

## ASEAN COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK ON CARE ECONOMY

### (I) Background

1. The ASEAN Comprehensive Framework on Care Economy serves to guide ASEAN's development of the care economy in response to complex crises and challenges — such as the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, changing demographics, the climate crisis — to further sustainable development and protect different segments of populations and sectors in the region. ASEAN's responses will require a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional, and multi-pronged — i.e. whole-of-ASEAN — approach to prepare for a stronger, resilient and sustainable ASEAN.
2. In line with the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF) and Its Implementation Plan, and the ASEAN Leaders' Vision Statement on a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN: Rising Above Challenges and Sustaining Growth (Ha Noi, June 2020), ASEAN needs to cooperate closely in strengthening the social safety net for its peoples, minimising social disruption and instability in the unprecedented times, particularly with the recent global COVID-19 pandemic, and its impact on the economy by designing and implementing risk-informed and shock-responsive social protection systems to reduce vulnerabilities of at-risk populations, as stipulated in the Declaration of the Special ASEAN Summit on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) held on 14 April 2020. At the same time, it is vital for ASEAN Member States and its relevant stakeholders to continue its joint and concerted efforts in protecting its citizens' well-being and respective economies, as well as the livelihood of those vulnerable groups.
3. The COVID-19 health crisis has demonstrated governments' resolve to put 'care' at the centre of public policy to generate new social and economic dynamics, solidarity, clean air, and new ways to combine work with family responsibilities amongst many recent developments. The activities of care and care work contribute towards sustaining, continuing and repairing the world in which we live. Investments in the care economy are expected to sustainably improve the quality of life and well-being for peoples of ASEAN.

### (II) Objectives

4. The ASEAN Comprehensive Framework on Care Economy will chart out the strategic priorities, map out the relevant sectoral initiatives, establish implementation mechanisms and timeline for the realisation of an ASEAN Care Economy that should be jointly implemented by ASEAN Member States. In this connection, it aims to:
  - (i) Provide a framework through which the region's Care Economy issues can be identified as well as comprehensively analysed and considered collectively by the relevant ASEAN Sectoral Bodies.
  - (ii) Encourage best practices or platforms or scoping exercise to look into modalities or relevant investments to better address care economy issues,

through dialogue with relevant stakeholders, and research efforts to increase the knowledge generating capacity of the ASEAN Secretariat on the topic.

- (iii) Provide for a mechanism to guide and support relevant sectoral bodies, with coordinated information and regular monitoring of overall ASEAN efforts.

### **(III) Scope of the Framework**

5. Care work is to be found in a variety of settings and across formal and informal economies. Existing conceptualisations of the care work and the economy are driven by increasing number of women entering job market and thus, increasing demands for i) child care and care for elderly, and ii) improvement of care policies and services. However, in this case, the ASEAN framework requires a broader scope of “care” in the spirit of leaving no one behind in sustaining our region’s robust economic growth, and returning back to pre-pandemic robust economic growth.
6. The care economy may encompass elements to reframe more comprehensive, enabling and supportive ASEAN policies, whilst ensuring equitable opportunities, as well as exploring cooperation with ASEAN’s external partners and international community to enhance readiness and response measures in concert with efforts to lessen impact of particularly COVID-19 pandemic, and beyond.
7. The scope of ‘care economy’ for this ASEAN Framework, will not only be direct and relational care work<sup>1</sup>, but also in other areas<sup>2</sup> that have arisen from the pandemic to build back better. Thus, the nature of care work and its interlinked areas, together can improve the quality of life and inclusion of the community, and strengthen communities’ involvement in economic and development activities through innovative policies and programmes.
8. As many current and emerging initiatives of the care economy are cross-cutting across pillars involving various sectoral bodies and working groups, which can be linked with, but not limited to sustainable development, digital economy and cyber security, there is a need for ASEAN to utilize existing mechanisms as a platform to examine the cross-cutting issues and challenges of the Care Economy. The framework needs to acknowledge existing sectoral initiatives contributing to the care economy platform. Therefore, the comprehensive framework can add value by suggesting the inter-linkages and identify gaps in those sectoral initiatives in a holistic manner for care economy.

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<sup>1</sup> Such as (i) paid care work, which includes public services, elder care and domestic work, and (ii) unpaid care work that involves care provided in the context of familial, community, or other types of relationships

<sup>2</sup> Such as reskilling and upskilling employability in sectors that are crucial in the context of a care economy, embracing of new technologies towards lifelong learning; hospitality (tourism) in terms of the changing demographic; development of creative industry and encouraging social entrepreneurship especially for the benefit of the vulnerable groups; as well as smart cities to smart homes, etc.

9. Such a platform is expected to sharpen the focus on the current state of regional and global policies as well as identify gaps across the different facets of the care economy. The potential of ASCC's role in regional economic development, **particularly the economic opportunities arising from its activities will be surveyed**. ASEAN will also explore the role of ASEAN's external partners and international community.
10. Overall, ASEAN's efforts towards the advancement of a care economy will focus on 6 broad strategies that are expected to address current and future societal needs arising from demographic change, societal inequalities, and sustainable development challenges. These strategic priorities are expected to support and develop the ASEAN care economy.

