

The Power of Care: Paid Domestic Workers and Decent Work for Dignified Ageing

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to highlight the necessity of paid domestic care workers in the context of ageing populations in Asia, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region and its subregions. Asia is going through the demographic transition and it is becoming old. The working population must provide support not only to their dependent children but also to elderly individuals. Consequently, both men and women are compelled to participate in the labour market. Previously, care work was predominantly the responsibility of women within households; however, they are now increasingly entering the workforce to earn a livelihood. In this context they need to depend upon outside labour force for looking their old parents. This automatically increased the demand for paid domestic care workers. This paper provides an overview of the situation of both by the employer and employee in the new global scenario. Earlier this care work for elders is provided by the family members themselves but due to the changing labour market scenario members in upper- and middle-class family began to depend on paid domestic care workers. This paper is analysed within the framework of ILO's Asia Pacific Employment Outlook 2024. The ILO calculations based on UN DESA Population Projections also used for the study. From this study it is clear that there is an increasing demand for paid domestic care workers and the present study emphasise the need for providing decent work the care workers for a dignified life of old people. This paper demonstrates that safeguarding the dignity of both the elderly population and workers can only be achieved through the provision of decent work. This paper aims to propose measures for enhancing the decent working conditions of this marginalized group. This study concentrates in Asia and Pacific region because the population aged 65 and above rising faster in these regions compared to the rest of the world.

Key Words: Paid domestic care workers, Decent work, Ageing Asia, Labour market, Labour force

Introduction

The Asia Pacific region and sub regions are one of the world’s most challenging regions while considering both the ageing population and decent work deficit situation. The Asia Pacific region and sub regions mainly include The Asia and Pacific, East Asia, South East Asia, South Asia and the Pacific region. As per the UNDESA 2020 report, globally the share of population aged 65 or above was 9.3 per cent and it is projected to be 16.0 percent. In the absence of demographic solutions to the ageing problems, Asian countries will have to depend on social and economic policies to meet the needs of the elderly and promote strong economic performances. The traditional family support system is under pressure due to social and cultural changes. The informal support care system was prominent in earlier periods, but now, due to changes in family work patterns, both males and females participate in the labour market (Sujatha, & Reddy,2012). Hence, this has created a demand for external family support care systems, underscoring the crucial role of paid domestic workers. There is different conceptualisation of Care: Care as labour and value orientation, care as a component of welfare state policy, Care in the context of the organization and effectiveness of service provision, care as embedded in the global process. (Daly 2021, Hamblin & Lariviere 2023). In this paper the researcher uses the concept of care as labour and value orientation and care as a component of welfare state policy.

In Asia and Pacific region around 1.3 billion workers were in informal employment for the year 2023(ILO report ,2024).

Table 1:

Extreme poverty, informal employment, own account workers, contributing family workers, share of population with at least 1 social protection benefit in Asia Pacific region (per cent)

Region	Extreme working poverty	Informal Employment	Own account workers	Contributing family workers	Share of population with at least 1 social protection benefit
Asia & Pacific	3.6	66.0	39.1	12.0	44.1
East Asia	0.4	46.8	29.2	9.4	64.1
South East Asia	2.2	69.8	34.3	13.0	33.2

South Asia	8.0	87.2	53.8	15.0	22.8
Pacific	4.9	34.7	18.8	4.1	77.3

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2023; ILO Social Security Inquiry Database

The table above shows that in South Asia 8 per cent are in extreme poverty that means their per day PPP is less than \$ 2.15 US. Besides that, 87.2 % in South Asians, 66 % of Asia Pacific people ,46.8% East Asians, 69.8 % in South East Asians work in informal sector. Informality is a clear indication of decent work deficits such as lack of access to social security. South Asia faces high levels of extreme poverty and informal employment, with a high proportion of self-employed workers and low social protection coverage. East Asia shows relatively better conditions, with low extreme working poverty, lower informal employment, and high social protection coverage. South East Asia has a higher level of informal employment, moderate poverty rates, and limited access to social protection. Pacific stands out with the highest social protection coverage and lower levels of informal employment and own-account workers. This analysis highlights the regional disparities in labour market conditions, poverty, and social protection across the Asia-Pacific region.

