

Module 3 Transcript : ESCAP's Model Framework for Action on the Care Economy: Understanding Key Policy Approaches

Slide 1: Building Inclusive and Resilient Care Systems: Induction Modules for Policymakers in Timor-Leste

Welcome back to Module 3 of the induction series on Building Inclusive and Resilient Care Systems. If you've made it this far, congratulations—you're more than halfway through the series, and well on your way to becoming a care economy policy thinker.

Slide 2: What's Ahead: Your Four-Module Induction Guide

In the first module, we explored the foundations of care: what care is, who provides it, and why it matters for inclusive development. In the second module we looked at the care policy landscape in Timor-Leste.

Slide 3: Learning Objectives for this Module: Using the MFA to Shape Care Policy

Now in Module 3, we will take a look at practical policy tools to help you design effective care systems for your country.

This module introduces ESCAP's Model Framework for Action, or MFA—a practical tool developed specifically for policymakers like you. It helps turn broad ideas about care into clear, actionable policies. you'll become familiar with the MFA and learn how it supports the creation of practical care policies.

We will cover the diverse policy categories within the MFA, examine key factors influencing care policies, and explore real-world examples from countries in the region that have successfully applied the MFA.

Now, let's dive in.

Slide 4: ESCAP's Model Framework for Policy Action on the Care Economy for Asia and the Pacific

In Module 1, we ended with a question:

If care across the world is mostly done by families—especially by women and girls—what can be done to share that responsibility more fairly?

ESCAP's Model Framework for Action, or MFA, is one answer. It's a tool developed by ESCAP in partnership with the Institute of Development Studies to help countries design policies that build inclusive, sustainable care systems.

The MFA is made up of four core components. You can think of them as four pieces of the same puzzle—and we need all of them to build a strong, comprehensive system of care policies.

First, we have the normative principles—the values that guide us as we design care policies.

Second, the policy categories of care—which help us understand the types of policies we need to build a care system that works.

Third, the political economy of care— this shows us how institutions, power, and norms shape what’s possible, and what isn’t, when we make policy.

And finally, the levers of change—these are the tools policymakers can use to move care issues onto the agenda and make reforms happen.

All of these might sound a bit abstract now—but don’t worry. In the next few slides, we’ll walk through each component one by one, with practical examples along the way.

Slide 5: ESCAP’s MFA Normative Principles

Before we dive into policies or politics, we start with purpose. That is why we have the first component of the MFA—the normative principles that guide everything else we do. When designing care policies, we need to keep these principles in mind to remind us that policies must be not only effective, but also fair and inclusive.

As you can see all the screen, there are in total seven normative principles. We won’t go into all of them here—but let’s look at two that are especially important for our work.

First is the idea of care as a public good.

We already touched on this in Module 1 when we introduced the care diamond. The state—as a key stakeholder—has a critical role to play in making care a public responsibility. Public provision of care services helps bring care out of the private realm of families and into the public domain. It also ensures that vulnerable groups—those who cannot afford to purchase care in the market—are not left behind.

We also need to pay attention to quality. Ensuring high-quality care is essential for building trust in care services. But defining or measuring quality isn’t always easy—it requires ongoing investment, feedback, and responsiveness to the needs of both caregivers and care receivers.

Together, these principles help keep our focus on what matters: dignity, rights, inclusion, and social justice.

As we move through the rest of the MFA, you’ll see how these values come back—shaping what policies we invest in, how we measure success, and how we involve different actors in decision-making.

Slide 6: ESCAP’s MFA Policy Categories of Care I

As we mentioned in Module 1, care is an all-encompassing concept. It includes both paid and unpaid care, direct and indirect care—all the activities that sustain people’s lives and well-being.

Because care touches so many aspects of life, there isn't a single policy solution that can address all its dimensions. That's where the second component of the MFA comes in—it helps us answer a key question:

What kinds of policies do we actually need to build a comprehensive care system?

To break this down, the MFA identifies four main policy categories. Each offers a different entry point for governments to support, improve, and redistribute care responsibilities.

Slide 7: Let's start with the first two:

The first is **Care Infrastructure**. This refers to basic services facilities like clean water, sanitation, energy-efficient fuel, electricity, and safe transport. Things like this directly shape how much time and physical effort care demands, particularly for women and girls in rural or underserved areas.

If you are still wondering why infrastructure matters to care, an Oxfam's research on unpaid care work in Timor-Leste shows us exactly why this is relevant. In Vatuvaou, research participants from the community explained that their water tank often doesn't work. When that happens, women spend hours each day collecting water. Similarly, in Beilaco, participants also described problems with water access, explaining that their closest river is unsafe because of crocodiles. If the government helps fix the water tank or install piped water, it could dramatically reduce the time women spend on indirect care each day.

Slide 8: The second category is **Care-Related Social Protection**.

This includes social insurance, welfare, and cash-based programmes—like child grants, pensions, health insurance, and income transfers—that help reduce the burden on caregivers and support the well-being of those who receive care.

When designed with care in mind, these programmes can ease both financial and time pressures on families—especially women—and help close the gender gap in unpaid care work.

Take the Philippines, for example. The country has been expanding its social protection system to better support workers and caregivers. Recent legislation extended maternity protection, introduced unemployment insurance, and expanded coverage to migrant workers—all of which help reduce the economic risks faced by caregivers and their families.

Slide 9: ESCAP's MFA Policy Categories of Care II

The third category is care services. It supports the provision of accessible, quality care—especially for children, older persons, and people with disabilities. Examples include childcare centres, eldercare homes, or community-based services. These services help shift some of the caregiving load from families—especially women—to the public sector or market.

