

# Women and the Future of Care Work in Asia

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# **Women and the Future of Care Work in Asia**

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## Foreword

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Despite economic growth and declining poverty levels across Asia, inequality continues to increase, with large groups of society remaining socially and economically marginalized.

Women in Asia continue to experience massive structural disadvantages, from early childhood education through their retirement—if they were even able to work—and into their older age. On the heels of all the economic progress now comes rapid technological transformation, which is altering the nature of work in ways that offer multiple opportunities as well as risks for social groups across the Global South.

In debates on the future of work, care work surfaces as one of the main areas of interest. The reason: Care workers are expected to face increasing vulnerability. At present, care work is unrecognized and undervalued. According to the International Labour Organization, adequate policy responses to the rising demand for care work and a solution on how to address the looming global care crisis are, by and large, missing. Women are perceived as particularly vulnerable because care work—paid and unpaid—is mainly shouldered by them. This has major economic, social and financial implications for their welfare, standard of living and status in society.

Care work has long been an issue among feminists but has yet to be adequately addressed in nationally appropriate contexts that consider the social, economic and cultural realities in Asia. Due to their poor access to education, skills development and professional know-how, Asia's women are at risk of slipping deeper into unemployment or resorting to migration far from their home for manageable jobs. The goal for us in development cooperation work is to find socially just and gender-equal responses to these challenges.

Through our regional networks, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) brings together diverse voices from social movements,

civil society organizations, trade unions, political parties and academia to jointly develop progressive ideas and narratives for advancing social justice. Among the more innovative platforms is its Women and the Future of Work in Asia Project.

Although the future of work is debated worldwide, marginalized voices are missing from the conversation and perspectives, particularly from the Global South, are underrepresented. FES aims to expose these blind spots by gathering women's perspectives and other voices from countries outside of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) membership. By developing inclusive conceptual ideas and policy recommendations, we hope to mitigate the risks and the rising inequalities in the future world of work.

The project has singled out care work and the digital economy as core issues requiring further research and analyses from women's perspectives. This paper focuses on the care economy while a second paper looks at women and the future of the digital economy in Asia, both offering narratives on the region's situation and policies and concluding with thought-provoking recommendations.

FES and its partners aim to further promote gender equality in the world of work, with emphasis on enhancing women's participation in public and political life and promoting decent work for all persons through gender-just and human-centric economic models.

We extend our sincere gratitude to Anna Julia Fiedler, the author of this paper on care work, for her thorough research. We hope that this study contributes to a fruitful discussion and provides valuable insights for future initiatives.

**Mirco Günther and Lea Gölnitz**

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# Introduction

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Over the past decade, the global job market underwent large changes first and foremost fostered by the rise of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. In light thereof, the definition of work and the direction of workplace and even economic reforms are once again widely debated. Work is not only a denominator for economic production but also a defining element of people's identities. Automation, digitalization and the rise of alternative economic structures, such as the platform economy, have a global impact on workers' lives. While these debates can be seen as a chance to incorporate marginalized voices into the discourse, studies have repeatedly shown that people at the margins, especially women, remain on the losing end of opportunities and benefits.

Women oftentimes suffer due to systemic inequalities as well as social and cultural norms. This is most prominently evident in the field of care, where women account for three quarters of all paid workers globally but take up more than 80 per cent of unpaid care work (Oxfam, 2020, p. 35).

In addition to digitalization, quickly ageing societies and the impacts of climate change are heavily straining local job markets. In a recent report, Oxfam (2020) warned of the effects that these developments, along with common cuts in social welfare, will have on both care workers and societies at large. Although the future of work debates have helped to promote new policies surrounding these developments, they often fall short of inclusivity and rarely take on a feminist approach that seeks to bridge the inequalities between the sexes, regions and the plurality of social strata (Aneja, 2019, p. 2).

Being home to more than half of the global population, Asia is a highly complex region with vast differences in economies, socio-cultural norms, labour and natural resources. The future of work debates and policies mirror this complexity.

Although industrialization has been the defining element of the region's economic development, its scope has varied between countries and led to gaps and regional specialization. China and the Republic of Korea, for example, have developed strong manufacturing sectors, while India transitioned from a predominantly agricultural

economy to include the service industry (Aneja, 2019, p. 3). Women's participation in the labour force has been a priority for some countries in the region, most commonly advanced through a directive to increase economic growth. But the advancement of gender equality in Asia still has a long way to go. Particularly in low-income countries, women shoulder a large amount of unpaid care work and are more likely to engage in low-wage and informal employment, especially in the care services.<sup>1</sup>

Demographic developments in the region are straining the insufficiently established care services and demand urgent social welfare policy responses. East Asian societies face both falling birth rates and increases in life expectancy. The subsequent effects of labour shortages and a rising demand for elder care as well as general health care do not only affect the respective nations. Regional supply and demand mechanisms as well as a lack of government investment in social service provision in some countries have led to an increase in the migration of care workers across the region.

This development is particularly troubling because labour markets in Asia are underregulated, and informal employment prevails in South and South-East Asia (Aneja, 2019, p. 3). Migration, as part of a more globalized and liberalized economy, has been a primary concern for feminist labour discourses in Asia (Ogawa et al., 2018; Baird et al., 2017).

But who gives and who receives care should not depend on people's wealth or sex.

Instead, care should be readily available to all people, and care work should be recognized as decent work for all women and men. In its 2020 report, Oxfam established that public social welfare systems are the most effective way to take on inequalities because they help to reduce and redistribute care burdens.

One way in which this redistribution could transpire in the future is through automation. Although the care sector, with its relational character, is less likely to see job substitution of machines for humans, changes to the labour market are being explored in countries like Japan and the Republic of Korea. Both countries are

spearheading the prototyping of care-related IT, with the Republic of Korea even implementing relevant policies (Kim, 2019). Because this field is still in its early stages, more research on the impact of automation on care needs to be done. But in this paper, the focus remains on social welfare as it offers a more comprehensive account of women's roles in society.

Existing gender pay gaps, lack of employment opportunities and traditional norms result in mainly women taking up the burden of unpaid care work. As the International Labour Organization (ILO) acknowledged, "The conditions of unpaid care work impact how unpaid carers enter and remain in paid work and influence the working conditions of all care workers" (ILO, 2018b, p. 1). The dependencies between unpaid and paid care work as well as other strands of paid work have an impact on the societal gender balance and on the sustainability of national economic development (Esquivel and Kaufmann, 2017, p. 4). As of 2018, the care sector (including domestic workers and non-care workers in jobs related to care) accounted for 11 per cent of total global employment (ILO, 2018b, p. 12).

The care economy only recently gained attention within the future of work debates. Previously, the prevailing gender inequalities in the field of care were largely only cited by Sustainable Development Goal 5 (target 5.4). That target includes both unpaid care and paid domestic work and offers suggestions for the redistribution of care responsibilities, such as "the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family". Because care is often closely linked to social and cultural norms as well as economic development, target 5.4 also emphasizes that its fulfilment should be "nationally appropriate". This emphasis highlights the difficulties surrounding the care discourse, particularly in regard to streamlining. Still, the target delineates State responsibility for inclusive policies.

Due to the variety of tasks covered by paid and unpaid care work, definitions of what it is or entails vary. In the academic debates and in policies, care work is most generally defined "as a form of social reproduction", including activities "involved in looking after and providing for various physical, social and emotional needs

of others" in both domestic and non-domestic settings (Romero, Preston and Wenona, 2014, p. 3). Care work can be provided directly, through personal interactions, such as nursing, or indirectly, such as through cleaning services. Domestic work oftentimes is situated at cross-sections of direct and indirect services.

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## “ Care work and social reproduction

Care work is "a form of social reproduction" and includes activities "involved in looking after and providing for various physical, social and emotional needs of others" in both domestic and non-domestic settings. Care work can be both paid and unpaid.

The terms "reproductive labour" or "social reproduction" have long been used in economic sociology for macro-level analysis of activities, mostly accomplished by women, that sustain society and, in specific cases, the labour force. Through unpaid labour, people help to free capacities or help to "produce" means of production, thus ensuring the continuity of social bonds but also of inequalities. Only recently has the focus shifted to the aspect of care work specifically.

