



► South-4-Care Learning Hub: Advancing Decent Work in the Care Economy in South Asia

South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) knowledge exchange and capacity-building for countries at different levels of development

21- 24 April 2026 (4 days), Colombo, Sri Lanka

Background and Justification

The proposed South Asia Edition of the South-4-Care Learning Hub builds on the momentum generated by the inaugural edition held in the Arab States region (Doha, September 2025), which was launched in alignment with the [Resolution](#) concerning decent work and the care economy (2024), and the subsequent [Plan of Action on Decent Work and the Care Economy](#) (2025-2030). These instruments mandate the ILO to strengthen research, policy advocacy, and capacity building on care; to document and disseminate best practices; and to establish South-South cooperation mechanisms to facilitate learning among developing countries.

South Asia region continues to face one of the world's lowest levels of female labour force participation, estimated at around 32 per cent in 2023, compared to 77 per cent for men. In Sri Lanka, the female labour force participation rate stands at 31.6 per cent, while 62.4 per cent of economically inactive women cite household and caregiving responsibilities as the reason for non-participation. Time-use data further show that 87 per cent of women and girls in Sri Lanka are engaged in unpaid household and care work compared to 59.7 per cent of men and boys. These statistics highlight that unpaid and underpaid care work constitutes a major barrier to women's full and equal participation in the labour market, with significant implications for inclusive growth and social justice. At the same time, limited access to affordable and quality care services constrains enterprise productivity, workforce retention, and labour supply, especially in sectors with a high concentration of women workers.

South Asian countries face growing demographic and socio-economic pressures—including ageing populations, rapid urbanization, and persistent informality in care work—that call for policy coherence, investment, and coordinated responses. While several governments have taken initial steps to address care needs, the region continues to lack a systematic framework to integrate time-use data, develop national care policies, and promote decent work in care services. Care systems function as essential labour market infrastructure that enables workers to participate productively in the economy and supports enterprises through improved attendance, reduced turnover, and stronger workforce stability.

The ILO's global experience demonstrates that care work—both paid and unpaid—is the foundation of inclusive and sustainable economies. Evidence increasingly shows that investment in care generates positive macroeconomic returns, stimulates job creation, and enhances enterprise-level outcomes. On one-side, EBMOs and the private sector have an important role, particularly as care providers and care investors leading to these macro-economic and enterprise-level returns of care investments. On the other hand, workers and trade unions have a key role in ensuring that workers' voices are represented, so that care work is properly recognized, fairly rewarded, and carried out with dignity. In this regard, it is essential to strengthen the representation of care workers within workers' organizations and social dialogue mechanisms, while also addressing the specific concerns arising from both internal and international



migration of care workers, including decent working conditions, social protection portability, skills recognition, and protection from exploitation.

To advance this agenda, the ILO's 5R Framework (Recognize, Reduce, Redistribute, Reward, and Represent) promotes a holistic and gender-responsive approach that values care workers, many of whom operate in informal or precarious employment, while also creating an enabling environment for EBMOs and private sector engagement, innovation, and investment in care solutions.

The South Asia Edition of the South-4-Care Learning Hub therefore provides a regionally adapted platform for peer learning, policy dialogue, and capacity building. It facilitates the exchange of regional and global best practices, promotes research on the care economy, and strengthens institutional capacities of governments, workers' and employers' organizations, to design, finance, and implement inclusive care policies.

The Learning Hub offers exposure for government participants to regional good practices enabling governments to strengthen regulatory frameworks, financing mechanisms, and governance arrangements for care systems, while promoting policy coherence across labour, social protection, education, and gender equality sectors. The exchange will further contribute to evidence-informed policymaking and improved inter-ministerial and tripartite coordination for sustainable and inclusive care systems.

For employers, this capacity strengthening opportunity provides a dedicated space to explore viable business models, financing options, public-private partnerships, and workplace-based or employer-led care initiatives that contribute to productivity, competitiveness, and decent work outcomes. Discussions on creating an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises to promote productivity, investment in education and skills development, and enhanced access to business opportunities, formalization and finance will be beneficial for South-South learning.

This Hub also benefits workers and trade unions by strengthening their understanding of labour standards, rights-based approaches, and organizing strategies within the care economy. Through peer learning and the exchange of good practices, trade unions will enhance their capacity to advocate for decent working conditions, fair remuneration, occupational safety and health, and access to social protection for care workers.

The initiative also serves as a means for all different actors in South Asian countries to collectively respond to the shrinking pool of development financing by identifying innovative models—such as care cooperatives and blended financing mechanisms—that align with the ILO's commitment to decent work and gender equality. As a key partner, the World Bank is expanding efforts to advance evidence, policy dialogue and implementation on affordable, quality care systems across South Asia.

This initiative is implemented primarily under the **RBSA-funded Care Economy Project of the ILO Country Office for Sri Lanka and the Maldives**, in partnership with the World Bank Group, and in collaboration with the International Training Centre of the ILO (ITCILO). The participation costs of country-specific constituents and other stakeholders are covered by development cooperation projects in each Country Office. These partnerships help ensure the financial sustainability and expanded reach of the programme, thereby reinforcing ILO's commitment to advancing decent work in the care economy across South Asia.

In this context, the South-4-Care Learning Hub is well-positioned to respond to the needs of tripartite constituents in the South Asia region by:

- ▶ Creating a shared understanding of the care economy and related concepts across South Asian countries, including care as labour market infrastructure and a driver of productivity and inclusive growth.



