



ELDER WELFARE CENTERS

THE PROPOSAL

Verité Research recommends the implementation of a state-run elder welfare centre in each district (25) in Sri Lanka. This policy would be an expansion of the elder welfare centres piloted by the Western Province Social Services Department with possible scalability to the divisional secretariat level. This is a first step towards reaching the government's objective of an elder care centre in every divisional secretariat (DS) division as mentioned in the NPP Manifesto.

SHORT ABSTRACT:

The proposal of an elder welfare centre in each district aims to be the first step towards achieving the government's objective of establishing such a centre in each DS division. The implementation of elder welfare centres is targeted towards the promotion of active aging, which is the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age.¹ Active aging is fostered through daily mobility and cognitive activities, with a strong emphasis on socialization of the elderly. This aims to reduce the care burden in two distinct ways. First, in the short-term, by giving elders a place to be cared for during the day, freeing up the time of the primary caregiver. Second, promoting active aging reduces the long-term care demands elders place on their caregivers over time. This may allow caregivers, predominantly women to engage in paid employment, thereby increasing female labour force participation, raising household incomes, and contributing to economic growth. Moreover, by promoting active aging and strengthening preventive health in old age, it will reduce both the cumulative costs on the healthcare system and healthcare costs incurred by households.

TOPLINE VIEW

Objective of the Proposal

- ☒ Economic Growth
- ☐ Governance
- ☒ Justice and Rights
- ☒ Social Welfare
- Other

<u>Implementing Agency:</u>	Ministry of Rural Development, Social Security, and Community Development
<u>Primary Beneficiaries:</u>	The Elderly population over the age of 60, Elderly Caregivers
<u>Cost Estimate (if available):</u>	Costs for all 25 centres: LKR 181.9 MN – Annual Operational Cost ² LKR 142.9 MN- Capital Expenditure ³
<u>Policy Type:</u>	Expenditure

¹ World Health Organization (2002) *Active Ageing: A Policy Framework*. WHO/NMH/NPH/02.8. Geneva: World Health Organization. Available at: <https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/WHO-Active-Ageing-Framework.pdf>

² Monthly Operational Cost Breakdown per centre (LKR 606,573): LKR 126,000 – Utilities, LKR 93,893 x 4 – Staff, LKR 80,000 – Janitorial Services, LKR 25,000 – Petty Cash

³ Capital Expenditure Breakdown per centre (LKR 5,714,329): LKR 5,000,000 – Renovation of 150sq ft kitchen, 50 sq ft Bathroom x 2, LKR 145,479 – Furniture, LKR 568,850 – Equipment for activities.

HOW IT ADVANCES THE OBJECTIVES

1. Economic Growth

Elder welfare centres reduce the burden of care on primary caregivers of the elderly, predominantly women. These centres will therefore reduce the time spent on care work and contribute towards creating time to spend on non-care related activities. This may, in turn, allow them to enter paid employment, thereby increasing female labour force participation, which may raise household income and support broader economic growth.

2. Justice and Rights

Elder welfare centres promote justice and rights in two ways. First, through the empowerment of the elderly: active aging increases the independence and dignity of the elderly, allowing them to retain their agency. Second, by reducing the care burden on primary caregivers and creating more time for caregivers to exercise their agency, the policy supports primary caregivers' economic empowerment. Since these caregivers tend to be women, this contributes towards the advancement of gender equality.

3. Social Welfare

Elder welfare centres promote social welfare as it aims to improve the mental and physical wellbeing of elderly people. This is achieved through the active ageing approach the centres are designed to provide, by having programs focused on daily physical, cognitive, and social activities. Improved mental and physical health outcomes for the elderly may also reduce the strain the elderly place on the healthcare system. Secondly it provides respite care for caregivers, time during the day in which they are relieved from their care responsibilities. This may assist in improving the wellbeing of primary caregivers by allowing time away from the stresses of caregiving.