*See Fraser, 2017 and Braunstein, 2015.*

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The provision of care helps recipients participate in society and provides them with more safety and comfort, while potential caregivers may be relieved of their care responsibilities and freed for engaging in the labour market. The latter refers most commonly to women who are still the primary care providers. Professional women are most commonly freed up of their respective care responsibilities through state care infrastructure or support from domestic helpers, many of whom are women (Romero, Preston and Wenona, 2014, p. 3).

In 2019, the care economy became a policy focal point of the ILO Centenary Declaration. The promotion of investment in the care economy and improvement of gender equality in opportunities were agreed upon by all member states (ILO, 2019, p. 4). Due to its shortcomings, the previous triple-R framework—recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work, which

was embraced as a tool to advocate for progressive reforms in the field of care, was replaced by the 5R framework. The ILO introduced this new approach as part of its “high road to care work” to foster policies for decent work. In addition to the focal points of the triple-R framework, the 5R framework also aims to “reward paid care work by promoting more and decent work for care workers and by guaranteeing care workers’ representation social dialogue and collective bargaining” (ILO, 2018, p. xliii). By including representation in the framework, the ILO acknowledges the agency of workers and promotes its tripartite exchange model.

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“ **Triple-R framework:** *Recognizing, reducing and redistributing* unpaid care and domestic work was established as an approach to advocate progressive reforms in the field of care.

**5R framework:** *Recognizing, reducing and redistributing* unpaid care and domestic work PLUS rewarding paid care work by promoting more and decent work for care workers and by guaranteeing care workers’ representation, social dialogue and collective bargaining.

According to the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (2016), the triple-R framework “expands the Beijing Platform for Action’s call for recognition and valuation [...] by adding a concrete economic justice dimension. Recognizing unpaid care and domestic work means avoiding taking it for granted, challenging social norms and gender stereotypes that undervalue it and make it invisible in policy design and implementation. It therefore involves more than facilitating women’s unpaid care and domestic work with measures that recast women as the main care providers.” The International Labour Organization adopted the 5R framework to highlight the need for decent work.

See: ILO, 2018, p. xliv.

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Since ratification of the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers in 2011 and the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, recognition of unpaid care work has slightly improved. The ILO included unpaid care activities in its definition of “work” in 2013, thus providing

urgently needed re-evaluation to the field. The effects of unpaid care work and domestic work on societies and economies also have been valued through explicit policy approaches (Esquivel and Kaufmann, 2017, p. 4).

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## “ Decent work

The International Labour Organization perceives decent work as an enabling mechanism for sustainable development. It is also highlighted in Sustainable Development Goal 8 to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”.

The ILO (2020) defines “decent work” as:

“Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.”

The concept is widely recognized and appears in major declarations and policy resolutions, such as article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the World Summit for Social Development (1995), the Second United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008–2017), the Conference on Sustainable Development (2011) and in the United Nation’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015).

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With that impetus, care workers can now gain access to legal support, such as freedom of association, the elimination of workplace discrimination and security concerning forced labour and child labour (Romero, Preston and Wenona, 2014, p. 2).<sup>2</sup>

Even though societies and economies in the Asia-Pacific region are highly diverse, the trends in the labour market reflect some similarities, and countries increasingly engage in transnational exchange on the future of work

issues, such as within the framework of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Within the ASEAN countries, the need to introduce lifelong learning programmes and to foster reskilling and upskilling is acknowledged, and policy programmes are being realized. Most importantly, the need for adequate social welfare policies is recognized throughout the region. Yet, the results of these efforts remain to be seen.

Since the early 2000s, the gender gap in employment has remained almost unchanged. Continued discrimination affects women's prospects throughout life but particularly into retirement, when many of them face poverty due to a lack of savings (UNESCO, 2019). This is but one aspect in which welfare policy and the redistribution of the care burden from the individual to the State could help improve the economic strain on individuals.

The growing demand for care workers and the increasing wealth gap between countries and regions in Asia has led to what Romero, Preston and Wenona (2014, p. 5) called an "international division of labour [and] a hierarchical care chain based on gender, nationality, class, ethnicity and race".

Such multidimensional issues need adequate policy responses and require multilateral efforts. This paper explores how several Asian societies are engaging in these challenges. Countries have partially acknowledged that even unpaid care work is just another strain of labour and are working towards gender equality in the sector. The next section describes the governmental framing surrounding policies on women and care work in Asia, followed by insights on selective policy approaches in the realm of social welfare and their effects on gender equality. The study then examines the effects of care worker migration on sending and receiving societies as well as on the workers, concluding with the highlighted necessity of multifaceted policy responses to gender inequality.



# National discourses on women, paid and unpaid care work

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Asia presents a difficult field for comparative political analysis because of the varying levels of economic development and spectrum of cultural norms that generate multiple dimensions of gender equality. Regional gaps in economic development have led to distinct priorities within the future of work and women's rights issues.

On an administrative level, most States have introduced ministries tasked with the protection of women's rights. Many of them are also tellingly covering children's and older person's concerns (such as in Bangladesh, India and Indonesia) or directly linked to family planning (such as in China and Malaysia). In Pakistan, the Human Rights Centre for Women is part of the Ministry of Human Rights; while in Thailand and Viet Nam, women's rights issues are respectively administered in the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs. Only the Republic of Korea has a dedicated entity, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, thus seemingly rendering the sexes equal.

In regard to care policies, the responsibilities are often distributed among several national agencies, particularly ministries for health care, education, labour and women. The governments in Bangladesh, Pakistan and the Philippines emphasized labour migration when they each established a ministry or department for their overseas citizens and employees. The administrative diversity of complex concepts, such as women's rights and care, particularly in a transnational regard, demands clear definitions and streamlined policies that can be implemented regionally.

Discourses on the future of work and the Fourth Industrial Revolution have been primarily shaped in an industrialized and academic context in the West. To explore the employability of these concepts in other settings, they need to be re-examined (Aneja, 2019, p. 4). The influence of global agenda-setting through such organizations as the OECD and the ILO, as well as international consultancy firms, cannot be underestimated.

The neoliberal framework of the future of work debates has been criticized for its preference for profit maximization and growth instead of sustainable

development and human-centred agendas (Aneja, 2019; Francisco-Menchavez, 2018; Mahon and Michel, 2017). One outcome of this framework are the political efforts to increase entrepreneurship and to support upskilling and other cash-benefit programmes. These policies are arguably less State-centred and place more responsibility on private enterprises and individuals (Aneja, 2019, p. 4).

Despite the criticism, the ILO promotes investments by public service provision because the care economy is one of the quickest-growing sectors in Asia. The ILO has estimated (2018) that investment in care must be doubled to meet the growing demands and an estimated 269 million jobs could be created worldwide.

Policy approaches depend on a society's demands. The chasm between Asia's low-income and high-income countries has developed along the lines of the region's demographics. India, for example, has a young population, with 356 million citizens aged 10–24. Policies are thus directed at education and childcare (Esquivel and Kaufmann, 2017, p. 28). China, on the other hand, has just recorded its lowest birth rate since the 1940s, with a continuous drop for the past decade. At the same time, its generation of baby-boomers is moving into retirement while experiencing a longer life expectancy than ever before. Subsequently, the country has made elderly care and the increase of the birth rate policy priorities.

By ensuring the adequate response for care needs through care policies, States such as China and India can help improve the social well-being of its citizens and effectively support the redistribution of care responsibilities, both within the family and between the family and the State.

Care policies distribute public resources, such as money, services or time, to people in need of care or those with care responsibilities. In addition to parental leave policies and care services, these regulations include care-related support, such as social transfers, care infrastructure (such as sanitation) and flexible work arrangements (ILO, 2018).

