

Budget 2023 Memorandum

Facilitating Resilient and Sustainable Reforms to Support Women and Children

Recommendations for an inclusive recovery.

— Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)



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This report by Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) is authored by Kiran Kaur, Anis Farid, and Isabel Chung, with assistance by Abinaya Mohan and input provided by Yu Ren Chung, Shazana Agha, and other WAO colleagues. To mainstream gender-responsive budgeting in Malaysia, WAO as part of the Gender Budget Group are jointly organising a series of offline workshops and other advocacy activities around the theme. Our advocacy work is generously funded by Yayasan Sime Darby, who bear no responsibility for the contents of this report. Graphics and illustrations designed by Raziq Fareed and the WAO team through Adobe Illustrator and Canva. Cover page designed on Canva.

About WAO

Since 1982, Women's Aid Organisation has provided free shelter, counselling, and crisis support to women and children who experience abuse. We help women and their children rebuild their lives, after surviving domestic violence, rape, trafficking, and other atrocities. Learning from women's experiences, we advocate to improve public policies and shift public mindsets. Together, we change lives. For enquiries, you may contact us at info@wao.org.my.

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Summary

This is the third iteration of the Women's Aid Organisation's Budget Report. To begin, we summarise our assessment of last year's budget and allocations, drawing from three major findings:

1. More efforts must be made to ensure the inclusivity and accessibility of programmes

While many initiatives aimed at increasing social protection were rolled out in Budget 2022, there still remain significant gaps in ensuring their accessibility and inclusivity for all, particularly the most vulnerable. For example, unclear plans of actions for the rollout of some programmes made them difficult to access for some segments of the population. Additionally, little was done to raise the awareness of some initiatives, while others remained inaccessible because of the increased need for digital literacy to navigate the offerings across government websites.

2. The gender lens must be applied to all budget allocations

The requirement of a gender analysis in proposed budget allocations has long been a requirement by the Ministry of Finance. However, most allocations in Budget 2022 were gender-neutral, lacking this necessary gender analysis to understand how access and utilisation of services differs across gender, age, socioeconomic status, and other identity markers. Budgets are not gender neutral policy instruments. Without a gender analysis and consideration of how different segments of the population are impacted, the existing inequalities, exacerbated by the pandemic, will

only be further perpetuated, delaying recovery as we shift into endemicity.

3. Increased transparency for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation is needed

There were many initiatives in Budget 2022 that remain crucial as measures of social protection, but whose implementation and monitoring remain outside public domain, thus little remains known on the success of the programmes rolled out. A monitoring committee for Budget 2022 allocations was formed in January 2022, however it is unclear how much of this committee's work has been made public and accessible for members of the public who are curious as to how allocations have been rolled out and implemented. While the recognition of monitoring and evaluation is a good first step, more must be done to ensure allocations are fully and properly tracked across their life cycle to ensure the rakyat can fully enjoy what has been allocated.

In planning for Budget 2023:

A key factor that foundationalises our Budget 2023 recommendations is ensuring that policy developments and spending decisions sufficiently supports the recovery needs of all, with focus on women and girls, who were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and subsequent fallouts – to ensure a truly inclusive, effective, and sustainable recovery.

Upon reviewing allocations from Budget 2022, we found that many allocations take a blanket approach as opposed to a targeted and gender responsive approach to policy and allocation development. While there have been notable

allocations that centre gender responsive principles and recognise the needs of diverse groups, such as the JaminKerja scheme that targeted women and single mothers, these are still far and in between - pointing towards the need for gender mainstreaming to be further realised in Malaysia's budgetary processes. Furthermore, gaps still arise in utilising appropriate methods to reach target groups, and the appropriate dissemination of information to ensure impact - which compromises the reach of these notable schemes.

Taking such policy gaps and gender disparities that still persist in our community into consideration, we have identified 3 overarching priority areas that Budget 2023 must centre to realise an inclusive recovery that will serve all segments of Malaysia's community and drive national prosperity as we enter endemicity. These 3 priority areas are as outlined below:

I. Gender-based violence response and education

Domestic and gender-based violence has emerged as a shadow pandemic over the two years of the pandemic, where rates of gendered violence have skyrocketed. As we transition to endemicity, some expected this to reduce without such exacerbating conditions. However, data has revealed that numbers are not reducing - as experienced firsthand on the WAO hotline where numbers of crisis calls about gendered violence remained consistent post-lockdowns.

This suggests that such high rates of gendered violence have always been present under the surface, and have simply been unveiled by the circumstances of the pandemic. To address such high rates of violence and discrimination against women and vulnerable genders, we must learn from our past shortcomings, gaps in implementation and support services to ensure

survivors accessibility to their services, particularly in times of crisis.

As such, our **key recommendations** are as follows:

1. Allocate **RM152 million** each year to increase the amount of **social workers and child protectors** at a rate of 1,000 per year for 4 years.
2. Allocate **RM190 million** to fund 271 more shelters and **women's shelters** to address Malaysia's shelter shortage.
3. Allocate **RM25 million** to expand **gender-sensitivity and SOP training** to all frontline officers, including police officers and medical officers – to ensure abuse, sexual assault, and other gender-based violence cases are handled adequately.
4. Allocate **RM2 million** to raising **public awareness** of available services and programmes
5. Allocate **RM25 million** for **disaster relief and emergencies**
6. Allocate **RM20 million** towards data for **gender analysis**
 - a. Allocate **RM20 million** for **gender-data collection**
 - b. Efforts must be made towards **comprehensively understanding the prevalence of social issues**, such as gender-based violence, and attitudes towards those issues, in order for budget allocation in better response to them.

II. Livelihoods, care, and social protection

The two years of the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic and multiple instituted movement control orders have exacerbated circumstances and negatively impacted livelihoods of many marginalised and vulnerable groups, including women. In fact, research has shown that women, particularly single mothers, have been some of the most affected during Malaysia's lockdowns. With the increase in the burden of care that came with the multiple movement control orders, women were being forced out of the formal workforce to shoulder this at high rates, while single mothers' loads, as the sole breadwinner and caregivers of their families, were severely exacerbated. Even as we move toward endemicity and pursue an economic and social recovery, women's formal workforce participation remains low—as impacted by the barriers to re-entry that are ever-present in our community.

Thus, to facilitate **a truly inclusive recovery that centres the livelihoods and social needs of diverse peoples** and, in turn the economic prosperity of the nation, it is important now more than ever for us to implement targeted and proactive steps toward ensuring that barriers that may prevent this from being realised are addressed.

As such, we recommend the following:

1. **RM75 million** must be allocated specifically for **formal and informal education and skill training programmes for marginalised communities** including women and single mothers, and towards course accessibility.
 - a. Allocate **RM50 million** for training programmes, with a **specific quota to benefit women**, particularly single mothers.
 - b. Designate **RM25 million** to **increase accessibility of training programmes** for underserved communities.
2. A separate **RM213.75 million** must be allocated to **establish single parent specific scholarships** at public and private educational institutions.
3. **Subsidise 50-70% of childcare costs** in addition to retaining employer subsidies and incentives to support B40 single parent families.
4. **Extend the social protection** offered through the **Housewives Social Security Bill to house-husbands**
5. Allocate **RM50 million** for **community childcare centres**.
 - a. Concurrently, allocate **RM5 million** per year to ensure these **childcare centres are registered**.
6. Increase the amount of **registered childcare givers**
 - a. **Incentivise registration** and training through subsidies
 - b. **Increase accessibility of training programmes**, especially for marginalised groups

III. Healthcare

The health of the community remains at high risk, over two years after the initial onset of the pandemic. The continued impact of the pandemic, including the escalated rates of violence, lingers, even in transitions into an endemic phase. **Support for vulnerable communities remains crucial, but underfunded**, especially with regards to the availability of crisis support services available for women who have faced any form of gender-based violence. This is coupled with a crisis in mental health, where **Malaysia currently lacks both the infrastructure and personnel to adequately handle the scale of mental health issues experienced by the community**, but especially by those who are most vulnerable – such as women and children who have experienced some form of gender-based violence. In this, it becomes crucial to invest in several aspects of healthcare, from primary healthcare to One-Stop Crisis Centres, to mental health services.

As such, **our recommendations** are as follows:

1. Allocate **RM50 million** specifically to the 129 **One-Stop Crisis Centres (OSCCs)** located in public hospitals across Malaysia.
2. Allocate **RM50 million** to expand availability of **MENTARIs** and specialty mental health services within primary healthcare clinics (*Klinik Kesihatan*) throughout Malaysia at a rate of 5 per year, and **RM9.3 million** for the **training of trauma-informed psychologists and counsellors**.
3. **Establish insurance schemes in all states**, modelled after the Skim Peduli Sihat scheme to benefit B40 and single parent families and overcome financial barriers to accessing healthcare.
4. Investing **RM30 million** towards **strengthening the primary healthcare response** to domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence.

Introduction

In this year's World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap report, **Malaysia is at the highest position it has ever been in the past few years, at 103rd place**, a positive shift from last year's low of 112.¹ On a positive note, Malaysia's economic participation and opportunity for women increased 1.3%. Nonetheless, we remain one of the lowest ranked ASEAN countries, ahead only of Brunei and Myanmar and we must not remain blind to the glaring gender gaps within the country. **Particularly a consistent sore spot for Malaysia over the last few years has been our lack of female leadership, where women's political empowerment in Malaysia consistently ranks low**, as we lack representation of women in higher levels of decision-making. These are issues which can be addressed through sufficient funding, attention, and care.

Gap between women and men in decision-making spaces

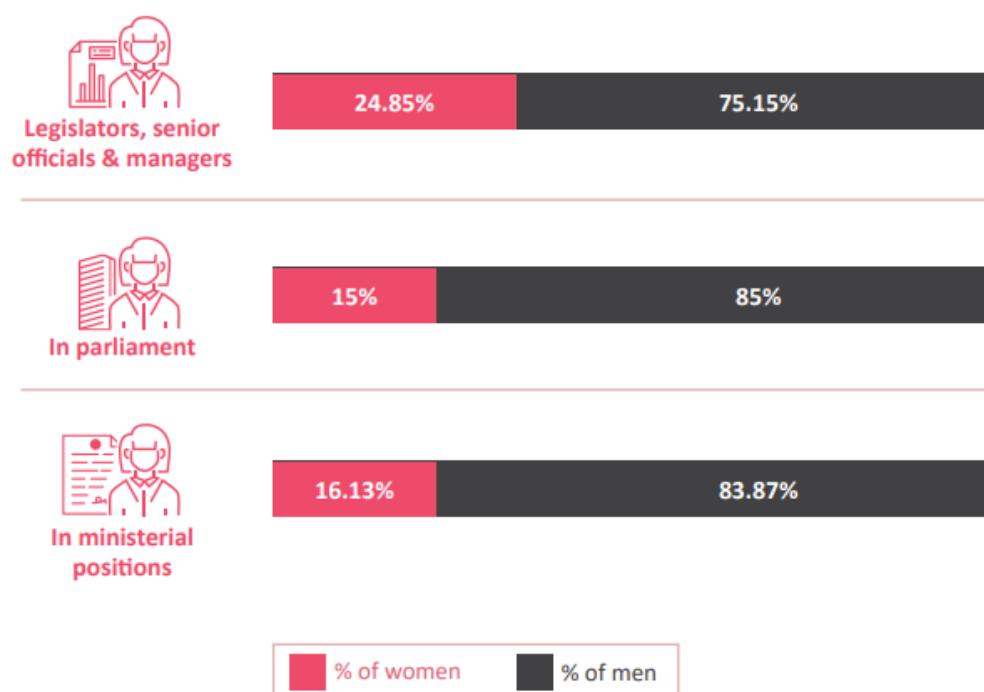


Figure 1. Gap between women and men in decision-making spaces, according to the World Economic Forum 2022 Report.

