



PUTTING CHILDREN FIRST

THE PENANG CHILDCARE POLICY AND ACTION PLAN



MARCH 2013

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GLOSSARY

ACS	Asia Community Service
BOLD	BOLD Association for Children with Special Needs
BOMBA	Fire Department
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRE	Corporate Responsibility for Employees
DBD	Daerah Barat Daya
DTL	Daerah Timur Laut
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
EXCO	State Executive Councillor
GIS	Geographical Information System
JKM	Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat
JPN	Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri
LFPR	Labour Force Participation Rate
MHLG	Ministry of Housing and Local Government
MMK	Majlis Mesyuarat Negeri
MPPP	Majlis Perbandaran Pulau Pinang
MPSP	Majlis Perbandaran Seberang Perai
PDK	Pemulihan Dalam Komuniti
PJKK	Pusat Jagaan Kanak-kanak
PPBM	Persatuan Pengasuh Berdaftar Malaysia
PWDC	Penang Women's Development Corporation
RAS	Rapid Assessment Survey
SFO	State Financial Officer
SPS	Seberang Perai Selatan
SPT	Seberang Perai Tengah
SPU	Seberang Perai Utara
SUK	Setiausaha Kerajaan
Tadika	Kindergarten
Taska	Childcare Centre for Children below 4 Years Old
Taskom	Community-based Childcare Centre
UPEN	Unit Perancang Ekonomi Negeri
WCC	Women's Centre for Change

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Preamble

The Penang state government recognizes the need to protect the rights of children as embodied in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and takes cognizance of the problems face by families in caring for their children in the current socio-economic situation.

The **Penang Childcare Policy** will strive to provide universal right and access to quality, safe and affordable childcare in order to ensure the well-being of every child 12 years old and below.¹ In addition, the Policy will help uplift the economy of Penang by enabling the increase in women's participation in the workforce as well as encourage a healthy balance between work and family-life as part of the State Government's programme for holistic and sustainable social and economic development.

Objectives

The Policy is formulated to achieve the following objectives:

- Children's well-being and safety
- Women's increased participation in the workforce
- Work and family-life balance

The Penang Context

In order to meet the childcare needs of the community effectively, the Penang Childcare Policy and Action Plan takes cognizance of the relevant prevailing conditions in the state, viz.:

- Age structure of the Penang population
- Mismatch between supply and demand
- Private sector-led childcare service
- Lack of quality care and inclusive environment for children with special needs

¹ Although the legal definition of "children" according the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Malaysian Child Act 2001 applies to those aged 0-18 years, this Childcare Policy is targeted at children aged from 0-12 years because they are a more vulnerable and dependent group, and their needs more urgent. In addition, it has become increasingly difficult to access quality care for them due to problems associated with obtaining domestic help and the rising cost of childcare, especially for those under the age of four. This Policy also limits its scope to childcare, to the exclusion of educational institutions like kindergartens, because the latter present a different set of issues and are best dealt with separately.

Principal Policy Thrusts

With a view to achieving its designated objectives and taking due cognizance of the prevailing context in the state, the following have been identified as the principal thrusts of the Penang Childcare Policy:

1. Ensuring Equitable Access to Safe and Quality Childcare
2. Increasing Workplace Childcare Centres
3. Establishing Community-based Childcare Centres
4. Improving Home-based Care
5. Assisting the Private Childcare Service Sector

An institutional framework will be put in place to ensure the achievement of the policy thrusts through successful implementation of the Action Plan.

Action Plan

An action plan has been drawn up in order to achieve the policy thrusts, and thus meet the objectives of the policy. Key items under each thrust are enumerated below:

1. Ensuring Equitable Access to Safe and Quality Childcare:

A mapping of the childcare centres in the state will be conducted and incentives will be offered to encourage operators to establish childcare centres in underserved areas. It is recommended that a childcare allowance be provided to low-income families who enrol their children in registered childcare centres.

Subsidized training will be organized for childcare providers in order to upgrade quality of care. The training will incorporate modules on inclusiveness for children with special needs and protocols to ensure the safety of children. Separate teams of early childhood care and education (ECCE) professionals, professional therapists and Home Visitors will be constituted to provide support to childcare centres and home-based childcare providers.

To facilitate inclusive care for special children, awareness campaigns on the positive outcomes of inclusiveness will be held and a reward system developed for childcare centres that practise inclusiveness. Training and other support mechanisms, such as itinerant therapists, will be introduced to facilitate the effective practice of inclusiveness.

2. Increasing Workplace Childcare Centres:

Regulations and guidelines will be reviewed to facilitate the setting up of workplace childcare centres of various modalities. Sector-based roadshows will be organized to showcase existing workplace childcare centres and to encourage new champions to take up the challenge. A shared facility for the manufacturing sector will be set up in one of the industrial areas in the state as a showcase for emulation.

3. Establishing Community-based Childcare Centres:

Pilot Taskom will be established in three low-income communities as test cases of community-operated childcare centres, which will also serve as an income-generating activity for the local community. Professional support in the form of training, periodic reviews and monitoring will be provided to ensure sustainability of the community childcare centres. The provision of custom-designed childcare

centres will be included as a requirement for planning approval of low-cost housing schemes.

4. Improving Home-based Care:

Training, certification and registration will be introduced to rationalize the home-based care sector. Professional support and upgrading of skills will be provided through a team of Home Visitors who are trained in ECCE.

5. Assisting the Private Childcare Sector:

In order to improve the quality of care in private childcare centres, an improved training programme will be introduced to ensure the availability of better childcare providers to the sector. Regulations and guidelines will be harmonized to facilitate the licensing of childcare centres. In addition, implementation of the revised guidelines proposed by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government will be expedited in order to speed up licensing. An online mechanism will be introduced to further facilitate the process.

PUTTING CHILDREN FIRST

THE PENANG CHILDCARE POLICY AND ACTION PLAN

1. PREAMBLE

The Penang State Government recognizes the urgent need to protect the rights and well-being of children who form more than one-third of the population.

Although Malaysia ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1995 and passed the Child Act 2001, a Child Division was only created within the Department of Social Welfare in 2005. In 2009, the National Policy on Children and the National Child Protection Policy, together with their respective Action Plans, were formulated by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MFCD). The policy statement of the National Policy on Children (see Appendix I) affirms „children's rights to survival, protection, development, and participation so they may enjoy the opportunity and space to achieve holistic development in a conducive environment". Nonetheless, the rights of children continue to be kept on the back burner.

Although the urgency of providing for the welfare of the children in the State is recognised, the structure of the Penang State Government has affected its effectiveness in carrying out this mission. Within the framework of the State Government, matters relating to women, family and community come under the responsibility of the State Executive Councilor (EXCO) for Women, Family and Community Development, Youth and Sports but matters pertaining to welfare fall under another EXCO. Matters relating to the physical planning and building regulations for childcare centres fall under yet another two different EXCOs.

Taking cognizance of this unsatisfactory state of affairs with no specific State EXCO tasked with the promotion of the rights and protection of children, the State Government plans to create a specific portfolio for children with the necessary financial allocations to carry out programmes in their interest. Pending this, the State Government is adopting this Policy on childcare and its action plan to ensure that the children are not left behind in the pursuit of development.

This focus on childcare as a first line of action is adopted out of widespread concern that the present inadequate regulation and monitoring of home-based childcare services and childcare centres put children at risk, as demonstrated by the reported deaths and abuse of infants in a few childcare centres and by some other childcare providers.

Besides, it is universally accepted that quality and safe childcare constitutes a basic need. The childhood years are the most important in any individual's development. It is the time when we learn most quickly about the world, when we learn how to learn, when we learn to find our equilibrium in society. Investing in the nurturance of our children is, therefore, crucial for the moulding of future generations who are well adjusted emotionally, socially and intellectually: future generations who will then be able to contribute meaningfully to the development of our society and economy. Access to childcare is also crucial for ameliorating the disadvantages stemming

from poverty and equalizing the life chances of children from different social classes and for children with special needs. In effect, quality care is vital for ensuring the **well-being of every child**, as well as the community as a whole. Hence, it is imperative that every child, as an individual citizen, be guaranteed the best possible care – as a right.

Availability of quality childcare contributes significantly to economic progress by enabling women to participate actively in the workforce and thus facilitate fuller harnessing of the country's productive forces. In Malaysia, labour force participation rate is high for women aged between 25 and 29 but drops substantially once they start a family. It never recovers. This trend is largely attributable to inadequacies in the support system, childcare being a major component. The resultant extremely low presence of women in the higher rungs of the occupational ladder represents a severe brain drain in view of the fact that women outnumber men two to one in the public universities. Our economy cannot afford to lose such assets. A comprehensive policy for quality and affordable childcare must be put in place to **increase women's participation in the workforce** and retain them there.