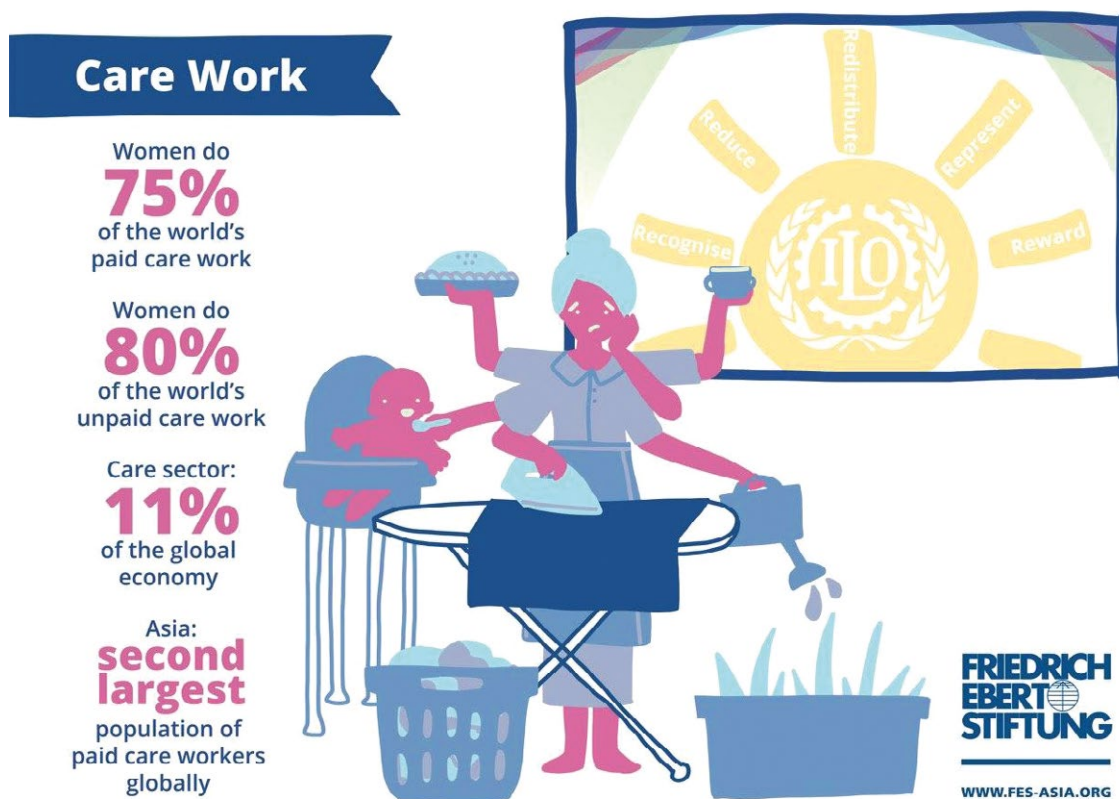
The framing of care-related policies in Asia is diverse. With the field of care strongly attached to social norms, care-

related agenda setting needs to take regional differences into account. Esquivel and Kaufmann (2017, p. 29) stressed that “[p]atriarchal systems of land ownership, family laws and access to productive resources” keep women from political participation and economic emancipation. In some cases, the normative direction of the care agendas proposed by the United Nations or the World Bank is perceived as “Northern” or “Western” (Esquivel and Kaufmann, 2017, p. 10). Asian families traditionally have close intergenerational ties and, according to the ILO (2018a), about 45 per cent of the population in Asia still prefers that family members, mostly women, provide care. These perceptions are shared, although not equally, by men and women, making it more difficult to advocate for a redistribution of care responsibilities. The emphasis of Sustainable Development Goal target 5.4 on nationally appropriate solutions for care redistribution thus may, in some cases, even cement traditional family structures and prevent the advancement of women’s empowerment (Esquivel and Kaufmann, 2017, p. 10).

Nonetheless, many countries have acknowledged that unpaid care work and domestic work keep women economically dependent on their family or spouse. Policy proposals that enable women to join the workforce and even to engage in entrepreneurship have emerged in some countries, such as China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand (OECD, 2020), on the grounds that women’s participation in the workforce is a motor for economic growth.

Despite being home to the second-largest population of female care workers globally, Asian societies still undervalue the importance of the sector (ILO, 2018a). Additionally, issues of unpaid care work are almost completely neglected. The rapid economic growth and fast industrialization in these Asian societies have led to rising wealth gaps within the populations, with China and Malaysia recording the widest disparities and a growing imbalance between rural and urban residents (OECD, 2019c). This has further exacerbated the rise

Figure 1.



in labour migration and employment in the informal sectors. Labour migration in the care sector is particularly high. Many care workers are employed outside of the care sector, with almost 100 per cent of all domestic workers in Brunei Darussalam and Sri Lanka and 60 per cent in China and India working informally (ILO, 2018c). The same goes for 30 per cent of care workers in health, social work and education in the region.

In the struggle for recognition of both paid and unpaid care work as decent work, the divide between formal and informal work has triggered criticism concerning the advocacy of the care and domestic work agenda. Because women are more likely to engage in informal work without access to social security (OECD, 2019a), the differentiation between unpaid care and other types of precarious work is increasingly questioned (Esquivel and Kaufmann, 2017, p.11). Some countries have designated the improvement of social security, poverty alleviation or economic development as their incentive for policies affecting women and the care sector.

In China, for example, the discourse on women in care work closely links to the debates surrounding poverty alleviation. The rural-urban divide in China is particularly wide, with women in rural areas among the most penalized when it comes to unpaid care work worldwide (ILO, 2018).

Despite national guidelines, there are vast policy differences between provinces, and care workers' experiences in China differ greatly, depending on their placement and respective *hukou*.<sup>3</sup> Hong (2017, p. 67) compared the labour migration within China to what is occurring within the whole Asia region, with "provincial boundaries acting like national borders".

For example, the southern Chinese province of Guangdong, long the powerhouse of the country's economy, recently launched a programme to tackle prevailing poverty in the southern part of the province as well as the rising demand for paid care work (MHRSS, 2019a), focusing on unemployed women. The programme aims to improve the skills of care workers by streamlining and internationalization and to educate 60,000 women annually by 2021 in the fields of nursing, maternity- and childcare. National policies also recently increased

emphasis on higher standards in care while decreasing the demands for entry qualifications (MHRSS, 2019a).

The promotion of care work, including programmes for skill enhancement directed at women, may reinforce gendered perspectives—a reality that has not been sufficiently addressed in the region. As well, the framing of care policies with familism or gendered approaches may lead to a backwards trend of women as domestic care providers and to a drop in 2017, p. 30). One way of counteracting this development as well as the feminization of the care sector is with incentives. By rebranding the care professions, for instance, the Chinese Government aims to increase all citizens' motivation to join the sector. Additionally, vocational training and professional education have been given more importance.

The ASEAN promotes lifelong learning and the provision of comprehensive and sustainable social protection, especially in the debates on the future of work.

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#### 6.6 Informal work

The informal economy continues to expand. Informal employment often coincides with the "high incidence of poverty and severe decent work deficits" (ILO, 2020). Workers in the informal economy have less job security due to a lack of monitoring and bargaining for their labour rights, receive low wages, are not covered by health insurance and have no access to general retirement funds. Both education and rural-urban divides have a strong impact on the levels of informality in a region. Globally, about 61 per cent of all people are working in the informal sector, and more than 64 per cent of women in the Asia-Pacific region are employed in an informal setting (ILO, 2018e). Due to the prevalence of informal employment in Asian societies, governments need to find ways to include these groups in national social protection.

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The association's initiatives in support of reskilling and higher education have been praised in reports by the ILO, the World Bank and the World Economic Forum. But due to an imbalance in economic and educational efforts, these reports also warn of a possible future lack of semi-

skilled and low-skilled workers, especially in the service and care fields.

The Philippines, for example, is struggling with a lack of employment opportunities for men and women along with an increase in precarious work. The highest employment rate among women is in the service industry, with 75 per cent of Filipinas in the labour force working in this field, 1.6 million of whom are domestic helpers in private households (Rowena, 2019).

Gendered views on care are prevailing, not only in society but also in policy responses. To tackle this imbalance, incentives are needed for high-skilled workers and also for workers with lower education. Hence, States need to invest more in education, health and social work (ILO, 2018c, p. 4).

The progressive labour and social policies in Mongolia are a good example of their positive effects on gender equality. Unemployment rates in the country are traditionally lower among women than among men due to equal access to

education and investment in childcare services. But there has been a reverse trend in recent years, with an increase in the gender gap in the labour force, at 12.3 per cent in 2017 (Ariunzaya, and Munkhmandakh, 2019). Again, the main reasons for women to stay out of the workforce remain care responsibilities or early retirement (Ariunzaya and Munkhmandakh, 2019). This is particularly prevalent in rural areas, where elder and childcare services are scarce. The World Bank (2018) recommended increasing efforts in legal consultation and anti-discrimination, particularly through gender indicators to reverse this backwards trend.