Due to the rapidly increasing number of people aged 65 years and above as share of total population, the Labour force participation rate is projected to fall from 61 per cent in 2023 to 55 per cent in 2050 (ILO,2024). There exist a lack of coverage and adequate pension schemes, hence many workers not receive any social security benefits like old age pension and this makes their condition much worse. Investment into social protection schemes is necessary to reduce their decent work deficits. Besides that, ageing will increase the demand for health workers and care workers. The ILO report 2024 state that the number of long-term care workers will double to 90 million by 2050.

Old age dependency ratio in Asia Pacific region:

Old age dependency ratio is the ratio of the dependent population aged 65 and above to those aged 15 to 64. US Census bureau released a report on June 21,2022 named as “Asia aging: Demographic, economic and health transitions”. The report states that low fertility levels, in combination with marked improvements in longevity, will increase Asia’s share of the world’s older population from 56.7% to 61.5% from 2022 to 2060. Asia Pacific Employment and Social outlook 2024 (ILO) provides old age dependency ratio of 2023 and projected ratio of 2050 of 36 countries of Asia Pacific region.

Table 2: Old age dependency ratio in Asia Pacific Region:

Region	OADR ¹ 2023	Projected 2050	OADR	Region	OADR 2023	Projected 2050	OADR
Mongolia	.08	.21		Indonesia	.10	.23	
Demo rep of Korea	.18	.35		Malaysia	.11	.26	
China	.21	.51		Vietnam	.14	.32	
Japan	.51	.73		Brunai Darusaleh	.09	.33	
Korea	.26	.75		Thailand	.23	.55	
Timor Leste	.09	.10		Singapore	.22	.61	
Lao Peoples demo re	.07	.15		Afghanistan	.04	.06	
Philippines	.09	.16		Pakistan	.07	.10	
Cambodia	.09	.20		Nepal	.09	.15	
Myanmar	.10	.20		India	.10	.22	
Bhutan	.09	.23		Samoa	.09	.14	
Bangladesh	.09	.23		Fiji	.09	.15	
Sri Lanka	.18	.35		Tonga	.10	.15	
Iran	.12	.36		Guam	.20	.31	
Maldives	.07	.37		New Caledonia	.17	.36	
Vanuatu	.07	.10		Australia	.27	.39	

Source: ILO Calculations based on UN DESA Population projections

¹ OADR-Old age dependency ratio

Table 3

Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test Results for Change in Old Age Dependency Ratio (2050 vs. 2023)

	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Old Age dependency ratio 2050 < Old Age dependency ratio 2023	0 ^a	.00	.00
Old Age dependency ratio 2050 > Old Age dependency ratio 2023	36 ^b	18.50	666.00
Ties	0 ^c		
Total	36		

a. Old Age dependency ratio 2050 < Old Age dependency ratio 2023

b. Old Age dependency ratio 2050 > Old Age dependency ratio 2023

c. Old Age dependency ratio 2050 = Old Age dependency ratio 2023

Test Statistics^a

	Old Age dependency ratio 2050 - Old Age dependency ratio 2023
Z	-5.233 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

b. Based on negative ranks.

There are 36 positive ranks with a mean rank of 18.5 and a sum of ranks equal to 666.00. This indicates that in all cases, the dependency ratio in 2050 is projected to be higher than in 2023. Given that all ranks are positive and none are negative, the sig value is .000, we reject the null hypothesis, suggesting a statistically significant increase in the old age dependency ratio from 2023 to 2050.