### **Strategic Priority 1: Promoting Healthy Ageing and Leveraging Opportunities in Ageing Societies in Southeast Asia**

11. The current and future population profiles of South East Asia, and its implications in terms of both challenges and opportunities are key concerns to policymakers and people on the ground. With the onset of this rapid demographic change, ASEAN Member States are facing an increasingly critical question: "How can we care for unprecedented numbers of elderly in our society?".
12. This has profound implications on the economies in this region. The Asian Development Bank (2015) estimates that social security and welfare expenditure against GDP have risen from 10.6% in 2000 to 17.7% in 2014 in East Asia. The same expenditure against GDP of Asian countries like South Korea, China and Thailand have also risen during the same period. These increases in the social security and welfare expenditure raise certain concerns as to the sustainability of social security and welfare systems as the middle and low income countries in ASEAN seek to establish more formalized elder care and support systems for the increasing number of elderly in their societies.
13. The demographic change also has profound implications on societies in this region. The low fertility rates observed in several of ASEAN Member States have raised certain questions as to who will be taking care of the elderly when they require long-term care, which was a traditional role played by the family in Asia<sup>3</sup>. Besides, the changes in women's workforce participations as well as internal and external migration of younger generations seeking employment put values and norms concerning family responsibilities under pressure.
14. In order to create an effective response to these rising issues, both intelligent policy making and practical solutions emerging from citizen engagement are needed on the ground. Careful examination and mutual learning from elder-care policies from other countries within the ASEAN region (i.e., Brunei Darussalam, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) and East Asia (Japan, Republic of Korea and China) may help identify solutions to help societies to prepare for the challenges on institutional care, community-based care, training and support for care-givers,

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<sup>3</sup> Available: <https://data.adb.org/dataset/population-and-aging-asia-and-pacific> (accessed: 18 June 2021). Also see <https://www.ahwin.org/longitudinal-survey-of-aging-and-health-in-asean-countries/> (accessed: 18 June 2021).

and active ageing in ASEAN<sup>4</sup> including the promotion of lifelong learning and the role of the elderly in socio-economic development; as well as developing or reviewing national social protection systems<sup>5</sup>.

15. At the same time, the opportunities and potential of policies on healthy ageing, will also directly or indirectly provide significant economic and societal benefits. Promoting healthy ageing amongst pre-seniors and seniors can help them to maximise their functional ability and continue living independently for as long as possible, which would alleviate the burden on governments and families to provide care. Sharing of related policies and best practices can prevent and delay care dependency and facilitate productive investment in healthy ageing, co-relating with the United Nations' Initiative "Decade of Healthy Ageing" from 2021 – 2030.
16. Population ageing also presents growth opportunities for the silver economy, to encourage the development of products, services and solutions catering to the needs and wants of seniors within the ASEAN region. Potential areas to explore could include medical technology and silver tourism.

**Strategic Priority 2: Enhancing the Role of the Care Economy in Building a Disaster Resilient ASEAN**

17. A disaster is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as any incident that could end human life or cause health-related harm and requires immediate response with sufficient human and other resources, preparedness, response, and recovery by many agencies, including healthcare institutions. Healthcare institutions, such as hospitals, must ensure a contingency plan is in place in order to effectively respond to disasters, and allow care providers to perform critical roles in caring for injured people and their families throughout disaster management.
18. Disasters not only impact the lives of people and economies, but also significantly affect healthcare institutions and care providers. To reduce the impact of disasters, care providers — such as healthcare workers, social work professionals, counsellors, psychologists and community-based care providers — need to be prepared to respond in a timely manner and in all phases of disaster management. However, disaster care workers face major barriers which include the following: (i) disaster care work is a relatively new field; (ii) inadequate level of preparedness; (iii) poor formal education and lack of training in disaster management; (iv) lack of research in the proper provision of care; (v) ethical and legal issues; and (vi) issues related to care workers' roles in disasters.
19. Care work in the disaster management processes entail identifying risks that might impact communities, families, individuals, and healthcare institutions. Even though identifying disaster risks is challenging and requires great effort from governments and related agencies, it is a fundamental and essential step in ensuring that effective and optimum care is provided in disaster management.

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<sup>4</sup> WHO (2015) World Report on Ageing and Health, Chap 3-5.

<sup>5</sup> To refer to the Regional Plan of Action on the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Ageing: Empowering Older Persons in ASEAN

Other issues that will need to be considered in enhancing disaster care provision is preparedness which involves education, training, as well as conducting drills and developing plans and policies<sup>6</sup>. Parties involved in engaging with preparedness include caregivers and social workers/counsellors/psychologists, community members, including volunteers and youth leaders/entrepreneurs, and healthcare providers, including nurses and organizations.

### **Strategic Priority 3: Accelerating Technology Innovations and Digital Transformation of the Care Economy in ASEAN**

20. Issues related to regional cooperation in digital transformation in the care economy which include the digital divide and enhance digital connectivity and skills harnessing technology-driven innovation (e.g., information and communications tools) amidst temporary restrictions of movement in many countries, reskilling and upskilling employability of the present and future generations, life-long learning and the push for creative industry and social entrepreneurship.
21. The onset of the health crisis has accelerated digital transformation which presented opportunities especially in terms of innovation and accessibility. It is important that we continue to build a people-centred and people-oriented ecosystem to nurture and drive innovation in all aspects of human and sustainable developments. Likewise, it is pivotal that we make use of technology innovations to promote inclusiveness for all, so that no one is left behind and to mitigate the digital divide among the vulnerable groups.
22. With the Creative Economy exemplifying technology innovations and digital transformation, ASEAN has identified the creative economy as an important sector that requires assistance to recover and also as an important driver to help in the regional recovery as reflected in the ACRF. Comprising knowledge-based industries that include, but not limited to, arts and crafts, music, performance, design, publishing, film, fashion, photography, the Creative Economy is an important driver that will better position our regional community toward positive post pandemic recovery. While the uptick in digital adoption in many sectors has created new forms of social and economic opportunities, especially for micro, small and medium-sized creative enterprises, the pandemic has also resulted in a significant loss of livelihood and income among cultural and creative entrepreneurs and enterprises.