One strong example comes from Cambodia, where a project is setting up 22 childcare centres for garment factory workers. These childcare services afforded by these centres not only provide a safe space for children, early learning, and nutritious meals—they also make it possible for mothers to stay in paid work. The project also involves local leaders and parents in managing the centres, building trust and sustainability.

Slide 10: The final category is **employment-related care policies**. These are policies that help people balance paid work and caregiving—like paid parental leave, flexible working arrangements, and workplace-based childcare.

Viet Nam offers one of the most comprehensive examples of employment-related care policies in the region. Women in Viet Nam are entitled to six months of fully paid maternity leave—with job protection—and fathers are also entitled to paternity leave. Employers are required by law to support childcare—either by setting up workplace nurseries or subsidising childcare costs. They must also provide paid breastfeeding breaks and flexible work options for new mothers. These protections help parents stay in the workforce while meeting their caregiving responsibilities—and position care as a shared responsibility between the state, employers, and families.

It is important to note that these four categories aren't separate boxes to tick—they're all part of a bigger interconnected system. Take childcare services, for example. It's essential, but on its own, it won't solve women's time poverty if families still have to walk miles for clean water or care for older relatives without support. That's why building a strong care system means looking at the whole picture.

Of course, governments don't have to do everything at once. In Module 4, we'll talk about how to choose the right starting points based on national or local needs. The goal is to start where it matters most, while still keeping in mind how all the pieces fit together—so that no care need is overlooked.

Slide 11: ESCAP's MFA Political Economy of Care

In the last few slides, we've explored the values that should guide care policy, and the types of policies governments can implement.

But to design actually effective policies for a comprehensive care system that properly reflect local needs, we also need to understand another important question?

In real world setting, why do some care policies move forward while others remain stuck on paper?

This is where the political economy of care comes in.

The political economy of care analyses the existing context. It asks:

Who holds power? Whose voices are heard in policymaking?

What ideas and institutions shape the system?

What social norms or barriers keep care from being centered?

A political economy approach helps us map the landscape: actors, interests, institutions, and the power dynamics between them. It reminds us that building a strong care system isn't just a technical task—it's a political one.

By understanding the political economy, we can better anticipate what obstacles exist, and what needs to shift—whether in laws, institutions, or social norms—to create the space for real care reforms.

All of these may feel abstract at first. But don't worry, Module 4, we'll unpack all of this further, with guiding questions and tools to help you reflect on your own national context.

Slide 12: From theory to policymaking in practice

Now we have our academic political economy of care analysis, we can move to the final piece of the puzzle -levers of change. While the political economy helps us understand the landscape, the levers of change help us act within it. by identifying the conditions that make it possible to design, fund, and sustain effective care policies- whether through strong data, active civil society, or coordinated policies.

Slide 13: ESCAP's MFA Levers of Change

As you can see on the graph here, the Model Framework for Action outlines seven key levers of change covering Cohesive policy ecosystem, Stakeholder mapping, Research and advocacy. These levers help identify where momentum exists—and how to strengthen it. Together, they enable us to select, design, and connect a robust basket of care policies that are not only well-intentioned, but implementable and sustainable.

We'll come back to each of these in more detail in Module 4—with country examples and tools to help you assess where your country stands and where action is possible.

But for now, just hold this in mind:

Even the best policy ideas won't gain traction unless the system is ready to carry them forward.

The levers of change help us build that readiness.

Slide 14: ESCAP's Model Framework for Action on the Care Economy for Asia and the Pacific

ESCAP's Model Framework for Action has been effectively applied in ASEAN countries, leading to transformative results in the care economy. Let me highlight a few examples:

In Lao PDR, the Model Framework helped identify strategic entry points for addressing care, including the inclusion of care in the 2030 Lao Women Development Plan and the development of national guidelines on care.

In Cambodia and the Philippines, the Model Framework has been instrumental in the development of national action plans focused on care.

The Philippines has also taken the initiative to establish a local care ordinance, which serves as a model for other provinces. Efforts are now underway to replicate this ordinance in other regions

These achievements underscore the importance of ESCAP's Model Framework in guiding ASEAN countries toward more equitable and sustainable care systems, demonstrating the potential for replication and scaling across the region.

Slide 15: ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening the Care Economy and Fostering Resilience Towards the Post-2025 ASEAN Community

Moving from framework to action, we can already see how these pieces of the puzzle are being put together in our region. Drawing from ESCAP's Model Framework for Action, the ASEAN Declaration on Care outlines a strategic roadmap for implementing evidence-based, care-sensitive, and gender-transformative policies. The ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW), chaired by the Lao Women's Union (LWU) of Lao PDR, has led the drafting of this landmark declaration. It was endorsed at the third ASEAN Women Leaders' Summit and subsequently adopted at the 44th and 45th ASEAN Summits in October 2024 under the leadership of Lao PDR as the chair of ASEAN.

Slide 16: ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening the Care Economy and Fostering Resilience Towards the Post-2025 ASEAN Community:

As you can see from the visual on this slide, the ASEAN Declaration aligns closely with the four policy categories in the MFA. It calls on governments to implement a comprehensive set of policies that address care infrastructure, social protection, care services, and employment.

Slide 17: Care to Recap?

In this module, we've walked through a series of exercises that show how the Model Framework for Action can be applied in real policymaking.

We've shown one possible way to use the MFA to identify a strong policy entry point. But remember—this isn't a fixed formula. The MFA is not a linear tool.

The steps we followed in this session are designed to support you during the national consultation. But depending on your national context, you might start from a different place—from a political opportunity, a budgeting window, or even an existing pilot.

That's the strength of the MFA. It's flexible, adaptable, and meant to meet you where you are.

This module covered a lot of ground—so before we wrap up, why not try out a few questions to test what you've absorbed?

Scan the QR code on screen to take the quick quiz for this module.