**MALAYSIA**

**STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON HUMAN RIGHTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE – HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL RESOLUTION 48/12**

# INTRODUCTION

In July 2019, Malaysia had lowered the definition of youth age from 15 to 40 to 15 to 30. Current statistics show that 30.5% or 9.9 million of the total Malaysian population are in the age of 15 to 30 and 46.5% or 15.1 million are in the age of 15 to 40. Overall, youth consists of a large population of Malaysia hence youth development is always at the forefront of Malaysia’s national development agenda, especially during this challenging time when the youth are hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The planning and implementation of youth programmes at the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS) are guided by the Malaysian Youth Policy (MYP). MYP aims to strengthen human capital and potential of youth in accordance to the Federal Constitution and National Principles (*Rukun Negara*). In addition, the MYP supports the international and national agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals 2030, Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 and the 5-Year Malaysia Development Plan, the latest being the 12th Malaysia Plan (2021-2025).

Currently, the MoYS is undertaking the development of a New Model of Youth Development 2030 (*Model Baharu Pembangunan Belia -* MBPB). MBPB is an initiative developed to complement the implementation of the MYP as well as to streamline youth empowerment into national and global development agenda. The Model is also designed to address the post-pandemic challenges faced by youth particularly in the adoption of digitalisation as well as prioritising the well-being of youth.

MoYS together with key stakeholders have undertaken a whole-of-Government and whole-of-society approach in implementing various initiatives to ensure youths in Malaysia are able to reach their highest potential locally, regionally or internationally including the implementation of their rights.

# CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUTH DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

## Youth Unemployment

Addressing youth unemployment has always been one of the main focuses of the Government of Malaysia. However, this challenge is compounded by the slowdown of the global economy due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Graduates Statistics 2020 published by the Department of Statistics Malaysia, the graduate unemployment rates for both male and female have both increased from pre-pandemic in 2019 from 3.5% to 4.3% in 2020 for male graduates while the rate for female graduates has increased from 4.2% in 2019 to 4.6% in 2020.

In addition, based on statistics published by the Institute for Youth Research (IYRES), youth who are in the Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) group comprise between 12% to 14% of the youth in the age group of 15-30 years old between 2015 to 2019.

MoYS has identified five (5) groups of youth as *‘*Distressed Youth’ who require intervention especially during this crisis, namely:

1. Youth at risk of losing their jobs;
2. Youth waiting to enter the job market;
3. Youth in entrepreneurship;
4. Youth in gig economy/ Informal economic sector; and
5. Youth who are ‘Not in Employment, Education or Training’.

## Access to Education

The students in schools and higher education institutions are directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. During the outbreak, majority of them could not continue classes physically following the closure of their learning institutions. The shift to online lesson delivery by schools have faced a number of challenges particularly due the widening of equity gaps ranging from motivational and psychosocial well-being to infrastructure limitations of broadband networks. As a result, many students and teachers were unable to connect to their new online classrooms. The reality of social and economic gaps, digital divide and inconsistencies in the online delivery system are some of the challenges faced by the education system which may result in widening equity gaps.

Key areas of concern are issues related to connectivity and access to gadgets. Not all students or families owned ICT gadgets or even had access to the internet. Rebuilding education disrupted by the pandemic is a major challenge especially among families in remote areas and the less affluent groups.

## Well-being of Youth

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Youth faced difficulties during COVID-19 pandemic where the lockdowns or Movement Control Order (MCO) disrupted the pre-pandemic socialising norms. This includes regulations to mask wearing and physical distancing. The lack of human interaction due to restriction movement order may disrupt the state of mental health of human especially in the young people. In addition, young people who have lost their parents or caregiver to COVID-19 faces obstacles for years to come.

Healthcare workers in the younger cohorts are especially vulnerable in the fight against COVID*-*19 and may experience significant psychological and mental health consequences. Anxiety, depression, distress, sleep problems, burnout are among the common mental health problems experienced by healthcare providers.

# YOUTH EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES

## Rights to Work

Addressing youth unemployment requires collaborative efforts from various stakeholders. Thus, the Government, spearheaded by MoYS has reached out to various strategic partners including government ministries and agencies, private sectors and Government-Linked Companies (GLCs) under the Cross-Ministerial Outreach Initiatives. The cross-ministerial approach is particularly pertinent at this moment to optimise resources and to ensure young people can uphold their rights to economic and social security as well as their overall wellbeing.