### **Strategic Priority 4: Building Stronger and Resilient Families as the foundation of the Care Economy**

23. Lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic will shape the policy landscape of ASEAN and its individual members for years to come. Solidarity and resilience,

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<sup>6</sup> The lack of data in education in particular, is one issue why those who are disadvantaged cannot be prioritised during disasters. These data are very crucial in developing plans and policies. In some countries, EMIS education data are not reliable, obsolete, incomplete or non-existent or sometimes inaccessible to a wide-variety of users. The situation gets more challenging with the marginalised groups (e.g. those with disability, girls at risk, etc.)

will strengthen and find ways for a better transformation of ASEAN Community, and increase the capacity to strengthen the resilience of ASEAN peoples.

24. The COVID-19 pandemic, and the consequent infection control measures such as community movement restrictions, have resulted in stressors such as social isolation and loss of livelihoods, leading to an increase in distress and anxiety amongst the population. Against this backdrop, many families spend longer hours at home together. Family members find themselves having to perform most activities at home in close proximity with each other, which were usually done elsewhere, hence at times, can increase anxiety, psychological distress, and conflict (including domestic abuse and violence) in the family. While the health crisis is a serious threat to physical health, policymakers have increasingly recognised that mental health is also a critical public health issue which has been severely affected by the pandemic.
25. Considering the need of workers, both in public and private sectors, to balance work and family responsibilities which becomes more challenging in time of pandemic, it is recognised that we should strengthen ASEAN cooperation to promote a positive workplace culture across the board. Initiatives such as flexible work arrangements, employee support systems, leave schemes, child-care facilities, and maternity protection, and sharing of best practices from within and outside the region should be promoted.
26. As ASEAN continues its work in enhancing the health, wellbeing and welfare of its people, we continue to promote measures to ensure a caring society, social harmony and values of humanity, and spirit of community, in the context of the care economy. This will remind ASEAN Member States of who we are, where we come from and where we are heading, both as an organization as well as a community, especially in time of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
27. The care economy will portray the uniqueness of ASEAN which embrace all ASEAN citizens in ways that will enable them to instil people-oriented ASEAN in which all sectors of society are encouraged to participate in and benefit from the process of ASEAN community building.

#### **Strategic Priority 5: Enhancing Social Protection / Leaving No One Behind**

28. While Southeast Asia has been riding on the wave of globalization that has brought benefits and economic growth with expanding trade and investment linkages, such global integration has also exposed fractures in the social protection of the region's labour force that have been crucial to investments.
29. Fast-paced economic development has come at the expense of labour and human rights protection in several countries. Recent geo-political instabilities and the COVID-19 pandemic has also exposed our economies' fragility – disruptions of supply chains and movement of essential goods as well as lockdowns have wide-ranging adverse effects on vulnerable populations and societies. Respective governments and private sector of ASEAN Member States should step up their efforts to ensure that Southeast Asia's labour force, in particular its

vulnerable groups, can also benefit from better social protection and access to remedy. In addition, it is necessary to pay attention on the development of a universal social protection and effective shock responsive social protection in such as the current COVID-19 pandemic as well as other unpredictable large-scale risks in the future.

30. Migration as a source of labour has been an important factor supporting the growth and development of the Southeast Asian region, filling labour shortages in countries of destination and providing much needed employment opportunities for workers in countries of origin. However, in spite of migrant workers' vital role in increasing the region's labour market efficiency, their labour rights are often subjected to abuses during recruitment and employment and are unable to make use of the social protection benefits to which they are entitled upon their return home.
31. Care work, both paid and unpaid, is predominantly performed by women<sup>7</sup>. For paid care work, demographic, socio-economic and environmental transformations have contributed towards an increase in the demand for care workers. Similarly, women performing unpaid care work are less likely to contribute to social security. If systemic and structural issues are not addressed properly, current deficits in care work and its quality will create a severe and unsustainable global care crisis and further increase gender inequalities in the world of work.<sup>8</sup>
32. There is also a growing recognition of the crucial importance of early childhood education and early intervention. Evidence shows that early childhood education and intervention are essential and have long-term effects on the development of human capital, social cohesion and economic success. Evidence also shows that high quality early childhood development programme may help to narrow the achievement gap for children from disadvantaged families. However, these children may face more barriers to participation.

### **Strategic Priority 6: Resilience and Care for the Environment**

33. Climate change and sustainable environment initiatives are gradually being mainstreamed into government policies all over the world. However the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted priorities away from climate and environmental protection to focus on crisis management, and scarce financial resources have been redirected to support economies, businesses, people, and jobs.
34. The pandemic offers opportunities for countries to reshape their economies and refocus on nature-based solutioning, advancing more resilient and greener solutions to prevent and enhance preparedness to future pandemics and other natural disasters. There is a need to boost investments in green recovery, and conserve Southeast Asia's environment, as well as promote green jobs. In particular, this situation encourages countries to identify innovative ways to

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<sup>7</sup> According to the ILO's report (2018) "Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work", there are an estimated 1.2 billion female unpaid carers (compared to 1.1 billion male), and another estimated 248 million females (65%) in the global care workforce.

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-\(uhc\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-(uhc))

enhance international cooperation to optimise post-loss funding capacity and budgetary discipline to protect and sustain existing and future sustainability projects.