The rise in demand for care workers in the region is both a chance and a challenge. Care workers are typically employed in the informal sector, and women shoulder both paid and unpaid care work. In light of care penalties, the region's welfare policies, pensions, social security provisions and health care services need more attention. Through a provision of sufficient social protection and investments in public services, women could be relieved from the socioeconomic inequalities.

# Welfare demand and supply

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Women provide the main load of unpaid care work across the region, and they rely heavily on social protection, particularly in the low-income countries. Despite consensus regarding the importance of care, there has been little progress in public welfare initiatives; the social protection of unpaid carers remains largely insufficient (OECD, 2019a; 2019c). Even though the burden of unpaid care work and inequalities in the workplace mutually affect each other, policies often fail to tackle the normative discrimination of women and are rarely gender-sensitive (OECD, 2019a; ILO, 2018b, p. 9).

Social protection investment in the Asia-Pacific region amounts to only 7 per cent of the region's gross domestic product value, and social protection is mainly covered by insurance, mostly for middle- and upper-economic strata of workers in the formal sector (OECD, 2019c). The 5R framework—recognition, reduction, redistribution, reward and representation—can help to redress the prevailing inequalities sustainably and efficiently. Redistributing care responsibilities between individuals and the State, between women and men, as well as between the State and the publicly subsidized market are the most effective ways to relieve women from their additional burdens and to improve the recognition of unpaid care as work. Yet, unpaid care has rarely been at the centre of social protection policies. Where it is, the efforts commonly follow gendered approaches on care that ultimately reinforce existing inequalities (OECD, 2019a).

Relevant care policies cover the provision of comprehensive care services for children, disadvantaged persons and elderly; they also include transfers and cash-benefits concerning care (ILO, 2019, p. 9). Additionally, they cover labour laws supporting families and a balance between paid and unpaid work. Investment in care-relevant infrastructure helps to limit some of the labour-intensive aspects of care. Most countries in the region have taken up legal reforms and investments to empower women. The government of Viet Nam (2012), for example, aims to increase women's representation in the political sphere and in the labour market through quotas. The government of India has pushed surveys to analyse the time use of women in unpaid care and help to develop cross-sector policies for the redistribution of care responsibilities through the application of technologies and with

parental services (MWCD, 2016). With introduction of the KEMAS Early Childhood Services Quality 2020–2030 Plan, Malaysia is working to increase the attractiveness of early childhood education and create more decent jobs in the field by demanding university education for care workers. The government of Pakistan (2019) is providing enhanced comprehensive legal support for women and better early childhood education on gender equality.

Despite all that, the divergence between countries and regions remains large, with East Asia providing the most comprehensive childcare services on the continent. In countries with insufficient provision of care services, the burden of care is most commonly carried by women or families who invest privately in their employment of domestic workers.

In Asia, the biggest providers of migrant care workers are the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka (Romero, Preston and Wenona, 2014, p. 9), while Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Malaysia report the largest numbers of employed domestic workers.

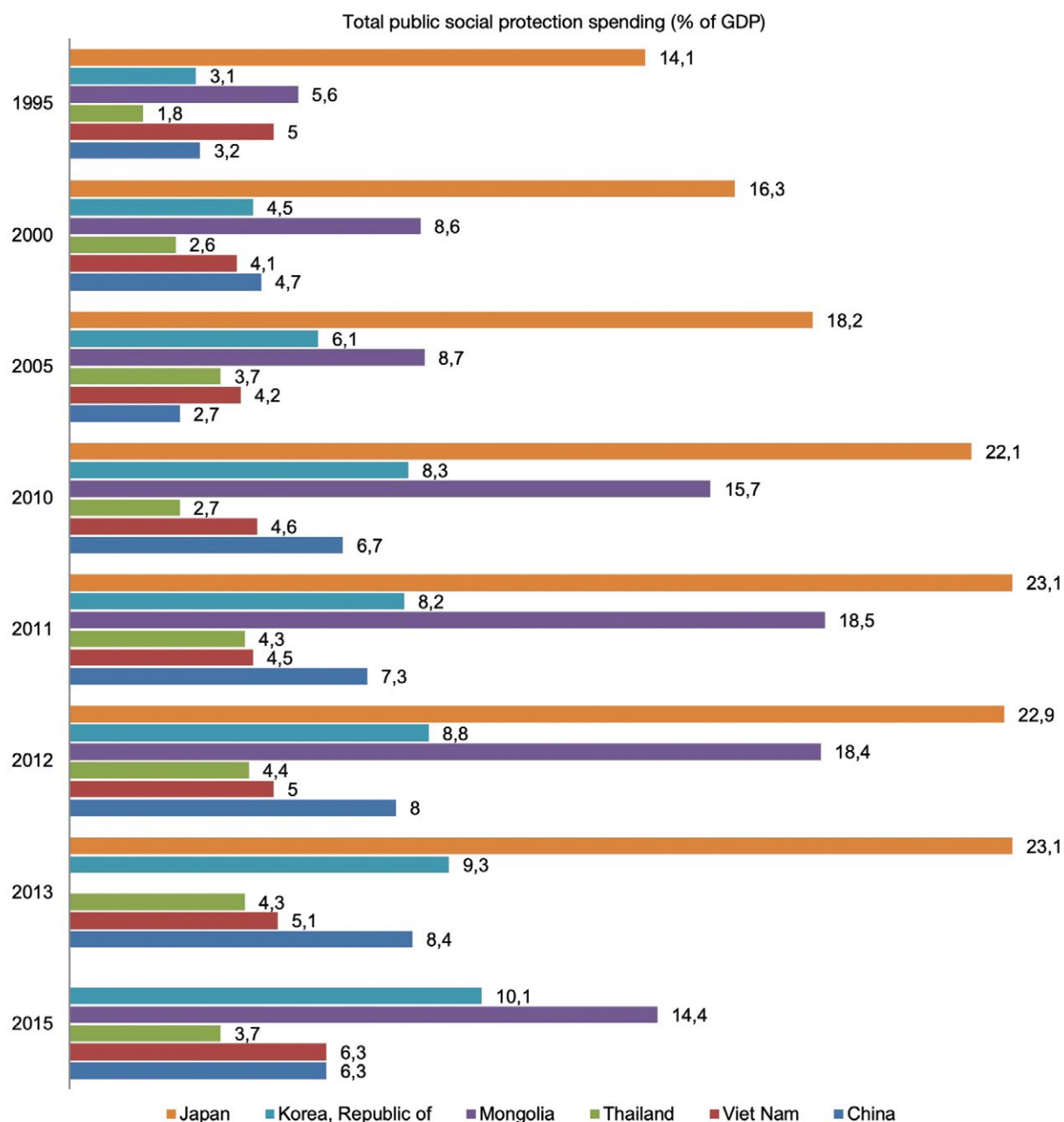
This dynamic could change in the coming decade, as China, India, the Republic of Korea and Thailand all struggle with rising care demands.

National discourses on welfare, women and care differ greatly. Norms regarding unpaid care work exceed mere gender dichotomy. Rather, they concern perceptions of intergenerational relations and responsibilities. As noted, family ties are traditionally close in Asia, and the main care providers remain family members, particularly women and girls. In many countries in the region, particularly in India and the Philippines, women still spend a greater amount of time on unpaid care work than men (Rowena, 2019). With men only doing a quarter of all unpaid care work, the distribution deserves more attention, but there is a lack of public and political discourse in many countries. Despite rising awareness of the effect of unpaid care work on women, the share conducted by men has even decreased over the past two decades in Mongolia and Thailand, for example (ILO, 2018).

Efforts to improve the gender balance and promote shared responsibility in domestic work and unpaid

Figure 2: Government spending on social protection, select countries in Asia, 1995–2015.

Source: Author, based on ILO, 2017.