It must be recognized, however, that provision of childcare is not enough - it has to be complemented by other policies and practices that re-organize relations both in the labour market and in the home. There must be a shift from the male-breadwinner/female-carer model to the dual earner/dual carer model. Besides encouraging mothers' labour force participation, this entails the sharing and redistribution of care: from mother to father in the family, and from family to society. Hence, it is equally imperative that family-friendly policies be implemented alongside an expansion of childcare services to ensure a better **balance between work and family-life** – for both men and women.

Clearly, childcare is not a private issue but a public one, with tremendous social and economic implications. Thus, it is incumbent upon the State to play a major role in the organization and provision of childcare services to ensure its delivery to every child as a **public good** besides increasing the participation and retention of women in the workforce.

In the light of the above considerations, the **Penang Childcare Policy will strive to provide universal right and access to quality, safe and affordable childcare in order to ensure the well-being of every child, increase women's participation in the workforce and achieve a balance between work and family-life** as part of the State Government's programme for holistic and sustainable social and economic development.

2. OBJECTIVES

As stated in the Preamble, the Penang Childcare Policy is formulated to achieve the following objectives:

- Children's well-being and safety
- Women's increased participation in the workforce
- Work and family-life balance

To attain these goals, the State Government will intervene actively to restructure childcare delivery in Penang as a public good, with the implication that no child will be denied access to quality care irrespective of class, creed, ethnicity, physical and intellectual capabilities, and residence. This is crucial as family background has

profound influence on children's development and their life chances. Early childhood care and education (ECCE) can play a significant role in equalizing the conditions under which children grow up and, therefore, offer them an even playing field for success later in life. As such, childcare provision is seen as a public good, a social investment that forms an integral part of our public policies on basic services. This childcare policy is formulated with the aim of putting in place the best possible structure for the care and development of our children, and in so doing, support parents in the important roles they play, so that everyone in our community can fulfil his/her human potential. Putting this system in place will ultimately bring returns in the form of social well-being and economic prosperity for our community and state, now and in the future.

The objectives of the Penang Childcare Policy provide the rationale for the form and direction of the policy and the action plan, and are elaborated on below.

2.1 Children's Well-being and Safety

Quality childcare can positively shape the life chances of the individual child by providing him/her with a good, safe and secure childhood and at the same time support the development of personal and social skills. Outcomes and achievements in adulthood are closely linked to cognitive and social competencies developed in childhood. Good cognitive abilities are associated with educational attainments later in life and, therefore, frequently to higher socio-economic status. Social skills are also critical for success in adult life – whether in the workplace or the community. In addition, access to quality ECCE helps to close the attainment gap between children from different economic backgrounds. A further equalizing role of public provision of ECCE is in enabling mothers from low-income families to participate more fully in the economy, hence breaking the cycle of poverty and improving the material well-being of their children. The aspired outcome is a more equitable society in which every individual member can play a productive and contributory role.

2.2 Women's Increased Participation in the Workforce

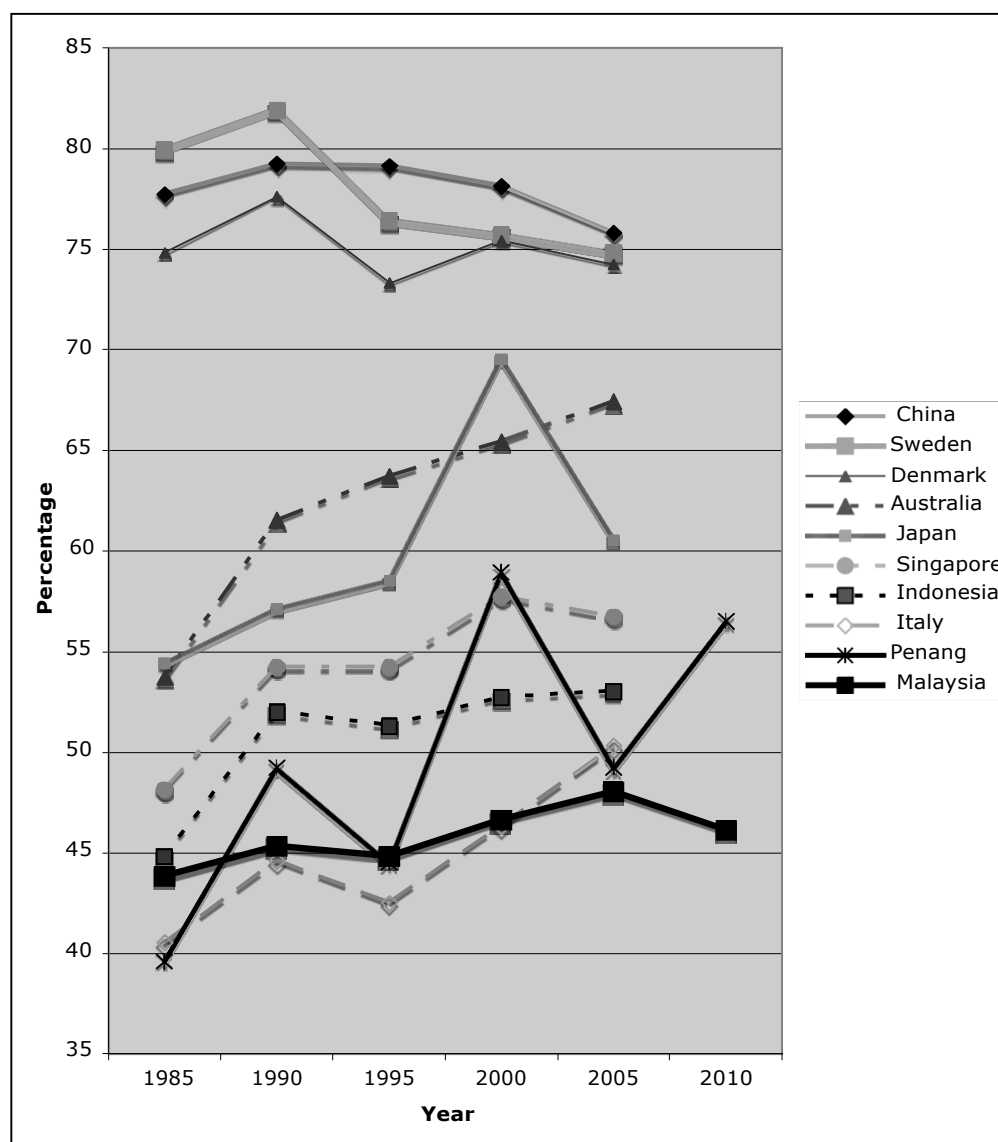
Women, more than men, find their career prospects hinging on their ability to balance work and family responsibilities. Many women are being forced to give up their careers, not by choice, but due to either the high cost of childcare or absence of flexible work options which allow them to combine their responsibilities as parents with staying in the workforce. Extended periods out of the labour market, in order to attend to childcare duties, impact negatively on women's careers. Extensive childcare provision is critical for women's career progression. Limited and inflexible childcare provision confines women to low-paid part-time work. These women find themselves facing a double penalty: after having children they have to trade down in pay and skills in order to work part-time, then they find that this low-paid work barely makes sense once they have factored in childcare costs.

Studies in the Nordic countries, which are the international benchmarks for childcare provision, have demonstrated that access to quality and affordable childcare was the primary factor which brought about the high level of participation of women in their labour force. As demonstrated in Figure 1 below, the two selected Nordic countries of Sweden and Denmark led the pack with female labour force participation rates (LFPR) upwards of 74 per cent in 2005 (the latest year for which

United Nations data are available) – outdistanced only by China, where the high female LFPR is a legacy of its communist past.

In contrast, a fellow European country, Italy, which does not have a well-established childcare system, records a female LFPR of only 50.3 per cent in the same year. Women's LFPR in the other selected advanced economies – Australia and Japan – stand at 67.4 and 60.5 per cent respectively. Malaysia is at the bottom of the table at 48.0 per cent, compared to 56.7 per cent for Singapore and 53.0 per cent for Indonesia. Penang's showing is substantially above the national performance, especially for the year 2010, at 56.5 per cent as opposed to the national figure of 46.1 per cent. However, it should be noted that female LFPR figures for Penang fluctuate significantly over the years and there might be need to exercise some caution in the use of the state figures.

