



# South-4-Care Learning Hub — South Asia Edition

Advancing Decent Work in the Care Economy in South Asia

21–24 April 2026 | Colombo, Sri Lanka



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## Executive Summary



The South-4-Care Learning Hub – South Asia Edition was convened from 21 to 24 April 2026 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, bringing together approximately 90 participants from across South Asia, including representatives of governments, workers' and employers' organizations, development partners, and academia. The event was organized by the International Labour Organization (ILO), in partnership with the World Bank Group and the International Training Centre of the ILO (ITCILO), under the framework of South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC).

The Learning Hub served as a regional platform for knowledge exchange, policy dialogue, and capacity building to advance decent work in the care economy, covering the supply side including paid and unpaid care work and the demand side including all care recipients. It emphasized the role of care systems as critical labour market infrastructure, essential for gender equality, inclusive growth, and social justice.

Participation reflected strong gender representation, with:



69%  
**FEMALE**

31%  
**MALE**

The discussions reinforced that investment in the care economy is both a social imperative and an economic strategy, with the potential to generate employment, enhance productivity, and support sustainable development across South Asia.

## Background and objectives



The Learning Hub builds on the momentum generated by the ILO Resolution on Decent Work and the Care Economy (2024) and its accompanying Plan of Action (2025–2030). In the South Asian context—where women labour force participation rates remains significantly lower than that of men and where unpaid care work disproportionately falls on women—the need for coherent, inclusive, and well-financed care systems is both urgent and strategic.

### Key objectives

- Strengthen understanding of the care economy as a driver of decent work, gender equality, and inclusive growth
- Build capacity of tripartite constituents to design, finance, and implement care policies
- Promote South–South learning and regional collaboration
- Identify actionable national and regional priorities



## Participation and format

### The learning hub brought together:



- Government representatives
- Employers' and business membership organizations
- Trade unions
- Development partners and academia

### FORMAT

The programme combined:

- High-level plenary sessions
- Thematic parallel tracks
- Panel discussions
- Country group work and roadmap development
- Peer learning and knowledge exchange
- Side research symposium on care and migration



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## SOUTH-4-CARE LEARNING HUB:

Advancing Decent Work in the Care Economy in South Asia

24 April 2026, Colombo, Sri Lanka



# Summary of Proceedings

## Asia-Pacific Learning Hub on decent work in the care economy

### Opening and high-level Engagement

The Learning Hub opened with high-level remarks from the ILO and World Bank, followed by the inaugural address by H. E. Dr. Harini Amarasuriya, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka.



#### A key message emphasized:

- The care economy is central-not peripheral- to economic and social systems
- The invisibility of care work is a structural issue that limits women's labour force participation

### Keynote Address

- The keynote highlighted critical policy directions:
- Universal public care service are essential for equity
- Formalization must include rights and social protection
- Expansion of social protection floors is crucial
- Adoption of gender-transformative policies across sectors



## Thematic Discussions

### a. Care Systems and Policy

(Track 1: From Policy to Actem)



#### Discussions emphasized:

- The need to address gender norms limiting shared care responsibilities
- Emerging innovative care models, including:
  - public-private partnerships
  - care cooperatives
- Financing approaches such as blended finance and entrepreneurship models
- The job creation potential of the care economy
- Improving conditions for domestic workers and informal care workers

#### A strong focus was placed on:

- Skills development
- Digital platforms
- Migration-linked care workforce strategies

### b. Social Protection for the care Economy

(Track 2)



#### Sessions adopted a life-cycle approach to care:

- Maternity Protection as foundation for gender equality
- Strengthening social insurance systems
- Expanding social protection coverage to informal care workers

#### Disability and care:

Need for:

- Income security
- Healthcare access
- Inclusive services

Shift from charity-based to rights-based approaches

#### Long-term Care (LTC):

Rapid ageing in South Asia, particularly in Sri Lanka

#### Key gaps:

- Skill shortages
- Poor job quality
- Limited policy frameworks

### c. Care and Migration

(Track 3)



#### Key insights included:

- Care work is central to global migration systems, with 1 in 3 women migrant workers employed in care sectors
- Emergence of global care chains
- Migrant care workers face:
  - Limited social protection
  - Weak support systems
  - High vulnerability

#### Policy priorities:

- Strengthening social protection portability
- Developing reintegration strategies
- Ensuring rights-based migration governance



## Cross-cutting themes

Care as economic infrastructure

Centrality of the ILO 5R Framework:

- Recognize
- Reduce
- Redistribute
- Reward
- Represent

Importance of formalization and decent work

Need for integrated, whole-of-government approaches

Critical role of social dialogue



## Country Roadmaps and group work

Participants engaged in developing national care roadmaps, identifying priorities such as:

