

# Protect, Promote and Prevent

*“Spearheading Social Protection Initiatives for All”*

SWRC SOCIAL PROTECTION BULLETIN



PUSAT PENYELIDIKAN KESEJAHTERAAN SOSIAL  
Social Wellbeing Research Centre (SWRC)

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## The Perspective

# Strengthening Social Work in Malaysia: Institution, Professionalism, Sustainability

**S**ocial workers play a vital role in safeguarding society's wellbeing and guaranteeing sustained socioeconomic development. Economic growth often generates complex socioeconomic challenges that individuals cannot resolve in isolation. Without continuous, professional social work intervention, these problems will intensify and directly threaten both individual health and national progress. Malaysia's future development requires a strong, professional and institutionalised social work sector.

Despite Malaysia's rapid economic growth, the nation faces increasingly complex socioeconomic challenges, including:

- Ageing population
- Child abuse
- Domestic violence
- Mental health issues
- Substance abuse
- Family instability
- Migration and urban poverty

High professional standards and a sufficient workforce are essential for any successful social work intervention. Currently, Malaysia faces a critical shortage of public social workers to meet escalating demands. While NGOs and the commercial sector partially bridge this gap, their uncoordinated efforts result in fragmented service delivery. This fragmentation underscores the urgent need for systemic reforms within Malaysia's social work framework to sustain national growth effectively.

Global literature defines social work as a coordinated, professional process of preventing and resolving social problems through evidence-based, supportive, and systemic interventions to enhance wellbeing.

Table 1 summarises its scope.



Table 1: Dimensions and Scope of Social Work

Professional practice	Institutional function	Assessment and intervention	Resource mobilization	System strengthening	Wellbeing and inclusion
Recognises trained social workers and standards	Social work operates through agencies, policies, and systems	Core daily activities	Links clients to services and supports	Includes advocacy and policy work	Identifies intended outcomes

Beyond counselling, social work includes evidence-based practice, preventive, institutional support, quantifiable results, and policy work. Psychology, sociology, politics, criminology, economics, ecology, education, health, law, philosophy, anthropology, and psychotherapy are among the disciplines it draws on.

A systemic perspective, rather than merely an individual focus, is necessary for effective social work. Professional competence, institutional support, access to resources, integrated systems, and client involvement are all necessary for success.

### Social Work Issues in Malaysia

Malaysia’s social work sector still lags behind high-performing systems in both staffing and institutionalisation. To fulfil its role,

foundational issues like professionalisation, institutional support, and system integration must be addressed. Table 2 summarises the main challenges Malaysia faces in elevating the impact of social work.

In conclusion, strengthening social work as a professional, institutionalised sector is not only important but essential to Malaysia’s sustained socioeconomic development. Only by prioritising its progress can Malaysia hope to address increasingly complex societal challenges and build a better, fairer future. This demonstrates unambiguously that professional social work is a bedrock of national progress.

*-Chief Editor-*

Table 2: Issues and Challenges Related to Social Work in Malaysia

 <h4>Weak professional recognition and regulation</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unclear professional identity</li> <li>• Inconsistent standards</li> <li>• Varied practitioner competency</li> <li>• Weak licensing structure</li> <li>• Public misunderstanding of social work roles</li> </ul>	 <h4>Public vs NGO dependence</h4> <p>Many vulnerable populations rely heavily on NGOs and civil society organisation for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shelters</li> <li>• Migrant support</li> <li>• Domestic violence services</li> <li>• Refugee services</li> <li>• Disability support</li> </ul>
 <h4>Shortage of trained social workers</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High caseloads</li> <li>• Burnout</li> <li>• Diminished ongoing support</li> <li>• Crisis-oriented practice</li> <li>• Staff turnover</li> </ul>	 <h4>Administrative burden and welfare orientation</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paperwork</li> <li>• Eligibility processing</li> <li>• Reporting</li> <li>• Administrative tasks</li> </ul>
 <h4>Fragmentation across agencies</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development</li> <li>• Department of Social Welfare (JKM)</li> <li>• Ministry of Health</li> <li>• Schools</li> <li>• Hospitals</li> <li>• Anti-drug agencies</li> <li>• NGOs</li> <li>• Religious organizations</li> </ul>	 <h4>Education and competency inconsistency</h4> <p>The need for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standardised curricula</li> <li>• Competency frameworks</li> <li>• Continuing professional development</li> <li>• Stronger regulation of qualifications</li> </ul>
 <h4>Limited preventive orientation</h4> <p>Intervention begins only when a crisis occurs</p>	 <h4>Public understanding remains limited</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social workers are often misunderstood as:</li> <li>• Charity workers</li> <li>• Welfare officers</li> <li>• Volunteers /Aid distributors</li> </ul>

# Why Malaysia Can No Longer Wait to Professionalise Social Work

by: Haniza Khalid and Norma Mansor

**W**hen a child is removed from an abusive home, a woman flees a violent partner, or a family is shattered by addiction, who is there to help? In an ideal world, a trained social worker stands at the centre of support, assessing risk, intervening in crisis, and protecting the vulnerable.