Among the programmes undertaken under the Initiative are:

### National Apprenticeship Scheme *(Skim Perantisan National -* SPN)

MoYS collaborated with the Ministry of Public Works and Ministry of Human Resource with the objectives to enhance the marketability of apprentices through soft-skills and on-the-job training as well as to provide a support system to help youths secure jobs and acquire work experiences. SPN provides opportunities for apprentices to gain work experience in the private sectors and GLCs. As of July 2021, the programme has managed to engage 164 companies and 4 training providers as strategic partners in providing employment opportunities for youth.

### myGIG Programme

Embracing digitalisation and the Industrial Revolution (IR) 4.0, MoYS supports youth to venture into the gig economy by introducing the myGIG Programme. myGIG is a partnership between MoYS and the Ministry of Communications and Multimedia and the Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation to provide avenue for youths who would like to tap into the potentials of digital platforms through “myGIG Service” and ‘myGIG Digital Freelance”, creating more job and entrepreneurship opportunities. As of the end of July 2021, 2,676 youth have registered with myGIG Service, while 1,872 have registered with myGIG Digital Freelance.

### MyPRENEUR

MyPRENEUR aims to encourage more youth participation in entrepreneurship. It cultivates, guides and provides training in entrepreneurship to selected youth. This programme targeted 450 entrepreneurs to participate in Jumper Star Up and Jumper 2.0 conducted by PUNB (*Perbadanan Usahawan Nasional Berhad*) in 2021.

### Skills Education

The pandemic has required the leveraging of digitalisation including in the technical and vocational education and training (TVET). To ensure youths are future ready including embracing the Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR 4.0), the skills training institutions under MoYS has launched the Digitalization of IR4.0 in 2019. In addition, skills training institutions constantly update and revise the module and curricular, tools and equipment to meet the needs of the industry. They also partner with industries for trainees internship and technological knowledge exchanges to ensure youths are job ready.

## Rights to Education

### Access to Learning

Recognising the importance and the need to integrate the new normal in teaching and learning (TnL) that emphasises on the aspect of cloud computing as an alternative to conventional TnL, the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) has reached out to higher education institutions students by offering various assistance and initiatives that could help students create conducive and balanced learning environment through online TnL approach. In addition, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has issued a Manual of Home-Based Learning (HBL) to help teachers implement HBL based on the principles of ensuring that no one drop out from learning; the basics of learning are met; and prioritising the socioemotional well-being of students.

Other initiatives to ensure youth have the rights to education are the introduction of the DELIMa - an online learning portal that include apps such as Google Classroom and other learning apps along with over 6,585 educational videos in cikgooTube and 1,591 in EduWebTV. Educational TV channels are broadcasted on public TV to ensure wider reach to all students including those in remote areas or without internet access.

In addition, MoHE and and MoE provide assistance in cash and kind (laptops and digital textbooks) to new students and those from the bottom 40% income (B40) group. In ensuring that learning institutions are safe for learning, the Government has developed Standard Operating Procedures and Guidelines related to the operation under the new norms as well as protects and ensures the safety of students, teachers and their communities.

MoHE also works together with Malaysian Higher Educations Institutions to continuously improve the infrastructure and dimensions of digital content as well as computer applications to strengthen the higher education sector through the Digitalisation of Education agenda for the development of higher education in Malaysia.

### Safe Online Learning

The Ministry of Communications and Multimedia has undertaken various preventive measures, as well as held advocacy programmes for parents and children to ensure safe internet use. These programmes include:

1. “Click Wisely” campaign on online safety;
2. Blocking of pornography websites, including paedophile and child pornography websites (until October 2019, a total of 5,155 pornography websites and 405 paedophile and child pornography sites have been blocked);
3. Encourage parents and guardians to utilise parental tools in their mobiles/gadgets to enable them to control their children’s internet use; and
4. Held consultations and carried out a study on the need for new legislation to deal with cyber bullying.