¹ World Economic Forum. (2022). "Global Gender Gap Report: 2022." Available at: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf

Budget 2022 saw the increased incorporation of women's issues, as well as other issues that disproportionately impact women, such as mental health, into budget allocations. That said, Budget 2022 was far from fully gender-responsive, with a misunderstanding in how seemingly neutral or blanket allocations, such as the aforementioned mental health allocation, will have a different impact on individuals based on their diverse circumstances, lived experiences and ability to access the allocations. As recently announced in August 2022, Prime Minister, Ismail Sabri, affirmed the preparation of a gender responsive budget for the B40 community for next year,² demonstrating a good step towards mainstreaming these principles in budgetary processes.

Thus, we continue to advocate for gender and identity responsive budgeting with our Budget 2023 report.

Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) is critical to ensuring that gender equality considerations are taken systematically into account in tax and spending decisions. According to the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP),³ gender-responsive budgeting:

- Recognises that budgets are not neutral and have different benefits on and impacts to men and women.
- Incorporates a gendered perspective and analysis into all stages of the budget cycle in order to ensure that women and girls benefit equally from government expenditure.

- Promotes gender equality by analysing who gets the most benefit from government revenue, who has the greatest and least tax burden, and what the impact of government spending is on phenomena like the unpaid care burden on women.
- May involve increasing spending in certain sectors that benefit women and girls and reduce inequality.

GRB not only considers spending, but also the impact that spending has on people from different segments of the community.

The end-goal of GRB is to create a budget that works for everyone and all sectors of the community - not just women and girls.

In addressing inequalities, everyone will be better off. With that in mind, the allocations we are putting forth this year aim to better represent the needs of women and girls of diverse circumstances and identities, thus facilitating more involvement in the public sphere, and addressing specifically the vulnerabilities that were exacerbated by the pandemic and putting forth strategies to adequately essential support as we move into recovery.

² Malaysiakini (2022). "PM: MOF, women NGOs to prepare gender responsive budget next year." Available at: <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/633377#friendshare-link-TXjre4xH-cb925b284a1ece7bfaff403a117f5610-2a8b6402635c14d87c3469209250dbdbi7>

³ United Nations ESCAP (2017). "Gender Responsive Budgeting in Asia and the Pacific: Key Concepts and Good Practices." Available at: <https://bit.ly/3rNgQoi>

Finally, gender-responsive budgeting, when done with attention and care, can help address the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):



Figure 2. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which can be addressed if GRB is practised.

Our Budget 2022 Assessment

Assessment of Allocations in Budget 2022

1. More efforts must be made to ensure inclusivity and accessibility of programmes

Budget 2022 saw the expansion of consideration towards marginalised communities, including several new social protection measures that were extended to housewives, self-employed individuals, and people with disabilities, and the incorporation of several women's issues such as domestic violence and safety. All of these efforts have been welcomed.

However, there still remain gaps in the inclusivity and accessibility of programmes offered which must be addressed.

A. Technological and other related barriers in accessing aid

As pointed out in our last report,⁴ there is an increasing move to technologise access to financial aid but internet penetration and household access to a smartphone, though high, is not a proxy for digital literacy.

While the Budget 2022 website is fairly easy to navigate if one is a digitally literate urbanite, it cannot be assumed that access remains the same for someone who has patchy internet access, no smart devices, and is not digitally literate. For example, the B40 families surveyed in UNICEF-UNFPA Families on the Edge report

⁴ Women's Aid Organisation. (2021). "Budget 2022: A Resilient National Recovery for Women." Available at: https://wao.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Budget-2022_A-Resilient-National-Recovery-for-Women.pdf

said accessing aid is a problem, also citing illiteracy, procedural issues, and logistical issues as barriers.⁵ Further, in Budget 2022, there was also a specific allocation towards orphaned children, known as Yayasan Keluarga Malaysia.⁶ The application is done manually through a form on the Keluarga Malaysia website, however, as the fund is for children, including those who have been orphaned since birth, it is unclear who is supposed to help younger children apply, raising concerns as to whether the process is child-friendly.

Finally, approximately 1.7 million people or 8% of adults in Malaysia remain unbanked. Of these, 88% either earn low or no income and 55% are women. While not all financial aid is disbursed through e-payments, the procedure for cash claiming at BSN branches is not straightforward. In fact, the Budget 2022 website has no details on how to go about the cash claim process.⁷ Thus, in light of the compounding of these issues, there is likely a significant amount of these individuals, often representing the most vulnerable, likely do not benefit from receiving aid.

B. Clear plans of action for impactful and targeted assistance

Positively, Budget 2022 allocations saw some targeted assistance schemes and programs that have potential to significantly benefit vulnerable

⁵ UNICEF-UNFPA (2020). "Families on the Edge, Issue 1." Available at: <https://uni.cf/3rRwzTy>

⁶ Jabatan Penerangan Malaysia. (2021). "BAJET 2022 : INISIATIF YAYASAN KELUARGA MALAYSIA." Available at: <https://www.penerangan.gov.my/japenv2/index.php/2021/1/01/bajet-2022-inisiatif-yayasan-keluarga-malaysia/>

⁷ Ministry of Finance. (nd). "Bantuan Keluarga Malaysia (BKM)." Available at: <https://budget.mof.gov.my/manfaat/en/faq/bkm.html>

communities. Community entrepreneurship programs were launched that specifically targeted those for B40 communities, senior citizens, single mothers, disabled persons and indigenous peoples.⁸ For example, the Dananita business financing scheme was established to provide funding opportunities for single mothers hoping to start businesses.⁹

That said, to ensure improvements of such initiatives, we must evaluate their current shortcomings. The little impact measurement and evaluation data made available to the public, and the lack of awareness among many in such target groups about the availability of these programs, suggest that more must be done from the development and initiation of these programs to ensure aid accessibility. Specifically, clear action plans for outreach and awareness must be developed with such programs, to ensure that they are impact oriented, with beneficiaries' interests in mind. Based on a series of interviews conducted with single mothers in Malaysia, WAO found that for more than a quarter of single mothers interviewed, barriers to accessing empowerment courses included a lack of information about these courses. Moreover, even if they were aware of the availability of these courses, around half of the single mothers interviewed reported that they were unable to access them due to non-negotiable obligations, including the lack of childcare, and having to prioritise day jobs.

This indicates that a clearer action plan must be initiated to circumvent single mothers being unable to join such courses, such as evaluating the methods used to communicate the availability of these progress to targeted

communities. For instance, registration drives at community level and non-internet based methods for information dissemination must be explored. Further, the development of these programs must take potential participants' diverse circumstances into account, such as through ensuring their commencement outside of working hours, and ensuring the availability of childcare services to interested participants.

C. Inclusivity across allocations

In a speech, YB Wong Chen highlighted that, based on his calculations, the amount of money that went towards women in Budget 2022 was approximately RM58 billion out of RM311 billion, or merely 18.6% of the national budget.¹⁰

In reality, however, despite how it appears that RM58 billion allocated towards women, this overly simplifies issues of access, whereby not every woman has equal access to their share of the RM58 billion. For example, a woman who has been left by her husband but is, on paper, still legally married, known as an *ibu tunggal*, will face significantly larger barriers receiving any financial incentives allocated towards single mothers because she is not legally registered as a single mother.

These barriers will also be different based on other factors, such as age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, education attainment, and geographical distribution, therefore, moving forward, Budget 2023 cannot merely be based just on sex, but a variety of other factors that impact an individual's ability to access and receive aid.

⁸ Budget 2022 (2022). "Community Entrepreneurship."

Available at:

<https://budget.mof.gov.my/manfaat/en/faq/tvet-community.html>

⁹ Portal Rasmi Majlis Amanah Rakyat (2022). "Special Business Financing Scheme for Women (DanaNITA)"

Available at:

<https://www.mara.gov.my/en/index/ent-menu/support-facilities/ent-business-finance/dananita/#tab-id->

¹⁰ Wong Chen. (2022). Transcript for a speech delivered at an event organised by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, on 31st March 2022. Facebook status update.

Available at:

<https://www.facebook.com/wongchen.pkr/posts/pfbid0Yg8KZciFFKcZpiTRsL6tDxPQ8cHvjLBjPd2XWW8EGexTyAVTzY6TubLkg5ytMyk6l>

2. The gender lens must be applied to *all* budget allocations

The requirement of a gender analysis in proposed budget allocations has long been a requirement by the Ministry of Finance. As mentioned in the introduction of this report, there was an allocation made towards improving mental health services and accessibility. However, this allocation, like most allocations in Budget 2022, were gender-neutral, meaning there appeared to be no gender analysis done to understand how access and utilisation of mental health services differs across gender, age, socioeconomic status, and other identity markers. As noted in our previous report, women and youth are particularly vulnerable to mental health issues, as demonstrated by the high rates of both female and youth suicides.

However, this issue extends beyond mental health, into issues such as livelihoods. As pointed out by the Gender Budget Group in their response to Budget 2022, targeted policies for the industrial sectors and supply chains in the fishing, agriculture and manufacturing industries failed to account for the women in their labour force. There was also little to no gender focus in budgetary measures under education (the largest budget of all ministries), amongst others, minimising the lived realities and needs of women, girls, and vulnerable groups.

- For example, the upskill programmes offered appear inclusive on paper, spanning over 20 areas, that range from aviation to admin and clerical support to tourism and actuarial statistics,¹¹ when looking at the courses actually offered through the upskill website, the available

courses offered only appear to be geared towards STEM graduates.¹²

- Further, these courses are limited to bumiputera who are between 19-25, for more technical subjects. Undeniably, the bulk of these subjects are likely to be undertaken disproportionately by young men, which potentially misses women who are skilled but want to re-enter the workforce in their 30s. A gender analysis is crucial to understanding which subjects would benefit whom, demonstrating how an allocation which may seem gender neutral at a glance can disproportionately benefit one segment of the community over others, despite intentions to encourage equal access.

As such, it is important to note, **budgets are not gender neutral policy instruments**. Without a gender analysis and consideration of how different segments of the population are impacted, the existing inequalities, exacerbated by the pandemic, will only be further perpetuated, delaying recovery as we shift into endemicity. Crucially, for example, women's employment has not recovered in much the same way as men's employment. Further, despite major steps towards ensuring the safety of women, such as the passing of the Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill in both Dewan Rakyat and Dewan Negara and the tabling of anti-stalking amendments, hotlines for gender-based violence, such as WAO's, have not seen a reduction to pre-pandemic numbers.

More specific allocations must be put in place to ensure the most vulnerable and marginalised have access to the help and services they require.

¹¹ Ministry of Finance (n.d). "Budget 2022: Reskilling & Upskilling Program." Available at: <https://budget.mof.gov.my/manfaat/en/faq/reskilling.html>

¹² Upskill Malaysia (2021). "Course details." Available at: <https://upskillmalaysia.gov.my/courseDetails>

3. Increased transparency for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation is needed

Finally, as always, it must be stressed that better efforts towards implementation, monitoring, and evaluation must be made. Budget allocations cannot just be an exercise of listing down initiatives without clear mechanisms of accountability to the rakyat across implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. There were many initiatives in Budget 2022 that remain crucial as measures of social protection, but whose implementation and monitoring remain outside public domain.