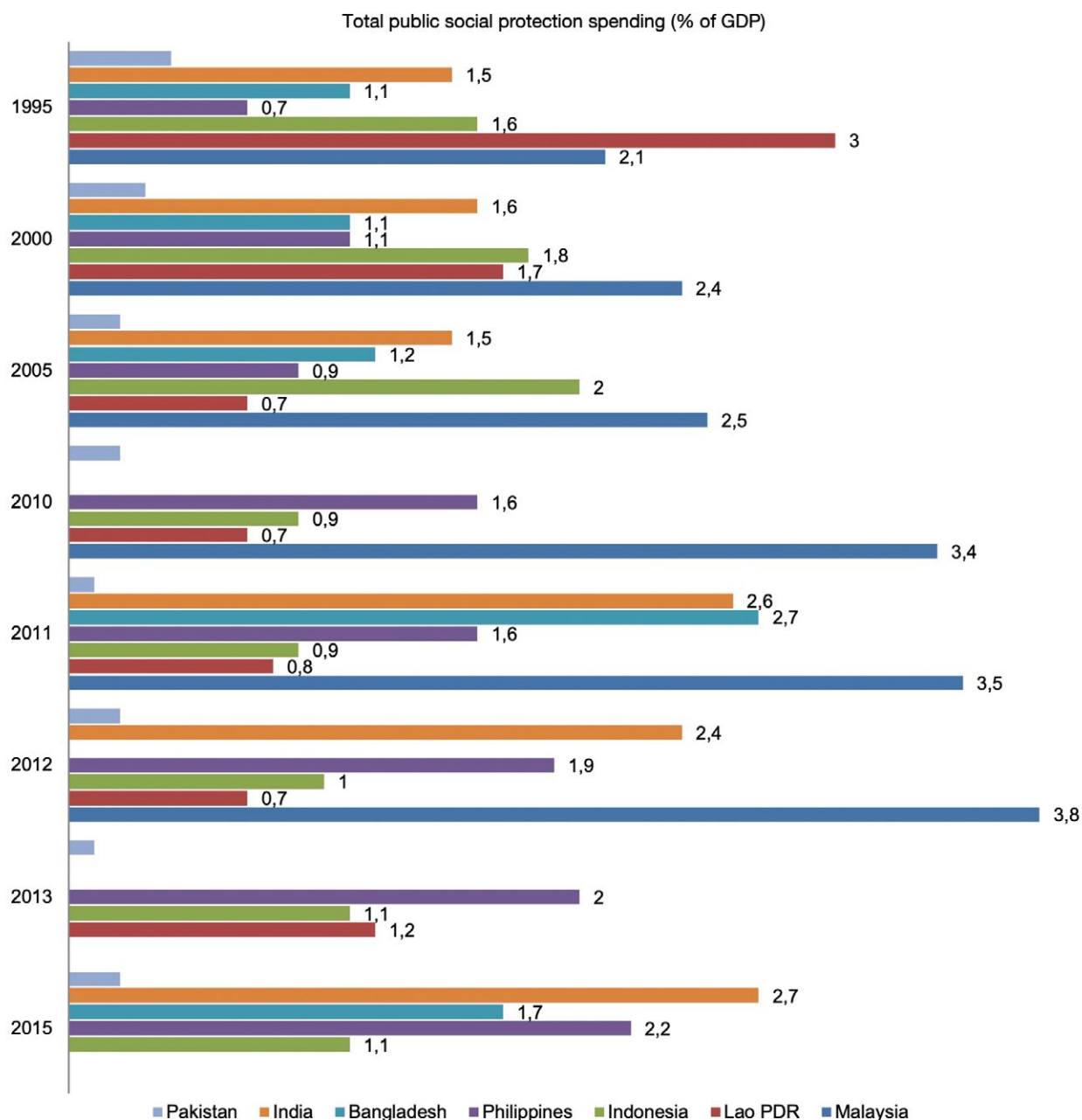
care are prone to backlash; communities first need to develop acceptance and a sense of ownership of the necessary new social norms (OECD, 2019a). Oftentimes, non-government organizations and local policy groups engage in this kind of advocacy work

with communities to instil acceptance of shared responsibility in unpaid care.

The perception of unpaid care as women's work further affects the status of paid care work. In China, the average

Figure 3: Government spending on social protection, select countries in Asia, 1995–2015.

Source: Author, based on ILO, 2017.



professional caregiver is aged between 40 and 50 years old (MHRSS, 2019a), and the country lacks skilled employees. The sector only offers low salary benefits and social security, thus failing to attract high-skilled workers. Incentivizing policy campaigns to improve the reputation

of vocational training as well as the working conditions and benefits of paid care work have been commissioned.

With more women joining the workforce and with the ageing demographics across Asia, social protection and



welfare policies have become a priority. This also is attributed to a change in family relations, with smaller nuclear families becoming more common, as is the long distance between family members due to labour migration. Women with care responsibilities typically experience a “labour force penalty”: Mothers, in particular, cut back on working hours to engage in care (ILO, 2018b, p. 7). As a result of the labour force penalty, women are prone to employment in the informal sector and more likely to seek self-employment. Due to these types of work histories, women suffer financial instability, lack social security and experience poverty at an older age (OECD, 2019a).

Malaysia is working towards better protection of low-income families and single mothers in its Eleventh Malaysia Plan, 2016–2020. Through selective research, the establishment of a comprehensive database on single mothers, educational efforts on health care benefits and implementation of childcare services and flexible working arrangements, the government wants to support women in the labour market (KPWKM, 2015).

Greater investment in sustainable care policies both support social stability within the population and have been proven to lead to higher employment rates among women (ILO, 2018b, p. 10). One exception is Indonesia, with a comparably high women’s employment rate at 53 per cent despite spending less than 1 per cent of its GDP on care policies.

Globally, the majority of women (70 per cent) and men (66 per cent) prefer that women work in paid jobs (ILO, 2018b, p. 5). Universal access to social protection, adequate care policies and improved care infrastructure could promote greater gender equality and emancipate women.

### **Parental leave and maternity protection**

As part of reproductive labour and care responsibilities, parental leave and maternity protection policies are a pressing issue when it comes to gender inequality. In 2016, only 42 per cent of all countries globally provided the minimum maternity protection standards demanded by the ILO, and 39 per cent of the countries offered

no paternity leave provision (ILO, 2018b, p. 11). This skewering leads to an increase in the gender employment gap because the time women spend on unpaid care after childbirth increases. The gap subsequently widens with the number of children in the household. Fathers of young children, on the other hand, have the highest “employment-to-population” ratio globally, with 89.3 per cent of fathers in the Asia-Pacific region in employment (ILO, 2018b, p. 7). The only exceptions to this are Mongolia and the Philippines, which report a high re-entry rate of women into the labour market.

As with other welfare policies, unemployed women and those working in the informal sector are typically not covered by maternity protection. In many cash-benefit programmes, women are only eligible if they are in formal employment, thus rendering those in informal employment or unemployed women more vulnerable (OECD, 2019a).

Because of demographic changes, governments have increased the promotion of family-friendly labour politics, particularly parental leave and maternity protection, to incentivize increased birth rates. Along with maternity leave, there is growing consensus that paid paternity leave is both necessary to foster a better relationship between fathers and their children (and hence children’s development) and to improve gender norms, the distribution of unpaid care work and productivity. Paid paternity leave has been introduced throughout the region, with Japan and the Republic of Korea offering the most generous plans (Gharib, 2018).

In the Republic of Korea, high education levels among women combined with low marriage and fertility rates have led to a decrease in births, to fewer than one child per woman in 2018 (OECD, 2019b). As a result, the country has invested in a comprehensive system of paid parental leave. Both women and men are legally entitled to paid care leave. But the acceptance rates are low, with only 25 per cent of women and 5 per cent of men taking child care-related leave (OECD, 2019b), prompting the government to undertake further reforms under article 7 of its Framework Act on Gender Equality to make broader offers on paid leave, with up to two years of paid leave for a two-parent household. The reform also aims to provide better social infrastructure and foster family-



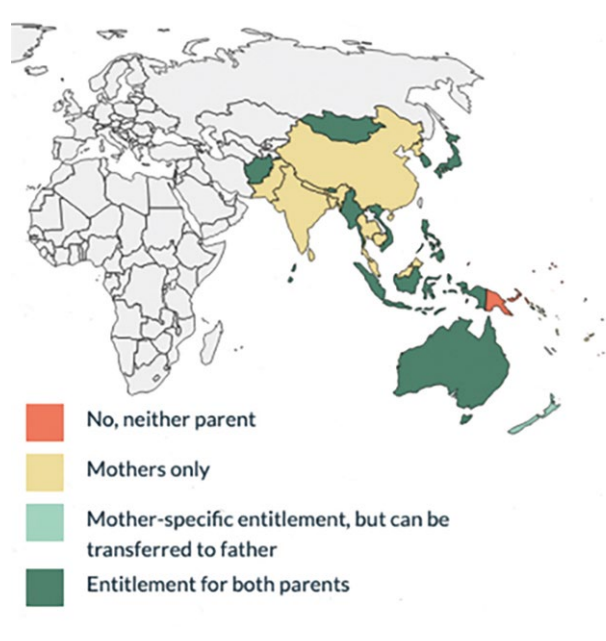
Figure 4: Paid paternity leave, by country, 2016.

