusing on advancing Sustainable Development Goal 5 through research, normative work, and technical cooperation on women's economic empowerment across ESCAP member states. Channe holds a Master's degree in Forced Migration from the University of Oxford Refugee Studies Centre and a Bachelor's degree in Sociology from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Opening Remarks



H. E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn

Secretary-General
Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

Kao Kim Hourn CM is the current Secretary-General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). He previously served two terms as Minister Delegate attached to the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia (2013-2022) and two terms as Secretary of State of Cambodia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2003-2013). Dr. Kao is a

Member of the Supreme National Economic Council, Senior Fellow at the Jeffrey Cheah Institute on Southeast Asia, and a Member of the Global Council of The Asia Society.



H. E. Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations

Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana is Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). Prior to joining ESCAP in 2018, Ms. Alisjahbana was Professor of Economics at Universitas Padjadjaran in Bandung, Indonesia. From 2009 to 2014, she was Minister of National Development Planning and the Head of the National Development Planning Agency (BAPPENAS), Indonesia.



H. E. Datuk Dr. Maziah binti Che Yusoff

Secretary General

Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development
Government of Malaysia

Datuk Dr. Maziah binti Che Yusoff is an experienced officer with extensive expertise in economics, particularly international macroeconomics, and a strong academic background. Since March 2021, she has served as Secretary-General at the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development, where she has contributed to the progress in Malaysia's care economy. Dr. Maziah is a champion for the care industry, leading a team that strengthens infrastructure, workforce development, and policy frameworks to support caregivers and care recipients. With expertise in national economic policy-making, she has spearheaded strategic research efforts, including the 12th Malaysia Plan in social development. Beyond public service, Dr. Maziah is active in academia, contributing to publications on topics such as public sector leadership. Her work has earned her multiple honors, including the Ministerial Award at the Global Summit of Women in Dubai in 2023 and recognition for her collaboration with the OECD on The Southeast Asian Economic Outlook. These accolades reflect her dedication to economic development and building a robust care infrastructure in Malaysia to enhance the quality of life for all.

ASEAN Declaration on Care



Ms. Soukphaphone Phanit

Permanent Secretary
Lao Women's Union

Ms. Soukphaphone Phanit is currently the Permanent Secretary of the Lao Women's Union and Chair of ACWC. She has served as Lao PDR's Representative to the ACWC for Women's Rights since 2014 and was appointed as the country's representative to the ASEAN Women for Peace Registry (AWPR) in 2018. Previously, She was a focal point of the Lao Women's Union for the Lao National Steering Committee on Human Rights. She holds a Bachelor of Laws from Chiang Mai University, Thailand (1999), a Master of Arts in Women's Studies from the Women's Studies Centre at Chiang Mai University (2005), and a Master of International Rural Development from Lincoln University, New Zealand (2010). Following the 2011 Christchurch earthquake, she completed a Master of Social Practice at UNITEC New Zealand in 2012.

Early in her career, she worked as a counselor for women and child survivors of violence at the Drop-in Centre of the Lao Women's Union. Born in a cave hospital in Houaphanh province, Lao PDR, soon after the country's independence, her lifelong commitment to women's rights and social justice continues to shape her leadership and advocacy.



Ms. Cai Cai

Chief
Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section
Social Development Division
ESCAP

Ms. Cai Cai heads the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). A public policy specialist trained at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Ms. Cai Cai has extensive experience at ESCAP as well as UNICEF and UNDP in policy development, advocacy and capacity building to empower women and girls as key strategy for pro-poor growth and sustainable development



Dr. Jemimah Njuki

Chief of Economic Empowerment Section

UN Women

Dr. Jemimah Njuki is the Chief of the Economic Empowerment section at UN Women, where she leads work on women's economic justice and rights. Her work is focused on decent jobs and entrepreneurship for women, gender responsive climate action and food systems, transforming care systems, gender responsive macro-economic as well as financing for gender equality. She is a recognized leader on gender equality and women's empowerment, having directed global initiatives promoting women's economic empowerment and women's leadership. She has served in multiple roles including as the lead for gender and women's empowerment for the UN Food Systems Summit, Director for Africa at the International Food Policy Research Institute, Coordinator of the Growth and Economic Opportunities program at Canada's International development Research Centre, Program Lead for Care USA's Women in Agriculture programme, and in different CGIAR Centers working on research at the intersection of gender and food systems. She has published widely on gender equality and women's empowerment and in 2021, was named one of the top 100 gender and policy experts.

Panel Discussion



Dr Ninpaseuth Xayaphonesy

Director General

Department of Women's Development

Lao Women's Union

Dr. Ninpaseuth Xayaphonesy (PhD) has been working with the Lao Women's Union since 1995. She served as the Director General of the Department of Women in Development and brings to this role more than 29 years of experience with the Lao Women's Union in international relations, gender equality, women's health, and women's economic empowerment. She also plays a role in developing strategies and laws related to women's and children's rights.

She has worked with UN agencies as a National Project Director, as well as with Oxfam, ADB, Fred Fellow, the Global Fund, and both international and local NGOs at the national level. She

serves as a Project Director, leading teams focused on strengthening women's resilience and economic empowerment, climate change and resilience, and the Parenting Education Programme. Additionally, she supervises a project on women's eye care.



Mr. The Chhun Hak
Director General
Ministry of Women's Affairs

Mr. The Chhun Hak is Director General for Gender Equality and Economic Development of the Ministry of Women's Affairs of Cambodia (MoWA) from 2018 to date. Main function is to lead technical advisory and coordination for gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment in good governance, media and economic development across government policy and reform programmes. He started working as gender activist since 2002. Between 2012 and 2018, he was Deputy Director General of Gender Equality of MoWA; Deputy Director Department of Gender Equality between 2012-2008, and Chief of Local Governance Unit of Gender Equality Department of MoWA between 2005 and 2008. He holds a Master Degree in Public Administration (2011).

Closing Remarks



Ms. Thamma Phetvixay
Vice-President
Lao Women's Union