For example, in Budget 2022, there was an allocation towards providing 130,000 B40 youth period products for the following year to alleviate period poverty. However, a quick search on the Budget 2022 website for any allocations matching the terms “period”, “period poverty”, “menstrual”, “hygiene”, and “sanitary” all yield no results. Elsewhere, there has been no follow up news coverage on this allocation either, since the measure was announced in October 2021. While the allocation was welcomed by many, it appears unclear as to whether implementation was even undertaken, much less monitoring and evaluation.

For allocations related to women's safety, such as the RM13 million allocation towards D11 unit of the Royal Malaysia Police and the RM10 million allocated towards shelter services, clarity was only received through meetings and dialogues with KPWKM, which often does not present publicly accessible information and offers no formal mechanisms of accountability to the rakyat.

A monitoring committee for Budget 2022 allocations was formed in January 2022,¹³ however, it is unclear how much of this committee's work has been made public and accessible for members of the public who are curious as to how allocations have been rolled out and implemented. While the recognition of monitoring and evaluation is a good first step, more must be done to ensure allocations are fully and properly tracked across their life cycle to ensure the rakyat can fully enjoy what has been allocated.

¹³ NST (2022). “2022 Budget Monitoring Committee formed to oversee implementation and performance.” Available at: <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2022/01/765141/2022-budget-monitoring-committee-formed-oversee-implementation-and>

Our Budget 2023 Recommendations

Pillar I: Gender-based violence response and education

Budget 2022 promised to empower women, through allocations for domestic-violence services, funding for childcare, allocations for single parents, programmes for women entrepreneurs, and other initiatives. Continuing this thread into Budget 2023, we recommend focusing on strengthening support for women vulnerable to gender-based violence, through continuing allocations for women's shelters, increasing social workers, as well as strengthening childcare support for parents, especially single mothers.



1. Malaysia must address the Social Worker and Child Protector disparity in the welfare system. As the Social Workers Profession Act is due to be tabled, Malaysia must commit to allocating RM152 million each year to increase the amount of social workers and child protectors at 1,000 per year for 4 years.

Our current social worker per population ratio stands at one social worker per 8,756 persons, which is a huge shortage compared to other countries such as neighbouring Singapore, at one social worker for every 3,448 residents and far less than the UK (1:3,025), Australia (1:1040), or the United States (1:490).¹⁴

A 2018 UNICEF Malaysia Survey Found that while 1,615 social services officers are gazetted as child protectors, only 236 officers¹⁵ were directly involved in handling child protection cases. By 2019, this number reportedly dropped to **only 208 protectors¹⁶ in the whole of Malaysia.**

In Budget 2022, 80,000 contract job opportunities (50,000 jobs in the public sector and 30,000 jobs in GLCs and strategic partners) were created.¹⁷ While the 50,000 spaces could have increased our social worker and child protector per population ratio, **these opportunities** last from anywhere within one (1) month and twelve (12) months, and **will not span beyond 30 June 2023.**

Social workers are an especially important resource in helping vulnerable populations interface with and navigate justice and welfare systems, ensuring a survivor's rights are protected and that they have access to the help they require in accessing governmental assistance, as these systems may be confusing.

- For example, based on a series of interviews conducted with Malaysian single mother participants, two thirds of eligible Malaysian single mothers **did not receive or were unsuccessful in applying for financial aid.** More than half reported that the **primary challenge** they faced in securing aid was a **lack of information** about financial aid schemes and their processes.
- These findings are just one illustration of how social workers are integral to assisting vulnerable populations, as they would be able to facilitate the provision of social assistance and support in navigating various institutions.
- Without sufficient social worker capacity, assistance schemes remain inaccessible and exacerbate the after effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on people's welfare.

¹⁴ Women's Aid Organisation. (2021). "Budget 2022: A Resilient National Recovery for Women." Available at: https://wao.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Budget-2022_A-Resilient-National-Recovery-for-Women.pdf

¹⁵ UNICEF. (2020). "Avoiding a Child Welfare Crisis." Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/reports/avoiding-child-welfare-crisis>

¹⁶ Berita Harian. (2019). "Malaysia perlu 130 pegawai pelindung kanak-kanak." Available at: <https://www.bharian.com.my/wanita/keluarga/2019/12/637462/malaysia-perlu-130-pegawai-pelindung-kanak-kanak>

¹⁷ Ministry of Finance (2022). "Short-term Employment." Available at: <https://budget.mof.gov.my/manfaat/faq/mystep.html>

Creating a safe environment: Ratio of Social Worker to Community

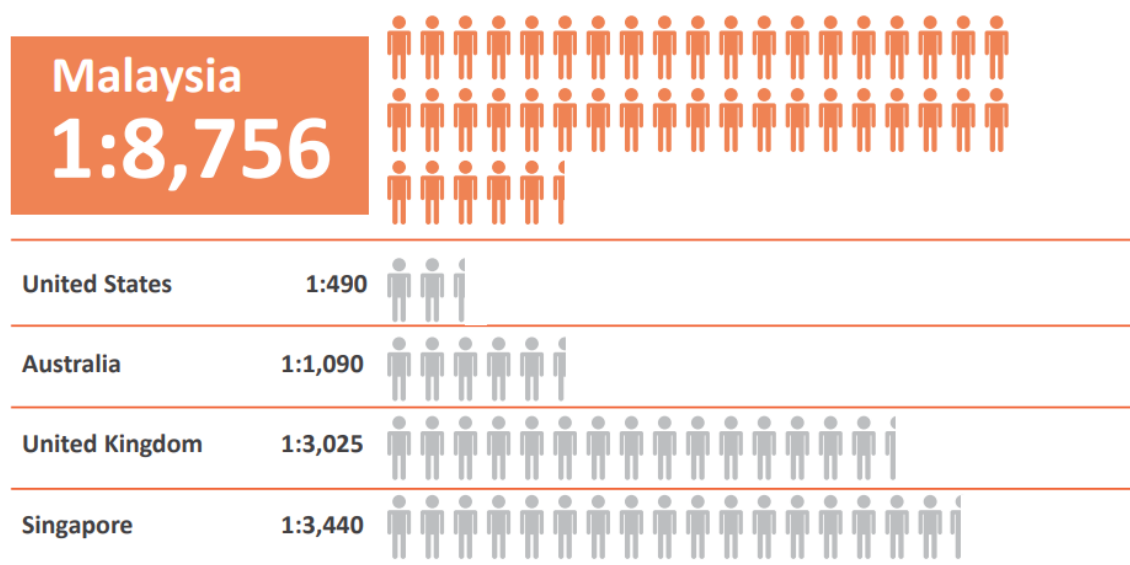


Figure 3. The current ratio of social workers to community in Malaysia, USA, Australia, UK, and Singapore.

2. RM190 million must be allocated towards women's shelters.

A large amount of the RM21 million allocated in Budget 2021 (and carried forward to 2022) toward building more shelters will be used for mobile (bus) shelters / PSSS (Pusat Sokongan Sosial Setempat).¹⁸ So far, **KPWKM only plans to have three permanent shelters built from this allocation.**

In 2021, the Federal Territories Islamic Religious Department (JAWI) identified 14 mosques to be used as transit centres for survivors of domestic violence.¹⁹ Malaysia currently has 43 gazetted shelters and needs to build around 271 more shelters to achieve a suitable shelter to population ratio. An investment of around **RM700,000 per permanent shelter** is needed to cover building, staffing and operations cost - **and for 271 shelters**, this totals to around **RM190 million.**

This means that 9 times the 2022 shelter allocation of RM21 million is needed to build sufficient permanent shelters. Additionally, a clear and detailed plan, made public, on how KPWKM intends on addressing this issue over the course of the next decade is needed to comprehensively address the issue.

¹⁸ KPWKM's response to WAO's enquiry on spending RM21 million on shelters and safe spaces for survivors of violence

¹⁹ Malaysiakini(2021). "WAO welcomes mosques as transit centres for domestic violence survivors." Available at: <https://www.malaysiakini.com/letters/573536>

Item	Cost	Amount	Total
Permanent shelter, including building, staffing and operations cost	RM700,000 per unit	271 shelters	RM700,000 x 271 units
			RM190 million

Table 1. Costing calculation for building a sufficient amount of shelters.

Creating a safe environment



Figure 4. Creating a safe environment by providing enough safe spaces.

3. Allocate RM25 million to expand gender-sensitivity and SOP training to all frontline officers, including police officers and medical officers – to ensure abuse, sexual assault, and other gender-based violence cases are handled adequately.

In Budget 2022, RM13 million was allocated to hire and train 100 new D11 police officers. In cases of gender-based violence, many survivors will first encounter a frontline officer before a D11 officer, demonstrating how training must be expanded to all officers.

There are over **137,000 sworn-in police officers**.²⁰

- Ensuring that frontline officers, such as police officers and medical officers, receive **training on gender-sensitivity** similar to D11 officers is **crucial**. Thus, expanding this allocation will potentially raise the figure to around RM25 million.

*This is an important investment because it **builds trust in state institutions and capacities to respond to violence, while also ensuring that sensitive cases are handled properly and professionally**. In this way, this allocation is also in line with the stated goals of the **12 Malaysia Plan, particularly under Theme 2 (Strengthening security, wellbeing, and inclusivity)**.*²¹

4. Allocate RM2 million to raising public awareness of available services and programmes

In WAO's 2021 study on Public Attitudes and Perceptions towards Violence Against Women (VAW): Initial Findings and Recommendations, it was found that **services such as Talian Kasih was only chosen by 10% of participants as the first place they would go** if they or someone they knew were experiencing domestic violence or sexual harassment, indicating that there is **low awareness** in the public of function of the services.²²

Anecdotal evidence from interviews conducted by WAO suggests there is a lack of awareness of services available to survivors, as well, with regards to the support, such as courses, available.

- In interviews from the Public Attitudes and Perceptions towards VAW study, a few participants noted how the government has already prepared many services and programmes for survivors, but the information on what is available is lacking.
- Based on a series of interviews conducted with 12 Malaysian single mother participants, three quarters of them reported facing challenges with information around schemes and how to

²⁰ Wikipedia. "Royal Malaysia Police." Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Malaysia_Police

²¹ EY. (2021). "12th Malaysia Plan (2021-2025) Sector Highlights." Available at: https://www.ey.com/en_my/take-5-business-alert/12th-malaysia-plan-2021-2025-sector-highlights

²² Women's Aid Organisation. (2021). "A Study on Malaysian Public Attitudes and Perceptions towards Violence Against Women (VAW): Research Brief." Available at: https://wao.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/WAO_Research-Brief_15-Dec_Updated.pdf

access financial aid schemes which may or may not have ultimately prevented them from accessing these schemes.

In order to raise the profile of the services that KPWKM provides to women, it is important to invest RM2 million.

- Particularly, from the Public Attitudes and Perceptions towards VAW study, it was revealed that the best channels for disseminating public messaging were television, Facebook, and newspapers.