The numbers tell a sobering story. Between 2020 and 2022, the Department of Social Welfare recorded 18,750 child abuse cases. The Health Ministry's mental health hotline received 24,346 calls in just eight months of 2023. Domestic violence reports shot up by 35 per cent between 2020 and 2024.

Yet Malaysia's social worker-to-population ratio stands at 1:8,576, far behind Singapore's 1:3,448 and Australia's 1:1,040. Data presented to Parliament shows that in 2022, JKM had only 3,790 officers engaged in social work nationwide. That's 1,658 social welfare officers, 1,661 probation officers, and 471 anti-trafficking officers attempting to cover the entire country.

Clearly, they cannot be everywhere. This is why social workers outside government, in NGOs, private hospitals, and independent practice, are so indispensable. But unlike their government counterparts, these practitioners operate in a vacuum. Research has consistently found that many NGO social workers lack access to proper supervision, formal training, and clear career pathways. Burnout and turnover are rampant.

It is time to fix this. The Social Workers Profession Bill (RUU PKS), in development since 2010, is almost ready for tabling in Parliament. Its purpose is straightforward: create a legal framework to register, regulate, and elevate social work as a profession.



## How Would it Work?

The Bill will establish a Social Work Profession Council with four core functions: registration and certification; training and development; competency standards; and disciplinary accountability. A public register will protect the title "social worker," restricting it to those with recognised qualifications, including supervised practicum hours.

This isn't a new idea. Other countries are already doing it. Hong Kong's Social Workers Registration Board, South Australia's SWRB, the Scottish Social Services Council, and Social Work England all show how regulation protects the public while raising the profession's standing.

## What About Professional Associations?

Some may worry that this diminishes the role of bodies like the Malaysian Association of Social Workers (MASW). Not at all. They serve different purposes. Associations provide networking, mentoring, and advocacy, giving social workers a collective voice. But an association's ethics process only covers its members. They cannot do what only a statutory body can: regulate the entire profession, investigate all practitioners, and impose enforceable sanctions – including removal from the register.

## Why Focus on Private Practitioners?

The Bill's immediate focus is on private sector practitioners and public servants who engage in social work outside their official government duties and for good reason. While government social workers operate within departmental hierarchies, performance evaluations, and disciplinary mechanisms, private practitioners lack such an accountability infrastructure. Their oversight is unclear, inconsistent, or absent.

Private practitioners often face two hurdles: little incentive and limited resources to pursue training. While many professional development programmes, such as those from Institut Sosial Malaysia, are accessible to them, participation remains voluntary and inconsistent without mandatory registration. Registration would change that by making professional development a requirement, ensuring consistent standards across all sectors.



## What About Government Social Workers?

The Bill permits public officers to volunteer for registration, creating a pathway for those who wish to meet professional standards beyond their departmental requirements. More importantly, it creates pathways for KPWKM to work with agencies like MoH and AADK to enhance their competency frameworks. Institut Sosial Malaysia is already developing National Competency Standards for Social Work Practice, due by 2027, a critical step toward increasing the number of qualified government social workers. The urgency is clear: for example, currently only 26.6 per cent of JKM's social work staff hold recognised qualifications.

The Bill provides the framework, but agencies themselves must own this process, not least to ensure their specialised expertise, whether in medical social work, addiction counselling, or child protection, remains intact as they move toward professional benchmarks.

## The Bigger Picture

The Bill would also enable the government to gather, for the first time, comprehensive data on where social workers practise and where needs remain unmet. This enables targeted interventions, scholarships for underserved regions, incentives for high-need specialisations, and collaboration with universities to align training with demand.