Source: World Policy Center (2016).



Figure 5: Paid maternity leave, by country, 2016.

Source: World Policy Center (2016).



friendly workplaces (MGEF, 2019). Since its introduction, 23,000 men have taken paternity leave in the Republic of Korea (Lee, 2020).

The ASEAN community has jointly acknowledged that “greater parity between paternity and maternity leave could support a more rapid return to work among mothers and help shift underlying gender norms” (UN Women, 2016). Parental leave policies find more resonance if they are well paid in respect to previous earnings. In addition to restrictive gender norms, financial loss may prevent fathers from taking up paternity care. The Philippine government was avant-garde when it introduced a paid paternity leave law in 1996, offering men seven days of leave (Hasnan, 2019). The regulation has since been extended, and women can transfer seven of their legally provided 105 days to the father. In Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam, fathers are eligible to take paid leave, albeit with differing regulations. In some cases, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, men working in the public sector are eligible to longer leave periods, of up to one month, while men working in the private sector only receive up to two weeks of paid leave (Hasnan, 2019).

In some cases, eligibility depends on the previous employment status of the father, rendering men in the informal sector or who are unemployed more vulnerable and thus reinforcing the socioeconomic disparities. In Myanmar, for example, fathers must have worked and paid social security insurance for half a year within the year preceding the birth of their child (Hasnan, 2019). In Malaysia, the parental leave of men working in the private sector is provided by the employer. In some countries, major corporations and consultancies have introduced their own paid leave policy.

Despite the policy push, men still seem reluctant to take paternity leave because they fear stigmatization due to gender norms or workplace culture (Lee, 2020). Tackling these perceptions and providing paid leave for all fathers, regardless of their previous employment status, is a major challenge for governments across the region.

### Childcare policies

Another sector experiencing increased attention due to ageing demographics is that of childcare services.

Investment in the sector is considered as necessary to support young families and free women to join the labour force amid shortages. But the provision of childcare often does not fully match the needs of working parents with irregular schedules and long commutes. There is also a rural-urban divide in countries, such as China, India and Indonesia. Young children and caregivers are especially at a disadvantage. The global pre-primary school enrolment rate for children younger than 3 years was only 18.3 per cent in 2015, and until 2018, only 18 percent of 207 countries offered free and compulsory pre-primary education (ILO, 2018b, p. 11). But enrolment rates in Asia have been on the rise, and the region has been making progress in this field, with most countries enhancing the compulsory education period, including pre-primary education (OECD, 2020). One positive example is the Republic of Korea, which increased its spending on day-care services to 1 per cent of its GDP and has furthered national public and private day-care and kindergarten provision. With the hours of both pre-primary care and primary and secondary care often not in line with parents' regular working hours, the Korean government put the development of afterschool programmes on its policy agenda in 2018 (OECD, 2019b).

China increased its public investment in pre-primary care, which grew 12.8 per cent from 2017 to 2018, along with a larger total education budget (MOE, 2019).

Similarly, the Philippine government extended childcare service provision and made pre-primary education obligatory (OECD, 2020, p. 161). But the student-teacher ratio still remains too low, once more having negative effects on the rural-urban divide. To mitigate the problem, the government introduced a programme fostering teacher exchange to ease the demand on public schools (OECD, 2020, p. 164). In its efforts to enhance employability, the government of Indonesia raised the number of compulsory school years to 12, now covering ages 5–18 (OECD, 2020, p. 147).

The field of pre-primary care is highly feminized. While education workers typically enjoy a good reputation and job security, workers in early childhood education generally receive lower salaries than their peers in primary and secondary education. This results in lower commitment rates. To tackle this challenge in Malaysia, the government introduced mandatory higher education degrees for early

childhood education workers. Generally, emphasis on high-skilled workers in the sector helps attract workers of both sexes and possibly leads to higher salaries.

### **Health care, elderly care and services for disadvantaged persons**

With social protection becoming increasingly important for governments across the region and perceived as a tool for more inclusive growth, there has been an increase in investment in the health care sector (ILO, 2017). Despite the economic and cultural differences in the region in recent years, there has been growing consensus on the positive effects of social protection on sustainable growth. Health care and social protection schemes are being expanded to include more vulnerable groups and new schemes are rolling out. Still, a large number of people in the region remain without social protection, and some “are ageing before instating robust social protection systems” (ILO, 2017). Even countries with a significantly sized youth population, such as Bangladesh and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, are prospectively facing similar challenges. At the same time, as demand for care workers rises, States are investing in education programmes. The ILO estimates that the care sector will experience a vast increase in both precarious and high-skilled professions adding to the existing divide. The biggest group of paid care workers comprise nurses and midwives (ILO, 2019, p. 12). As a particularly feminized field, nursing offers low wages but also has a high demand for overtime work. But this comes at the expense of both carers and recipients, and care quality suffers.

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### **“ Social protection**

As defined by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, “social protection” seeks to prevent, manage and overcome situations that adversely affect people's well-being. Social protection consists of policies and programmes designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability by promoting efficient labour markets, diminish people's exposure to risks and enhance their capacity to manage economic and social risks, such as unemployment, exclusion, sickness, disability and old age.

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Along with a lack of skilled care workers, people in need of care suffer from insufficient coverage. In 2015, only 9 per cent of people with severe disabilities received some form of benefit in the Asia-Pacific region (ILO, 2019, p. 11). During its 2013 summit, ASEAN made the provision of social protection and coverage a priority. All ASEAN Member States have enhanced their exchange on care-related policies and monitoring. To secure proper implementation, the ASEAN Senior Labour Officials Meeting Working Group is working on a monitoring framework that is in line with the Sustainable Development Goal targets. Focal points are “pension systems, social protection of migrant workers, the challenges of extending coverage to workers in the informal economy, financing social protection and monitoring” (ILO, 2017).

As social structures and family patterns change in Asian societies, some countries are seeing a dramatic shift from traditional perceptions of care responsibilities for children and older persons. In 2018, only a mere quarter of Koreans still believed that elderly care was the responsibility of their family, while 48 per cent deemed

the State as responsible for the provision of care services (OECD, 2019b). At the same time, the country has the fastest-ageing population across all OECD members (OECD, 2019b).

Ageing societies face multiple challenges, including shrinking workforces, rising demand for care and a high strain on national pension funds. Women are affected by both the rising care demand and old-age poverty due to the pay gap and their years spent in informal employment and lacking social security, if they even ever worked. Japan and the Republic of Korea are both facing a steep increase in older women poverty (SCMP, 2020). In both countries, a prevailing culture demanding long working hours keeps female employment rates low because women are more likely to engage with care needs within the family (OECD, 2019b). To secure financing for universal social protection, Asian governments are increasingly looking at tax-based models (ILO, 2017). In some countries, labour migration is treated as a solution to the shortage in care workers, yet leaving migrants without access to any national scheme of social protection.

## Labour migration and care work

The changing nature of work and the societal, economic and ecological transformations in Asia have triggered migratory streams, both nationally and transnationally. While the former mostly encapsulates a rural-urban migration, the latter denotes both low- and high-skilled workers looking for better pay and job stability within the region or even beyond. Both types point to increasing wealth gaps and persisting regional disadvantages, which had been particularly exacerbated by the economic crisis of the latter 1990s. Multiple member countries of ASEAN have a history of labour export, with 70 per cent of migrant workers living outside the ASEAN region, many of them as care workers. And yet, ASEAN only recently started to work on cooperative policy models to formalize migration and protect workers' rights.