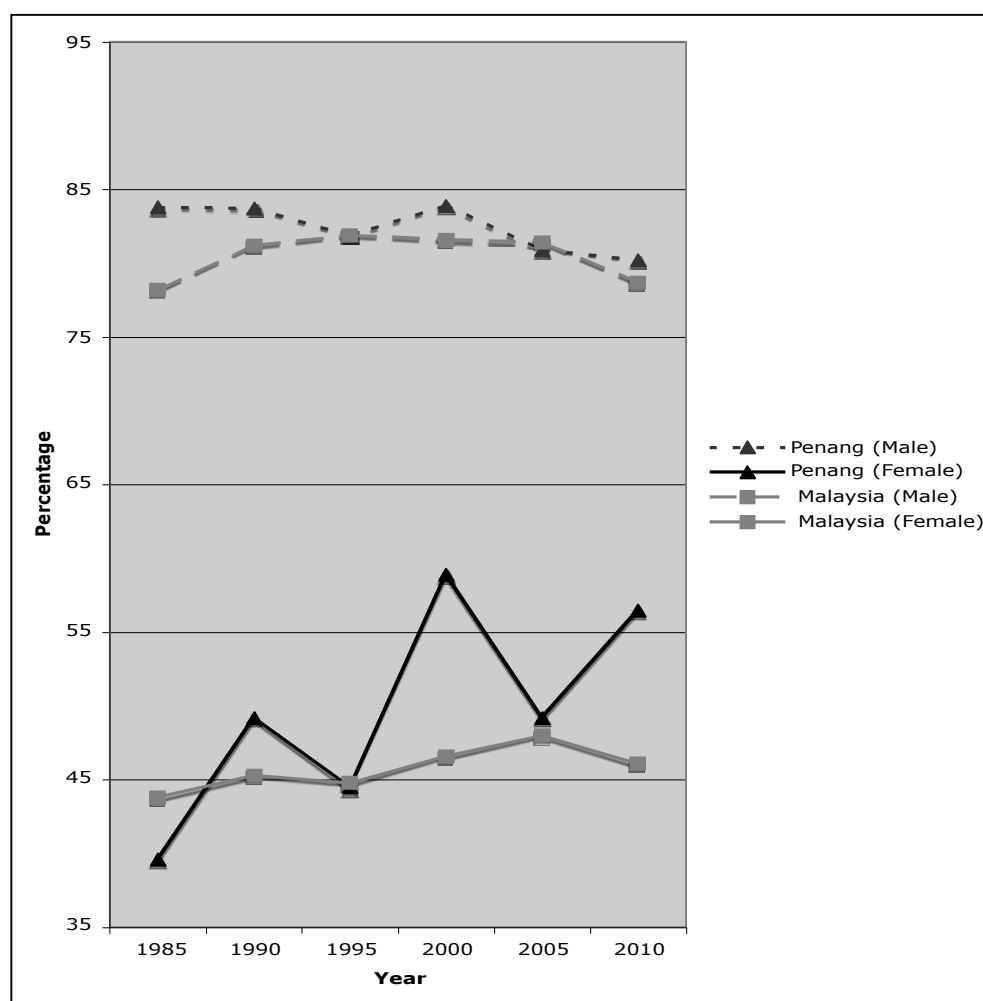
**Figure 1: Female Labour Force Participation Rate, 1985-2010
(Various Countries)**



Source: Gender Info, United Nations Statistics Division

It is also instructive to note the gap between male and female LFPR in these countries. Again, Sweden and Denmark are ahead of the other countries with only a difference of 10 and 11 percentage points respectively. On the other hand, in Malaysia and Indonesia, the gulf amounts to 34 percentage points. Figure 2 shows the differential between male and female LFPR in Penang and Malaysia over the 1985-2010 period. It is obvious that concerted measures have to be taken to narrow the gap. The Nordic countries have again pointed the way by instituting family-friendly policies that emphasize the equal sharing of care responsibilities between men and women, amongst others.

Figure 2: Male and Female Labour Force Participation Rate in Penang and Malaysia, 1985-2010



Sources: Gender Info, United Nations Statistics Division; Department of Statistics, Malaysia

2.3 Work and Family-life Balance

Availability and affordability of childcare is a key issue for many families, especially those who have children with special needs. In the absence of state-supported facilities, the high cost of childcare often exerts tremendous financial pressure on the average family – leading to the closing off of career options for parents and the

loss to the economy of skilled employees who opt out of the workplace. Those who choose to remain within the workforce have to juggle many competing demands, leaving them with little time for parenting. In Malaysia, many look towards domestic helpers as the solution but this is an option available only to those who can afford it, once again disadvantaging the lower income groups. Questions have been raised as to the quality of care, family dynamics, the economic and social issues associated with the presence of large numbers of foreign workers in the country, and, not least, the ill-effects of absentee mothers for the families of the domestic helpers, amongst many others. This should, obviously, not be the preferred choice.

Even when extensive and accessible childcare is available, narrow focus on women's employment participation will fail to address the imbalances arising from the organization of work and the gender roles within the family. Major paradigm and policy shifts are necessary to ensure that it is possible for both men and women to work and care. The institution of paid parental leave, fathers' quotas in parental leave, use of parental leave in a flexible/part-time way, flexible work organization, etc. have proven to be partially effective in this regard but have yet to erase the deep-seated gender differentiation of roles. Cash for childcare policies, which are also practised in many of the Nordic countries have, on the other hand, tended to reinforce existing gender differences whereby the majority of those accessing such benefits are mothers – and predominantly mothers with low incomes and low educational levels.

In sum, a combination of accessible, affordable and quality childcare and family-friendly organization of work is essential for promoting women's participation and retention in the workforce.

3. THE PENANG CONTEXT

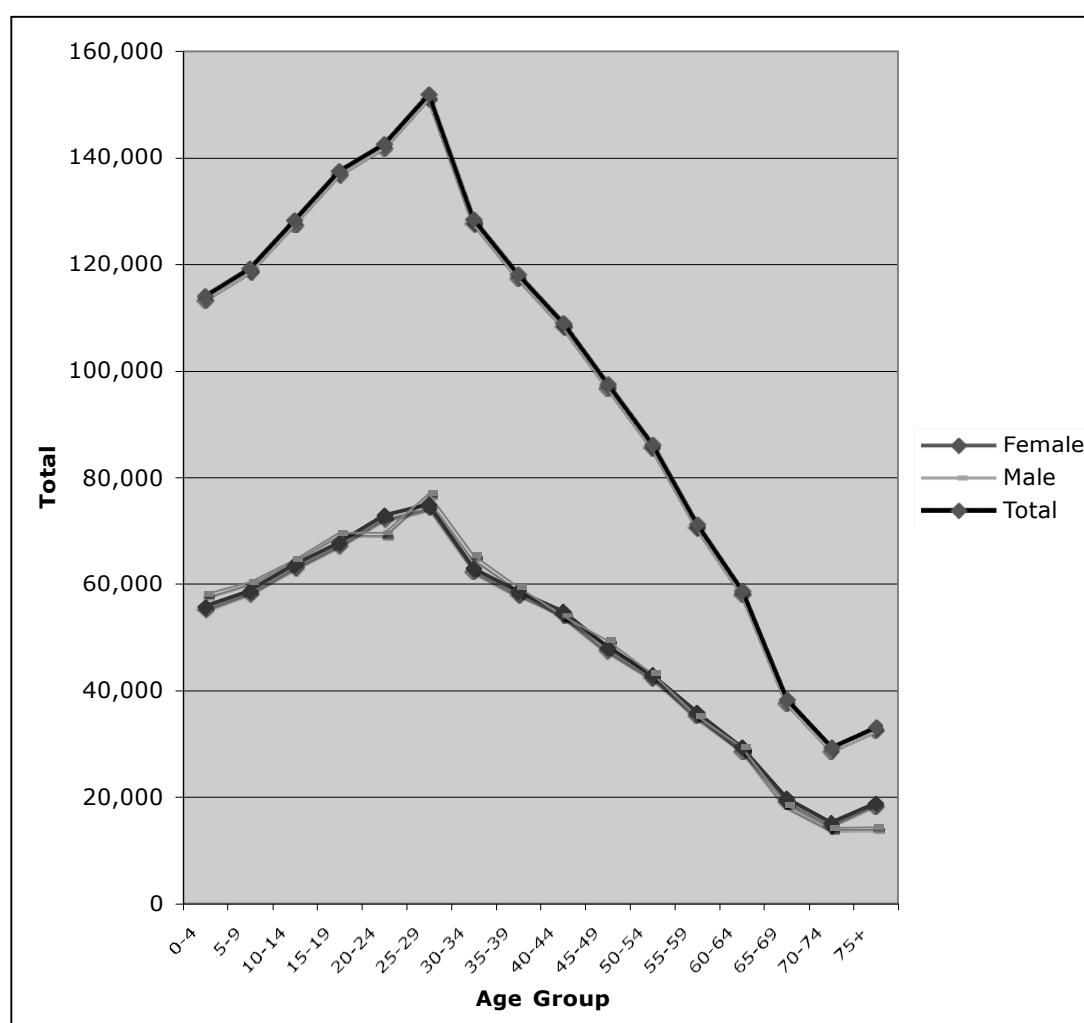
In order to meet the childcare needs of the community effectively, the Penang Childcare Policy and Action Plan takes cognizance of the relevant prevailing conditions in the state, viz:

- Age structure of the Penang population
- Mismatch between supply and demand
- Private sector-led childcare service
- Lack of quality care and inclusive environment for children with special needs

3.1 Age Structure

Penang has a very young population, whereby 66 per cent are below the age of 40 and 20 per cent are below the age of 12, as shown in Figure 3. This, coupled with an annual population growth rate of about 3 per cent, means that the demand for childcare will remain high for the foreseeable future. There is a clear need for the expansion of childcare services in the state to cater for this continuous and growing demand.