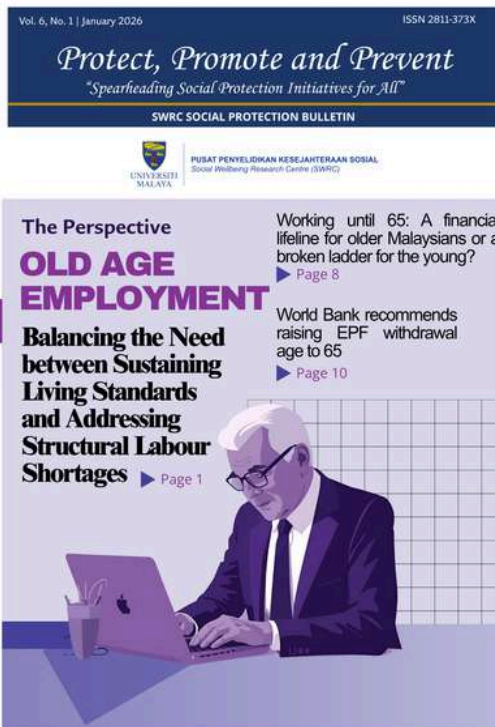
Social workers have long played quiet, unsung roles in people's lives. It's time their work received the recognition it deserves. Fourteen years is long enough. Though passing this Bill won't solve every challenge overnight, it can lay the essential groundwork: a registered, regulated, and respected profession, accountable to the public and equipped to serve a society that urgently needs them.

## Bulletin Showcase

**SEE ALSO>>** *Our previous work related to this **Perspective***

# Old Age Employment: Balancing the Need between Sustaining Living Standards and Addressing Structural Labour Shortages

Vol. 6, No. 1, 2026



For more information, please visit:

[https://umcms.um.edu.my/sites/social-wellbeing-research-centre%20swrc/bulletin/SWRC%20Social%20Protection%20Bulletin%20Vol.%205%2C%20No.%201%20\(January%202025\).pdf](https://umcms.um.edu.my/sites/social-wellbeing-research-centre%20swrc/bulletin/SWRC%20Social%20Protection%20Bulletin%20Vol.%205%2C%20No.%201%20(January%202025).pdf)

## SUMMARY

Malaysia's transition into an ageing society presents increasingly complex economic and social challenges, particularly in ensuring retirement adequacy, sustaining labour market resilience and strengthening long-term social protection systems. This volume highlights the need to rethink traditional approaches to ageing by recognising older persons not merely as beneficiaries of support, but as valuable contributors to society and the economy. Through discussions on retirement security, labour force participation, pension reform and healthcare sustainability, the issue underscores the importance of adaptive and forward-looking policies. By promoting active ageing, strengthening protection systems and investing in sustainable reforms, Malaysia can transform demographic change into an opportunity for greater wellbeing, productivity and inclusive development.



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**Policy Brief 1**

# Health Capacity to Work among Older Malaysians

SWRC Policy Brief Series 2025  
by Norma Mansor, Halimah Awang & Donghyun Park

## Abstract

This paper explored the extent to which greater labour force participation among older Malaysians can expand Malaysia's labour supply. The Milligan–Wise (MW) method estimates the potential to increase the labour force participation rate of older Malaysians by estimating how much they would work if they were to work as much as those with the same mortality rate in the past. The Cutler, Meara, and Richards-Shubik (CMR) method estimates the same potential by measuring how much older Malaysians would work if they worked as much as their younger counterparts in similar health conditions. Simulations were performed to quantify the work capacity of older Malaysians after age 60. The results indicate a significant increase in work capacity among older people in Malaysia, particularly among males, urban dwellers, and those with lower educational attainment.

## Introduction

Malaysia is experiencing a demographic transition with a steady increase in the size and proportion of its older population. To address the short- and long-term challenges of population ageing, Malaysia needs to build sound and sustainable socioeconomic, health, and social care systems. Improved -

- health is likely to enhance the quality of life and increase the productive capacity of older persons. A longer working life benefits the wellbeing of older persons through income security, continued social participation and contribution to society, and self-fulfilment. Greater labour force participation among older workers can help mitigate the shortage of workers and other challenges related to population ageing (Lai and Yip 2022).

Many factors affect the capacity of older individuals to work, with health-related factors being the most influential. This study investigates the health capacity to work and explores the potential for increased labour force participation among older Malaysians. Health capacity to work can be defined as the incremental years of working life brought about by improved health status. We estimated an individual's ability to work at older ages based on the relationship between mortality and employment that existed at an earlier time, along with current mortality data in Malaysia. We also examined to what extent older persons in Malaysia with a given level of health could work if they were to work as much as their younger counterparts with a similar level of health across key socio-demographic variables.

### Data Description

Malaysia's Labor Force Survey (LFS) and mortality rates data in 2000 and 2019 were used to compare the employment-mortality curves for the two years for both men and women, respectively. In addition, the study used a subsample of the Malaysia Ageing and Retirement Survey (MARS), a national longitudinal study of individuals aged 40 and older in which the first wave was conducted in 2018 and the second wave in 2020. MARS wave 1 successfully interviewed 5,613 respondents using a computer-assisted personal interview, of which a subsample of 3,890 individuals aged 50-79 years was used for analyses.