5. Allocate RM25 million for disaster relief and emergencies

The health of women and girls has been set back by the pandemic, as reflected by increases in domestic violence, child abuse, unplanned pregnancies, and unassisted home births. School closures have also contributed to a rise in cases of child marriage. Access to essential items such as menstrual hygiene products and contraception have also been affected, particularly in rural areas.

- Coupled with the disproportionate impact of natural disasters such as flooding on women,²³ **more must be done to ensure that our acute responses during disasters can help prevent secondary traumatisation.**

We propose a RM25 million fund be set up in order to enable better coordination between relevant stakeholders to plan for times of crises. They must focus on **upscaling resource allocation** to increase the capacity of community clinics, developing community outreach centres in rural areas, and ensuring women and girls have access to the necessary healthcare resources, including feminine hygiene products, in times of crisis.

6. Allocate RM20 million towards data for gender analysis

Budget 2022 saw the introduction of an allocation of RM5 million (reduced from RM15 million) for gender data collection to aid efforts towards gender-responsive budgeting and mainstreaming gender in national policy. One of the biggest challenges for gender-responsive budgeting is a lack of available data, particularly gender disaggregated data. To this end, efforts towards increasing data availability are important, particularly for cross-sectional gender-disaggregated data, considering a myriad of factors, and their intersections in relation to domains of labour participation, engagement with the health and social sectors, and more. Gender is an essential component to comprehensive data collection; mainstreaming and in fact, centralising a gender perspective in national statistics has the potential to better define issues disproportionately affecting women - such as, domestic violence - or men, and influence clearer coordination between various governmental agencies to devise multi-pronged solutions to these issues.

²³ University of York. (2021). "Women more likely than men to suffer psychological distress from having their homes flooded." Available at: <https://www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2021/research/women-psychological-distress-flooding/>

a. Allocate RM20 million for gender data collection.

For Budget 2023, we propose strengthening allocations for gender data collection. While the initial investment of RM5 million is a good start, it remains unclear how the Department intends to tackle this issue. As such, we recommend the following breakdown:

RM1.5 million must be allocated to increasing the transparency and availability of data collected by DOSM, and all other relevant Ministries.

- The collection of consistent and timely gender aggregated statistics is essential to drive evidence-based planning and national policy-making, towards the end of an inclusive, gender-equal society. As gender-responsive budgeting aims to look at the budget through an **intersectional lens**, this requires understanding of how current budget allocations affect people based on their gender, age, ethnicity, geographic location, disability status, and income.

Notably, data collection efforts of this nature would aid in better understanding **how current employment policies can better account for women's patterns of employment**, in light of their age, number of children, status as single parents, educational attainment, and so forth.²⁴ For example, in Australia's recent budget cycle, the Australian Bureau of Statistics was allocated AUD 3.2 million to enhance regional labour market statistics.²⁵ In line with this, we

recommend the use of evidence-based guidelines to reliably steer national data collection efforts towards gender-sensitivity, throughout the processes of questionnaire and sample design, interviewer training, coding, and editing.²⁶

RM3 million be allocated to increasing accessibility of the data, particularly for members of the public.

- Concurrent to its collection and availability, this data must also be accessible through a public data portal with a user-friendly interface, and comprehensive guidelines to manoeuvre the platform to make sense of the provided data.
- Helpful tools already exist - such as the Labour Market Interactive Data portal,²⁷ a visual platform which allows users to disaggregate national-level data by gender, age, industry, education attainment, and a variety of other factors. However, data from this portal is outdated, from the year 2019. As such, in ensuring the availability and accessibility of up-to-date, large-scale data to the public, such platforms require regular upkeep.
 - Portals like this could also serve as a platform for the appropriate governmental agencies to plot the progress of existing policies and

²⁴ Example of data collection on labour force statistics on families in Australia, available here: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-status-families/jun-2021>, which examines the employment patterns across couple and single family households. This type of data is useful in considering how employment policies may affect different families.

²⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). "Update on the Australian Bureau of Statistics work program." Available at:

<https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/update-australian-bureau-statistics-work-program>

²⁶ UN Women. (n.d). *Methods for Gender Data Collection and Estimation*. Accessed at: https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/Asia-Pacific-Training-Curriculum/Module5/Module5_Syllabus_Methods%20for%20data%20collection%20and%20estimation.pdf

²⁷ Available at: <https://mbis.dosm.gov.my/mylmid/dashboard.html>

programmes implemented at a national level, **boosting visibility of government-led interventions** within the public eye, and ensuring that members of the public are able to access the important, timely information about the progress and effectiveness of these interventions - including their gender impact.

A portion of the RM20 million should also be **allocated to DOSM staff for gender-sensitivity training to better equip analysts in incorporating a gender lens** towards large-scale data and policy analysis. A better understanding of key concepts such as gender mainstreaming and analysis generate data that is more constructive for gender budget analyses. This

can guide **careful examination of previous budgetary spending and its impact on people** with regards to helping them break out of poverty and increasing their economic opportunities.

Finally, a portion of the allocation **should be used to create a cross-agency national gender-sensitive data plan**, in consultation with key stakeholders such as the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, the Ministry of Human Resources, the Ministry of Health, and civil society organisations (CSOs), to ensure that data practices moving forward account for gender **across domains**.

b. Efforts must be made towards comprehensively understanding the prevalence of social issues, such as gender-based violence, and attitudes towards those issues, in order for budget allocation in better response to them.

For example, Malaysia currently lacks prevalence data on the scale of gender-based violence, such as domestic violence. While there have been nationwide studies, these have been undertaken by academics or nongovernmental organisations. While data from national hotlines and police reports are also available, they often underestimate the scale of the issue, with many survivors taking formal action as the last resort. **Importantly, Malaysia also lacks national-level data on cases of 'near-misses'** - for example, victims of domestic violence who attempted to take formal action against perpetrator(s) whose cases were not taken on, classified within the purview of the Domestic Violence Act, or did not progress with for any given reason. Data on fatalities from domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence is also absent.

Nationwide data collection by DOSM is necessary to identify the extent of these issues within Malaysian society; gaps in knowledge or awareness amongst the public with regards to the availability of sources of support; bottleneck(s) faced by survivors in seeking help or shelter away from perpetrator(s); prevailing attitudes within formal sources of support; the specific needs of front-line staff in responding quickly and effectively to such cases; and a wealth of other important data needed to drive evidence-based policy making and improvements in the landscape of support for survivors. Data is necessary to ensure accountability within existing systems, as well as in crafting targeted, nuanced solutions for persistent issues.

Concurrently, issues such as gender-based violence are sustained by attitudes and perceptions which find them permissible. In 2021, WAO conducted a nationally representative survey with 1,000 respondents on their attitudes and perceptions towards violence against women. The survey found worryingly that **almost half of Malaysians or 47.3% agree with violence endorsing attitudes**, with the rest, in some way, demonstrating attitudes or perceptions which deemed violence against women permissible under certain circumstances. Simultaneously, over half of Malaysians demonstrated attitudes which discriminated against women, particularly as decision-makers and leaders.²⁸ Being able to **fully understand the scale of these issues** is in line with the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)** and intentions stated in the 12th Malaysia Plan to achieve gender equality and empower women and children, particularly under Theme 2 (Strengthening security, wellbeing, and inclusivity).²⁹ Countries such as Australia and Scotland have embarked on the concurrent use of prevalence and attitudinal surveys.³⁰

*As nationwide surveys are **costly undertakings**, it is important that **sufficient budgetary allocations** for the Department of Statistics are made to undertake this endeavour. The information collected would be **valuable to inform Malaysian policies moving forward**.*

²⁸ Women's Aid Organisation. (2021). "A Study on Malaysian Public Attitudes and Perceptions towards Violence Against Women (VAW): Research Brief." Available at: https://wao.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/WAO_Research-Brief_15-Dec_Updated.pdf

²⁹ EY (2021). "12th Malaysia Plan (2021-2025) Sector Highlights." Available at: https://www.ey.com/en_my/take-5-business-alert/12th-malaysia-plan-2021-2025-sector-highlights

³⁰ United Nations. (2014). Guidelines for Producing Statistics on Violence Against Women: Statistical Surveys. New York: United Nations.

Pillar II: Livelihoods, Care, and Social Protection

Work policies for women must consider their work-life cycle holistically as women's employment patterns are much more closely tied to their reproductive decision-making. However, macroeconomic simulations have implied that closing gaps between men's and women's economic opportunities could boost Malaysia's income per capita by 26.2%—an average annual income gain of about RM9,400 for each Malaysian.³¹ If women reach their full potential in the labour market, forecasters say that this could lead to global GDP growth of 26% by 2025.³² As such, offering women the support to make this a reality should be one of the main goals of Budget 2023.

Concurrently, more must be done to ensure the accessibility and affordability of childcare, which remains one of the biggest and most persistent barriers for women's (re)entry into the formal workforce. Finally, all these policies must work in tandem to secure social protection for the most vulnerable.



³¹ IMF Blog (2018). "Malaysia needs more women in the workforce." Available at: <https://bit.ly/3xkgmHv>

³² Habrich et al. (2021). "The Influence of Economic Activity of Women in Malaysia and Guatemala on National Development." Accessed from <https://bit.ly/3xkrwT>

1. RM75 million must be allocated specifically for formal and informal education and skill training programmes for marginalised communities including women and single mothers, and towards course accessibility.

A. Allocate RM50 million for training programmes, with a specific quota to benefit women, particularly single mothers.

In Budget 2022, the government committed to allocating RM6.6 billion for various initiatives to strengthen and enhance technical and vocational education and training (TVET) with the goal of empowering the local community through increased knowledge and strengthened skills, increasing employability and living standards, and meeting the industry's demand for labour.

- RM25 million was allocated for TVET training programmes for 25,000 trainees including those from targeted communities³³ such as senior citizens, single mothers, disabled persons and those from B40 income groups in 2022. If at least half of these spots (12,500 spots) were reserved for those from marginalised communities in 2022, **we recommend doubling these spots in 2023, to benefit 25,000 people from these groups at an allocation of RM25 million.**

However, there has been **limited information of how much funds have been earmarked specifically for educational or upskilling programs for women and single mothers, and the impact that these programs have had.**

- Women's patterns of employment vastly differ from men's, particularly in the role of women's reproductive decision-making, therefore policies must aim to complement women's work-life cycle.
- Research has demonstrated that Malaysian women's employment is a single-peak curve, compared to other Asian countries, such as Japan and South Korea, which have a double peak (where the double peak denotes that women enter the labour market twice—once post-studies and a second time after their children begin school).³⁴
- Women's presence in the formal labour force peaks at ages 25-29, after which it starts declining in all subsequent age groups, reaching a minimum at ages 55-64,³⁵ especially when compared to men, who retain high levels of labour force participation throughout their adulthood.

³³ The Edge Markets. (2022). "Four Johor community colleges to have permanent campuses, says Ismail Sabri." Available at: <https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/four-johor-community-colleges-have-permanent-campus-says-ismail-sabri>

³⁴ It should also be noted that in non-Asian OECD countries, the curve is an inverted-u, following similar trends as the male employment curve, demonstrating that once women enter the labour market post-studies, they do not leave until retirement. While Japan and South Korea have a double-peak curve, it should be noted that this in no means signals that these countries have successfully addressed the issue of women's underemployment, as the existence of a double peak when the male employment curve looks different suggests current work policies are gender unequal or gender insensitive.