Figure 3: Age Structure of Penang, 2010



Source: Department of Statistics, Penang

3.2 Mismatch between Supply and Demand

3.2.1 Geographical Distribution

Although Penang is a relatively small state, there is a clear disparity in the developmental level between the various districts -- with the more urban ones, Timur Laut (DTL) and Barat Daya (DBD) on the island and Seberang Perai Tengah (SPT) on the mainland enjoying a faster pace of growth and also more of the amenities associated with urbanity. The same disparity is discerned with regards to availability of childcare services by district as shown in Table 1. Seberang Perai Selatan (SPS) is highly disadvantaged, the ratio of children (aged 0-12 years) to childcare centres in this district being almost double that in DTL. In addition, almost two-thirds of the childcare centres in the SPS are not registered. A similar proportion of unlicensed childcare centres is found in Seberang Perai Utara (SPU), the other relatively rural district. The percentage of private childcare centres which are unlicensed is also very high in DTL and DBD, at 55 and 58 per cent respectively. SPT rates quite well in comparison at 33 per cent. Besides expediting the registration process of the unlicensed private childcare centres, investment by the public sector is necessary to rectify the imbalance in distribution.

Table 1: Ratio of Childcare Centres to Children Aged 0-12 Years by District

District	Age Group				No of Childcare Centres**	Ratio
	0-4	5-9	10-12*	Total		
Seberang Perai Utara	23,847	25,398	16,658	65,903	47	1:1402
Seberang Perai Tengah	26,255	27,680	17,791	71,726	51	1:1406
Seberang Perai Selatan	14,034	16,480	10,135	40,649	20	1:2032
Daerah Barat Daya	16,596	16,118	10,179	42,893	33	1:1300
Daerah Timur Laut	30,578	30,741	20,385	81,704	73	1:1119
Total	111,310	116,417	75,148	302,875	234	1:1352

Sources: Department of Statistics, Malaysia; Welfare Department, Penang

*This is an estimate as the original age group is for 10-14 year-olds. The totals in this column represent three-fifths of those aged 10-14.

**The numbers indicate only private childcare centres, registered and unregistered, as supplied by the Penang Welfare Department.

3.2.2 Low-Income Communities

There is also an uneven distribution of childcare centres according to the income level of the communities. This results from the fact that supply of childcare services in Penang remains largely private sector driven. Childcare providers are not disposed to set up their centres in low-income communities because few would be able to afford the fees. Hence, these communities are severely underserved. Rapid Assessment Surveys (RAS) in three complexes of low-cost flats, viz. PPR Jalan Sungei, PPR Ampangan and Taman Perda, Teluk Kumbar, bear out such observations. As shown in Table 2, the proportion of children enrolled in childcare centres in PPR Ampangan and Taman Perda is extremely low. In Ampangan, none of the respondents with children below 4 years old have placed their children in childcare centres. The same applies in Taman Perda where none of the families with children in the 4-6 and 7-12 age groups have done so. Even for age groups where some families have opted for the use of childcare centres, the percentages are extremely low, i.e., 3.3 per cent for the 4-6 age group and 2.3 per cent for the 7-12 age group in Ampangan, and 1.2 per cent for the under-4 age group in Taman Perda. The situation is significantly better in Jalan Sungei, possibly due to its more urban location, substantiating the arguments on geographic distribution above. The RAS data also showed the lowest level of unemployment of women in Jalan Sungei, at 28.4 per cent, compared to 56.8 per cent in Ampangan and 66.4 per cent in Taman Perda. This establishes the direct correspondence between availability of childcare services and women's participation in the workforce.

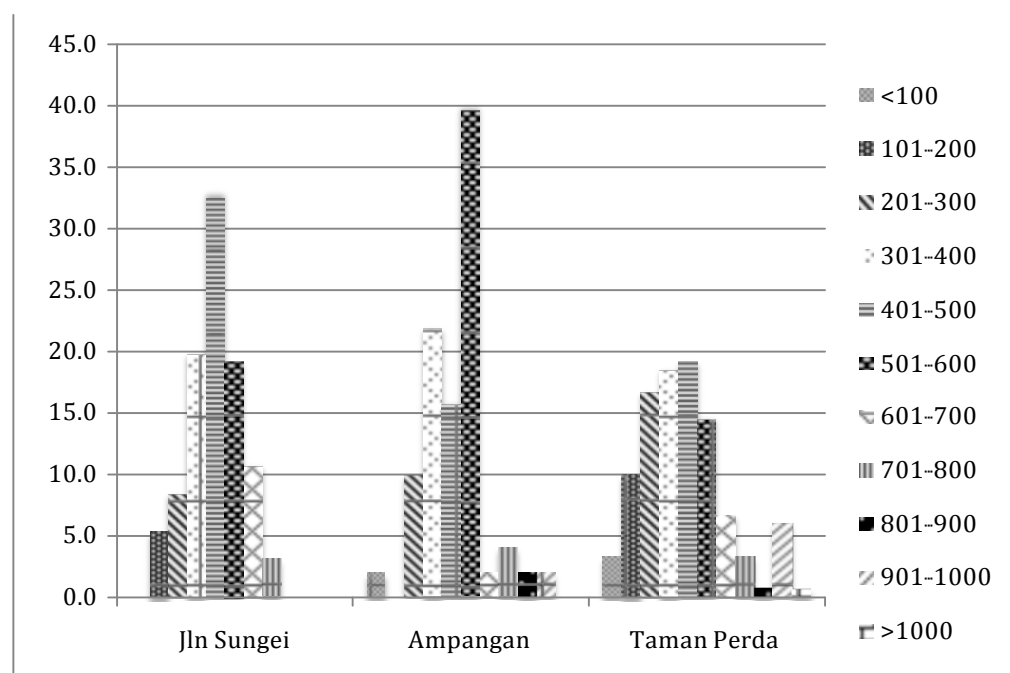
Table 2: Type of Childcare by Age Group in PPR Jalan Sungei, PPR Ampangan and Taman Perda

Type of Care	Age Group								
	Jalan Sungei			Ampangan			Taman Perda		
	<4	4-6	7-12	<4	4-6	7-12	<4	4-6	7-12
Within Home	40.9	52.6	76.1	78.1	66.7	81.4	78.8	69.8	82.9
Childcare Centre	38.6	19.2	5.7	0.0	3.3	2.3	1.2	0.0	0.0
Home-based Care Provider	20.5	28.2	18.2	21.9	30.0	16.3	20.0	30.2	17.1

Source: PWDC Rapid Assessment Survey in PPR Jalan Sungei, PPR Ampangan and Taman Perda

Even if private childcare centres are available, most of the residents in these flats find the cost prohibitive, especially when they have a relatively large number of children. As shown in Figure 4, 72.3 per cent of families in Jalan Sungei who use childcare services spend between RM301-600 for such services whilst close to 15 per cent of them spend RM601-800 for them. The comparable figures are 78 per cent and 6 per cent respectively for Ampangan. Expenditure for childcare is more evenly distributed in Taman Perda, with 30 per cent of the families paying RM300 or less per month. Obviously, childcare expenditure takes up a substantial portion of household income for families that use such services.

Figure 4: Expenditure on Childcare Services, PPR Jalan Sungei, PPR Ampangan and Taman Perda



Source: PWDC Rapid Assessment Survey in PPR Jalan Sungei, PPR Ampangan and Taman Perda

Many women, therefore, do not seek employment because the income earned would not be sufficient to pay for childcare. The prevalence of single-income households, in turn, increases the incidence of poverty, reducing further the ability to access childcare. Women who do go to work often have no choice but to leave their younger children in the care of their older ones or to leave them all to fend for

themselves. The situation is more critical in single-parent households. Provision of affordable childcare would contribute greatly to breaking the cycle of poverty for such households. Initiatives will be taken to establish community childcare centres in low-income areas as a means to equalize the opportunities for children from economically disadvantaged families.

Under current Federal Government provisions, parties interested in setting up community childcare centres can apply for an RM55,000 grant for this purpose. In addition, families in urban areas with an income below RM2,000 or those in rural areas with incomes below RM1,200 are eligible for monthly subsidies of RM180 per child to attend such community childcare centres. The State Government will seek to facilitate interested parties and eligible families to access these grants. To supplement these provisions, the State Government will put in place a subsidy programme for low-income families to enrol their children in registered private childcare facilities where community childcare centres are not available.

3.3 Private Sector-led Childcare Service

3.3.1 Affordability

In contrast to the Nordic countries where public funding for ECCE covers between 75-85 per cent of total costs, parents in Penang have to bear the entire cost of childcare out of pocket. This typically ranges between RM300-800, even for lower income families. As noted earlier, such expenditures are prohibitive for many families. Consequently, many children are left in the care of unregistered and unmonitored centres or home-based childcare providers or left to fend for themselves.