### Methodology

Two methodologies were employed, Milligan-Wise (MW) and Cutler, Meara, and Richards-Shubik (CMR) methods. The MW method estimated the potential work capacity based on historical employment rates and current mortality data, while the CMR method assessed work capacity by -



- comparing older individuals' employment to that of their younger counterparts with similar health. Linear probability model and binary logistic regression analysis were then performed to identify significant factors influencing the likelihood of older Malaysians to work.

### Key Findings

Estimates show that in 2019, the 1-year mortality rate for men aged 65 was 23.4 per thousand, with a labour force participation rate of 16.5%. If 65-year-old males had the same employment rate as in 2000, their participation would be 36.5% higher. For women, the 1-year mortality rate at age 65 was 15 per thousand, with a labour force participation rate of 4%. If 65-year-old females had the same participation rate as in 2000, it would be 13.5% higher. Hence, men aged 57 to 69 could work an additional 3.36 years, while women could work an additional 1.09 years.

Analyses of MARS data revealed key determinants of work capacity included individual characteristics, self-reported health, functional limitations, and chronic health conditions and that diagnosed illnesses negatively impact work capacity, particularly for men. Married men are more likely to work than unmarried men; however, men with diagnosed illnesses, such as hypertension and depression, are less likely to work.

For women, those married are less likely to work than unmarried women and women with at least a postsecondary education are more likely to work compared to those with secondary education or below. Women and married individuals in urban areas are less likely to work compared to their male and unmarried counterparts. The actual working capacity in urban areas is lower than in rural areas, with urban workers showing a gradual increase in additional working capacity with age. Among respondents with at most an elementary education, women and married individuals are less likely to -

- work. Additionally, smoking is positively associated with work capacity among older individuals, particularly those with elementary education.

### Policy Recommendations

Using labour force participation rates and mortality rates data, this study showed that the cumulative additional working capacity was higher for men than for women. The additional capacity for women started to improve as age increased to 60 and older, which suggests that women might be more affected by the mandatory retirement age than men and that besides health, other factors could influence a woman's decision to continue working beyond retirement.

Examining the association between the predictors and employment status, the results showed that health and marital status were influential determining factors of the likelihood to work among men, regardless of their education level. A high proportion of the men work in the informal sector and for as long as their health permits, they will continue to work due to family commitment. For women, being married was negatively associated with the likelihood to work, while age and educational attainment showed positive influence. Traditionally, many married women consider themselves homemakers and caregivers. However, such domestic work is not given its due recognition.

Hence, there is a need to recognise participation in domestic work as a form of labour participation. Additional work capacity is higher in urban areas because rural residents often work at their physical limit, resulting in a higher actual work capacity driven by the informal sector. Furthermore, the higher cost of living in cities necessitates dual-income households, contributing to this urban-rural disparity.

The study calls for policy changes to enhance employment opportunities for older Malaysians.

- There is a need for incentives for employers to create flexible work arrangements for older workers.
- Addressing workplace discrimination and ageism is essential to leverage the skills and experience of older individuals.
- Policymakers should recognise domestic work, which includes caregiving, as a form of labour participation, particularly for women.

### Conclusion

Evidence from this study raises questions as to whether Malaysia's labour market provides opportunities for older people to work or if it is too rigid to cater to workers' needs for greater flexibility. Older workers may prefer more flexible working hours, but may not necessarily mind longer working hours. Some may look for more meaningful jobs. A key issue is whether there exists workplace discrimination against older workers in addition to ageism, even as the skills and experience of older people can contribute to the productivity of firms and industries. Policymakers must seek to provide incentives for employers to provide opportunities and more flexible work.



Policy Brief 2

# Cognitive Functioning among Older Adults in Selected Countries : In Search of a Better Way to Remeasure Population Ageing

SWRC Policy Brief Series 2025

by Naohiro Ogawa, Taiyo Fukai, Norma Mansor\* & Nurul Diyana Kamarulzaman

**Abstract**

One of the study's objectives was to apply a new indicator, the cognition-adjusted dependency ratio (CADR), to re-measure the level of population ageing in Japan and four other Asian countries: China, India, Malaysia, and Thailand. The new index was computed using the mean age-group-specific immediate recall scores, and the results were compared with those derived from the United States and other European countries. The analysis showed that Japan's pattern and level of age-related decline in cognitive functioning are highly comparable to those of many developed nations, particularly in Continental Europe. Among the other Asian countries, cognitive functioning for Malaysia shows a similar downward trend to countries in Southern Europe, although Malaysia has slightly lower scores than Southern Europe in all age groups. More importantly, the results based on CADR emphasised the need for refined approaches to studying ageing and cognition.

