



KEYNOTE SPEECH

**YB DATO' SRI HAJAH NANCY SHUKRI
MINISTER OF WOMEN, FAMILY & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

PROGRAM

ABAC MALAYSIA CARE ECONOMY ROUNDTABLE 2026

LOCATION/DATE/TIME

ST. REGIS KUALA LUMPUR | 8 JUNE 2026 (MONDAY) | 9.00 AM

Update 7th June 2026

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh,

[SALUTATION TO BE ATTACHED]

Salam Sejahtera, Salam Malaysia Madani, and a very good morning to all.

SECTION 1: OPENING AND CONTEXT

1. I would like to thank ABAC Malaysia and the Women Leadership Foundation for organising this roundtable and for bringing together such a diverse group of stakeholders from across government, industry, academia, civil society, and the broader care ecosystem. I recognise many familiar faces here today — many of you have worked closely with the Ministry or with me over the years to advance these issues, and I am grateful for your continued commitment and advocacy.

-
2. It is encouraging to see the care economy being discussed more prominently within broader economic and regional policy discussions. The realities of care today intersect directly with demographic change, workforce pressures, and evolving economic and social needs that economies can no longer afford to ignore.

3. In this context, discussions such as today's roundtable are important not simply for raising awareness on the issue, but for helping identify more practical and sustainable approaches towards strengthening care systems and institutional preparedness.

SECTION 2: STRUCTURAL DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIETAL TRANSITIONS

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. Across the world, including within Malaysia and the wider Asia-Pacific region, economies are undergoing significant demographic and societal transitions that are reshaping the scale and nature of care demands.

5. Malaysia is projected to enter the Ageing Nation phase by 2050, with persons aged 60 years and above expected to comprise approximately 15.3 per cent of the population. At the same time, fertility rates have continued to decline while life expectancy continues to improve.

Together, these trends are steadily reshaping household structures, dependency patterns, and support needs across society.¹

6. These transitions are also taking place alongside broader socioeconomic shifts, including urbanisation, smaller family units, and rising dual-income households, all of which are placing increasing pressure on childcare, eldercare, disability support, and long-term care systems.

¹ Department of Statistics Malaysia. “Population Projections, Malaysia, 2020-2060”. Ministry of Economy. July 2025. <https://www.dosm.gov.my/portal-main/release-content/population-projections-2020-2060->

SECTION 3: ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

7. A significant portion of caregiving responsibilities continues to be carried informally within households and families. While unpaid care and domestic work has historically remained under-recognised within conventional economic measurements, its implications for labour participation, productivity, and economic resilience are becoming increasingly difficult to ignore.

8. At the same time, Malaysia's total fertility rate has declined significantly from 6.0 births per woman in 1960 to approximately 1.6 births per woman today, falling well below the replacement level of 2.1. This trend signals a shrinking future workforce and a growing dependency burden that will require stronger care and support systems.

9. These realities are also evident in Malaysia. Research by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (“ISIS”) Malaysia estimates that unpaid care and domestic work could amount to approximately RM379 billion annually — broadly comparable to the entire manufacturing sector. An estimated 3.2 million Malaysians, predominantly women, face constraints to full workforce participation because of caregiving responsibilities.²

² Lee, Min H.. “Building a Cradle-to-Grave Care Economy for Malaysia”. Institute of Strategic and International Studies Malaysia. May 2024. <https://www.isis.org.my/2024/06/12/building-a-cradle-to-grave-care-economy-for-malaysia/>

10. This is not an abstract statistic – and I say that not only as a Minister, but as a daughter. When my mother fell ill, we had to find a caregiver for her and it was not easy. Despite having the resources that many families do not have to identify someone trustworthy and trained, putting the right support in place was a deeply challenging and overwhelming process.

11. I can only imagine what it is like for many Malaysian families who face the same challenges with far less. That experience stayed with me and shaped how personally I feel about the work this Ministry must do.

12. Enabling greater workforce participation through more accessible and reliable care systems could contribute approximately RM77 billion annually to the economy — roughly 5 percent of GDP. The case for investing in care is not simply a social one. It is an economic imperative.

13. Beyond workforce shortages, many countries are also facing increasing demand for professional caregivers. The World Health Organization estimates a global shortage of approximately 10 million health and care workers by 2030, particularly in ageing societies where demand for long-term care services continues to rise. Economies are also facing growing pressures surrounding the accessibility and sustainability of formal care systems themselves, including workforce shortages, rising operational costs and increasing demand for specialised care services.

SECTION 4: MALAYSIA'S POLICY DIRECTION AND NATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

Ladies and Gentlemen,

14. Malaysia cannot afford to approach issues around care through fragmented or short-term responses alone. The scale of demographic change taking place today demands stronger institutional coordination, clearer policy alignment, and more sustained planning care systems and support structures.