#### (IV) Implementing the Framework

35. The SOCA with the support of the ASEAN Secretariat, is tasked to facilitate, coordinate and monitor the implementation of this Framework by identifying the nexuses that may benefit from inter-pillar and cross-sectoral collaborations to promote the Care Economy. The SOCA will provide guidance on subsequent considerations including: (i) Potential incorporation of this Framework into the Coordinating Conferences; (ii) Timeline of activity implementation and M&E/reporting mechanism (2021-2025); (iii) Steps for cross-pillar coordination.
36. Crucial factors for the successful implementation of these policies are: (i) official adoption or support by relevant governmental bodies and mainstreaming these policies in respective local context; (ii) the establishment of an inter-sectoral (cross-pillar) governance mechanism; (iii) the engagement of development partners; (iv) the engagement of the private sector to contribute towards better care-centric work and business outcomes; and (v) the involvement of local and grassroots communities.
37. Relevant Sectoral Bodies in the three ASEAN Community Pillars together with concerned stakeholders are encouraged to undertake measures to implement this Comprehensive Framework.
38. Relevant sectoral initiatives that are in line with strategic priorities of ASEAN comprehensive framework on care economy have been identified and appear in the **Annex**. Specific country adaptations will likely be needed that should be led by the relevant national institutions (and/or Sectoral Bodies). Such progress towards care-sensitive goals requires high-level policy commitment and grassroots-level support.
39. A care economy platform will be established within the ASEAN Secretariat, in close coordination with the ASCC Research and Development Platform, to coordinate and conduct sector-specific reviews and research to ensure that existing initiatives and activities can comprehensively meet all care economy challenges within societies across ASEAN Member States.<sup>9</sup> A further aim of such reviews and research by the platform is to identify the gaps that will need to be addressed in achieving care-centric policies where care is placed centrally in sectoral policies and in overall economic and development policies.
40. ASEAN Member States should endeavour to provide regular biannual updates on their progress of implementing the Framework to the ASEAN Secretariat, through appropriate reporting line.

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<sup>9</sup> A care economy platform has been proposed to and endorsed by the 30<sup>th</sup> SOCA Meeting and endorsed at the 25<sup>th</sup> ASCC Council Meeting on 31 March 2021.



41. The ASEAN Secretariat will report the progress to the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Council and the ASEAN Economic Council during respective coordinating conferences. This will enable ASEAN Member States to monitor and keep track of their progress and development with respect to this Framework.

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## ANNEX

**RELEVANT SECTORAL INITIATIVES  
THAT ARE IN LINE WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES OF  
ASEAN COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK ON CARE ECONOMY**

**Relevant Sectoral Initiatives in line with Strategic Priority 1: Promoting Healthy Ageing and Leveraging Opportunities in Ageing Societies in Southeast Asia**

1. Ageing has been prioritized by two sectors in ASEAN – Health Sector (Senior Officials Meeting on Health Development - SOMHD) and the Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development Sector (Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development - SOMSWD). As of April 2019, SOMSWD through the leadership of Malaysia is developing the Regional Plan of Action (RPA) to implement the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Ageing: Empowering Older Persons in ASEAN. In particular, Malaysia developed the zero draft of the RPA which was subsequently shared with all the ASEAN Member States, ESCAP and HelpAge International. The proposed Expert Group Meeting intends to provide a venue to present the draft RPA. Through this meeting, representatives from governments and relevant ASEAN bodies, ASEAN Secretariat together with experts from ESCAP and HelpAge International would be able to exchange views on thematic aspects of the draft RPA particularly taking into consideration national contexts and recent developments both at the regional and global levels.
2. The ASEAN Health Sector included *the Promotion of Healthy and Active Ageing*, as one of the 20 Health Priorities of the *ASEAN Post 2015 Health Development Agenda* for 2016 to 2020, and for 2021 to 2025, as part of the Work Programme of *ASEAN Health Cluster 1 on Promoting Healthy Lifestyles*. This Health Priority on the *Promotion of Healthy and Active Ageing* includes completed and ongoing initiatives on the integration of elderly health programmes with non-communicable diseases and mental health; empowerment initiatives for the elderly to maintain their ability to participate in the family and community activities; and, promotion of greater inclusion of active ageing in national policies and action plans including active employment policies, social protection, welfare and healthcare services, as well as mainstreaming those policies and action plans across government sectors.<sup>10</sup>
3. In relation to the aforementioned Health Priority on *the Promotion of Healthy and Active Ageing* and its further implementation, the ASEAN Leaders launched the *ASEAN Centre for Active Ageing and Innovation (ACAI)* at the 35th ASEAN Summit on 3 November 2019. The Centre, as one of the deliverables of Thailand's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2019 under the theme of 'Advancing Partnership for Sustainability', aspires to *enhance better life quality of ageing and prepare ASEAN to be ready for the ageing society in the future*. The missions are to serve as a knowledge centre on active ageing and innovation, support evidence-informed policies, strategies and guidelines on active ageing,

<sup>10</sup> [https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Agd-8.3\\_1.-ASEAN-Health-Cluster-1-Work-Programme\\_Endorsed-SOMHD.pdf](https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Agd-8.3_1.-ASEAN-Health-Cluster-1-Work-Programme_Endorsed-SOMHD.pdf)

implement capacity development programme, and conduct research and development and innovation on active ageing in ASEAN. The Centre also facilitates collaboration among ASEAN Member States, international and regional partners in supporting active ageing in ASEAN.<sup>11</sup>

4. In view of the rising aging population within ASEAN and the world, policy discussions should be organised — within member states and partners of ASEAN, including regional and international organisations — to leverage knowledge and critical lessons learnt, and share best practices and expertise on issues that can contribute to potential policies on enabling the aging population to continue to be socially and economically engaged. Examples of these issues include medical technology/technology-enabled solutions in response to the impact of ageing, practices in reshaping the work of care givers, innovative solutions to promote active and healthy ageing, and best practices in mainstreaming lifelong learning.
5. In line with this, advancing the contribution of youth and sports cooperation to development through intergenerational collaboration has been identified as an emerging approach, under the Senior Officials on Youth - SOMY and Senior Officials Meeting on Sports – SOMS. Under the ASEAN Work Plan on Sports 2021-2025, the ASEAN sports sector through collaboration with the Right to Play Foundation will implement the *ASEAN Active (Inter) Generation* project.
6. The Labour Sector (Senior Labour Officials Meeting – SLOM) also takes initiatives to support the well-being of retirees through sharing of best practices on various aspects of decent work including on improvement of coverage and quality of social pension. A regional study on old-age income security in ASEAN Member States was conducted last year<sup>12</sup>. The Study provides recommendations contributing to a comprehensive approach towards effective pension policies and systems. Likewise, the Study covers mechanisms in extending existing and new contributory schemes particularly to workers in informal employment and in new forms of employment brought about by rapidly changing business models and job transformation.