**Introduction**

Population ageing is becoming increasingly significant worldwide, with implications for economic and social systems. Since the 1960s, global and Asia's population growth have slowed due to declining fertility rates and there have been dramatic changes to the population age structure. The -

- proportion of Asia's population aged 65 and over in the world's older population increased from 44% in 1950 to 57% in 2020, projected to reach 62% by 2050, with Japan having the highest proportion of individuals aged 65 and over (United Nations 2019). Asia's total dependency ratio peaked at 0.81 in 1966 and fell to 0.47 in 2015, indicating demographic shifts. However, there have been substantial inter-country differences in the trends and levels of population ageing within Asia in the past several decades (Lee and Mason 2011, Ogawa et al. 2021).

Conventional demographic indicators for measuring ageing such as age dependency ratio rely solely on chronological age, failing to account for cognitive abilities which could affect policymaking. This study explored a new approach incorporating cognitive variation into dependency ratios among older adults to better measure population ageing across Asia, in particular, Japan and four other Asian countries namely India, China, Thailand and Malaysia.

**Data Description**

The study employed multiple datasets to analyse cognitive abilities and their determinants among older adults in the five Asian countries. The datasets -

- included Japanese Study on Aging and Retirement (JSTAR); China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS), the Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI) Pilot Survey; the Health, Aging and Retirement Thailand (HART) and Malaysia Ageing and Retirement Survey (MARS). Core questionnaires of these studies cover demographics, health status, chronic illnesses, lifestyle behaviours, cognitive testing and economic factors. Cognitive tests included immediate and delayed word recall tasks, verbal fluency, numeric ability, and basic computation.

### Methodology

The new metric for assessing population ageing introduced in this study incorporated cognitive functioning as suggested by Skirbekk, Loichinger, and Weber (2012). Cognitive functioning is critical for maintaining independence and making informed decisions in older adults. Cognitive processes include thinking, knowing, remembering, judging, and problem-solving. The study focused on immediate word recall as a key measure of cognitive functioning among older adults across the five Asian countries and compared with Western nations. In addition, the study employed the cognition-adjusted dependency ratio (CADR) to measure population ageing. CADR is based on mean agegroup-specific immediate recall scores from these countries. Subsequently regression models were performed on adults aged 50-79 to examine the relationship between cognitive abilities and demographic, socioeconomic, and psychosocial factors.



### Key Findings

Mean age-group-specific immediate recall scores decline with age in all five countries. Japan has the highest scores among Asian countries until the 70-74 age group, while India shows lower scores for older age groups. The cognitive performance of Thailand is the lowest among the five Asian countries, particularly in the 60-64 age group. Japan's CADR (0.22) is higher than the US (0.10) and Northern Europe (0.12), but comparable to Continental Europe (0.18) which include Austria, France, Germany and Switzerland. Malaysia follows a similar pattern of change to countries in Southern Europe (Greece, Italy, and Spain), although Malaysia has slightly lower scores than Southern Europe in all age groups. The results highlight significant differences between CADR and traditional dependency ratios, suggesting a need for new ageing metrics.

The study identified various factors associated with cognitive performance among older adults in five Asian countries. Age, education, self-rated health, and marital status are significant predictors of immediate recall scores. Education and good health are highly and positively associated with cognitive performance, while age negatively impacts cognitive abilities. Gender differences in cognitive performance were observed, with women generally performing better than men in most countries and that married older adults score higher in immediate word recall than their nonmarried respondents.

### Policy Recommendations

The study explored a new approach which incorporated cognitive functioning into age-dependency ratios to measure the level of population ageing in a society which could shed a different light on policy-oriented research on ageing. The inter-country comparisons based on cognition-adjusted dependency ratios were found to be substantially different from the conventional old-age dependency ratios suggesting the need for refined approaches to studying ageing and cognition.

While mean age-group-specific immediate recall scores decline with age in all five countries, there were variations demographic and socio-economic factors. The study explored the long-term effects of health and education on cognitive performance. Excellent health and higher education levels were associated with better cognitive functioning in later life. The findings provided evidence of the enduring impact of healthy lifestyle and educational attainment on cognitive health and highlighted the importance of promoting healthy living and lifelong learning to acquire new knowledge and skills for older adults. The study highlighted the need for policies addressing gender inequality in education and health.

Another finding is the significance of marriage on cognitive functioning, married older persons have higher cognitive abilities than those never married. The findings highlighted the protective effects of social bonds on cognitive health. In view of the recent gradual shift from universal marriage to lifetime singlehood in Japan and other Asian countries, policymakers and researchers should pay more attention to Asia's changing marriage patterns in the years to come, particularly from a standpoint of cognitive performance among older adults. Overall, the findings have implications for improving cognitive health among older adults.