CASE FOR THE PROPOSAL

Sri Lanka's population is ageing. In 2023, Sri Lanka had the highest proportion of adults over 60 in South Asia, and by 2040, nearly one-quarter of the population is expected to be above this age. The old-age dependency ratio (the proportion of population aged 60 years or older to the population aged 15–59 years) is also expected to nearly double between 2020 to 2050.⁴ This indicates that the care burden on the younger cohorts will increase substantially over the same period. Despite these changes in population structure, care arrangements for the elderly have remained largely unchanged in the last few decades. With the care burden increasing, the need for alternative care solutions is an immediate concern. Care arrangements in Sri Lanka are generally centred within the family and predominantly facilitated by the unpaid labour of women. This has had effects on the female labour force participation rate (FLFP) which has remained between approximately 30 - 35% for the last two decades.⁵ This puts Sri Lanka behind regional peers such as India and Bangladesh where the FLFP rate stands at 41.7% and 38.6%

⁴ Asian Development Bank (ADB). (2019). Growing Old Before Becoming Rich: Challenges of an Aging Population in Sri Lanka. ADB. <https://dx.doi.org/10.22617/TCS190612-2>

⁵ Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka (2024) *Labour Force Survey Annual Report 2024*. Colombo: Department of Census and Statistics. Available at: https://www.statistics.gov.lk/Resource/en/LabourForce/Annual_Reports/LFS2024.pdf (Accessed: 11 May 2026).

respectively⁶ and underscores the need to treat women's economic empowerment as a pressing policy priority.

The growing care burden and its concentration within the household will continue to reduce the amount of time primary caregivers have for activities outside of care. A recent quantitative study of caregivers by Verité Research highlighted the intensive nature of elder care, with many caregivers reported not being able to get enough sleep and having little to no time for activities outside care work.⁷ The time spent on care work is attributed to limit caregivers' ability to engage in paid employment,⁸ particularly as the prime caregiving age and working age overlap significantly, with 94.6% of working age women recognized as engaged in unpaid work.⁹ The care burden on women has a direct effect on the FLFP rate.¹⁰ The lack of suitable alternatives to home care prevents this burden from being shifted away from households. This policy therefore aims to create time for caregivers by shifting the location of care - for at least part of the day - outside the household. This will allow caregivers, predominantly women, the opportunity to engage in paid employment and promote their economic empowerment.

Sri Lanka's ageing population raises the need to ensure that older persons can age with dignity and independence. This policy proposal seeks to address current and future care demands by creating a supportive environment for older persons. In addition to providing direct care, the centres' daily programme of physical, cognitive, and social activities promotes active ageing, reduces physical and mental health risks, and helps older persons maintain their wellbeing and independence as they age.

The implementation of elder welfare centres aligns explicitly with the NPP's policy position on care. The NPP manifesto states: "While some policymakers view the increasing elderly population as a challenge, the NPP believes that it is a national responsibility to understand and address this situation with special attention to the wellbeing of the elderly." The manifesto directly promises the establishment of elderly care centres at the DS level. This proposal is a concrete first step towards achieving this objective. The piloting of care centres in each district allows for the situational adaptation of the type of care and services to be provided by the centres based on regional differences. Demographic, socio-economic, and rural/urban differences will shape what health services are needed and how activities should be delivered.

⁶ Press Information Bureau (2025) 'Secretary (Labour & Employment) Participates in Round Table Discussion on Improving Female Workforce Participation in India', *Press Information Bureau*, 5 March. Available at: <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2108281®=3&lang=2> (Accessed: 11 May 2026).

World Bank (2026) *Bangladesh – Gender Data Portal*. Washington, DC: World Bank. Available at:

<https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/bangladesh> (Accessed: 11 May 2026).

⁷ Verité Research. *Understanding The Care Economy in Sri Lanka: A Quantitative Analysis Based on a Pilot Survey of Unpaid Care Work* (Dec 2024).

⁸ Alonso, C., Brussevich, M., Dabla-Norris, E., Kinoshita, Y. and Kochhar, K. (2019) 'Reducing and redistributing unpaid work: stronger policies to support gender equality', *IMF Working Paper*, WP/19/225. Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5089/9781513514536.001> (Accessed: 11 May 2026).