### **Relevant Sectoral Initiatives in line with Strategic Priority 2: Enhancing the Role of the Care Economy in Building a Disaster Resilient ASEAN**

7. The ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM) oversees the implementation of the *ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER)*, a legally binding document that serves as the regional policy backbone for ASEAN's regional cooperation, coordination, technical assistance, and resource mobilisation in all aspects of disaster management and emergency response. Through consecutive AADMER Work Programmes implemented since 2010 to outline ASEAN's priorities for implementation, the ACDM has effectively bolster regional and national

<sup>11</sup> <http://acai.dms.go.th/about-en/>

<sup>12</sup> Study Report is available on the ASEAN website: [https://asean.org/?static\\_post=old-age-income-security-asean-member-states-policy-trends-challenges-opportunities](https://asean.org/?static_post=old-age-income-security-asean-member-states-policy-trends-challenges-opportunities)

capacities to respond to natural disasters within the ASEAN region through a variety of disaster risk reduction, management and response initiatives. The latest AADMER Work Programme 2021-2025 adopted on 27 November 2020 focuses on five priority programmes namely: 1) risks assessment and monitoring; 2) prevention and mitigation; 3) preparedness and response; 4) resilient recovery and 5) global leadership.<sup>13</sup>

8. The ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) is the primary ASEAN regional coordinating agency on disaster management and emergency response to natural disasters. One of its key mechanism that AHA Centre oversees is the Disaster Emergency Logistics System of ASEAN (DELSA) that allow for swift provision of relief items to ASEAN Member States facing post-disaster emergency situations.
9. Apart from emergency response, the AHA Centre had for the first time, coordinated donors' contributions during the rehabilitation and reconstruction period to develop the ASEAN Village in Palu City, comprising 100 housing units and community facilities, in the aftermath of the devastating 2018 Sulawesi earthquake and tsunami for the displaced communities. This resonates ASEAN's collective commitment and strong solidarity, in line with the spirit of One ASEAN One Response.
10. The Education Sector (Senior Education Officials Meeting – SOMED) will organise a policy dialogue with Disaster Risk Reduction sector to further integrate safe-schools initiatives into national education, monitoring systems and regional coordination mechanisms. The sector will also facilitate integration of environmental education in various school lessons and curricula to align with the Education for Sustainable Development.
11. The Youth Sector (Senior Officials Meeting on Youth – SOMY) will implement the inaugural cycle of ASEAN Volunteers project under the theme “Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction and Preparedness” with funding from the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF) 2.0. The project aims to foster the spirit of a caring and sharing community among ASEAN youth through community based disaster risk reduction and preparedness volunteering activities by mobilising 100 volunteers to ASEAN Member States.
12. Complementary to disaster management in the region are the initiatives of the ASEAN Health Sector through its Health Priorities on the prevention and control of communicable diseases and emerging infectious diseases including public health emergencies and pandemics; mitigation of biological threats; combating antimicrobial resistance (AMR) through One Health Approach<sup>14</sup>; and, disaster health management (DHM). These priorities have resulted in the scaling-up and synergising of regional health-related initiatives that prepare, prevent, detect and respond to public health emergencies (PHE) and pandemics (such as COVID-19) that includes the *ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and*

<sup>13</sup> [https://asean.org/storage/2017/11/ASEAN-Health-Cluster-2-Work-Programme\\_FINAL-ENDORSED.pdf](https://asean.org/storage/2017/11/ASEAN-Health-Cluster-2-Work-Programme_FINAL-ENDORSED.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <https://asean.org/asean-leaders-declaration-on-antimicrobial-resistance-amr-combating-amr-through-one-health-approach/>

*Emerging Diseases; ASEAN PHE Coordination System; and, the ASEAN Strategic Framework on PHE.* There are also ongoing implementation of the *ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Disaster Health Management* (ASEAN Summit, Nov 2017) through one of the regional initiatives in its work programme that focus on strengthening of capacities of the region in DHM; and, *ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on AMR: Combating AMR through One Health Approach*<sup>15</sup> as operationalised through the multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder regional strategic framework<sup>16</sup>.

### **Relevant Sectoral Initiatives in line with Strategic Priority 3: Accelerating Technology Innovations and Digital Transformation of the Care Economy in ASEAN**