³⁵ Johan Merican (2012). "The Women Agenda." Available at: http://mystarjob.com/articles/story.aspx?file=/2012/10/6/mystarjob_careerguide/12087244&sec=mystarjob_careerguide

- Women make up the largest proportion of university students, but many are not retained in the workforce as they age.

Recently, it was revealed that women currently make up 40% of positions in senior management teams within companies in Malaysia and 38% of CEOs in Malaysia are women.³⁶

- While this demonstrates great progress and is hailed for increasing diversity in companies across Malaysia, attention must also be paid to the types of women being promoted to these roles in terms of socioeconomic background, ethnicity, and age to ensure meaningful diversity. Potentially, the women who drop out may face significant barriers and challenges to continuing in their career and their retention within the workforce is as important as ensuring equal representation of women in decision-making spaces.

Additionally, **women's career progression has a tendency to get derailed when they have children to a degree that men do not experience.**³⁷

- Additionally, in a study by the United Nations Development Programme and the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, it was found that the odds of a woman working was 94% less likely for those without childcare arrangements.³⁸

³⁶ Grant Thornton (2022). "Press Release: Women in Business 2022." Available at: <https://www.grantthornton.com.my/press/press-releases-2022/wib-2022/>

³⁷ Bernama (2022). "Challenges remain despite support for childcare and working women policies." Available at: https://bernama.com/en/b_focus/news.php?id=2100416

³⁸ ibid

Labour force participation rate (LFPR) by age (2021) (%)

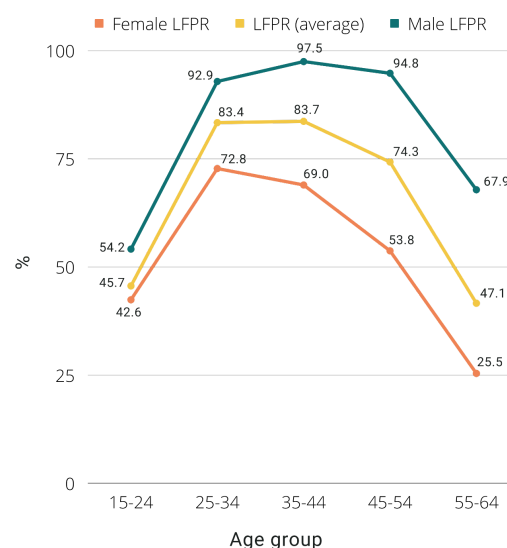


Figure 5. % LFPR by age (2021).

Thus, women may experience barriers returning to work after a career break in terms of skill set.

- According to a 2019 DOSM report, men's annual informal sector growth recorded a decline of 9.2% from 2017 to 2019 while women's informal sector participation in the same period increased by 1.2% yearly.³⁹ With the effects the pandemic has had where women were disproportionately expected to shoulder double the amount of care work compared to men, this rate has likely increased. By 2020, women only made 38.8% of the formal workforce in Malaysia (DOSM).⁴⁰
- Additionally, it has been observed in Malaysia that women tend to choose more precarious informal work because

³⁹ Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM). (n.d). "INFORMAL SECTOR WORK FORCE SURVEY REPORT, MALAYSIA, 2019." Available at: <https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/pdfPrev&id=U0tMZmJudTkzNmhwjdjZFb2FmVWxOUT09>

⁴⁰ Women's Aid Organisation. (2021). "Budget 2022: A Resilient National Recovery for Women." Available at: https://wao.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Budget-2022_A-Resilient-National-Recovery-for-Women.pdf

of the flexibility these types of jobs offer,⁴¹ indicating more must be done to rethink how current work policies and programmes can better support women.

- Further, the number of employed women during the pandemic in Malaysia fell by 2.5% (or 148,000 women), while the number of employed men fell by 0.5% (68,000 men), based on estimates by the Institute of Strategic and International studies (ISIS).⁴²
- From a series of interviews conducted with 20 single mothers in 2021, nearly half of them **reported that greater language skills (Bahasa Malaysia/English) would have benefited them** in seeking employment and/or in increasing their skillset to generate income.
- Meanwhile, in our transition to endemicity, 2022 statistics from Malaysia's Department of Statistics (DOSM) have revealed that **women's informal and formal employment only rose by 0.3%.**⁴³ Given what we know—that women in Malaysia are not likely to reenter the formal economy after dropping out—**this rise is likely in informal sectors.**

These numbers illustrate how the burden of care that women have had to shoulder has forced them out of formal employment, and resulted in their increased participation in informal sectors in comparison to their male counterparts. This impact is often felt hardest by those who are

more vulnerable, such as single mothers and refugees. Hence, it is important that there are courses **that equip single mothers with marketable skills** and their availability to all single mothers, **regardless of nationality or legal status.**

We ask for this allocation to be expanded to RM50 million for educational and upskilling programmes to specifically benefit 50,000 people from marginalised groups such as women, senior citizens, disabled persons, single parents, those from B40 groups, and refugees or non-Malaysians, **with a minimum quota of 60% reserved for women and and, of this 60% for women, a minimum quota of 40% be reserved for single mothers** to ensure the programme specifically benefits them. This would address the **disproportionate impacts women and single mothers face from lacking education and equip them with marketable skills** that will assist them with breaking into formal employment sectors or independently using their skills to increase their income.

We recommend for this fund to be established **in addition to employer hiring incentives**, to ensure women and single mothers are equipped with marketable skills that will assist them with breaking into and sustaining their participation in formal employment sectors or independently using their skills to generate income.

*For Malaysian single mothers, access to these courses would mean being better equipped to **break out of informal sectors or low paying jobs to join the formal workforce or move up income brackets.** For refugee single mothers, being able to access these programs would allow them to **independently utilise skills to generate more income to support themselves and their children, without being exploited in informal sectors.***

⁴¹ UNDP. (2020). "Care Work in the Time of COVID-19: Women's Unpaid Care Burden in Four Charts." Available at: <https://www.my.undp.org/content/malaysia/en/home/blog/2020/care-work-in-the-time-of-covid-19--womens-unpaid-care-burden-in-0.html>

⁴² Cheng (2021). "Pushed to the margins: The unequal impact of the COVID-19 crisis on Malaysian workers." Available at: <https://bit.ly/3A3BrHP>

⁴³ Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM). (2022). "Key Statistics of Labour Force in Malaysia, April 2022." Available at: https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemeyCat&cat=124&bul_id=R2dGZXRGaGx0ZWY4ZnVpa0hjdjBlQT09&menu_id=Tm8zcnRjdVRNWWlpWjRlbmtlaDk1UT09

B. Designate RM25 million to increase accessibility of training programmes for underserved communities.

Establishing a fund for formal and informal educational and upskilling programmes for women and single mothers **alone will not address the significant barriers faced in accessing these courses.**

Implementing these courses without addressing these aspects will, as a result, not have the intended effect of upskilling women and single mothers so they can move up income brackets, break out of poverty cycles, and reduce their reliance on government assistance.

Based on a series of interviews with 20 Single Mothers from WAO's network, **about half could not access formal education** courses due to their inability to prioritise their education as a result of **non-negotiable obligations**. This was the leading barrier to accessing formal education, and comprised factors such as **lack of finances** - a challenge particularly exacerbated for refugees and non-Malaysian single mothers - **childcare responsibilities, and day job commitments.**

On the other hand, half of eligible (Malaysian) single mothers previously accessed government upskilling or informal education programmes. Of these participants, **most of them shared that they had experienced one or more challenges when attending.** These included factors resulting in their inability to prioritise their skill development due to **non-negotiable obligations**, such as far locations which render them

resource intensive, challenges with childcare, courses commencing during working hours, and having to self-finance materials for courses. Most of these women experienced one or more of these challenges.

- Other challenges included limited knowledge on marketing the products made, lack of internet availability for online courses, limited class seats resulting in inaccessibility, racial criteria for class registration, and a limited selection of classes to advance desired skills.
- As such, the allocation for establishing courses targeted toward women and single mothers must include the funds needed to better implement formal and informal educational courses and governmental upskilling programmes.

This can be done by collecting data on the skills the target group would like to learn, ensuring racial, nationality, and legal status criteria is eliminated, providing transport coverage to class locations, ensuring locations are accessible by public transport, providing childcare during classes, providing allowances for data coverage for online classes, ensuring that the courses commence after working hours, and ensuring that all required are provided to participants.

- Assuming that a budget of RM500 per participant is needed to cover these costs, **an additional RM25 million will be needed to ensure accessibility for 50,000 targeted participants**, which brings the total allocation to **RM75 million.**

2. A separate RM213.75 million must be allocated to establish single parent specific scholarships at public and private educational institutions.

Formal education must be made more accessible to single parents. Currently, under Budget 2022, there is a Community Entrepreneurship programme targeting those in B40 communities, single mothers, senior citizens, youth, people with disabilities, and *orang asal*.⁴⁴ This programme helps equip people from these underserved communities with skills training to produce entrepreneurs with education through a list of community colleges. However, when accessing the link to the list of community colleges, the information becomes more scarce as to how someone can enrol in the programme—including if there is any prior education criteria required. While this is a great initiative, it must be expanded upon to ensure it is accessible and also to allow training beyond just entrepreneurship and into other areas for tertiary education and beyond.

According to research conducted amongst Malaysian single mothers,⁴⁵ most of them reported their highest education levels as secondary school and more than three fourths of them fell into the B40 category, with most of them living below the poverty line. Evidently, **the salaries of single mothers is often insufficient to pull them out of poverty.**

- The same study found that single mothers who held tertiary degrees, surpassed the poverty level, demonstrating that access

to tertiary education can help move them out of poverty.

Advanced qualifications enable single mothers to access more stable jobs, including the potential to earn higher salaries and break out of poverty. In the long run, the investment in the education of these women creates sustainable growth and opportunities that can also enhance Malaysia's economy.

To ensure that single parents are able to access formal education such as diplomas, degrees or master qualifications, the Ministry of Education must allocate RM213.75 million for funding scholarships at public and private institutes.

Considering that it costs an average of RM10,500 and RM75,000 to study a 3-year programme at a public and private university respectively,⁴⁶ to benefit 5,000 single parents with public and private education, assuming equal enrollment in each (2,500 places for private universities and 2,500 for public universities), RM213.75 million is needed for tuition fees alone.

⁴⁴ Ministry of Finance. (n.d). "Budget 2022: Community Entrepreneurship." Available at: <https://budget.mof.gov.my/manfaat/en/faq/tvet-community.html>

⁴⁵ Muzalwana Abdul et al. (2021). "HOUSEHOLD INCOME AND LIFE SATISFACTION OF SINGLE MOTHERS IN MALAYSIA." Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/355442637_HOUSEHOLD_INCOME_AND_LIFE_SATISFACTION_OF_SINGLE_MOTHERS_IN_MALAYSIA

⁴⁶ NST. (2017). "How much would it cost to pursue higher education in Malaysia?" Available at: <https://www.nst.com.my/news/2017/03/223461/how-much-would-it-cost-pursue-higher-education-malaysia>

3. Subsidise 50-70% of childcare costs in addition to retaining employer subsidies and incentives to support B40 single parent families.

Inflation and the cost of living in Malaysia is climbing, and this translates into higher childcare costs.

The **minimum** cost of childcare in 2021 and 2022 stands at around RM615 - **excluding** costs needed to be borne by parents to supply care takers with their childrens' basic needs.