Ageing with Dignity:

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP) states that older persons must be recognised as agents of development and society must take steps to provide safe, secure and dignified life to them. As per the report of ESCAP sixty per cent of world's older persons lived in Asia Pacific region in the year 2020 and by 2050 one quarter of the population of Asia and the Pacific will be older. For a dignified life they require proper care and nursing facilities. During these time period households began to depend upon informal domestic care workers for the caring of their age-old parents. Jokela (2015) states that larger elder population and a high female employment are the two variables that are positively associated with the prevalence of paid domestic labour. Jokela continued that if there exist strong government care provisions the demand for domestic workers will be low. Due to the increased life expectancy and improved access to pension benefits the number of people in need of care has been on rise (ILO,2024). As per UNDESA 2020, the proportion of older persons in the global population was 13.5 per cent. It is expected to rise to 21.4 per cent by 2050 and to 28.2 per cent by 2100. ECLAC Gender report (2020) states that the current model of social organisation of care is based on families and it is met through the unpaid work of women and that system is not going to sustain because women entered into outside labour market and they have no time for unpaid work. In that context paid domestic care workers required.

Role of paid domestic care workers:

In 2015, 992 million children under the age of 15 and 110 million older persons were in need care and by the year 2030, the number of children under the age 15 will decrease to 944 million and the number of older persons will increase to 163 million (ILO, 2018). According to projections, Asia and the Pacific will see the largest increase in older person dependency ratios globally, rising from 3.7% in 2015 to 4.9% in 2030 (ILO,2018).

Domestic workers will provide both direct and indirect care works for remuneration. Direct care work includes nursing an ill or old person, feeding a baby etc. Indirect care work includes cooking, cleaning, washing etc (Pape). In the light of changing demographic condition, the care economy is expected to rise in future. Around 166 million people worldwide—93 million women and 73 million men—work in the care industry. As per the ILO report (2024) 25 % of global care workers are domestic workers.

Paid care work in private household is provided by domestic workers. If the governments in various countries provide adequate social security mechanisms and guarantee decent work for care workers there will be an ample scope for this sector. By 2035 care economy could create an estimated 300 million jobs (ILO,2022). As per Domestic workers Convention 2011(no:189) a

Domestic worker is defined as “any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship and on an occupational basis. Domestic workers can be employed by a household or through /by a service provider (public or private)”. Therefore, domestic workers include those care workers who are employed within a household under an employment relationship. Domestic workers face with the problem of decent work deficits. As per ILO report 2021, 8 out of 10 domestic workers are informally employed hence they are excluded from labour and social security laws or in some countries there is lack of implementation of these laws. In order to improve their condition, it is important to change their status from unskilled labour to skilled labour. International Standard Classification of Occupation (ISCO-08) classifies homebased personal care as skilled work (ILO,2024). Even though domestic workers contribute a lot to the care economy, their work is treated as low valued both economically and socially and it is considered as an extension of unpaid work of women. IDWF report recommends that domestic workers should be recognised as care workers and they must be included in the National Care policies and this would help to improve their working condition and will help to solve decent work deficits (Valenzuala M. E., 2024). The General Secretary of CONLACHTRAHO (Confederation of Domestic Workers from Latin America and the Caribbean), Marcelina Bautista, spoke during the June 2010 International Labour Conference in Geneva that domestic workers, firmly believe that decent work is an inalienable and non-transferable right that should reflect the dignity of the individual and is fundamental in terms of making progress towards a democratic society, keeping in mind that the right to decent work is a human right for both men and women, and considering that human dignity is non-negotiable.

For most women and men who work in this field, domestic work is not respectable employment. They are especially susceptible to violations of their fundamental rights as human beings, including their rights and values at work (Ramos-Carbone, 2012). As per ILO report (2018) in Asia and Pacific women domestic workers work on average 50 hours per week but on the other hand the other wage workers usually work 40 hours per week. This reveals the pathetic condition of domestic workers.