13. The ACRF and its Implementation Plan seek to instil digital and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills across all levels and types of education, and encourage utilising ICT in education delivery to speed up digital transformation. The Education Sector has developed its 2021-2025 Work Plan on Education, which will be underpinned by the principles of lifelong learning, inclusion, equity, and quality, and will address the needs and situations of all learners in the region. It also highlights the promotion of equitable access to quality early childhood education including in mitigating the impacts of crises, through availability of regional strategies and coordinated support in providing comprehensive ECCE services especially during the post-crisis situation. The workplan was adopted by ASED in May 2021.
14. The Education Sector also established the ASEAN TVET Council in June 2020 to facilitate better coordination and sharing of resources among Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) stakeholders. ASEAN Secretariat, Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) and Department of Education (Philippines) are also co-organising webinars and sharing sessions on the role of TVET in ASEAN's post pandemic recovery.
15. Building on the findings of ASEAN Youth Development Index, trends in the recent years, as well as the national priorities of ASEAN Member States, in 2019, ASEAN Youth Ministers agreed on the importance of two (2) aspects that have been further acknowledged as ASEAN's post-2020 strategic direction in youth development: (i) Future-ready ASEAN youth through digital skills development; and (ii) Institutionalised youth engagement mechanism, including in policy discourse. Under the ASEAN Work Plan on Youth 2021-2025, the youth sector will strengthen partners' engagement for projects on the development of technical and digital skills, entrepreneurship and school-to-work transition.
16. Following the 9<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Meeting of the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts (AMCA) on 22 October 2020 via video conference, Indonesia proposed to convene ASEAN Regional Workshop on Creative Economy in Yogyakarta in 2021, in which one of the expected outputs is the establishment of ASEAN Working Group on Creative Economy. The ASEAN Creative Economy Business Forum is also expected to be held in Bali in November 2021, aiming to

<sup>15</sup> <https://asean.org/asean-leaders-declaration-on-disaster-health-management/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.jica.go.jp/project/english/thailand/023/index.html>

harness industries towards innovations, to generate livelihoods and to support economic development, strengthening the resilience and ability to face challenges and opportunities. One of the expected outputs of the Workshop is the establishment of an ASEAN Working Group on Creative Economy, a deliverable under the ACRF Implementation Plan that aims to put in place a cross-pillar, cross-sectoral platform for discussing programmes to harness industries towards innovation, generate livelihoods, and support economic development of ASEAN Member States to strengthen their resilience to face future challenges and opportunities. The Working Group will include relevant sectoral bodies from both the ASCC and AEC including culture and the arts, information and media, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, information and communication technology and tourism, intellectual property rights, among others to discuss pertinent issues such as implementing recovery efforts for the tourism and SMCEs, safeguarding employment in affected sectors; exploring the development of platform to harness the contribution of the creative industries towards innovations; generating livelihoods and supporting economic development in ASEAN Members States.

17. The Culture Sector is also working on several digital cultural innovations including the use of virtual reality to promote UNESCO ASEAN heritage sites. Likewise, the ASEAN Cultural Heritage Digital Archive allows visitors to appreciate the rich treasure trove of ASEAN artefacts three-dimensionally online. These initiatives provide impetus for learning and exchanges of ideas to encourage the culture sector to promote inclusiveness for all, embrace innovation and digital adoption as part of the push for promoting the creative digital economy.
18. Digitalisation is a key strategic thrust of Brunei Darussalam's Chairmanship of ASEAN for 2021 not only to be in line with the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint 2020 but more importantly to accelerate the region's economic recovery from the COVID-19 global pandemic. Digital transformation in a care economy requires not only close cross-sectoral but also cross-pillar coordination and collaboration. In the area of electronic commerce (e-commerce), for instance, the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Electronic Commerce (ACCEC) would have to work closely with the relevant Sectoral Body under the ASCC in creating a conducive environment to put in place the necessary e-commerce infrastructure, promote the use of e-commerce and contribute to the pathway towards a regional digital economy. In addition, as micro, small and medium Enterprises account for more than 90 percent of commercial activities in the region, close collaboration with the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (ACCSME) is also imperative to ensure that these enterprises are able to not only thrive in a digital environment but also reap the benefits from it.
19. ACCMSME, during its 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting in 2019, adopted the Action Agenda on Digitalisation of ASEAN MSMEs through Capacity Building Initiatives, which aims to enable MSMEs participation in the digital economy by adopting digital technologies, through three vertical pillars namely i) enhancing MSMEs skills and knowledge; ii) facilitating access to experts; and iii) facilitating access to digital tools and solutions. The Action Agenda is an overarching framework for ASEAN

to establish strategic partnerships with the private sector leveraging their technical expertise and resources. The ACCMSME also maintains two online portals to deliver support services for MSMEs, namely the ASEAN SME Academy and ASEAN Access. ASEAN SME Academy is an online portal that curates self-paced learning materials on various topics, including digitalisation, for ASEAN MSMEs, while ASEAN Access is a one-stop business information gateway for businesses in ASEAN to expand their market outreach by providing SMEs with trade and market information on one portal.

**Relevant Sectoral Initiatives in line with Strategic Priority 4: Building Stronger and Resilient Families as the foundation of the Care Economy**

20. Unity in diversity continues to be work-in-progress and anchored on a shared ASEAN identity. Thus, there is a need to strengthen the regional cultural ecosystem. In 2020, the Year of ASEAN Identity was launched, aiming to create greater public awareness among the Citizens of ASEAN on its activities and development, with the involvement of ASEAN stakeholders; and the Narrative of ASEAN Identity which adopted by the ASEAN Leaders at the 37<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit in November 2020. The Narrative articulates the common set of values that bind ASEAN people together such as values forged through a long history of exchanges and passed on from generation to generation, and those espoused by ASEAN through institutional consensus and practice.
21. To foster and promote an Adaptive ASEAN Community of greater understanding, tolerance and a sense of regional agendas among the peoples of the region, the Senior Officials Committee for the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Council (SOCA) with the support of the Culture Sector (Senior Officials Meeting for Culture and Arts - SOMCA) are leading the development of a Strategic Policy Framework to lend greater coherence and narrative in guiding the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community's efforts on this front.
22. The onset of the health crisis has brought about the spread of fake news and misinformation that led to a climate of mistrust, intolerance, discrimination and fear that could undermine effective preparedness, resiliency and responsiveness of the people. To facilitate accurate and timely information while minimising the harmful effects of fake news and misinformation, the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information (AMRI) issued the Joint Statement, "ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information to Minimise the Negative Effects of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)". The Information Sector underscores the importance of media and information literacy and promotes information inclusiveness and accessibility for all with the adoption of the Framework for Promoting Accessibility for All in ASEAN Digital Broadcasting and the Framework for Developing Digital Readiness among ASEAN Citizens. As part of the ongoing efforts to advance the implementation of the ASEAN Communication Master Plan 2018-2025 (ACMP II), the information sector has launched a series of strategic communications to underscore the ASEAN Culture of Prevention including the publication, "In Conversations with ASEAN Citizens" and the "ASEAN Champions Podcast Series."