3.3.2 Market Segmentation

As childcare provision is largely regarded as a business venture, the quality of service is pegged to the ability to pay. This can serve to reinforce already existing disparities between the haves and have-nots.

3.3.3 Profitability before Quality

Another observable consequence of private sector driven childcare provision is the uneven quality of care. Childcare providers who view their enterprises as business ventures often do not go beyond custodial care, investing little in the human and material resources required for the holistic development of the children entrusted to their care. Many are unregistered and not monitored. Providers who wish to register their centres face problems pertaining to the requirement to convert their premises (often rented) from residential to commercial use and often face objections from their neighbours. Planning provisions for childcare centres in the current development guidelines used by the local authorities and government agencies need improvement.

3.3.4 Limited Public Sector Involvement

As the provision of childcare by the private sector is the norm in Malaysia, there has been little public sector involvement to date. However, the Penang State Government had identified childcare as a critical social service soon after it took over the administration of the state in 2008. Two state-sponsored childcare centres -- one in Rifle Range, George Town, and the other in Taman Serumpun, Bukit

Mertajam -- have been set up thus far to serve the low-income communities in these localities. Efforts are being made to expand this initiative.

With regards to other public sector bodies, the only ones that are providing some form of childcare facilities for their staff are the Penang Development Corporation, the Seberang Perai Municipal Council (MPSP) and the General Hospital. This is despite the fact that government departments and agencies are eligible for grants from the Federal Government amounting to RM80,000 for the renovation and furnishing of childcare centres within their premises. In addition, government servants with monthly salaries below RM2,000 qualify for a monthly subsidy of RM180 per child for sending them to these centres. The State Government will encourage more public sector bodies to avail themselves of this grant facility. In this regard, preparations are underway for the establishment of a childcare centre in KOMTAR to cater for civil servants working in the building.

The formulation of this policy and action plan is aimed at expanding the role of the State Government, both as a facilitator and provider of childcare services.

3.3.5 Limited Provision by Employers

A quick survey among the factories in the Bayan Lepas Free Trade Zone (FTZ) revealed that in the factories which responded, 73 per cent of the employees are in the reproductive age of 20-39 years, and 65 per cent are production operators. For the hospital sector, the corresponding figure is 62 per cent, with 45 per cent of them earning less than RM1,500. Without a doubt, access to childcare is a major concern for employees in these age and income cohorts. Nonetheless, many employers remain reluctant to assume this corporate responsibility to their employees (CRE). At present, Pentamaster is the only factory that is providing an in-house childcare centre for its employees. The reasons frequently cited by employers for not supporting such an initiative are:

- No request from the staff
- Impact on bottom line
- Lack of space
- Safety issues arising from the manufacturing environment
- Problems of litigation in case of injuries sustained by the children
- Presence of children being disruptive to work routines
- Shift work being not conducive to childcare provision
- Production operators unable to bring their children with them in the *bus kilang*
- Human resource issues arising from the operation of the childcare centre
- Childcare centres being available in the vicinity of the FTZ
- More feasible to use childcare facilities near the employees' homes

A number of more progressive employers, however, support providing childcare centres in the workplace because it:

- Facilitates recruitment and retention of employees
- Reduces absenteeism due to childcare responsibilities
- Affords employees peace of mind, hence ability to focus on their work
- Induces greater employee satisfaction, leading to sense of belonging and productivity
- Promotes parent-child bonding and family well-being
- Provides optimum nutrition and health status for infants by supporting breastfeeding

Employees, on their part, proffered the following grounds in support of workplace childcare centres:

- High cost of childcare being a burden, especially when they have more than one child
- Children left to fend for themselves or left with unregistered childcare providers and therefore are put at risk because they cannot afford childcare
- Transportation and time-management issues arising from use of private childcare
- Production operators cannot take on overtime work because the additional childcare cost renders it uneconomical.

The Penang State Government has identified the provision of workplace childcare centres as a crucial component of its push to proliferate childcare facilities. Although the Federal Government provides a 10% tax exemption on the cost of building of childcare centres for 10 years for private sector companies, the low take up rate demonstrates that this incentive is not attractive enough. The State Government will draw up a programme to further incentivize this initiative.

Giving consideration to the real limitations associated with certain manufacturing environments, the definition of workplace childcare centres has been widened to include not only *in-situ* childcare centres. Other modalities to be encouraged are shared facilities to be established within or in the vicinity of the FTZ; a system of subsidy for employees using selected childcare centres nominated by the employer; or subsidies for all employees whose children are enrolled in registered childcare centres. The key sectors that have been identified to spearhead this initiative are: government departments, factories, hospitals, hotels, shopping complexes and banks. This is because they have the staff numbers to make the setting up of childcare centres feasible. Hospitals, in particular, are highly suitable because they possess in-house expertise by way of paediatricians, paediatric nurses, nutritionists, dieticians, etc. The banks are another focus because the National Union of Banking Employees has put childcare provision on the agenda in their current collective agreement negotiations.

3.4 Quality Care and Inclusive Environment for Children with Special Needs

Special children need special care, but they also need to interact with other children in inclusive environments. Unfortunately, this is sadly lacking in Penang. Very few childcare centres would open their doors to them, demurring on grounds of lacking the necessary capacity and qualified staff, and opposition from parents of other children enrolled in the centres. It must be noted, however, that there is a slow but definite rise in the number of childcare centres that have adopted an inclusive policy, and they have found the experience a positive and enriching one for their staff and charges alike. The Penang State Government's policy for promoting inclusiveness will include provision of training for the care of special children to all childcare providers and the deployment of itinerant teams of professional therapists – comprising speech therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists – to support childcare providers in the care of special children.

There are currently 21 Pemulihan Dalam Komuniti (PDK, Community-based Rehabilitation) centres in the state, catering for 659 special children. These centres are under the jurisdiction of the Welfare Department, a federal agency. Although they fulfil an important role in the care of special children and in providing them with training in living skills, the PDK are exclusively for special children – leaving them

with little opportunity for interaction with more typical children. The State Government will seek to supplement the programmes of the PDK with the provision of additional training for their staff and support in the form of itinerant therapists.

4. PRINCIPAL POLICY THRUSTS

With a view to achieving its designated objectives and taking due cognizance of the prevailing context pertaining to childcare provision in the state, the following have been identified as the principal thrusts of the Penang Childcare Policy:

- I. ***Ensuring Equitable Access to Safe and Quality Childcare***: Recognizing the equalizing impact of quality and affordable childcare, the State will work towards universal access for every child on the basis of need, irrespective of ability to pay.

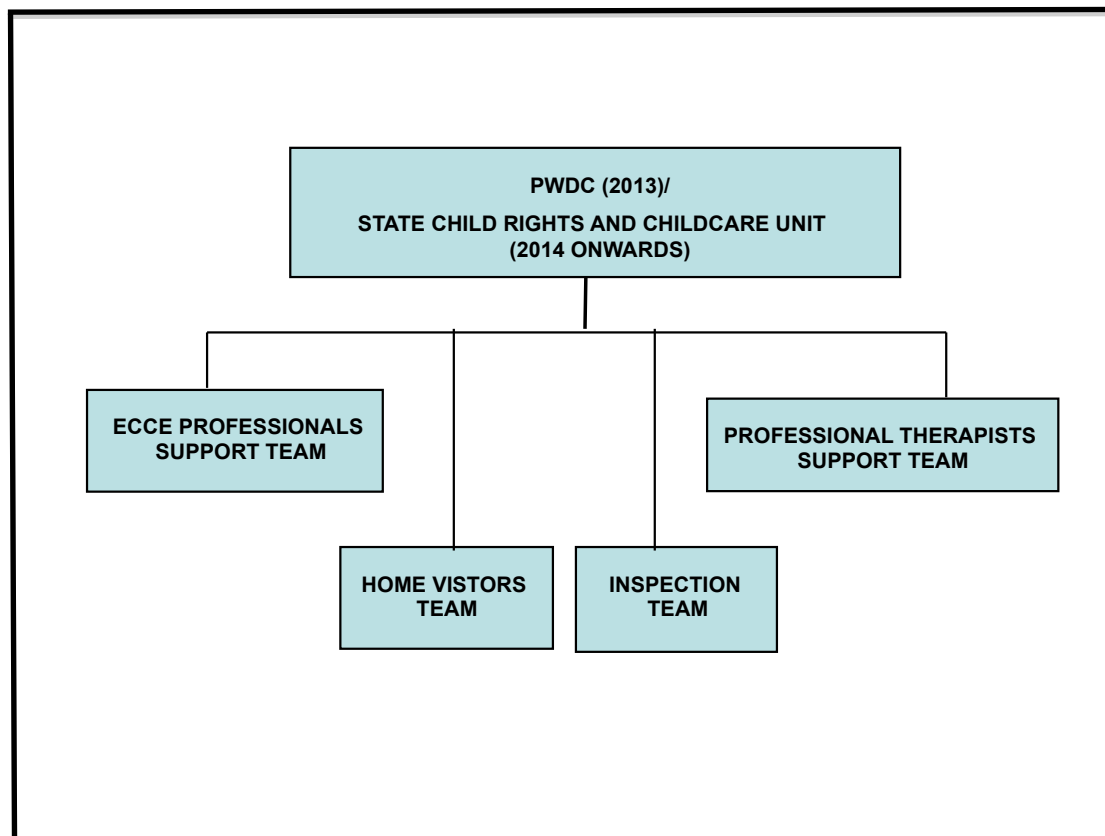
Recognizing that every child has the right to a good, safe and secure childhood, the State will invest public resources to upgrade the quality of care and implement a child protection policy in all childcare facilities to vouchsafe the safety of the children.