- Policy integration across sectors
- Expansion of care services
- Financing mechanisms
- Strengthening labour standards

Emerging messages included:

- Strong political commitment to care economy reforms
- Need to move from fragmented initiatives to integrated systems
- Importance of data and evidence-based policymaking
- Increasing demand for South-South knowledge exchange



## Partnerships and closing sessions

Development partners emphasized:

- The need for sustainable investment in care systems
- Opportunities for blended financing and partnerships

The Learning Hub concluded with:

- Presentation of country priorities
- Consolidation of key takeaways and commitments
- Reinforcement of regional collaboration mechanisms



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- 24 April 2026, Colombo, Sri Lanka



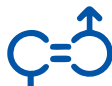
# Ms Joni Simpson

Director, Country Office for Sri Lanka  
International Labour Organization



## ► Key Takeaways, Recommendations and Next Steps

| Key Takeaways                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <b>1. Care economy is central to inclusive growth</b><br>Investment in care systems supports employment, productivity, and gender equality.                                                                          |  | <b>4. Decent work deficits persist in care sectors</b><br>Informality, low wages, and lack of social protection remain widespread.                    |  | <b>7. Social protection is foundational</b><br>Extending coverage across the life cycle is critical for both care recipients and providers. |
|  | <b>2. Unequal structural inequalities of unpaid care must be addressed</b><br>Unequal care, a major barrier to women's labour force participation, must be recognized, redistributed equally and its burden reduced. |  | <b>5. Financing is both a challenge and an opportunity</b><br>Innovative models-including care cooperatives and blended finance-show strong potential |  | <b>8. Data gaps limit effective policymaking</b><br>Investment in time-use surveys and care data systems is essential                       |
|  | <b>3. Integrated care systems are urgently needed</b><br>Fragmented policies must evolve into coherent, cross-sectoral frameworks.                                                                                   |  | <b>6. Migration is reshaping care economies</b><br>Policies must address global care chains, worker protection, and reintegration.                    |  | <b>9. Social dialogue is key to sustainable reforms</b><br>Tripartite engagement strengthens policy legitimacy and implementation.          |

| Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
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| POLICY AND GOVERNANCE                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | FINANCING                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | LABOUR AND SOCIAL PROTECTION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | GENDER EQUALITY                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | MIGRATION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | DATA AND EVIDENCE                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | CAPACITY BUILDING AND PARTNERSHIPS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop national care policies and integrated care systems</li> <li>Strengthen inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms</li> <li>Align policies with the ILO SR Framework</li> </ul> |  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase public investment in care services</li> <li>Promote:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public-private partnerships</li> <li>Blended finance models</li> <li>Innovative care models such as care cooperatives and other social and solidarity economy (SSE) entities</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formalize care work with:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimum wages</li> <li>Social protection</li> <li>Occupational safety and health standards</li> </ul> </li> <li>Expand social protection floors to include care workers</li> </ul> |  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote redistribution of unpaid care work</li> <li>Encourage male participation in caregiving</li> <li>Integrate gender-transformative approaches across sectors</li> </ul> |  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bilateral agreements</li> <li>Social protection portability</li> <li>Reintegration programmes</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invest in:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time-use surveys</li> <li>Care economy valuation</li> <li>Labour market data systems</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue South-South and Triangular Cooperation</li> <li>Strengthen collaboration with:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development partners</li> <li>Private sector</li> <li>Civil society</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |

| Next Steps                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Support country-level care roadmaps</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide technical assistance for implementation</li> <li>Align with national development strategies</li> </ul> | <b>2. Establish regional knowledge-sharing platforms</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate continuous SSTC learning</li> <li>Document and scale best practices</li> </ul> | <b>3. Mobilize financing for care investments</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage development partners and financial institutions</li> </ul> | <b>4. Strengthen pilot initiatives</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scaleup:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Care cooperatives                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employer-supported care models</li> <li>Community-based care services</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <b>5. Enhance monitoring and evaluation frameworks</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Track progress on care policies and decent work outcomes</li> </ul> | <b>6. Deepen research and evidence generation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Care economy impact</li> <li>Migration-care linkages</li> <li>Gender outcomes</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |

*Investing in care investing in people, productivity and a more just and inclusive future for all*

In addition, communication efforts were further strengthened through a range of targeted outputs, including an opinion editorial, infographics, and social media content highlighting key moments and messages from the Learning Hub. Real-time engagement was supported through live tweeting and vox pop interviews, while a press release ensured broader media outreach. Outputs for print media were produced in Sinhala, Tamil, and English to ensure accessibility and reach across diverse audiences.

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