**Conclusion**

The study introduced a new index, cognition-adjusted dependency ratio using the mean age-group-specific immediate word recall scores among older adults were computed and compared across five Asian countries namely Japan, China, India, Malaysia and Thailand. Comparisons were also made between these countries and the US as well as developed European nations. The inter-country comparisons based on cognition adjusted dependency ratio results were found to be different from the conventional old-age dependency ratios. Hence there is a need to raise awareness on innovative approaches to remeasure population ageing for formulation of more efficient and effective policies to cope with rapid population ageing in both developed and developing nations.



*Ruangan Bahasa Melayu*

Lensa Jaringan Keselamatan Sosial

## Masa depan kerja sosial di Malaysia

*Diterbitkan di Sinar Harian pada 23 April 2026 oleh Haniza Khalid dan Norma Mansor*

**M**alaysia kini berdepan peningkatan ketara dalam isu sosial seperti penderaan kanak-kanak, masalah kesihatan mental dan keganasan rumah tangga.

Statistik menunjukkan puluhan ribu kes dilaporkan dalam beberapa tahun kebelakangan ini, sekali gus menuntut peranan lebih besar daripada pekerja sosial terlatih dalam melindungi golongan rentan.

Namun, nisbah pekerja sosial di negara ini masih rendah berbanding negara maju, menyebabkan beban tugas yang tinggi dan menjejaskan kualiti perkhidmatan sosial.

Kekurangan tenaga kerja dalam sektor awam khususnya di Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM) menjadikan penglibatan sektor bukan kerajaan seperti NGO, swasta dan pengamal bebas satu keperluan mendesak.

Bagaimanapun, pekerja sosial di luar sektor kerajaan berdepan cabaran besar kerana ketiadaan rangka kerja perundangan yang jelas.

Mereka sering beroperasi tanpa garis panduan kompetensi, latihan yang diiktiraf atau sokongan profesional yang mencukupi, sekali gus mewujudkan ketidaktentuan dalam kerjaya dan kualiti perkhidmatan.

Sehubungan itu, sudah tiba masanya kerja sosial di Malaysia diangkat sebagai profesion bertauliah dan diiktiraf setaraf dengan bidang profesional lain.

Rang Undang-Undang Profesion Pekerja Sosial (RUU PKS) yang telah lama dirangka, perlu segera dibentangkan dan diluluskan.





SWRC In the News

## My Say: Expedite the tabling of the social work profession bill

*as featured in The Edge on 23 Apr 2026, written by Hanizā Khalid and Norma Mansor*

“

Malaysia faces a stark social reality. As social challenges grow more complex, the demand for qualified and supported social workers continues to rise. Yet the profession remains inadequately recognised and structurally fragmented. Burnout is increasing, caseloads continue expanding and professional standards remain inconsistent. Strengthening the profession is no longer optional—it is necessary for building a resilient and responsive social protection system.”

### Key Facts

- 18,750 child abuse cases recorded by JKM between 2020–2022
- 24,346 mental health hotline calls received by MoH from January–August 2023
- Domestic violence reports increased 35% between 2020–2024
- Growing caseloads and burnout continue affecting social workers nationwide.

”

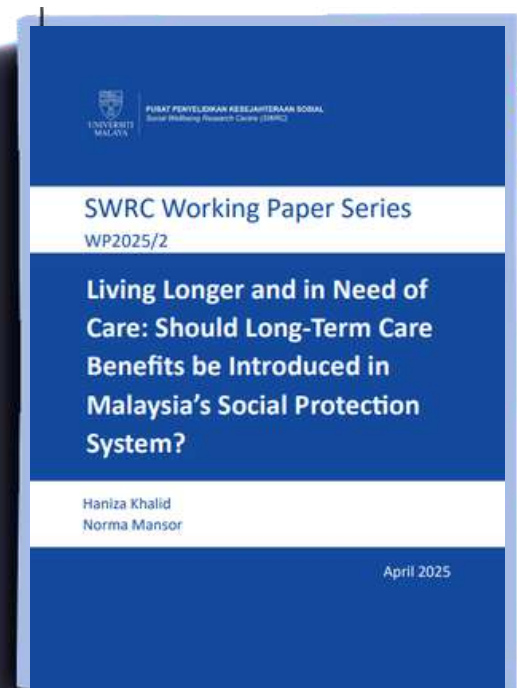
## Featured Working Paper Series

# Living Longer and in Need of Care: Should Long-Term Care Benefits be Introduced in Malaysia's Social Protection System?

Malaysia is ageing rapidly due to falling fertility rates and rising life expectancy, yet its social protection system lacks adequate long-term care (LTC) provisions. Most elderly people face high out-of-pocket costs, as government homes are limited, private LTC insurance is unavailable, and EPF savings are largely insufficient. Income and gender inequalities worsen the problem: poorer older adults have worse health, while women have lower savings, longer lifespans, and bear most unpaid caregiving.