Recognizing that special children grow and develop best in an inclusive environment, the State will put in place a supportive mechanism to ease their inclusion into the mainstream childcare centres.

- II. ***Increasing Workplace Childcare Centres***: Recognizing the significant contribution of workplace childcare centres to work and family-life balance as well as the economic prosperity of the state as a whole, the State will facilitate the proliferation of workplace childcare centres through a combined package of infrastructural support, incentives and regulatory liberalization.
- III. ***Establishing Community-Based Childcare Centres***: Recognizing that the low-income communities are severely underserved with respect to childcare facilities, the State is committed to the establishment of community-based childcare centres (Taskom, Taska Komuniti) with a view to training the local communities to operate them as an income-generating activity. These state-sponsored Taskom must be exemplary in quality of care, accessibility, inclusiveness and multiculturalism.
- IV. ***Improving Home-Based Care***: Recognizing the extensive use of unlicensed and unmonitored home-based childcare providers, the State plans to rationalize this segment of childcare provision by providing training and instituting a system of certification and registration.
- V. ***Assisting Private Childcare Service Sector***: Recognizing the pivotal role private childcare centres have played and will continue to play, the State, with the assistance of the Local Authorities, will aid in enhancing the quality of service in this sector and facilitate the ease of doing business by reviewing and liberalizing the regulatory framework associated with the childcare sector without compromising standards. The state agencies involved with town and country planning will be required to include childcare as an important component in all development plans.

The institutional framework below will be put in place to ensure the achievement of the policy thrusts through successful implementation of the Action Plan, and hence, attainment of the objectives of the Penang Childcare Policy. **The PWDC will act as the coordinating agency for the implementation of the policy during the first year of transition. Its role will be taken over by the permanent Child Rights and Childcare Unit to be set up by the state government.**

Figure 5: Institutional Framework



The composition, roles and functions of each team within this framework will be finalized in consultation with the relevant State and Federal authorities, in particular the Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat, but are currently proposed as below:

- **ECCE Professionals Support Team**
This team will comprise experienced childcare providers who will provide input to childcare centres and home-based childcare providers on how to improve their facilities and services, in collaboration with JKM
- **Professional Therapists Support Team**
This team, comprising speech therapists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists will provide support service to inclusive childcare centres, PDK, and special needs children in home-based care
- **Home Visitors Team**
Led by JKM and supported by ECCE professionals, this team will conduct periodic visits to registered home-based childcare providers to provide

professional support and advice towards improving the standard of home-based care.

- **Inspection Team**

This monitoring team, comprising officers from JKM and other regulatory bodies like BOMBA, Department of Health, MPPP, MPSP and supported by ECCE professionals, will conduct periodic inspection of childcare centres and home-based childcare providers to ensure compliance with stipulated standards of care and regulatory requirements.

5. ACTION PLAN

THRUST	ACTION	IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES	TIMEFRAME
Ensuring Equitable Access to Safe and Quality Childcare	1.1 Compile a comprehensive list of childcare centres, operated by both private and public sectors, in the state	PWDC to appoint consultant for the task	Q2 2013
	1.2 Undertake a mapping of the childcare centres by district and average income of the communities	Consultant/Volunteer, GIS Section of State Computer Unit	Q4 2013
	1.3 Develop an incentive package to encourage operators to establish childcare centres in underserved areas	MMK Local Govt., MMK Women, MPPP, MPSP, SFO, UPEN	Q2 2014
	1.4 Provide community-based childcare centres in low-income areas (To be elaborated on under Thrust 4)		
	1.5 Provide childcare allowance for low-income families to enrol their children in registered childcare centres. Special attention to be given to single parent households	MMK Local Govt., MMK Women, MPPP, MPSP, SFO, UPEN	Q4 2014
	1.6 Promoting Inclusiveness:		
	1.6.1 Conduct awareness and publicity campaigns to increase understanding and acceptance of inclusiveness	PWDC/State Child Rights and Childcare Unit, ACS, BOLD	On-going
	1.6.2 Develop an award and recognition scheme for childcare centres that practice inclusiveness	Child Rights and Childcare Unit, ACS, BOLD	Q3 2015
	1.7 Training:		
	1.7.1 Organize subsidized training for childcare providers. At least 200 childcare providers to be trained each year	PWDC, Child Rights and Childcare Unit, JKM, Outsource to professional trainers, e.g. PPBM	On-going
	1.7.2 Incorporate module on inclusive care for special children in all training courses	JKM, ACS, BOLD, PPBM	Q3 2013
	1.7.3 Incorporate module on safety protocols for children in all training courses	JKM, WCC, PPBM	On-going
	1.8 Professional Support Teams:		
	1.8.1 Establish itinerant teams of ECCE professionals to provide inputs to childcare centres.	Child Rights and Childcare Unit, JKM, SFO, UPEN, Ministry of Health	Q1 2014
	1.8.2 Establish team of Home Visitors, led by JKM officers, to support and monitor certified home-based childcare providers	Child Rights and Childcare Unit, JKM, SFO, UPEN	Q2 2014
	1.8.3 Establish itinerant teams of therapists (physiotherapist, occupational therapists and speech therapists), in collaboration with JKM, to service inclusive childcare centres, PDK, and special needs children in home-based care	Child Rights and Childcare Unit, ACS, BOLD, Penang Chapters of the Malaysian Assoc. of Speech and Hearing, Malaysian Occupational Therapy Assoc., Malaysian Physiotherapy Assoc., JKM,	Q2 2014

THRUST	ACTION	IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES	TIMEFRAME
	1.9 Monitoring: Periodic spot checks by JKM and regulatory bodies to ensure compliance with standards of care and regulatory requirements. Team to be constituted by Q3 2013	ECCE Council, certified ECCE professionals, JKM, BOMBA, State Health Dept., MPPP, MPSP	On-going
	1.10 Develop a Child Protection Policy to be adopted by all childcare centres. Considers instituting online test for operators.	Child Rights and Childcare Unit, MMK Women, PWDC, WCC, JKM	Q3 2013
Increasing Workplace Childcare Centres	2.1 Review and revise regulations and guidelines to facilitate setting up of workplace childcare centres	PWDC, UPEN, MMK Local Govt., MMK Women, SUK, MPPP, MPSP, JKM, BOMBA, State Health Dept., ECCE Council	Q1 2013
	2.2 Assist in setting up childcare centre in KOMTAR	PWDC, SUK, PDC, MPPP, JKM	Q1 2013
	2.3 Conduct sector-based roadshows to showcase workplace childcare centres in the respective sectors	Chief Minister's Office, MMK Women, PWDC, Employers providing workplace childcare centres	Q2 – Q4 2013
	2.4 Identify potential new champions and incentivize them to provide workplace childcare centres.	Chief Minister's Office, MMK Women, PWDC, PDC, UPEN, SFO, Identified champions	Q4 2013
	2.5 Establish a shared childcare facility in or near one of the industrial areas in Penang as a showcase. State Government to provide capital cost, employers to subsidize operation cost. (The shared facility being established by MOHR and PPBM in Bangi can serve as a model)	Chief Minister's Office, MMK Women, State Child Rights and Childcare Unit, PDC, MPPP/MPSP UPEN, SFO, PPBM, Employers in the selected industrial area	Q2/Q3 2014
Establishing Community-based Childcare Centres	3.1 Review existing state-sponsored PJKK/Taskom in Rifle Range and Taman Serumpun, with a view to improving service provision	MMK Women, PWDC	Q1 2013
	3.2 Establish pilot PJKK/Taskom in PPR Jalan Sungei, PPR Ampangan and Taman Perda	MMK Women, PWDC, MPPP, MPSP, GRB Team, Communities in the three areas concerned	Q3 2013- Q2 2014
	3.3 Identify and establish PJKK/Taskom in other low- income communities based on improved modality and lessons learnt from pilot Taskom. At least 2 each year	MMK Women, State Child Rights and Childcare Unit, MPPP, MPSP, Communities in the areas concerned	On-going from Q2 2013
	3.4 Mobilize and train members of the community to operate the PJKK/Taskom as an income-generating activity. The training to be followed up with close monitoring and handholding for at least six months.	MMK Women, PWDC/State Child Rights and Childcare Unit, Trainers (Outsource to PPBM)	On-going
	3.5 Professional Support:		
	3.5.1 Provide continued training to upgrade the competency and skills of community childcare providers	PWDC, Child Rights and Childcare Unit, MMK Women, PPBM, JKM	On-going