- In 2018, childcare costs stood at a minimum of RM450, up to RM1,000 per month - with a projected increase of 30% in 2019 to 2020.^{47 48} Based on these figures, the minimum cost of childcare per month in 2019- 2020 would have been RM600 per child. Accounting for 2021's average inflation rate of 2.5%,⁴⁹ the **minimum** cost of childcare in 2021 and 2022 stands at around RM615 - **excluding** costs needed to be borne by parents to supply care takers with their childrens' basic needs.

Notably, the Deputy Operations Director of the Social Welfare Department (JKM), Fatimah Zuraidah Salleh mentioned there exists a subsidy of RM180 per child per month at registered childcare centres. However, the qualification criteria for those who live in urban areas is earning less than RM800 per capita and

earning less than RM500 per capita in rural areas.⁵⁰ This is clearly too little.

- If a two person urban household were earning RM1,600, and if they had a minimum of two children, the cost of sending each child to childcare stands at a total of RM1,230. With a subsidy of RM360, this would still leave them with RM870—more than half of their household income. In most cases, however, a dual income household likely earns *more* than RM1,600, disqualifying them for the subsidy, even if, realistically, childcare remains unaffordable for them.
 - In a single parent household, these costs are even less manageable.

Without affordable childcare at registered childcare centres and without sufficient subsidies, parents will likely choose unregistered childcare centres or givers, which can increase safety issues, as these places do not have certification and likely do not meet the minimum standard of training required to handle children.

- **Based on 2020 data from DOSM, the average nuclear family in Malaysia ranges from 3.5 to 4.9 persons, presumably for an average of 1-3 children per household.**⁵¹ This means that on average, a single parent family or nuclear family will have to spend a

⁴⁷ MalayMail (2018). "Report: Childcare Centres to cost more next year." Available at: <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2018/12/28/report-childcare-centres-to-cost-more-next-year/1706925>

⁴⁸ The Star (2018). "Childcare centres to hike fees in 2019, rates to rise by 10-30% to cover costs." Available at: <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/12/28/child-care-centres-to-hike-fees-in-2019-rates-to-rise-by-10-to-30-to-cover-costs/>

⁴⁹ Bank Negara Malaysia. (2022). "Economic and Financial Developments in Malaysia in the Fourth Quarter of 2021." Available at: <https://www.bnm.gov.my/-/4q-gdp-2021>

⁵⁰ Bernama. (2021). "JKM sedia pelbagai inisiatif galak taska, pusat jagaan berdaftar." Available at: <https://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/jkm-sedia-pelbagai-inisiatif-galak-taska-pusat-jagaan-berdaftar-334026>

⁵¹ NST (2022). "Average household size in Malaysia shrinking, reveals census." Available at: <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2022/02/771331/average-household-size-malaysia-shrinking-reveals-census>

minimum of RM1,230 on childcare per month, for just one child - a sum that exceeds Malaysia's 2021 minimum wage, and will leave minimum wage earners in 2022 (RM1,500) with only RM270 for all other living expenses for their family for the month.

- Based on 2021 data, the cost of living for a single adult person is estimated at RM3,262. Meanwhile, based on data from 2018, the minimum monthly cost of raising a child is RM1,000, and this sum accounts for basic needs only.

Single parents, particularly single mothers are more likely to find work in informal employment, where wages often do not exceed minimum wage thresholds.

- In an interview series **WAO conducted with 20 single mothers, nearly half earned at or below 2021's minimum wage** (below RM1,200). Of these participants, 6 have young children below 12 years of age in need of childcare. Meanwhile, 4 earn less than RM1,500 and another 4 earn above RM1,500. **Crucially, none of these single mothers qualify for the aforementioned RM180 childcare subsidy**, which requires a per capita income of RM800 per month, as their income far exceeds the minimum threshold.
- Additionally, **three-fourths of single mothers interviewed had said that childcare affordability and accessibility is or has been a significant barrier** for them to go to work and generate income. Of this, 4 reported that their children had to learn how to be independent from a young age, and had to **leave their children at home alone when going to work**.
- While Budget 2022 initiatives such as **employer subsidies** to hire single mothers under the JaminKerja scheme **and increased one-time financial aid**

payouts for single mothers⁵² encourages single mothers' participation in the formal economy and reduces their financial pressures to an extent, it does little for single mothers to manage the rising costs of living and childcare in the long term.

- **As such, we recommend for the government to roll out a childcare scheme that provides monthly subsidies of at least 70% of childcare per child** for single parents earning below RM3,169 (B1-B2 categories) and 50% of childcare per child for single parents earning below RM4,989 (B3-B4 category)

As there are nearly **235,240 single mothers (1.7%) of the total population**,⁵³ if this scheme were to benefit **300,000 single parent families** (150,000 single parents earning RM3,169 and below and 150,000 single parents earning RM4,989 and below) at a rate of 70% and 50% respectively, **an estimated allocation of RM2,656,800,000 must be made** to pilot this scheme for a one year.

Household income vs. Childcare cost

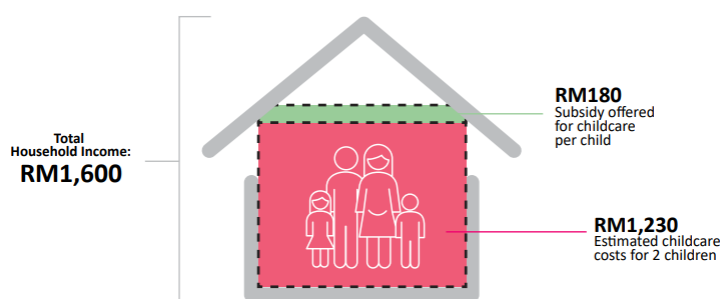


Figure 6. Illustration of RM180/child subsidy to childcare costs in households earning RM1,600.

⁵² Ministry of Finance. "Bantuan Keluarga Malaysia (BKM)." Available at:

<https://budget.mof.gov.my/manfaat/faq/bkm.html>

⁵³ NST. (2021). "Rising number of single mothers big concern." Available at:

<https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/letters/2021/11/742680/rising-number-single-mothers-big-concern>

4. Extend the protection offered in the Housewife Social Security Bill to House-Husbands

The newly passed Housewife Social Security Bill⁵⁴ is progressive in realising housewives' contributions to the national care economy and affording them protections when doing their work. However, **this must be expanded to include house-husbands.**

- From December 2022, housewives in Malaysia will be eligible for monetary and medical benefits should they suffer accidents when carrying out carework at home.
- While this sends a message that housewives' work is valued, house-husbands who undertake carework must also be afforded these protections.
- While most people who undertake carework in Malaysia remain to be housewives, limiting the scope of such essential protection sends the message that housewives are more obligated to carry out carework and house chores than their partners.
- This perpetuates the notion that women are expected to shoulder more carework than men, and may contribute to women's reduced participation in the formal economy. Not only this, but it may result in the strengthening of unequal domestic partnership and gender roles.

*As such, we recommend for the government to **expand the Housewife Social Security Scheme (HSSS) to include all housewives and househusbands, so the carework of all homemakers regardless of gender is valued, and all homemakers are able to access essential social protections.***

5. Allocate RM50 million for community childcare centres.

Research released in 2019 by the National Child Data Centre (NCDC), shows that Malaysia currently has 4,968 TASKAs or childcare centres operating with an average of 30 children attending. As of October 2021, the number of registered TASKAs seems to have risen to 5,436.⁵⁵ Given that the population of children under 5 in Malaysia is estimated at 2.5 million, the NCDC suggested, in 2019, that there is a shortfall of 80,091 TASKAs. Given how the number of registered TASKAs has risen by 468, **this shortfall now potentially comes up to 79,623 TASKAs.**

⁵⁴ The Sun Daily (2022). "Dewan Rakyat passes Housewives Social Security Bill." Available at: <https://www.thesundaily.my/local/dewan-rakyat-passes-housewives-social-security-bill-2022-ED9498402>

⁵⁵ Bernama. (2021). "JKM sedia pelbagai inisiatif galak taska, pusat jagaan berdaftar." Available at: <https://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/jkm-sedia-pelbagai-inisiatif-galak-taska-pusat-jagaan-berdaftar-334026>

Making childcare available

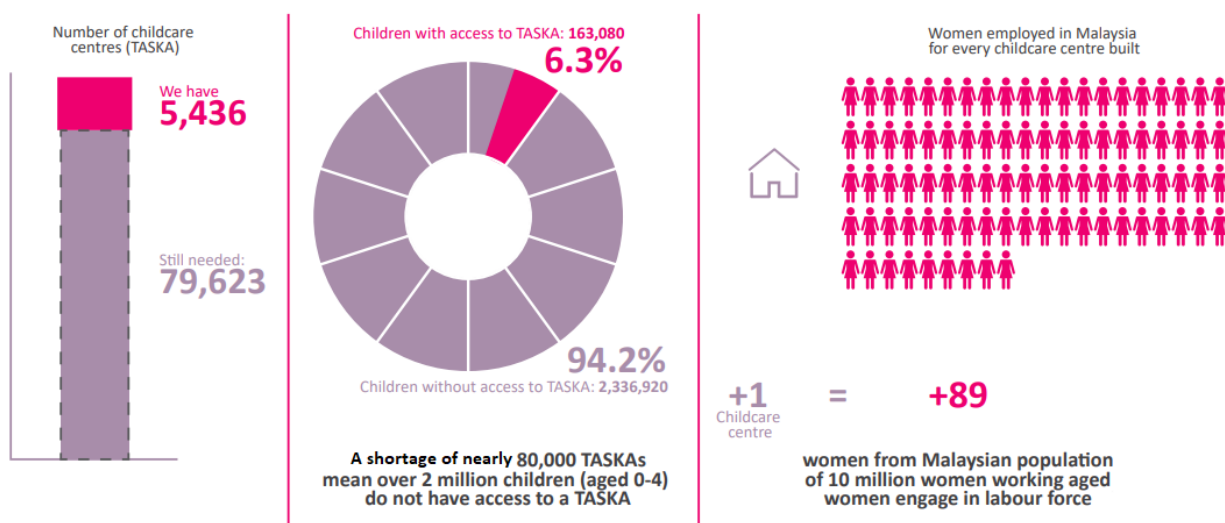


Figure 7. The current availability of childcare for children aged 0-4 and the potential impact if these childcare needs are met.

According to World Bank calculations, for every preschool opened, an additional 89 women in Malaysia joined the workforce, where the World Bank defined preschool-aged children as 4-6 years old.⁵⁶ If so, the opening of childcare centres, which cater to children ages 0-6, would likely draw in more women to the workforce. The same World Bank report cited the difficulties that B40 families had with accessing childcare, which highlights the need for a strategic plan to build and provide community childcare centres that are based in and managed by the communities.

This would have benefits all around, **drawing informal childcare providers into the formal workforce and allowing parents dependable childcare**, which would **facilitate their own labour participation**.

In 2020, 34 childcare centres were built in Ministries for a cumulative total of RM5.5 million.⁵⁷ Based on these figures and if the same model was used for community childcare centres, through an allocation of RM50 million, over 300 new childcare centres can be built per year, which would thereby address this existing gap, so long as the allocation is maintained.