23. The Youth Sector through the ASEAN Youth Development Index (YDI) Task Force has completed a study on ASEAN Awareness, Values and Identity as the fifth domain of ASEAN YDI. Aside from suggesting the components of Awareness, Values and Identity, the study outcome provides reference for the youth sector and other sectors on how to promote the involvement of youth in ASEAN's socio-economic development as an ASEAN Community. The publication is planned for launch in August 2021.

**Relevant Sectoral Initiatives in line with Strategic Priority 5: Enhancing Social Protection / Leaving No One Behind**

24. The Labour, Education and Social Welfare sectors have sought to understand the magnitude of the pandemic's impact on the workforce, students and vulnerable groups through the study report "ASEAN Rapid Assessment: The Impact of COVID-19 on Livelihoods across ASEAN".<sup>17</sup> The rapid assessment report highlighted recommendations which include reintegrating workers into the economy and supporting the poor, new poor, and other vulnerable groups, and improving remote teaching and learning options to cater to different learning contexts and needs especially for the most vulnerable students.
25. The Labour Sector took steps to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the region's most vulnerable workers especially those in informal sectors. SLOM has conducted studies and developed guidelines, as follows:
- (i) A study to analyse possible ways and challenges to expand social security to workers in informal employment in the ASEAN region.<sup>18</sup> Findings and recommendations of the study are most relevant to support AMS in improving responsiveness of social security and resilience of workers in the post-pandemic era. As platform workers are emerging trends across the region, it is important that labour policies are adaptable and able to protect the rights and well-being of workers in platform economy, who are usually considered as self-employment or informal employment.
  - (ii) A study to provide baseline information and recommendations on how to manage technology's implications for work, workers, and employment Relationships.
  - (iii) A guideline to ensure that migrant workers — including those who face the brunt of the health crisis — receive the necessary support for their safe return and economic and social reintegration.<sup>19</sup> Studies have also been undertaken to understand the laws and policies in Member States in

<sup>17</sup> Study Report is available on the ASEAN website: [https://asean.org/storage/ASEAN-Rapid-Assessment\\_Final-23112020.pdf](https://asean.org/storage/ASEAN-Rapid-Assessment_Final-23112020.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Study Report is available on the ASEAN website: <https://asean.org/storage/2020/01/Regional-Study-on-Extension-of-Social-Security-to-Informal-Workers-in-ASEAN.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> The Guidelines is available on the ASEAN website: [https://asean.org/?static\\_post=asean-guidelines-effective-return-reintegration-migrant-workers](https://asean.org/?static_post=asean-guidelines-effective-return-reintegration-migrant-workers)



their management of migrant workers, and ways to facilitate cross-border transferability of social security benefits for migrant workers.

- (iv) A guideline to ensure that workers in small and medium enterprises are provided with adequate health and safety protection was also established by the labour sector.<sup>20</sup> Forums and workshops were held to share experiences on improving health and safety standards in the workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic, and responsibilities of employers and labour inspectorates in this regard.
  - (v) A guideline — to be implemented by ASEAN Member States in 2021 — was also designed by SLOM to encourage gender mainstreaming in labour and employment policies and promote gender equality in the workplace.<sup>21</sup>
26. General plans in the SLOM-WG Work Plan 2021-2025 and the Action Plan 2018-2025 of the ASEAN Consensus also have potential to follow-up the following regional studies:
- (i) Study Report on Extension of Social Security to Workers in Informal Employment in the ASEAN Region (2019)
  - (ii) Study Report on Old-age Income Security in ASEAN Member States (2019)
  - (iii) Study Report on Portability of Social Security Rights between ASEAN Member States (2020)
  - (iv) Study Report on Managing Technology's Implications for Work, Workers, and Employment Relationships in ASEAN (2019)
27. The COVID-19 pandemic also turned global attention to the gendered dimension of the crisis. Women's safety, economic and social security, and institutional support have been compromised. ASEAN and UN Women launched, in March 2021, the ASEAN Gender Outlook: Achieving the SDGs for All and Leaving No Woman and Girl Behind. The study reveals that women noted increased intensity of domestic work, unpaid and invisible care compared to men during the pandemic. The findings present an opportunity to create policies to allow shared responsibilities between men and women, support work-life balance for gender equality, and building more inclusive and resilient communities. Along this vein, the final version of the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework 2021-2025 was also endorsed by the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) and ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW) on 3 March 2021.
28. The Health Sector has also prioritised the promotion of UHC in its Work Programme <sup>22</sup>on Strengthening Health Systems and Access to Care which focuses on entitlement/access to affordable package of goods and services;

<sup>20</sup> The Guidelines is available on the ASEAN website: <https://asean.org/guidelines-occupational-safety-health-osh-risk-management-small-medium-enterprises-asean-member-states/>

<sup>21</sup> The Guidelines is available on the ASEAN website: <https://asean.org/asean-guideline-gender-mainstreaming-labour-employment-policies-towards-decent-work/>

<sup>22</sup> [https://asean.org/storage/2017/02/Agd-8.3\\_3.-ASEAN-Health-Cluster-3-Work-Programme\\_Endorsed-SOMHD.pdf](https://asean.org/storage/2017/02/Agd-8.3_3.-ASEAN-Health-Cluster-3-Work-Programme_Endorsed-SOMHD.pdf)

availability and quality of care<sup>23</sup>; and services for special populations.<sup>24</sup> The regional activities on UHC has resulted in publications and documentation of good practices in ASEAN in strengthening health systems and access to care; and, progress towards UHC realisation among AMS<sup>25</sup>.