THRUST	ACTION	IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES	TIMEFRAME
	3.5.2 Conduct periodic reviews and provide continuous support to the PJKK/Taskom	Itinerant Team of ECCE Professionals	On-going from Q2 2013
	3.5.3 Conduct periodic checks and monitoring to ensure quality and safe care	Child Rights and Childcare Unit, JKM, ECCE Council	On-going
	3.6 Include provision of custom-designed childcare centres as a requirement for planning approval of low-cost housing	MMK Local Govt., MMK Housing and Planning, Local Authorities, PDC, ECCE Council (which is collaborating with Persatuan Akitek Malaysia to design such centres)	Q2 2013
	3.7 Assist parties interested in setting up community-based childcare centres to access Federal and State Governments' Grants	JKM, PWDC/State Child Rights and Childcare Unit	On going from Q3 2013
Improving Home-based Care	4.1 Enact regulations for the rationalization, monitoring and control of home-based childcare.	State Legal Advisor, UPEN, State Child Rights and Childcare Unit, MPPP, MPSP, JKM	Q1 2014
	4.2 Training:		
	4.2.1 Train home-based childcare providers in ECCE so that they can go beyond custodial care. At least 60 home-based childcare providers to be trained each year (See 1.7.1)	MMK Women, PWDC/State Child Rights and Childcare Unit, Trainers (Outsource to PPBM)	On-going
	4.2.2 Provide trained home-based childcare providers with starter kits and handholding for at least six months.	MMK Women, PWDC/State Child Rights and Childcare Unit, Trainers (Outsource to PPBM)	Q4 2014
	4.3 Certification and Registration:		
	4.3.1 Certify and register home-based childcare providers who have undergone training	JKM	On-going
	4.3.2 List registered home-based childcare providers on state childcare website	JKM, PWDC/State Child Rights and Childcare Unit	On-going
	4.4 Provide professional Support by Home Visitors	JKM and Home Visitors Team	On-going
	4.5 Ensure regular monitoring by JKM	JKM, State Child Rights and Childcare Unit	On-going
Assisting Private Childcare Service Sector	5.1 Inventory of Childcare Centres and Quality Assessment:		
	5.1.1. Conduct census of registered and unregistered childcare centres in the state	JKM, PWDC	On-going
	5.1.2 Display listing of registered childcare centres on JKM website to facilitate selection by parents (See 1.1 and 11.2)	JKM	On-going from Q3 2013
	5.2 Expedite Licensing of Childcare Centres:		
	5.2.1 Review and harmonize local council guidelines	PWDC, Local Government department, MPPP, MPSP	Q1 2013

THRUST	ACTION	IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES	TIMEFRAME
	5.2.2 Organize workshops to assist unlicensed operators in the application process	PWDC, JKM, MPPP, MPSP, BOMBA, State Health Dept	Q3 2013
	5.3 Implement Revised MHLG Guidelines:	MMK Local Government, MPPP, MPSP	
	5.3.1 Review and reduce conversion charges for childcare centres	MPPP, MPSP, JKM, PWDC	Q2 2013
	5.3.2 Establish a one-stop centre for approval and licensing. Ensure approval within 21 days if all requirements are fulfilled	PWDC, JKM, MPPP, MPSP, BOMBA, State Health Dept	Q3 2013
	5.3.3 Establish online mechanism for application of license for childcare centres	PWDC, Child Rights and Childcare Unit, JKM, MPPP, MPSP, BOMBA, State Health	Q3 2013
	5.4 Promote inclusiveness for children with special needs (See Action Plan item 1.6)		On-going

Timeline for Childcare Action Plan from 2013-2015

THRUST	ACTION/ACTIVITIES	TIME SCHEDULE												IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES
		2013				2014				2015				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
1. Ensuring Equitable Access to Safe and Quality Childcare	1.1 Compile a comprehensive list of childcare centres, operated by both private and public sectors, in the													PWDC to appoint Consultant for this task
	1.2 Undertake a mapping of the childcare centres by district and average income of the communities													Consultant/Volunteer, GIS Section of State Computer Unit
	1.3 Develop an incentive package to encourage operators to establish childcare centres in underserved													MMK Local Govt., MMK Women, MPPP, MPSP, SFO, UPEN
	1.4 Provide community-based childcare centres in low-income areas (To be elaborated on under Thrust 4)													
	1.5 Provide childcare allowance for low-income families to enrol their children in registered childcare centres. Special attention to begiven to single parent household.													MMK Local Govt., MMK Women, MPPP, MPSP, SFO, UPEN
	1.6 Promoting Inclusiveness													
	1.6.1 Conduct awareness and publicity campaigns to increase understanding and acceptance of inclusiveness													PWDC/State Child Rights and Childcare Unit, ACS, BOLD
	1.6.2 Develop an award and recognition scheme for childcare centres that practice inclusiveness													State Childcare Rights and Childcare Unit, ACS, BOLD
	1.7 Training													
	1.7.1 Organize subsidized training for childcare providers. At least 200 childcare providers to be trained each year													JKM, Outsource to professional trainers, e.g. PPBM
	1.7.2 Incorporate module on inclusive care for special children in all training courses													JKM, ACS, BOLD, PPBM
	1.7.3 Incorporate module on safety protocols for children in all training courses													JKM, WCC, PPBM
	1.8 Professional Support Teams													
	1.8.1 Establish itinerant teams of ECCE professionals to provide inputs to childcare centres.													JKM, SFO, UPEN, Ministry of Health
	1.8.2 Establish team of Home Visitors, led by JKM officers, to support and monitor certified home-based childcare providers													JKM, SFO, UPEN
	1.8.3 Establish itinerant teams of therapists (physiotherapist, occupational therapists and speech therapists), in collaboration with JKM, to service inclusive childcare centres, PDK, and special needs children in home-based care													ACS, BOLD, Penang Chapters of the Malaysian Assoc. of Speech and Hearing, Malaysian Occupational Therapy Assoc., Malaysian Physiotherapy Assoc., JKM, SFO, UPEN
	1.9 Monitoring: Periodic spot checks by JKM and regulatory bodies to ensure compliance with standards of care and regulatory requirements. Team to be constituted by Q3 2013													ECCE Council, certified ECCE professionals, JKM, BOMBA, State Health Dept., MPPP, MPSP
1.10 Develop a Child Protection Policy to be adopted by all childcare centres. Considers instituting online test for operators.													MMK Women, PWDC, WCC, JKM	

THRUST	ACTION/ACTIVITIES	TIME SCHEDULE												IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES	
		2013				2014				2015					
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
2. Increasing Workplace Childcare Centres	2.1 Review and revise regulations and guidelines to facilitate setting up of workplace childcare centres														MMK Local Govt., MMK Women, SUK, MPPP, MPSP, JKM, BOMBA, State
	2.2 Assist in setting up childcare centre in														PWDC, SUK, PDC, MPPP, JKM
	2.3 Conduct sector-based roadshows to showcase workplace childcare centres in the respective sectors														Chief Minister's Office, MMK Women, PWDC, Employers providing workplace childcare centres
	2.4 Identify potential new champions and incentivize them to provide														Chief Minister's Office, MMK Women, PWDC, PDC, UPEN, SFO, Identified
	2.5 Establish a shared childcare facility in or near one of the industrial areas in Penang as a showcase. State Government to provide capital cost, employers to subsidize operation cost. (The shared facility being established by MOHR and PPBM in Bangi can serve as a model)														Chief Minister's Office, MMK Women, State Child Rights and Childcare Unit, PDC, MPPP/MPSP UPEN, SFO, PPBM, Employers in the selected industrial area
3. Establishing Community-based Childcare Centres	3.1 Review existing state-sponsored PJJK/Taskom in Rifle Range and Taman Serumpun, with a view to improving service provision														
	3.2 Establish pilot PJJK/Taskom in PPR Jalan Sungei, PPR Ampangan and Taman Perda														MMK Women, PWDC, MPPP, MPSP, GRB Team, Communities in the
	3.3 Identify and establish Taskom in other low-income communities based on improved modality and lessons learnt from pilot PJJK/Taskom. At least 2 each year														MMK Women, State Child Rights and Childcare Unit, MPPP, MPSP, Communities in the areas concerned
	3.4 Mobilize and train members of the community to operate the PJJK/Taskom as an income-generating activity. The training to be followed up with close monitoring and handholding for at least six months														MMK Women, PWDC/State Child Rights and Childcare Unit, Trainers (Outsource to PPBM)
	3.5 Professional Support:														
	3.5.1 Provide continued training to upgrade the competency and skills of community childcare providers														PWDC, MMK Women, PPBM, JKM
	3.5.2 Conduct periodic reviews and provide continuous support to the PJJK/Taskom														Itinerant Team of ECCE Professionals
	3.5.3 Conduct periodic checks and monitoring to ensure quality and safe														JKM, ECCE Council
	3.6 Include provision of custom-designed childcare centres as a requirement for planning approval of low-cost housing														MMK Local Govt., MMK Housing and Planning, Local Authorities, PDC, ECCE Council (which is
	3.7 Assist parties interested in setting up community-based childcare centres to access Federal and State Governments' Grants														JKM, PWDC/State Child Rights and Childcare Unit