Using health data, the paper shows Malaysians spend about 4.5 years in poor health before death, with women faring worse. Non-communicable diseases like diabetes, heart disease, and dementia drive LTC needs. International examples (Sweden, Japan, Singapore, US) offer models from tax-funded systems to mandatory social insurance.

The authors recommend that Malaysia introduce a dedicated LTC social insurance scheme, leveraging existing institutions like EPF and SOCSO for fund management and disability assessment. The goal is affordable, dignified care for older persons without impoverishing families, while promoting intergenerational equity.



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# Activities and Gallery

Highlights of SWRC's Activities from Jan - May 2026



## UNICEF CHILDCARE AVAILABILITY FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

→ The study incorporates Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) as a qualitative component to complement the spatial and administrative analysis of childcare availability in Malaysia. While secondary data helps identify geographic gaps, the FGDs are designed to capture lived experiences, perceptions, and behavioural responses related to childcare availability, affordability, quality, and accessibility.

The FGDs target four key groups: general parents and guardians, non-working mothers, working mothers, and care providers. This segmentation allows for systematic comparison across groups with differing childcare needs and labour market attachment. The discussions are semi-structured and organised around five core themes: background characteristics, access and affordability of childcare, work-family balance, quality and expectations of services, and perceptions of government and community support.

Sessions are conducted in accessible venues, last approximately 60–90 minutes, and are audio-recorded with participants' consent. Thematic analysis is used to identify recurring patterns and mechanisms not observable in administrative data alone, such as trust, cultural preferences, and reliance on informal care. Findings are triangulated with quantitative results to refine policy interpretation.



## 10-12 FEBRUARY 2026: FUNDAMENTALS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION (FSP)

→ The Fundamentals in Social Protection (FSP) course, held from 10–12 February 2026 at Wyndham Grand, Bangsar, marked a significant milestone in SWRC's ongoing efforts to strengthen Malaysia's social protection ecosystem. Bringing together professionals from key institutions, the course created a dynamic and collaborative environment for knowledge exchange, critical dialogue, and capacity building.

Over the three-day intensive programme, participants were exposed to a multidisciplinary curriculum that combined theoretical foundations with practical applications. Expert speakers from SWRC, EPF, UNICEF, Universiti Malaya, SEACEN, and the Life Insurance Association Malaysia enriched the sessions with evidence-based insights and global perspectives. Key topics included social protection frameworks, comparative pension systems, ageing and longevity risk, labour market productivity, financial planning, and insurance planning.

What set this course apart was its ability to foster cross-sectoral engagement. Participants from academia, government agencies, and financial institutions engaged in meaningful discussions, shared institutional experiences, and worked collaboratively on group discussions and presentations. This not only deepened their technical understanding but also laid the groundwork for potential inter-agency partnerships moving forward.



## 7 APRIL 2026: ENDURING TODAY SHAPING TOMORROW

→ The Employees Provident Fund (KWSP EPF) hosted a report publication and panel session titled "Enduring Today, Shaping Tomorrow: Akaun Fleksibel as a Financial Lifeline for Wellbeing." The event began with opening remarks from EPF, followed by a presentation of key report findings, a panel discussion, and a question-and-answer segment.

The panel session featured Hawati Abdul Hamid, Head of the Social Policy Research Section at EPF, as both presenter and panellist. She was joined by Dr Christopher Choong Weng Wai, Deputy Director of Research at the Khazanah Research Institute. The session was moderated by Dr Muhammad Alzat Zainal Alam, Deputy Director of Research at the Social Wellbeing Research Centre. Financial literacy advocate Suraya Zainudin, founder of Ringgit Oh Ringgit, was also highlighted as a participant in the discussion.

The central focus of the session was the role of EPF's Akaun Fleksibel as a financial lifeline for wellbeing, particularly how it helps Malaysians manage daily financial needs while still preparing for long-term retirement security. The discussion brought together perspectives on social protection, financial resilience, and the importance of accessible savings mechanisms for self-employed and gig workers. Overall, the event provided a timely platform for policymakers, researchers, and advocates to explore practical solutions for improving financial wellbeing among Malaysians.



## 5 MAY 2026 ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION : CHILDCARE AND WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN MALAYSIA

→ The Social Wellbeing Research Centre (SWRC) recently convened a roundtable discussion to review findings from the upcoming publication, *Childcare and Women's Employment in Malaysia: Insights from Public Housing Residents in Klang Valley and Kelantan*. A diverse group of experts and stakeholders joined the session and provided invaluable feedback to help refine the research.