15. The Malaysia Care Strategic Framework and Action Plan 2026–2030 represents an important step towards establishing a more structured and coordinated national direction for the care ecosystem.³

³ Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development Malaysia. “Malaysia Care Strategic Framework and Action Plan 2026–2030”. Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development Malaysia, November 2025. https://www.kpwkm.gov.my/uploads/content-downloads/file_20251114162252.pdf

16. Among others, the framework places emphasis on governance and legislation, workforce professionalisation, strategic collaboration, research capacity, technology integration, and stronger data systems within the care sector.

17. One area requiring sustained attention is the care workforce itself. Strengthening the care economy will depend not only on expanding services, but also on ensuring that careers within the sector are viewed as skilled, meaningful, and economically sustainable professions.

18. Greater emphasis will therefore need to be placed on workforce professionalisation, accreditation, career pathways, and talent development capable of attracting and retaining future generations of care workers.

19. This also extends to the broader formalisation of the care economy itself, particularly in improving standards, training, institutional oversight, and accessibility to safer and more sustainable formal care systems.

20. Through the 2026 Budget, the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (KPWKM) has allocated funding to implement caregiving training under the Caregiving TVET Programme (MTVET). This initiative aims to develop a pool of trained, competent, and skilled caregivers, particularly in areas such as basic care, safety, welfare, and psychosocial support for older persons and persons with disabilities, in line with current and future caregiving needs.

21. In addition, the Ministry is in the process of developing the **National Care Standards for Older Persons and Persons with Disabilities**. These standards will serve as a key governance instrument for strengthening the quality, safety, and accountability of care services nationwide. They are intended to establish minimum standards of care, safeguard the dignity and rights of care recipients, and promote greater consistency in service delivery across institutional, community-based, and home-based care settings.

22. Overall, these two initiatives complement each other in building a **high-quality and sustainable care ecosystem**, with a strong emphasis on human capital development as well as the strengthening of governance and care standards at the national level.

SECTION 5: THE ROLE OF COLLABORATION, INDUSTRY, AND SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

23. The scale and complexity of these challenges also mean that strengthening the care economy cannot rest on government efforts alone. Sustainable progress will require stronger coordination between public institutions, industry, care providers, and communities themselves.

24. The private sector will also play an increasingly influential role, not only through investment and innovation, but also through workplace practices and support structures that affect how individuals balance employment and caregiving responsibilities.

25. At the same time, demographic transition is also creating new areas of economic opportunity, particularly in sectors linked to healthy ageing, rehabilitation, assistive technologies, and the wider silver economy.

26. Existing models of care delivery will also need to evolve in response to changing demographic realities. Future care systems must become more adaptive, community-oriented, and capable of supporting increasingly diverse care needs over time.

27. Questions surrounding care are also becoming increasingly connected to how communities, cities, and public infrastructure are designed. Accessibility to care is often shaped not only by services themselves, but also by transportation, housing accessibility, digital connectivity, and the overall ease of receiving care within daily life.

28. This is especially important for vulnerable groups, including older persons living alone, persons with disabilities, and individuals without strong support networks. More broadly, it reflects the extent to which care systems increasingly influence participation, independence, and resilience across different stages of life.

29. Across APEC economies, care-related challenges are increasingly recognised as economic issues rather than solely social concerns. Strengthening care systems has become an important component of enhancing workforce participation, supporting women's economic empowerment, improving productivity, and ensuring that economies remain competitive amid demographic change.

30. Malaysia's experience is therefore part of a broader regional conversation on how economies can build more inclusive and sustainable growth. The pace of demographic change means that delays in strengthening care systems will carry increasingly significant social and economic costs — and that cost only grows with time.

SECTION 6: CLOSING

Ladies and Gentlemen,

31. The care economy can no longer remain at the margins of national planning and economic policy discussions. It must be recognised as a strategic enabler — one that supports labour force participation, productivity, social wellbeing, and long-term national resilience. The decisions we make today about how we invest in, organise, and value care will shape the kind of society and economy we leave for the next generation.

32. The discussions today are an important step in that direction. Malaysia is committed to building a care ecosystem that is not only responsive to today's needs, but resilient enough to meet tomorrow's. I believe that with sustained political will, stronger partnerships, and a genuine shift in how we value care, we can get there.

33. What that ultimately requires is not only stronger policies and institutions — but a broader willingness to rethink how care is valued, how caregivers are supported, and how the work of caring is woven into the fabric of our society and our economy. That shift is within reach. And gatherings like this one help bring it closer.

34. On that note, I wish to thank ABAC Malaysia, the Women Leadership Foundation, and all participants here today for your continued commitment to this agenda. I look forward to a rich and substantive discussion.

Wabillahi taufiq walhidayah.

Wassalamualaikum warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.

YB DATO' SRI HAJAH NANCY SHUKRI
Minister of Women, Family & Community Development
08 JUNE 2026