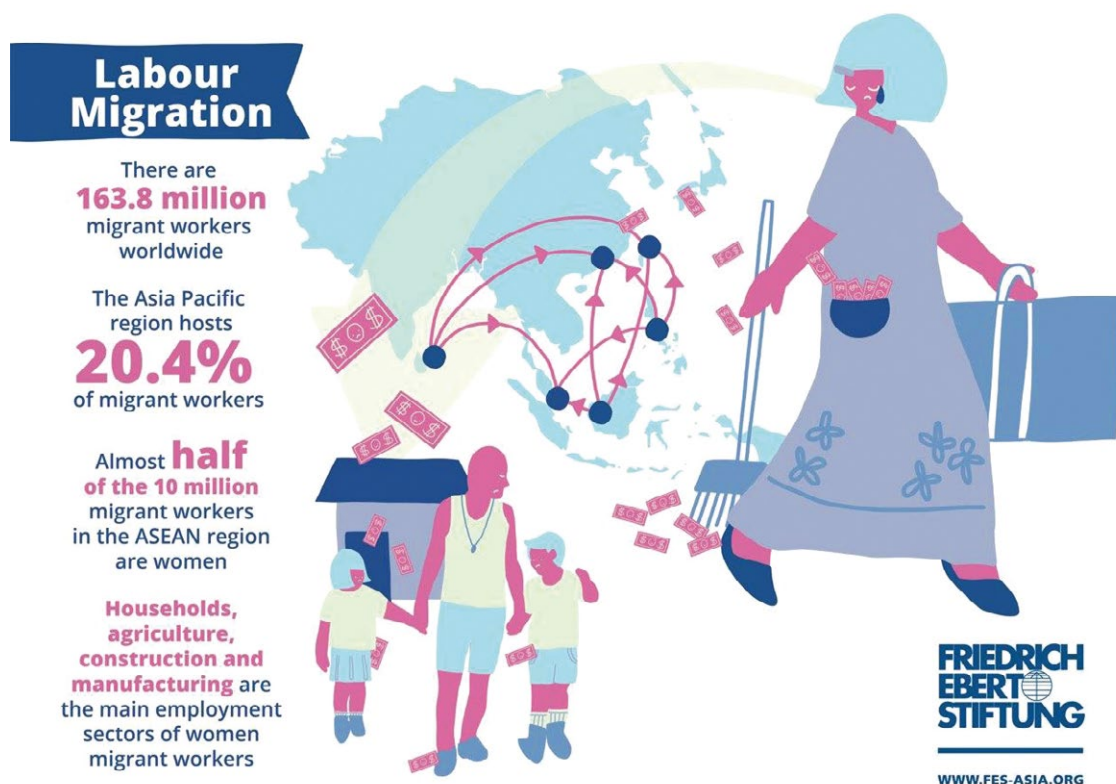
Migration is not merely a side-effect of economic inequalities. It can also help to understand complex relational dependencies and highlights the "inequalities inherent in traditional notions of women's work and the

intersections of race, class, ethnicity and citizenship" (Romero, Preston and Wenona, 2014, p. 2). Through the migratory patterns in the region as well as related labour policies and transnational cooperation, socio-political restrictions can be traced. The impact of migration of care workers, especially women domestic workers, on family care strategies in the face of long-term separation urgently needs to be more deeply examined (Francisco-Menchavez, 2017, p. 4).

One example of transnational efforts to respond to labour migration is the ASEAN Forum on Labour Migration. There has been a close political exchange between home countries and receiving nations. In light of rising care demands in East Asia, there have also been initiatives to develop new partnerships.

Winners from these exchanges could be Indonesia and the Philippines because they have long invested in care education in their countries and have experience in

Figure 6.



supporting migrants. China also has a long history of labour migration; once an important sending country, in recent years the trend of an ageing population has led to rising internal demand for care workers (Hong, 2017, p. 67). In 2013, about one fifth of all domestic workers globally worked in China (ILO, 2015), and many of them had migrated from rural areas in the country to the cities.

Through the recognition of both paid and unpaid care work in their agenda, the ILO and the OECD both support an urgently needed formalization of the sectors and also promote policy initiatives highlighting the global dimensions of care. Migrants in the care sector face difficulties due to a lack of regulations, with no social protection and a physically and psychologically strenuous job in a foreign environment. Due to the various types of care work, the struggles of migrant care workers differ. While personal care workers, many of them home-based, are confronted by low wages and discrimination, community health workers face a lack of resources, training and similarly low salaries (ILO, 2018b, p. 13).

As noted, some countries (Pakistan and the Philippines) have reacted to the precarious conditions of migrant workers, specifically domestic workers, by setting up ministries and offices charged to protect workers' interests abroad. Nevertheless, there have been repeated scandals, including physical abuse and, in some cases, denial to leave their employer and host country. In response, Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka offer shelters to support workers (Romero, Preston and Wenona, 2014, p. 12). But the receiving societies, particularly at the government level, have been slow to adopt regulatory measures to better ensure the safety of domestic workers.

In a comparative study on responses to abuse against migrant domestic workers in Shanghai, Taiwan and Hong Kong, Laliberté (2017, p. 136) concluded that the slow reaction at all levels of governance, regardless of the political and economic system, proves that "care work does not merit much attention". Laliberté argued that socio-political decisions are not informed by the aim to increase social security but much rather led by economic considerations and that governments apply social norms to legitimize their policies. One example of this is the new trend in Chinese politics to again promote Confucianism and the concept of "filial piety".

But the rising demand for domestic workers in one place only leads to a shift of the supply shortage in the home provinces and countries of the migrants. According to the ILO (2018b, p. 14), domestic workers have become an integral essential in high-income countries with a lack of institutional care services, where "(1) more affluent populations have economic power to outsource unpaid care work to another population group of lesser economic means; (2) where care-specific foreign worker programmes facilitate their recruitment and employment by private households; (3) where public policies provide incentives and subsidies to encourage individuals to hire care workers, as in the case of several cash-for-care policies; and (4) where employment relationships and working conditions in private households are de jure or de facto, partly or completely unregulated."

The recruitment of care workers is usually conducted through private agencies that demand high fees from employers and employees. And only about 10 per cent of all domestic workers globally are provided with similar legal rights as other workers, while 29.9 per cent have no legal protection (Romero, Preston and Wenona, 2014, p. 17).

Despite laws on minimum wage, maximum working hours, residency, health care provision, vacation days and sick leave in Hong Kong, for example, domestic workers still commonly experience discrimination. Their struggle only somewhat recently attracted sympathy from the general public due to documented reports of extreme abuse. With a lack of regulation, women are left in insecure environments with little legal protection. Their immigrant status leaves them in uncertainty and with prospects of deportation. In recent years, a strong domestic workers movement has been established in Hong Kong, and several labour rights groups have been formed offering psychological, financial and legal support. One such group is the Hong Kong Federation of Asian Domestic Workers. Similarly in India, there have been efforts to organize women in the informal sector, including domestic workers, by the Self-Employed Women's Association. However, global care chains remain highly unregulated.

Mahon and Michel (2017, p. 270) criticized the lack of comprehensive efforts to ratify multilateral policies protecting migrant care workers by both international

organizations and national governments. ASEAN (2017) reacted to the trend and jointly agreed to protect migrant workers' rights and engage with different stakeholders in its Compendium on Migrant Workers' Education and Safe Migration Programmes. Because care is a cross-sector field, it relates to governance regarding migration, development and social policy, which can only partially be influenced through the ILO and the OECD governance regulations (Mahon and Michel, 2017, p. 270). Through the "migration-development nexus", the United Nations has acknowledged the role that migration has had in the development of national economies of both sending and receiving countries.

In the Philippines, for example, women have outnumbered men as working migrants, amounting to more than 50 per cent of all overseas workers in 2017 (Rowena, 2019). The income of working migrants provides needed support for their families but also national economies in their home country, leading to what Sassen (2003) coined as the "feminization of survival".