Key themes emerged from the discussion. On women's employment, participants highlighted the need to examine intra-family dynamics and household decision-making. While government initiatives like extended school sessions were acknowledged as important long-term solutions, more targeted short-term support is needed, especially for women in the informal economy outside of Klang Valley, such as in Kelantan.

On future research, an upcoming childcare survey will address cost structures, reservation wages, and regulatory frameworks. Participants also called for expanding the scope to include disability and elderly care.



**FRIDAY • 15 MAY 2026 • 10:00 PM**

Watch it on **CH 501** | Live TV - [astroawani.com](http://astroawani.com) & Astro AWANI App



## 15 MAY 2026 CONSIDER THIS: NATIONAL TRANSFER ACCOUNTS — HOW TO EASE THE 'SANDWICH GENERATION' SQUEEZE

→ Malaysia recently released its first National Transfer Accounts, offering a different lens for understanding the economy. Instead of focusing solely on growth or inflation, the data examines how generations support themselves financially across different stages of life, revealing how resources flow between children, working-age adults, and the elderly.

On this episode of Consider This, host Melisa Idris speaks with Professor Emeritus Datuk Norma Mansor, Director of Universiti Malaya's Social Wellbeing Research Centre. A former Secretary of the National Economic Advisory Council and former Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Administration at UM, Professor Norma brings deep expertise to the discussion.

The conversation focuses on easing the "sandwich generation" squeeze—middle-aged adults caught between supporting ageing parents and their own children. The National Transfer Accounts highlight how this growing burden affects household finances, retirement savings, and long-term wellbeing. Professor Norma also shares policy insights on strengthening social protection and intergenerational support systems.

# Join us @ Pension and Retirement Professional Programme (PRPP) 2026!

The Pension and Retirement Professional Programme (PRPP) is a three level course designed by the Social Wellbeing Research Centre (SWRC), Universiti Malaya. The programme equips social social protection practitioners to become specialists in the retirement and pension industry.



Scan for more info!



## Programme Objectives



Promote economic development and social wellbeing



Prepare practitioners to meet the evolving needs of an ageing society



Develop a robust and dynamic workforce in the field of pension and retirement services

## About Social Wellbeing Research Centre (SWRC)

The Social Wellbeing Research Centre (SWRC) is an academic multi-disciplinary research entity, focusing on conceiving and implementing research in social security and old age financial protection.

SWRC has been providing evidence-based expertise and consulting in the aforesaid domains to elevate economic development on social cohesion in Malaysia.

The Centre supports research in social protection in general and old-age financial protection, in particular. The Employees Provident Fund (EPF) of Malaysia has graciously provided an endowment fund to create the nation's first endowed Chair in Old Age Financial Protection (OAFPC), now known as Social Wellbeing Chair (SWC) at Universiti Malaya.

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# FLAGSHIP PROJECTS



**Malaysia Ageing and Retirement Survey (MARS)** is a major research undertaking by the Social Wellbeing Research Centre (SWRC) to produce nationwide longitudinal micro-level data relating to ageing and retirement involving personal interviews of individuals aged 40 years and older in Malaysia.

MARS is carried out every 2 years and is part of the harmonised database parallel with leading international family studies, namely, Health and Retirement Survey, USA; Survey of Health, Ageing, and Retirement Europe (SHARE); and Japanese Study of Ageing and Retirement.

MARS collects information on vital issues impacting their lives which include personal (background characteristics, etc.), family (relationship with spouse, parents, children, siblings, transfers, etc.), health (health status, diagnosed illness, healthcare utilisation, physical measurement, etc.), economic (work, employment, retirement, income, etc.) and other social factors (friends, social participation, etc.).

## Interested in MARS dataset?

Data request is available through SWRC website ([swrc.um.edu.my/mars-data](http://swrc.um.edu.my/mars-data)) and the Gateway to Global Aging Data (<https://g2aging.org/>).



**Belanjawanku** is an expenditure guide that provides estimated minimum monthly expenses on various types of goods and services for different family sizes in Malaysia. It is a budget that can be used for information or as a guide for personal finance. It is known as a reference budget or a budget standard, that contains household expenditure, basket lists of goods and services and their cost thereof, a guide for a family of a specific size and composition to attain a decent standard of living.

The first wave of Belanjawanku (2019) covers the cities and districts in Klang Valley. The second and third wave of Belanjawanku was conducted between 2019-2022 and covered the additional cities including Alor Setar, Kota Kinabalu, Johor Bahru, Kuala Terengganu, Kuching, Georgetown, Kuantan, Kota Bharu, Ipoh, Seremban and Malacca City.

Belanjawanku App was launched in 2023. The app provides a medium for users to track their expenses and plan their budget smartly to achieve a dignified standard of living.



## Belanjawan *ku*

Belanjawan kini lebih mudah



For iOS



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## Download yours now!