A. Concurrently, allocate RM5 million per year to ensure these childcare centres are registered.

In reality, the number of childcare centres in Malaysia is much higher than the number of *registered* childcare centres as there are many illegally operating childcare centres. If the process of registration was

⁵⁶ World Bank Group. (2019). "Breaking Barriers: Toward Better Economic Opportunities for Women." Available at <https://bit.ly/3jk0VKa>

⁵⁷ The Sun Daily. (2020). "34 applications approved for childcare centres at ministries, state govt office." Available at: <https://www.thesundaily.my/local/34-applications-approved-for-childcare-centres-at-ministries-state-govt-offices-YD3173450>

made easier, this could easily increase the number of registered childcare centres without the need to invest in building new ones. Particularly, shifting to a community childcare model, as suggested above, would also help as many parents turn to unregistered childcare centres for their affordability.

JKM Deputy Operations Manager, Fatimah Zuraidah Salleh, previously stated that the costs of childcare centres are beyond JKM's control and often match the quality of services provided.⁵⁸ **However, it is unfair that parents, especially single parents and those from the B40 community, must choose between affordability and quality.** As such, more should be done to capture unregistered childcare centres and convert them into registered childcare centres and a RM5 million allocation can help address this gap.

6. Increase the amount of registered childcare givers.

There are currently only 18,385 registered childcare givers as of October 2021, with **only 9,310 (around 50%) who are KAP (Kursus Asuhan PERMATA) certified**, which is the golden standard of certification set by JKM for both childcare givers and childcare centres.⁵⁹ While JKM has set guidelines and initiatives to ensure both childcare givers and centres are certified, these processes have been declared as time consuming and difficult, resulting in a lack of enthusiasm in the uptake, despite how important registration is.

The registration of childcare givers is important to parents, especially amidst growing complaints of child maltreatment through unregistered avenues, to ensure safety and a standardised quality of service.

If a child is under three years of age, a carer is only allowed to take on a maximum of three children. Thus, there is a clear shortage of registered childcare givers.

A. Incentivise registration and training through subsidies

Currently, there is no incentive to register or become trained through KAP, which is one of the only standardised courses available for childcare givers. Ensuring a standard quality of care, through both training and registration, is important to earn the trust of parents. Further, **childcare givers who have undergone training are more likely to be able to ensure the safety of the children under their care.** Registration also helps the Ministry keep track of carers and update them on any courses or trainings they should undergo in order to maintain high standards of care.

To incentivise both registration and training, **subsidies must be provided.** For example, perhaps to encourage more childcare givers, many of whom, in WAO's experience, tend to be single mothers from the B40 community, the registration fees can be waived and trainings can be provided at 50% discount. Alternatively, the trainings, for certain interested individuals who meet select criteria, such as being a single mother from the B40 community can be provided through existing upskill and reskill avenues, such as Upskill Malaysia,⁶⁰ which provides programmes free of charge.

⁵⁸ Bernama. (2021). "JKM sedia pelbagai inisiatif galak taska, pusat jagaan berdaftar." Available at: <https://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/jkm-sedia-pelbagai-inisiatif-galak-taska-pusat-jagaan-berdaftar-334026>

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Upskill Malaysia (2021). "Course details." Available at: <https://upskillmalaysia.gov.my/courseDetails>

For those who take care of three children under the age of three, perhaps an allowance or aid assistance can be instituted. As a childcare giver's salary is dependent on how many children they take care of, those who take care of younger children likely earn less than those who take care of older children, though both services are equally important. **If a carer earns RM300 per child per month and is only allowed to take care of three children, they will only earn RM900 a month—far below minimum wage.** To address these disparities, financial aid schemes should be provided, similar to incentive schemes for the self-employed.

If a registered childcare giver works independently of a TASKA, they would have to spend even a portion of their salary on providing essential products. For WAO, it costs RM1,450⁶¹ per month for essential products for eight children, including food, toiletries, and household cleaning supplies. As incentive to register, some of these costs could also be subsidised for independent registered childcare givers.

*Finally, there **must be more efforts undertaken by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development alongside the Ministry of Education to formalise the caring profession,**⁶² to ensure that carers, be it childcare givers, elderly carers, or OKU carers are recognised and protected through professionalisation.*

B. Increase accessibility of training programmes, especially for marginalised groups

The training to become a childcare giver needs to be made more accessible, especially for single mothers, where the cost of licensing and time commitments required may not necessarily be easy. For example, a single mother tends to require more flexibility while learning because of their childcare duties and because they cannot work regular hours, they are unable to earn sufficient income to acquire licensing.

Persatuan Pengasuh previously had a programme where they trained women in PPRs to become registered childcare givers in a home-based childcare centre model.⁶³ A programme such as this is invaluable for single mothers and increases the accessibility to means of generating income. Programmes such as this need to be expanded and monitored, potentially with a modest allocation of RM1 million in the year to come to roll out a pilot programme.

⁶¹ This cost is estimated from 2021's figure of RM1,400, with an increase of 3.2%, which is the year-on-year Consumer Price Index (CPI). However, it is likely that the costs for children's products have increased far more than 3.2%, as products such as formula and diapers have seen high price hikes. Additionally, this is only an estimate for eight children—these prices are highly variable given the amount of children and how much they consume.

⁶² The purview of those responsible for children aged 0-4, as well as the elderly and disabled, fall under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, whereas the purview of children aged 5-6 (essentially those before entering primary school) falls under the purview of the Ministry of Education.

⁶³ Revealed in a childcare crisis workshop held by DHHRA.

Pillar III: Healthcare

In Budget 2022, RM320 million was allocated for psychiatry and mental health spending, with an additional RM70 million earmarked for the betterment of mental health,⁶⁴ bringing the Budget 2022 total for mental health spending to 1.2% of the total national health budget (an increase from the 0.98% from Budget 2021) and a good step towards the recommended 2.4%, in line with international global standards. Building off of that, for Budget 2023, we recommend specific prioritisation of the MENTARI, as well as OSCCs, which did not receive specific support in Budget 2022.



⁶⁴ Galen Centre. (2021). "MMI Response to Budget 2022." Available at: <https://codeblue.galencentre.org/2021/11/03/response-to-budget-2022-mmi/>

1. Allocate RM50 million specifically to the 129 One-Stop Crisis Centres (OSCCs) located in public hospitals across Malaysia.

As of May 2022, **OSCCs do not receive specific funding to maintain, improve, or monitor their services** - rather, OSCCs receive a portion of funds allocated by the Ministry of Health to public emergency departments at the discretion of the individual hospitals. However, specific funding is essential to ensure consistency in the quality of services provided at OSCCs. Studies have cited a lack of training, as well as unclear policies and procedures as hindrances to its success⁶⁵ - in addressing such barriers, we propose for these funds to be invested for the following purposes:

- To ensure availability of specific waiting areas and private treatment rooms for all OSCCs, necessary to shield survivors from being identified by perpetrators, and dissuaded from seeking help and treatment.
- To conduct annual training sessions for healthcare providers and allied staff at OSCCs - namely, police officers and receptionists - to identify potential cases of domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, and child abuse in emergent cases presenting beyond the OSCC, as well as to sensitively respond to and document such cases.⁶⁶ Training/Employing medical social workers and/or other specialised staff certified to provide psychosocial support acutely and information about support services and legal options for patients, as well as safety planning skills.
- To develop an assessment framework to ensure the effective implementation of OSCC services within hospitals.

⁶⁵ Colombini M, Ali SH, Watts C, et al. (2011). One stop crisis centres: a policy analysis of the Malaysian response to intimate partner violence. *Health Res Policy Syst*, 9:25 10.1186/1478-4505-9-25

⁶⁶ Chew KS, Noredelina MN, Ida ZZ. (2015). Knowledge, attitude and practice among healthcare staffs in the Emergency Department, Hospital Universiti Sains Malaysia towards Rape Victims In One Stop Crisis Centre (OSCC). *Med J Malaysia* 70(3):162-8. PMID: 26248779. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26248779/>

2. Allocate RM50 million to expand availability of MENTARIs and specialty mental health services within primary healthcare clinics (Klinik Kesihatan) throughout Malaysia at a rate of 5 per year, and RM9.3 million for the training of trauma-informed psychologists and counsellors.

The 2019 National Health and Morbidity Survey found that 2.3% of Malaysians experience depression,⁶⁷ a number that is likely to have risen, given the immense economic pressure from the pandemic. As previous studies have pointed towards the increased risk faced by victims of intimate partner violence for depression, anxiety disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder,⁶⁸ **mental health support must be clearly accessible within communities - such as in public primary health clinics (Klinik Kesihatan)**, leveraging also on the functions of the National Centre of Excellence for Mental Health to coordinate service delivery and address gaps in comprehensive mental healthcare.

The mental wellbeing of Malaysians is a crucial aspect of our long-term recovery from the pandemic, acute investments into mental health support services made by the Ministry of Health (MOH) - notably, the deployment of 200 counselling psychologists into the primary healthcare system and the launch of the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPS) service in 2020⁶⁹ - must continue and strengthen, for both the general public and healthcare providers, who have borne the brunt of the frontline response to Covid-19. **Although**

specialty psychiatry clinics are available at selected Klinik Kesihatan (typically those catering to a large patient population), **little information is available about which clinics fall within this category** or which house the 28 MENTARIs,^{70 71} **as such, it is unclear where, or how mental health services are accessible to the public.** Information regarding the availability of trauma-informed mental health professionals at these sites, trained or experienced in counselling survivors of gender-based violence, is also unavailable.

- The National Strategic Plan for Mental Health has outlined the provision of counselling services at a minimum of one clinic per district by 2025.⁷² As such, we advocate for the opening of at least **5 additional MENTARIs in 2023 with a sustained rate of 5 per year until 2030**, particularly focusing on states which lack mental health capacity and infrastructure. In the case of *Klinik Kesihatan*, we advocate to upscale the mental health response, such as through the continued deployment of mental health professionals to high-need areas, as well as early clinical exposure for counselling, clinical psychology, and psychiatry students - with a particular

⁶⁷ Galen Centre. (2020). "MOH Plans 40 Community Mental Health Centres By 2030." Available at: <https://codeblue.galencentre.org/2020/10/09/moh-plans-40-community-mental-health-centres-by-2030/>

⁶⁸ Trevillion, K., Oram, S., Feder, G., & Howard, L. M. (2012). Experiences of domestic violence and mental disorders: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *PloS one*, 7(12), e51740. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0051740>

⁶⁹ Bernama. (2020). "MOH expands counselling service, deploys 200 new counsellors nationwide." Available at: https://www.bernama.com/en/general/news_covid-19.php?id=1888486

⁷⁰ MalayMail. (2021). "Covid-19: 85.5% of distress calls involved mental health issues, says Health Ministry."

Available at: <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2021/05/21/covid-19-85.5pc-of-distress-calls-involved-mental-health-issues-says-health/1976102Human>

⁷¹ Klinik Kesihatan Setapak homepage viewable here:

<https://jknkl.moh.gov.my/index.php/klinik-kesihatan-setapak>

⁷² Ministry of Health (2020) *National Strategic Plan for Mental Health (2020-2025)*. Accessed at:

https://www.moh.gov.my/moh/resources/Penerbitan/Rujukan/NCD/National%20Strategic%20Plan/The_National_Strategic_Plan_For_Mental_Health_2020-2025.pdf

focus towards the areas of gender-based violence and family trauma rehabilitation.

We recommend the **development of an assessment framework for the quality of services provided** by these sites to patients; and **specified allocations** to continuously provide resources for staffing, infrastructure, gender sensitivity training and day-to-day functions for sites facing growing demands for these services. Strong monitoring mechanisms must be implemented as the MOH aspires towards building 40 MENTARIs by 2030, such as in **continually revising the functionality of these**

centres to ensure their relevance within communities, and **assessing coordinative mechanisms** between MENTARIs and specialty psychiatric services within *Klinik Kesihatan* to rectify discontinuity and fragmentation.