29. Children as a vulnerable group also features prominently in several sectoral initiatives. Further to the adoption of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection of Children from all Forms of Online Exploitation and Abuse in ASEAN, a Regional Plan of Action for the Protection of Children from All Forms of Online Exploitation and Abuse in ASEAN (2021-2025) (RPA on COEA) is being developed by SOMSWD-ACWC under the leadership of Thailand. The RPA on COEA aims to accelerate actions to end all forms of online exploitation and abuse of children in ASEAN, as well as to support and enhance collective efforts of the AMS to strengthen protection measures and services across sectors and across borders, and provide recommendations for the AMS to strengthen their comprehensive legal and policy frameworks on online violence, abuse and exploitation, among others.
30. The protection of children in the context of migration, which recognise migrants as internal members of the societies, is also prioritised in the Regional Plan of Action on Implementing the ASEAN Declaration on the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration (RPA on CCM). The Plan is being developed to encourage ASEAN Member States to ensure the protection of the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in all relevant policies and practices in the context of migration, and to further strengthen national systems to identify and respond to the specific needs of children in the context of migration, including but not limited to child protection, education, health, and justice, and enhance their accessibility to children affected by migration. The RPA on CCM is expected to be submitted to the Leaders for consideration and adoption.

### **Relevant Sectoral Initiatives in line with Strategic Priority 6: Resilience and Care for the Environment**

31. ASEAN leaders adopted the Declaration on Culture of Prevention (CoP) for a Peaceful, Inclusive, Resilient, Healthy and Harmonious Society at the 31st ASEAN Summit on 13 November 2017. Recognising the need to institutionalise a culture of prevention to address the root causes of social issues including violence, environmental degradation and quality of life, the ASEAN initiative on Culture of Prevention represents a paradigm shift in our mindset, especially in enabling ASEAN to comprehensively respond to challenges that hamper sustainable social and human development in our region. It aims to shift the approach upstream in order to strengthen resiliency in ASEAN.

<sup>23</sup> [https://asean.org/storage/2017/02/FINAL-PRINTED\\_-STRENGTHENING-HEALTH-SYSTEMS-AND-ACCESS-TO-CARE.pdf](https://asean.org/storage/2017/02/FINAL-PRINTED_-STRENGTHENING-HEALTH-SYSTEMS-AND-ACCESS-TO-CARE.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> [https://asean.org/storage/2017/02/ASEAN-Regional-Guideline-SBA\\_0.pdf](https://asean.org/storage/2017/02/ASEAN-Regional-Guideline-SBA_0.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> <https://asean.org/asean-socio-cultural/asean-health-ministers-meeting-ahmm/publications-documents/#48bbf8ab8464c30b6>

32. With the complementarities between ASEAN Vision 2025 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) as the backdrop, the 6 thrusts of ASEAN's Culture of Prevention are well aligned with the 17 SDGs, focusing on key areas such as education, empowerment of youth, intercultural dialogue, poverty eradication, gender equality and empowerment of women, the use of the Internet and social media, among others. Promoting people's awareness and care for the environment, and to prepare people for emergencies as a means to prevent risks of natural, human-induced disasters and environmental degradation feature as one of the cross-sectoral and whole-of-ASEAN thrusts to promote ASEAN's shared values of tolerance, mutual understanding and respect for life and diversity.
33. Under the leadership of National Committee on Youth of Viet Nam and in the light of Viet Nam's 2020 ASEAN Chairmanship the ASEAN Youth Ministers issued the Joint Statement of ASEAN Youth Ministers on Enhancing Youth Cooperation for a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN Community. The Joint Statement among others declared Youth Ministers' commitment to work hand in hand with the ASEAN Youth to overcome the difficulties and challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and in the meantime, unleash the opportunities created by the new normal. This Joint Statement informs the ongoing development of ASEAN Work Plan on Youth 2021-2025.
34. The active engagement of youth in sustainable development efforts is a central theme in ASCC's work. In commemoration of the ASEAN Youth in Climate Action and Disaster Resilience Day on 25 November 2020, under the leadership of the Philippines, the ASEAN youth sector through the ASEAN Secretariat disseminated a set of toolkit and materials to encourage ASEAN youth to lead climate actions in their respective communities.
35. The active engagement of youth in sustainable development efforts is a central theme in ASCC's work. Further to the adoption of ASEAN Declaration on the Adoption of ASEAN Youth in Climate Action and Disaster Resilience Day by ASEAN Leaders in 2018, under the ASEAN Work Plan on Youth 2021-2025, the ASEAN youth sector will continue fostering 21st century skills among ASEAN youth through volunteerism and leadership in community projects, including in climate action and mitigation, as well as disaster risk reduction.
36. The critical roles of youth in SDGs implementation were also discussed at the 5th ASEAN-China-UNDP Symposium: Enhancing the Roles of Youth in Achieving the SDGs on 8 April 2021. The symposium elaborated strategies to further strengthen youth participation and provided an opportunity for youth leaders to have dialogue with policy makers. At the same time, the symposium discussed the ways forward in fostering enabling environment for youth to reach their potential. The symposium offered several recommendations for policy makers, development practitioners as well as youth leaders.

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