



The Paid Care Economy: Building Dignified Work in India and Beyond

Concept Note & Call for Paper

Organisers:

Centre for Social Sensitivity and Action & Centre for Public Policy and Governance

Goa Institute of Management

in collaboration with

V.V. Giri National Labour Institute

Venue: V. Giri National Labour Institute

Date: 11 December 2026

Introduction

Paid care work lies at the intersection of economic production and social reproduction. It sustains households, labour markets, and public systems yet remains among the most undervalued and least protected forms of work. Domestic workers and home-based caregivers to nurses, community health workers and childcare providers and millions of workers – overwhelmingly women, deliver essential services that enable economies to function. Despite its centrality paid care work continues to be characterised by informality, low wages, long and irregular working hours, limited bargaining power and inadequate access to social protection. In this regard, India's New Labour Codes provide an important policy and legislative framework for advancing the formalization, protection, and social security coverage of care workers. The conference will explore how these reforms can contribute to building a more inclusive and resilient care economy.

Recognising care as a multidimensional social, economic, and developmental imperative, the conference seeks to examine its role in sustaining human well-being, supporting labour market participation, generating employment. The growing demand for care services driven by factors such as demographic ageing, rising female labour force participation, urbanisation, and changing family structures, underscores the need for a larger, skilled and adequately protected care workforce. In this context, India's New Labour Codes, particularly their expanded

provisions relating to social security and labour protections for unorganised workers in the care occupations presents an important opportunity to advance the recognition, formalisation, and protection of care work within the broader framework of inclusive development. The central concern is how paid care work can be transformed into dignified, formalised, and sustainable employment in India and across the Global South.

Background and Rationale

India's paid care economy is large, diverse, and deeply fragmented, spanning households, community-based public programmes, and a rapidly expanding private sector. It includes:

- An estimated 4.2 million domestic workers, the overwhelming majority of whom are women, form a critical component of India's care economy. In this context, the New Labour Codes provide an important framework for expanding labour protections and social security coverage for workers in the sector.
- Over one million Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers, officially designated as "volunteers," despite performing essential frontline public health functions under demanding conditions, compensated through modest honorariums rather than formal wages.
- Anganwadi workers and helpers, who constitute the backbone of India's public childcare, nutrition, and early education system, yet continue to struggle for recognition as formal employees with commensurate rights and benefits.
- A growing private and non-profit care sector encompassing geriatric care, nursing services, disability support, and home healthcare, marked by uneven regulation, skill standards, and employment practices.

Globally, paid care work is among the fastest-growing sources of employment. The International Labour Organization estimates that India alone will require over 13 million additional care workers by 2030 to meet demographic and social care needs. However, without deliberate regulatory and fiscal interventions, the expansion of care services risks reproducing existing patterns of informality, gender inequality, and exploitation. The COVID-19 pandemic made visible both society's reliance on care workers and the systemic neglect of their safety, income security, and well-being.

The care economy thus presents a dual challenge: meeting rising care needs while ensuring that care workers themselves experience decent work. Addressing this challenge requires coordinated interventions across labour regulation, social protection, public finance, skills policy, and collective representation.

Core Objective

The primary objective of the conference is to develop an evidence-based and policy-relevant roadmap for transforming paid care work into decent work. The conference will examine how formalisation, fair remuneration, skill development, social protection, and collective voice can be institutionalised across diverse care occupations, with particular attention to gender equity

and the realities of informal and migrant work. It will also explore the implications of India's New Labour Codes for the recognition, regulation, and governance of paid care work, including opportunities to strengthen labour market institutions and extend protections to care workers across the continuum of formal and informal employment.

Thematic Tracks

Track 1: Labour regulation, Formalisation, Wages, and Financing of Care Work

This track brings together debates on legal recognition, remuneration, and the political economy of care. It examines pathways for formalising domestic workers, migrant caregivers, and community-based care workers; transforming volunteer-based models such as ASHA and Anganwadi work into formal employment; and establishing minimum wages, labour standards, and social security protections across care occupations, including in the context of the Code on Wages, 2019 and the Code on Social Security, 2020. The track also addresses questions of financing care, including public investment, insurance and reimbursement models, wage boards, and the distribution of care costs between the state, markets, and households.

Track 2: Occupational Safety, Health and Social Protection

Focusing on job quality, this track explores the everyday realities of paid care work and the institutional mechanisms required to ensure health and safety at work. Themes include occupational health and safety, emotional labour and burnout, access to pensions, health insurance, maternity benefits, paid leave, and portable social protection for migrant and informal workers. In light of the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 and the Code on Social Security, 2020, the track will examine opportunities and challenges in extending workplace protections, social security coverage, and welfare benefits to care workers across diverse employment arrangements. Particular attention will be paid to working conditions that have adverse impacts on care workers' health, well-being, and economic security.

Track 3: Technology, Collective Voice, and the Future of Care Governance

This track examines emerging forms of care governance in an increasingly digital and fragmented labour market. It focuses on app-based care platforms, algorithmic management, digital worker registries, grievance redressal systems, and data governance, alongside risks of surveillance and new precarity. Central to this track are questions of worker organisation, unionisation, cooperatives and worker-led collectives, social dialogue, and advocacy for a comprehensive National Care Policy anchored in labour and employment rights.

Conclusion

By bringing together researchers, policymakers, practitioners, worker organisations, and civil society actors, the conference aims to advance a shared understanding of the paid care economy as a cornerstone of a just and inclusive development strategy. It seeks to move beyond diagnosis toward actionable policy pathways that recognise care work as skilled, essential, and deserving

of dignity. By bringing together researchers, policymakers, practitioners, worker organisations, and civil society actors, the conference aims to advance a shared understanding of the paid care economy as a cornerstone of a just and inclusive development strategy. It seeks to move beyond diagnosis toward actionable policy pathways that recognise care work as skilled, essential, and deserving of dignity.

Timeline

Activity	Proposed date
Announcement of Call for papers	05 August 2026
Last date for abstract submission	15 September 2026
Intimation of shortlisted abstracts	05 October 2026
Last date for full-paper submission	10 November 2026
Communication of review comments, if any	20 November 2026
Submission of revised final paper and presentation	30 November 2026
Conference in Delhi	11 December 2026

Guidelines for Abstract submission

The abstract should:

- Be of 1000 words.
- Clearly mention the selected thematic track.
- Include the paper title, research problem, objectives, methodology or analytical approach, principal or expected findings, and policy relevance.
- Include three to five keywords.
- Provide the name, designation, institutional affiliation, email address, and telephone number of every author.
- Clearly identify the corresponding author.
- Be submitted in Microsoft Word format.
- Use Times New Roman, 12-point font, 1.5-line spacing and standard margins.
- Does not contain tables, figures or an extensive bibliography. A maximum of five essential references may be included.
- Email abstract to: careconference2026@gmail.com
- Mention in the subject line of your email: **GIM-VVGNLI / Care Conference 2026**

Note: Outstation Authors of Selected Papers would be provided with accommodation at the VVGNLI campus, and selected travel assistance (shortest distance and AC 3-tier train fare) would also be provided.

Convenors:

Dr. Kingshuk Sarkar, Centre for Public Policy & Governance, GIM

Dr. Sreerupa Sengupta, Centre for Social Sensitivity and Action, GIM

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