We propose for **a part of this allocation to be directed towards constructing a user-friendly, multilingual database** for which the public may refer to in seeking mental health support from MENTARIs or *Klinik Kesihatan*, as well as towards **raising the public profile and awareness of these services within marginalised communities.**

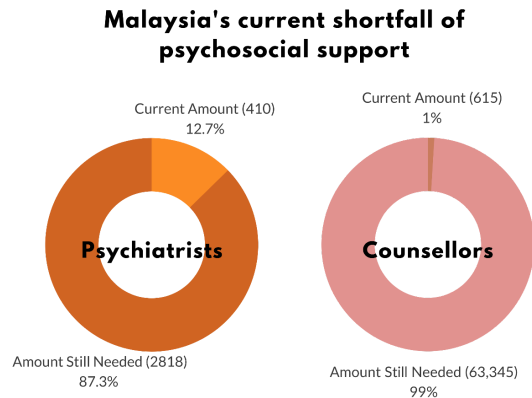


Figure 8. Malaysia’s current shortfall of psychiatrists and counsellors based on figures provided by Datuk Dr. Noor Hisham Abdullah and the World Health Organization.

3. Establish insurance schemes in all states, modelled after the Skim Peduli Sihat scheme to benefit B40 and single parent families and overcome financial barriers to accessing healthcare.

The barriers to accessing physical and mental healthcare in Malaysia are exacerbated for single parents due to financial and other resource constraints. Long term lack of accessible physical and mental healthcare facilities impacts the health of single parents' and severely affects their children's wellbeing.

In Budget 2022, an allocation of RM13.4 million was allocated towards a healthcare insurance scheme set up for hardcore poor communities with disbursement of RM10,000- RM20,000 in the event of permanent disability or death of sole breadwinners. The annual fee borne by the family is RM50.⁷³

- However, this scheme will only benefit 262,000 people categorised as 'hardcore poor', who earn a monthly income of RM1,169 or below and 6,000 people from 'poor' categories. **This means that most of those who are eligible to benefit from this scheme must also meet the criteria of being at or below the B1 income range** (below RM2,500 monthly).

Moreover, this scheme only benefits one family member if permanent disability or death occurs, and **does not cover other medical needs such as surgery, critical illnesses, medications, and outpatient care.**

Meanwhile, the **Skim Peduli Sihat insurance scheme** provided by the Selangor government is only offered to those with a household income of below RM2,000. However, while outpatient and personal accident care is afforded to the

owner of the insurance scheme and family members, this is capped at a yearly rate of RM500 and RM5,000 respectively for all family members. Additionally, life, critical illness and funeral coverage is only limited to the owner of the insurance scheme.

- Coverage for critical illnesses, outpatient care and medications are essential for all members of B40 and single parent families to ensure that their wellbeing is not negatively impacted by inability to access these necessities.

Data from a **brief survey WAO conducted with 20 single mothers** in Klang Valley found that coverage for surgery, critical illnesses, medications and outpatient care is required for beneficiaries to fully utilise allocations:

- **Close to half the single mother participants** from B1- upper B2 categories reported experiencing **financial barriers to accessing healthcare** and **most reported challenges in accessing healthcare services.**
- Additionally, **one-fifth of the participants reported experiencing financial barriers to accessing mental healthcare.**
- Challenges were particularly reported for **managing access to medications and outpatient care.** The inability to access medication and treatment results in having to ignore persistent pains in themselves and their children, and **mothers having to prioritise their child's health over their own** due to insufficient funds.

⁷³ The Star. (2022). "Keluarga Malaysia insurance scheme to help hardcore poor" Available at: <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2022/03/31/keluarga-malaysia-insurance-scheme-to-help-hardcore-poor>

Therefore, in Budget 2023, we **recommend that insurance schemes modelled after the Skim Peduli Sihat insurance scheme to benefit all B40 and single parent families in other states in Malaysia and the limit for outpatient treatment be increased to RM500 per individual in each**

single parent family to cover costs of regular medication and doctor visits. Further, we recommend that **psychiatric or mental health care for B40 and single parent families** be covered under this insurance plan.

4. Investing RM30 million towards strengthening the primary healthcare response to domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence.

Domestic violence is a clear human rights violation, and a global public health issue. In May 2016, the World Health Organization (WHO) emphasised the integral role of healthcare in preventing and tackling violence against women and girls through a global action plan;⁷⁴ followed by comprehensive guidelines for healthcare providers to respond to intimate partner violence, leveraging on the strengths of a multistakeholder approach, and expanding on the role of primary healthcare in this endeavour.

⁷⁵

Klinik Kesihatan (public primary health clinics) form an integral response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) - particularly, domestic violence - given their wide reach within local communities and vital role in family health management. **The prevalence of domestic violence cases reported in primary healthcare settings stand at 22%,⁷⁶ which greatly exceeds**

the national prevalence of 9%.⁷⁷ However, while healthcare centres may be perceived as a primary source of support for survivors of domestic violence;⁷⁸ **it was found that patients are reluctant to disclose experiences of abuse to, or seek help from providers without specific enquiry.⁷⁹** This is exacerbated by the fact that, ***Klinik Kesihatan* providers are not required to screen for any form of sexual and gender-based violence.** Support within healthcare settings must be visible and accessible at all times to prevent abuse from escalating to the point of grievous injury - which is often the case for survivors approaching One-Stop Crisis Centres.

We recommend an investment of **RM25 million towards building the capacity of public primary health clinics in identifying and responding to SGBV**, as well as in **implementing strong monitoring mechanisms.** The cost of running a collaborative provider-advocate screening and referral system in the United Kingdom costs approximately £3,333 annually (or RM18,287)

⁷⁴ World Health Organization. (2016). *GLOBAL PLAN OF ACTION to strengthen the role of the health system within a national multisectoral response to address interpersonal violence, in particular against women and girls, and against children*. Accessed at:

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⁷⁵ World Health Organization (WHO). (2017). *Strengthening health systems to respond to women subjected to intimate partner violence or sexual violence: A manual for health managers*. Accessed at:

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⁷⁶ Othman, S., Yuen, C. W., Zain, N. M., & Samad, A. A. (2019). *Exploring Intimate Partner Violence Among Women Attending Malaysian Primary Care Clinics*. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36, p.15-16.

<<https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519839426>>

⁷⁷ Shuib, R., Ali, S. H., Abdullah, S., Ab Ghani, P., Osman, I., Endut, N.,...Shahrudin, S.S. (2014). *Executive Report, Summary of Findings: A Country Level Study of Women's Well-being and Domestic Violence Against Women (DVAW) Using WHO Multi-country Questionnaire*. Pulau Pinang: Women's Development Research Centre (KANITA), Universiti Sains Malaysia.

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Portnoy, G.A., Colon, R., Gross, G.M., Adams, L.M., Bastian, L.A., Iverson, K.M. (2020) *Patient and provider barriers, facilitators, and implementation preferences of intimate partner violence perpetration screening*. *BMC Health Serv Res* 20, 746.

<<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-020-05595-7>>

per clinic, including administrative services and training for healthcare providers.⁸⁰ This would cost RM3.5 million to cover the 193 public primary health clinics in Selangor alone, ranging from *Klinik Desa* to *Klinik Kesihatan*. We recommend initiating this programme in Selangor, given the relative density of civil society organisations in the state equipped to offer support. For the year, these funds would cover:

- **The development of a selective screening tool for domestic violence, and referral pathway procedures from *Klinik Kesihatan*.** Primary healthcare providers face a substantial set of barriers in managing cases of domestic violence, such as a lack of time to ask about abuse, uncertainty in asking as well as fears of offending the patient, and limited knowledge about options for support.⁸¹ As such, we advocate for the development of a tool to address these particular concerns, as well as mainstreaming gender-based violence - particularly, domestic violence - as a public health issue warranting multi-sectoral action from the Malaysian health system.
- **Training primary healthcare providers towards this end, an education on the functions of different stakeholders within the integrated support system for survivors.** Beyond recognising abuse, healthcare providers must be able to identify the particular needs of each survivor and stand equipped with knowledge of existing resources in order to refer patients appropriately. For example, survivors seeking safety from

their perpetrators may be referred to the Social Welfare Department or civil society organisations like WAO for temporary shelter. Conversely, survivors who are considering, or have chosen to disclose their experiences of violence to providers must be met with sensitivity, emotional support, as well as options for practical next steps.

RM5 million towards design and implementation of monitoring mechanisms to track the relevance of novel screening and referral procedures within KKM. We advocate for RM5 million (from the RM25 million) to develop a monitoring framework for the implementation of screening and referral procedures within public primary healthcare clinics. For a novel intervention, monitoring mechanisms are necessary to ensure appropriate use of tools and resources and to their fullest potential, and to ensure that its 'users' (primary healthcare providers) provide input on the relevance and usefulness of the intervention based on the realities of day-to-day clinical practice. Importantly, direct feedback facilitates the process of iterative improvement, informs resource allocation for future upscaling, and encourages buy-in and ownership from providers - ultimately contributing towards its sustainability within the primary healthcare system.

We advocate for an allocation of **RM5 million for the development of best practice guidelines for the integrated response of the healthcare system towards gender-based violence.**

- Guidelines for the systematic identification, management, and referral of SGBV cases within a healthcare context, bridging the functions between secondary care institutions (OSCCs; specialist care) and primary care institutions (*Klinik Kesihatan; Klinik Ibu dan Anak*), as well as the police, Social Welfare Department, and other sources of support, are sorely needed. Best

⁸⁰ Devine, A., Spencer, A., Eldridge, S., Norman, R., Feder, G. (2012) *Cost-effectiveness of Identification and Referral to Improve Safety (IRIS), a domestic violence training and support programme for primary care: a modelling study based on a randomised controlled trial*. BMJ Open, :e001008. <<https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/2/3/e001008>>

⁸¹ Othman, S., Noor Azmi M.A. (2008) *Domestic violence management in Malaysia: A survey on the primary health care providers*. Asia Pacific Family Medicine. <doi:10.1186/1447-056X-7-2>

practice guidelines complement screening procedures, steer healthcare providers towards the best course of action by systematically mapping out the functions and roles of each

stakeholder. It takes into account the expertise and constraints of primary healthcare practice and ensures clarity and consistency in coordinating support for survivors of gender-based violence.

Conclusion

We welcome the government's commitment toward making gender responsive budgetary allocations and decisions.⁸² To facilitate this intent, we strongly urge these recommendations be considered, to ensure that Malaysia's continued recovery be inclusive, especially for those who are furthest fallen. **These recommendations arise from gaps in social protection, identified through WAO's direct and continued work with survivors.** In this, we reiterate **the importance of the coordination of government agencies and sectors**, especially those involved in social protection, for a variety of efforts from data collection to implementation and monitoring.

Only through these efforts can the visions outlined in the 12th Malaysia Plan, National Women Policy, and Malaysia's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals become a reality.



⁸² Malaysiakini (2022). "PM: MOF, women NGOs to prepare gender responsive budget next year." Available at: <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/633377#friendshare-link-THxjre4xH-cb925b284a1ece7bfaff403a117f5610-2a8b6402635c14d87c3469209250dbdbi7>

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