THRUST	ACTION/ACTIVITIES	TIME SCHEDULE												IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES
		2013				2014				2015				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
4. Improving Home-based Care	4.1 Enact regulations for the rationalization, monitoring and control of home-based childcare.													State Legal Advisor, UPEN, State Child Rights and Childcare Unit, MPPP, MPSP, JKM
	4.2 Training													
	4.2.1 Train home-based childcare providers in ECCE so that they can go beyond custodial care (Refer to item													MMK Women, PWDC/State Child Rights and Childcare Unit, Trainers (Outsource to PPBM)
	4.2.2 Provide trained home-based childcare providers with starter kits and handholding for at least six months.													Child Rights and Childcare Unit, Trainers (Outsource to PPBM)
	4.3 Certification and Registration													
	4.3.1 Certify and register home-based childcare providers who have undergone training													JKM
	4.3.2 List registered home-based childcare providers on state childcare website													JKM, PWDC/State Child Rights and Childcare Unit
	4.4 Provide professional Support by Home Visitors													JKM and Home Visotors team
	4.5 Ensure regular monitoring by JKM													JKM, State Child Rights and Childcare Unit
5. Assisting Private Childcare Service Sector	5.1 Inventory of Childcare Centres and Quality Assessment													
	5.1.1. Conduct census of registered and unregistered childcare centres in the state													JKM, PWDC
	5.1.2 Display listing of registered childcare centres on JKM website to facilitate selection by parents (see													JKM
	5.2 Expedite Licensing of Childcare Centres:													
	5.2.1 Review and harmonize local council guidelines perspective													PWDC, Local Government department, MPPP, MPSP
	5.2.2 Organize workshops to assist unlicensed operators in the application process													PWDC, JKM, MPPP, MPSP, BOMBA, State Health Dept
	5.3 Implement Revised MHLG Guidelines:													MMK Local Government, MPPP, MPSP
	5.3.1 Review and reduce conversion charges for childcare centres													MPPP, MPSP, JKM, PWDC
	5.3.2 Establish a one-stop centre for approval and licensing. Ensure approval within 21 days if all requirements are fulfilled													PWDC, JKM, MPPP, MPSP, BOMBA, State Health Dept
	5.3.3 Establish online mechanism for application of license for childcare centres													PWDC, JKM, MPPP, MPSP, BOMBA, State Health Dept
	5.4 Promote inclusiveness for children with special needs (See Action Plan item 1.6)													

NATIONAL POLICY FOR CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

Children are an important part of society. They are the nation's assets and future pulse of the nation's development. In 2008, there were a total of 10.5 million (37.9%) children out of a population of 27.7 million people.¹ Therefore, the government is concerned about the well-being and interests of children.

In this regard, Malaysia ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on 17 February 1995. This convention focuses on the welfare and life of children with emphasis on the aspects of survival, protection, development and participation. As a state party to the CRC, Malaysia is most concerned and committed to the responsibility of ensuring the safety and well-being of children who are the nation's future generation of leaders.

The importance of children is clearly evidenced in the Vision 2020 statement where the institution of family and children constitutes one of the priority areas in the nation's pursuit of developed country status besides producing an equitable and caring society.

DEFINITION

A child is defined as a person under the age of 18 years as stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Child Act 2001.

POLICY STATEMENT

The National Policy for Children is a policy on children's rights to survival, protection, development, and participation so they may enjoy the opportunity and space to achieve holistic development in a conducive environment.

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

The National Policy for Children is aimed at producing individuals who are healthy, fit, knowledgeable, innovative, creative, competitive and progressive as well as who possess personal identity and noble values.

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the National Policy for Children are to ensure that:

1. each child has the right to life with the provision of care, nurturing, love, health services, support services and social aid;
2. each child including a child with disabilities has the right to be protected from any form of neglect, abuse, violence and exploitation; and subsequently provided with rehabilitation and integration into the family and society;
3. each child has the right to holistic development in terms of physical, cognitive, linguistic, socio-emotional, personality and spiritual development;

¹—Source: Department of Statistics of Malaysia, 2008

4. each child has the right to self-expression, to participate and to be involved in matters that are related to his or her best interests and well-being;
5. children, parents, guardians, communities and society are aware of the rights of children to survival, protection, development and participation; and
6. research and development on the survival, protection, development and participation of children are carried out from time to time.

STRATEGIES

The strategies to achieve the abovementioned objectives are as follows:

Objective 1

Survival

1. To provide basic needs such as identity, shelter, food, water, clothing, love, security and a conducive and child-friendly environment
2. To enhance co-operation between government agencies, NGOs, the private sector and the local community in healthcare, safety and education in order to safeguard the well-being and welfare of children
3. To enhance the quality and extend support services and social aid in accordance with the needs of children, including children with disabilities and orphans
4. To extend access to appropriate information and materials from various sources to enable children to acquire the knowledge and skills to survive
5. To ensure that children obtain social security protection

Objective 2

Protection

1. To increase training for all parties who work with children so that they have sufficient knowledge, qualifications, skills and a positive attitude to handle cases of neglect, abuse, violence and exploitation against children
2. To provide care, protection and rehabilitation services to children who are victims of torture, neglect, abuse, violence and exploitation or uncontrollable children as well as to provide rehabilitative treatment for child offenders
3. To provide protection for victims, complainants and their families from harassment or threats from certain parties
4. To ensure that children are accorded the right to legal and support services
5. To provide support to high-risk families so that the children in these families can enjoy their rights
6. To ensure that all parties dealing with or providing services to children formulate their respective child protection policies and protocols and implement them
7. To formulate specific programmes for street children, children without documents, drop-outs, children who are involved in drug addiction and children in critical situations and other difficult circumstances
8. To ensure that child victims of disasters receive proper treatment for rehabilitation, development and reintegration into society
9. To ensure that child victims of sexual exploitation (including child trafficking, sex tourism, child pornography) and trafficking are provided with protection, rehabilitation and reintegration into society or repatriated to their country of origin

10. To establish an early warning system and to strengthen the child protection mechanism at national and international levels
11. To promote the provision of a healthy and safe environment for children

Objective 3

Development

1. To enhance quality, accessible and affordable child care services and education in a conducive environment to stimulate the optimum development of children
2. To provide child-friendly infrastructure facilities and environment
3. To expand specific programmes and facilities for the development of children with disabilities in all aspects such as early detection and intervention, rehabilitation, education and reintegration into society
4. To provide continuous assistance, training and monitoring to ensure children receive high quality nurturing, care and education

Objective 4

Participation

1. To ensure that children are given access to quality information and appropriate materials from various sources to enable them to participate in activities related to their concerns
2. To encourage the mass media and the private sector to disseminate appropriate and quality information
3. To encourage children to express their opinions and views responsibly and ethically as input in the formulation of programmes for them or programmes related to their interests

Objective 5

Advocacy

1. To increase awareness among families and society of the importance of healthcare for children
2. To increase awareness among families and society of the equal rights of children from any form of discrimination
3. To strengthen existing programmes and to introduce suitable programmes to prevent neglect, abuse, violence and exploitation against children
4. To increase awareness of parents, guardians and members of society of the importance of early childhood education and care
5. To increase awareness and understanding of all relevant parties of the rights, well-being and interests of children

Objective 6

Research and Development

1. To increase research and development in the field of child development and to disseminate research findings for the purpose of improvement

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT FINANCIAL PROVISIONS FOR CHILDCARE

The Federal Government, via the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development provides the following grants and financial assistance for childcare:

1. Public Sector:

- Government departments and agencies are eligible for grants of RM80,000 for the renovation and furnishing of childcare centres set up with their premises.
- A monthly subsidy of RM180 per child is available for government servants with salaries below RM2,000 a month to send their children to these centres.

2. Private Sector:

- Private sector employers are eligible for a 10% tax exemption for 10 years on the cost of building childcare centres at the workplace.

3. Community Childcare Centres:

- Parties interested in setting up community childcare centres are eligible for a grant up RM55,000.
- Families who send their children to these community childcare centres can receive a monthly grant of RM180 per child if their income is below RM2,000 for those living in urban areas and RM1,200 for those living in rural areas.