⁹ Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka (2020) *Sri Lanka Time Use Survey Final Report – 2017*. Colombo: Ministry of Finance, Economy and Policy Development. Available at: http://www.statistics.gov.lk/PressReleases/TUS_FinalReport_2017

¹⁰ Alonso, C., Brussevich, M., Dabla-Norris, E., Kinoshita, Y. and Kochhar, K. (2019) 'Reducing and redistributing unpaid work: stronger policies to support gender equality', *IMF Working Paper*, WP/19/225. Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5089/9781513514536.001> (Accessed: 11 May 2026). Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka. (2020). *Sri Lanka Time Use Survey final report – 2017*. Ministry of Finance, Economy and Policy Development. [PDF report](#)

The lessons learned from each district can be used to develop programs for centres to be implemented at the DS level in similar contexts.

Elder welfare centres are not only a government manifesto promise, they will help deal with the growing care burden placed on households created by the aging population Sri Lanka faces. In addition, it provides an innovative solution towards promoting women's economic participation and old age wellbeing. The contribution of these factors makes elder welfare day centres a compelling answer to the question of how Sri Lanka tackles its ageing population dilemma.

HOW DOES IT HELP THE COUNTRY

1. **Wellbeing of the Elderly.** Elder welfare centres aim to improve the physical and mental health outcomes of the elderly and preserve their dignity in old age. The centres focus on active aging and promoting independence through an activity program and a health screening function. Activities proposed target physical mobility, cognitive tasks, and socialization. Mobility activities help preserve physical health and autonomy. Cognitive tasks help the elderly maintain cognitive function and retain their agency. Socialization addresses issues of isolation, which is among the leading drivers of deteriorating mental health in old age.¹¹ Health screenings enable early detection of non-communicable diseases and access to earlier, less costly treatment. Together, these approaches aim to preserve the independence of the elderly population as they age.
2. **Better Allocation of Healthcare.** Elder welfare centres are expected to better allocate government health care costs. This will be achieved through a two-pronged approach: promoting active aging and providing regular health screenings at the centres. First, active aging programmes will support improved health outcomes throughout old age reducing the demand for curative healthcare services and easing the pressure on the public healthcare system. Second, regular screenings can enable the early detection and treatment of health issues, which is typically less costly than late-stage interventions and hospitalizations. Together, a healthier elderly population and an early-detection system are expected to reduce the strain an aging population place on the healthcare system allowing for better allocation of healthcare resources.¹²
3. **Women's Economic Participation.** The provision of elder welfare centres aims to relieve some of the burden of care within households. This is done in two ways. First, by providing a direct alternative to household-based care. Second, by promoting active aging and elder independence, reducing the burden on caregivers. This would allow primary caregivers, mainly women, to reduce the time spent on care activities. This extra time creates the opportunity for caregivers to engage in paid employment, increasing economic participation, particularly among women, and supports a rise in the female labour force participation rates overall. With more members of the household

¹¹ Eisenstein, M. (2024, May 7). *For healthy aging, stay connected*. Hopkins Bloomberg Public Health Magazine. [Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health](#)

¹² Fries, J.F. (2011). "Compression of Morbidity 1980–2011: A Focused Review of Paradigms and Progress." *Journal of Aging Research*, 2011

contributing, household incomes are expected to rise, potentially reducing household poverty and contributing positively to national economic growth.

HISTORY OF THE PROPOSAL

Significant collaborative efforts have been undertaken across government, academia, civil society, and international development partners to examine and respond to the care economy. At the national level, the NPP manifesto marks a pivotal moment in formally acknowledging the need for care infrastructure, with specific reference to the development of elder welfare centres at each DS level. This led to the creation of the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) that under pillar two tackled social care. The NSPS is complemented by the draft National Action Plan on Care which has provided a structured framework for translating research and government objectives into concrete policy commitments, particularly around recognizing, reducing, and redistributing unpaid care burdens. These included targeted policies aimed at developing national elder care infrastructure. This proposal builds on the policy architecture established by the National Action Plan on Care, and explicitly on the priorities set out in the NPP manifesto, situating this analysis within this broader momentum toward a more equitable and well-supported care economy.

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