Due to gender discrimination, abysmal working conditions, low salaries or a lack of opportunities in their respective home countries, the migration of women care workers is a global trend. Some of the biggest hurdles for migrant care workers are skill recognition and certifications (ILO, 2018b, p. 13). Among migrants in the care economy, domestic workers are the largest group. Although their work is essential for the host economies, domestic workers are often perceived as unskilled and rarely benefit from migration policies directed at high-skilled care workers, such as nurses, teachers and social

workers (Romero, Preston and Wenona, 2014, p. 3). The inadequate care policies in host societies have led to a drain on care workers from South and South-East Asia. But in many cases, women migrant care workers are only considered for informal, low-pay jobs without social security, which are unattractive to local populations. Women thus tend to be employed short-term and end up in a cycle of remigration in search of employment (Mahon and Michel, 2017, p. 275). The consequences are manifold but tend to be ignored in policy reports.

First among those consequences: Caregivers are rarely allowed to bring family members to live with them. The relationship with their family becomes strained, and often care responsibilities as well as economic support are passed on to other family members, especially older persons who might be in poor health and in need of care. Mahon and Michel (2017, p. 276) criticized the ILO and the OECD for their reports portraying the women as vulnerable, in need of support and not knowing about their rights in their host societies. Instead, the psychological consequences of migrant care work and the workers' collective and organized efforts to bridge existing divides to manage transnational families and build support networks should gain more attention.

In 2009, the ILO and the United Nations Development Programme introduced the concept of "co-responsibility" to address these issues concerning women migrant workers' experiences (Mahon and Michel, 2017, p. 278). The 5R framework and the effort to include women workers by giving them more representation might be a good first step of awareness in this direction.<sup>4</sup>



## Policy insights and recommendations

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As pointed out, many countries in Asia are investing in care policies. And yet, the policy approaches regarding care frequently focus on freeing up women from family responsibilities for economic development. These policies tend to not delineate unpaid care work and instead target social welfare and poverty alleviation. Because care work is not prioritized, many policies fall short of Sustainable Development Goal target 5.4, which aims at redistributing care responsibilities between women, men and the State. And they lack a clear approach to analysis of care time use.

Under these policies, women's role in care remains undervalued. They continue to shoulder heavy amounts of unpaid care work and remain the main target for gendered policies, such as parental leave regulations and care education mainly directed at women, which reinforces existing patterns. In the continuing rural-urban divide, women in rural areas now suffer from double inequity.

In its new "high road to care", the ILO has prioritized gender equality and more social justice in the field of care. Member States are asked to focus increased attention on the fields of "care, macroeconomics, social protection, labour and migration" (ILO, 2019). This reflects both the complexity of care and the necessity of multifaceted policy responses.

To achieve that complexity, the ILO introduced the 5R Framework for Decent Care Work to promote "more and decent work for care workers; and guarantee care workers' representation, social dialogue and collective bargaining" (ILO, 2018b), p. 17). Some governments in the region, such as Malaysia, Pakistan and the Republic of Korea, are adhering to the tripartite approach and have invited academics and non-government organizations to learn from different stakeholders. Transnational networks, such as ASEAN, have acknowledged that care policies are needed on both the local and international levels. But as the recent Oxfam (2020) report emphasized, the development is still too slow and care redistribution has gone backwards in some situations, such as in China and Mongolia. One issue preventing the redistribution of care highlighted by the governments in India and Pakistan but seemingly overlooked in China are socio-cultural norms.

Through progressive school curricula, TV programmes and non-government initiatives, Pakistan, for instance, is aiming to change gendered views from an early age. Whereas in China, the low birth rate has led to a push for gendered policy education on women and motherhood.

The 5R framework aims to close the gap between advocacy work and workers' experiences by opting for a broader representation of care workers in the reform process. This way, women's experiences gain more emphasis in the future.

The analysis of care is another field that is lacking attention in national politics. To monitor the effects of policies related to Sustainable Development Goal 5, a time-use survey has become common. The survey enables governments and researchers to explore the "time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age group and location" (UNESCO, 2016). But national reports of time-use surveys have been under critique due to their lack of comparability. Charmes (2019) noted that responsible analysts often lack awareness "or have not been sensitized enough to understand that gender is not a variable like others". He suggested that analysts cross-classify variables by sex. The Republic of Korea is a positive example for its efforts to provide gender-neutral responses to care. Nonetheless, all countries are aware of the gender gap in the provision of unpaid care.

Because they lack adequate public care services, some societies have become receivers of large groups of care migrant workers, mostly women. These societies' "cash-for-care" solutions to the worker shortage have been introduced as a first step. But they are insufficient and do not reach those most in need. The measures are typically individualized and directed at families—leaving families in charge of care provision and women as the main providers of unpaid care (Romero, Preston and Wenona, 2014, p. 4).

As in China and Mongolia, this may lead to a revision of previous progressive trends and subsequently to a decline in women's participation in the labour force.

To counteract this reinforcement of gender-disparate norms, governments should concentrate on both paid

and unpaid care work in relation to its impact on society generally and women in particular. The redistribution of care responsibility from private households to the State will help regulate both working conditions and pay and could lead to improvements in the informal sector. Unregulated, private and informal care work tends to leave caregivers more vulnerable to abuse and without social protection (ILO, 2018b, p. 15). The access to labour protection, the right to organize and the right to engage with workers' organizations and unions are integral to strengthening labour security in the care sector and representation of the most vulnerable workers, such as the domestic workers. By concentrating on social justice issues, the effects of unpaid care work and gender inequality would gain more attention and support. A revaluation of paid care work has the potential to reverse the feminization of care jobs. Pakistan and the Philippines have invested in the promotion of technical and vocational education and training and aim to improve the reputation of vocational education at large.

The vast changes in the labour market, as discussed in the future of work debates, call for a strengthening of national taxation systems, in line with the comprehensive provision of social welfare services and an increase in public services (ILO, 2017). Campaigns aiming at the education of care workers are needed to gradually improve gender inequalities regarding unpaid care. Only through a multidimensional policy approach to care can countries achieve sustainable results in the redistribution of the care burden and can women gain more opportunities to participate in the labour force.

To summarize the policy recommendations:

1. To act sustainably, policy focus needs to find multifaceted responses, particularly to care in relation to macroeconomics, social protection, labour and migration.
2. Communities should jointly implement the 5R framework to promote decent care work and support gender equality and acknowledge the value of family in societies.
3. Governments should follow the tripartite approach of the ILO and invite academics and non-government organizations to learn from different stakeholders and include all related parts of society to develop policy solutions.
4. To break with gender stereotypes:  
Governments, together with various stakeholders, must develop a wide range of socio-cultural initiatives (gender-neutral school curricula and TV programmes) Governments must gender mainstream policies so that both sexes are equally addressed and benefit to the same degree
5. Governments need to improve the reputation of care work and care workers (with certified vocational training and higher remuneration) to increase gender equality in the paid care sector.
6. Governments need a closer focus on monitoring tools in care work and gender equality analyses to ensure their effectiveness (improve time use-surveys).
7. Because care is a societal issue and remuneration of paid care and recognition of unpaid care are closely linked, governments need to specifically address unpaid care work in relation to its impact on society at large and women in particular.
8. State solutions should be prioritized in the care sector instead of leaving responsibility with the private sector.
9. National taxation systems should be strengthened, in line with the comprehensive provision of social welfare services and an increase in public services.
10. Women working in the informal sector and their specific obstacles to social services or protection needs to be acknowledged and redressed.



# Endnotes

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1. The International Labour Organization estimated that, globally, around 606 million women are not part of the labour force because of care responsibilities, while the most common reasons for unemployed men are lack of education or sickness (ILO, 2019b, p. 5). The OECD (2019c) reported that low education and informal employment are most closely linked in East Asia, with “90 per cent of workers without primary education” ending up in informal education.
2. An analysis of the relationship between migrant workers, their host societies and care recipients and home societies and families whom they commonly support financially, would be an interesting venture point for future studies.
3. In China, citizens receive a *hukou*, or household registration, upon birth. The system helps to control inner-country migration as well as administer welfare. The main categories are “agriculture” (or rural) and “non-agriculture” (or urban). See Hong, 2017, p. 85.
4. The question of whether women’s migration is depicted differently in policy reports in sending countries needs to be looked at in-depth. The framing of women as mothers and caregivers continues with their transnational employment, leading to an even bigger emotional burden surrounding their expected care responsibilities.

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