- ▶ Strengthening the capacity of governments, workers' and employers' organizations, cooperatives, and other stakeholders in South Asia to design, finance, and implement inclusive care policies and initiatives, including workplace-based care solutions, leveraging peer learning from economies at different stages of development.
- ▶ Promoting regional collaboration and knowledge exchange through South-South and Triangular Cooperation approaches, enabling countries to share best practices, innovations, and lessons learned in the care economy, with clearly defined outcomes for each constituent group.

Objectives of the South-4-Care Learning Hub

The second edition of the **South-4-Care Learning Hub for South Asia** seeks to:

- ▶ **Promote awareness and understanding of the ILO Resolution on Decent Work and the Care Economy and its Plan of Action**, emphasizing its relevance for South Asia and providing practical implementation guidance, thereby strengthening tripartite constituents' capacity to develop inclusive, rights-based care policies through South-South and Triangular Cooperation.
- ▶ **Foster a shared perspective and advocate for the care economy** among governments, workers' and employers' organizations, cooperatives, and other stakeholders in South Asia, while drawing on lessons and good practices from other Global South regions.
- ▶ **Build the institutional and technical capacity of tripartite constituents in South Asia** to design, fund, and implement inclusive and coherent care policies and initiatives — including sustainable business models, financing options, and workplace-based care solutions — that advance decent work, gender equality, and the objectives of the ILO Resolution on Decent Work and the Care Economy.
- ▶ **Encourage regional collaboration and partnerships**, enabling tripartite constituents from diverse South Asian countries, as well as key regional and international partners, to exchange knowledge, experiences, and strategies to strengthen the care economy.
- ▶ **Identify actionable priorities at both national and regional levels, tailored to different constituents**, that promote South-South cooperation and practical implementation. This may include employer or trade union-led pilots or workplace-based care solutions, exchange programmes for policy specialists, joint research on innovative care models, scaling up effective initiatives, exploring new financing mechanisms and setting up peer-learning arrangements

Participants / Resource Persons / Observers

The Learning Hub will include participants from the South Asia region (appx. 90 persons) including representatives of governments, trade unions, and employers' and business membership organizations.

Date and Venue

- ▶ **Date: 21- 24 April 2026**
- ▶ **Venue: Sangam Hall Ballroom 1 (Level 2), ITC Ratnadipa, Colombo, Sri Lanka**

Format

The Learning Hub will be delivered **in person** in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and will combine structured plenary moments with interactive workstreams to support peer learning and practical exchange. It will feature a **high-level opening with regional tripartite representatives**, followed by plenary discussions on regional pathways to advance decent care work and the care economy. Participants will then engage in parallel thematic tracks, country-team group work and presentations of national priorities, as well as side events showcasing good practices and experiences from South Asia.

Agenda

Tuesday 21 April 2026

07:50 – 08:30	Registration and opening session
08:30 – 08:40	Opening remarks delivered via video message <i>Delivered by Ms. Kaori Nakamura-Osaka</i> Assistant Director General and Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, ILO
08:40 – 08:50	Inaugural address <i>Delivered by H.E. Dr. Harini Amarasuriya</i> Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
08:50 – 09:00	Welcome address <i>Delivered by Ms Joni Simpson</i> Director, Country Office for Sri Lanka and Maldives, ILO Group Photo
09:00 - 09:10	Special Address World Bank Group
09:10- 09:45	Keynote: 'Decent Work and the Care Economy: The South Asia Perspective' <i>Delivered by Prof. Dipa Sinha</i> Associate Professor, Azim Premji University <i>Moderator- Master of Ceremony</i>
09:45 – 10:15	Coffee/tea break
10:15 – 12:00	High-Level Panel: Regional Perspectives on Advancing Decent Care Work Panel Discussion <i>Moderated by Prof. Dipa Sinha</i> Associate Professor, Azim Premji University



Hon. Prof. Anil Jayantha Fernando (tbc)

Minister of Labour, Government of Sri Lanka

Mr. Ramhari Pandey

Programme Director, National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal

Ministry representative - India (tbc)

India

Ms Joni Simposon

Director, Country Office for Sri Lanka and Maldives, ILO

World Bank Representative

World Bank Group

This high-level panel will bring together senior representatives from governments, international organizations and development partners to reflect on the importance of advancing decent work in the care economy across South Asia.

Panelists will share perspectives on the current policy landscape, key challenges faced by countries in the region, and innovative approaches to strengthening care systems, improving working conditions in the care sector, and promoting gender equality.

The discussion will also highlight the role of social dialogue, public investment and policy coordination in building sustainable and inclusive care systems.

12:00 – 13:30

Lunch

13:30 – 15:00

National stakeholders' panel: role of national actors in strengthening the care economy

Panel Discussion

Moderated by Ms Mariko Ouchi

Senior Technical Specialist on Social Protection, ILO Decent Work Team for South Asia and Country Office for India

[3-4 PANELISTS]

This panel will explore how national actors contribute to strengthening care systems and promoting decent work in the care economy.

Representatives from employers' and workers' organizations, the private sector and other national stakeholders will share their experiences and perspectives on advancing care policies, improving working conditions in care sectors, and promoting care-friendly practices in workplaces.

The session will also highlight how social dialogue and collaboration between governments, employers and workers can support the development of sustainable and inclusive care systems.



15:00 – 16:00

Introductory session: Diving into the world of decent care work in Asia

- Training course introduction by **Ms Maud Ritz**, Programme Officer, ITC
- Presentation on global frameworks for care systems **by Ms Deepa Bharathi**, Senior Gender Specialist, ILO-Bangkok.

16:00 – 17:00

Care Marketplace

Coffee break