Table 4: Share of Domestic Workers in the Care Sector as a Percentage of Total Employment

Region	Total	Men	Women
World	2.1	1.0	3.8
Africa	2.6	0.9	4.8

America	3.6	0.5	7.7
Arab States	5.8	3.1	21.2
Asia & Pacific	1.9	1.3	2.9
Europe & Central Asia	0.7	0.1	1.4

Source: ILO 2018

In all regions, the percentage of women in care work is significantly higher than that of men. For example, in the Arab States, women comprise 21.2% of domestic care work, compared to only 3.1% for men. This trend reflects a gendered division of labour, where care work is predominantly performed by women across regions. The Arab States have the highest percentage of domestic care workers, with a particularly high proportion among women (21.2%). This could indicate cultural or economic factors that make domestic care work one of the primary employment options for women in this region. America also has a notable gender disparity, with women at 7.7% compared to men at 0.5%. Europe & Central Asia has the lowest overall percentage of domestic workers in care, with women at 1.4% and men at 0.1%. Asia & Pacific regions show a relatively balanced participation between men (1.3%) and women (2.9%), though women still represent a larger proportion.

Policies for quality elder care and fair treatment of care workers:

Asia Pacific care economy Forum highlight investment in care sector. The report of the forum (2023) states that investment in indirect care sector is very important because that is the workplace for the most informal and vulnerable sector and workplace of many domestic workers. This forum held at Kuala Lumpur (Highlight and recommendation for practitioners Asia-Pacific Care Economy Forum, 2023) gave opportunity for two care workers for sharing their concerns about care work and they emphasized the role of government in supporting and subsidizing the care sector. They stated that currently the wages of the care workers are very low and it solely depends on the willingness and financial ability of employers and hence they put forward a suggestion for the government to implement wage subsidies for care workers. Proper government regulation is required for promoting the rights of care workers and decent working condition of workers and it will also boost the dignity of older persons who receive care (2023).In Nepal, government encouraged private sector participation in care economy by expanding care service to those who can afford it due to the financial crisis of government (Highlight and recommendation for practitioners Asia-Pacific Care Economy Forum, 2023).

Public delivery of care services, public-private partnerships in care models, employer-friendly policies and digitally enabled care service delivery are suggestions put forward by the forum for improving the care mechanism. The report states that care must be regarded as crucial human right and must emphasize the right to care and decent work for care workers especially those who are in the informal sector (ibid). In Argentina, UN Women and United Nations Resident Coordinators office conducted a programme “Shared care: Collective management of care for the elderly”. This Shared *Care* program, formally known as *Cuidar en Común*, focuses on creating a collective and community-based approach to elderly care. The program seeks to alleviate the burden of caregiving on individual families by fostering a network of shared responsibility, involving caregivers, community members, and the state. It offers professional training to caregivers and promotes community participation, aiming to improve the quality of life for older adults by ensuring they receive dignified and comprehensive care. This collaborative model strengthens community ties and recognizes the essential role of caregivers while addressing the social dimension of aging. Such programs should be organized worldwide to ensure the dignity of older people. UN System policy paper (2024) suggest five key principles to address care inequalities and care system all over the world. They are:

1. Human rights – based: The dignity and autonomy of caregivers, care workers, and those in need of care and assistance must be respected and upheld by care systems, according to this notion.
2. State accountability: State have the responsibility to protect and fulfil human rights as provided under International human rights law. Hence this also includes provide better facilities for care workers and regulate the market for care services, ensure decent working conditions for domestic workers.
3. Universality: This implies quality care related services must be available to the entire population without any discrimination
4. Transformative: This principle states that the care system should promote gender equality and avoid discrimination. The system should transform the subordination of care recipients as “dependents”.
5. Leaving no one behind: This principle states that care system must identify those who are being excluded and discriminated and must provide ample care and protection.

The 5 R Framework (ILO, 2018) for Decent care work provide the foundation for the high road to care work. This approach attempted to create a care system that meets the current and future needs. The 5 R’s are Recognise the care work, Reducing care work where necessary & in a way conducive to the enjoyment the rights of care recipients, redistribute the time, cost & responsibility for unpaid care work among private communities ,states, individuals and families

, representation of care givers and recipients , rewarding paid care workers by ensuring decent work(UN,2024) .

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