## Rights to Physical and Mental Health

### Physical Health

Realising the importance of leading a healthy and active lifestyle despite being confined at home, the MoYS initiated various activities leveraging on technology and digitalisation platforms. Some of the activities include virtual fitness programmes, healthy lifestyle tutorials suitable for individuals and families as well as webinars on various topics. In addition, e-Sports competitions were carried out.

### Mental Health

Malaysia has initiated several initiatives to address mental health among youth including students and healthcare workers. These are carried out through various initiatives such as:

* 1. MoE in collaboration with the Ministry of Health (MoH) implemented the Student’s Mental Well-Being in the New Normal to provide support socio-emotional support to students impacted by the pandemics;
  2. Dissemination of Psychoeducational Information such as motivational words, posters, infographics and short videos through various media to increase learning readiness, educational information and students' learning enjoyment;
  3. Psychosocial Support Line by the School Guidance and Counselling Unit to support and help students manage emotions and conflicts that arise especially during the MCO period;
  4. Capacity Building and Training Program for counselling teachers, “Training for School Counsellors: Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Children, Parents and Teachers During COVID-19” together with the Malaysian International Counselling Association (PERKAMA International) and UNICEF Malaysia;
  5. *Pembimbing Rakan Sebaya* (PRS) or Peer Mentoring Program is also used as an approach in helping to improve students ‘psychosocial and emotional well-being’;
  6. anonymous support groups on entrepreneurship, family and relationships, jobs and anxiety, and a counselling service subsidy for youths;
  7. mental health screening conducted on healthcare workers and front liners from time to time to identify those who show signs of early onset of pressure, anxiety and depression;
  8. unrecorded leave with the approval of the respective heads of departments were given to avoid symptoms of extreme stress or burnout;
  9. provision of the integrated mental healthcare services and support to the youth in Malaysia in each hospital and health clinic under the MoH; and
  10. provision of counselling services to children (under the age of 18) and other family members by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development who are facing emotional distress due to loss of parents/guardian in the pandemic.

## Rights to Political and Public Participation

### Malaysia Youth Parliament

The National Department of Youth and Sports had organised a programme called *“Townhall Perdana Parlimen Belia Malaysia 2021 (Virtual)”* or Virtual Malaysia Youth Parliament Townhall 2021 session which involved 153 members*.* The objective of this programme was to gather inputs and ideas from the members in assisting the new policies that are in line with the current needs of the country. Besides that, this is a platform that appreciates and recognises the members of the Malaysia Youth Parliament that contribute to the development of youth in the country. The Malaysia Youth Parliament is a youth council and simulation of the parliamentary proceedings of the Parliament of Malaysia for youth aged between 18 and 30. The Youth Parliament gives young people an insight into the workings of the Parliament of Malaysia and raise their awareness of the democracy process. The format of the unicameral Youth Parliament of Malaysia resembles that of the actual Dewan Rakyat, the lower house of Parliament of Malaysia.

### National Youth Consultative Council (*Majlis Perundingan Belia Negara -* MPBN)

The MPBN was established in 1971 and acted as a council body to assist Government in the formulation and implementation of national development matters related to youth. The Council consists of among others, representatives from the Government, federal government agencies, state governments, National Youth Council and members of the national youth organisations. The Council discusses and debates on various issues covering economy, well-being and health before proposing resolutions to the Government. Despite the pandemic, the most recent MPBN was held on 25 January 2022 which was chaired by the Minister of Youth and Sports Malaysia. Among the topics discussed were the transition of youth leaders, digitalisation, youth employment opportunities in the gig economy, youth leadership as well as recognition of youth workers.

### Youth Voting

A significant milestone for Malaysia has been reached when the Parliament approved the amendment to the Federal Constitution to lower the voting age from 21 years old to 18 years old for Malaysian citizens on 16 July 2019. The amendment received bipartisan support and included provision for voters to be automatically registered on electoral rolls and for candidates to be eligible to stand for election from 18 years of age, which commenced on 1 January 2022. This milestone will encourage more youths to participate in the democracy process of the country.

# ROLES OF YOUTH IN RECOVERY EFFORTS

The effectiveness of the mitigation measures to contain the virus is highly dependent on cooperation and compliance of all members of society including the youth. The COVID-19 vaccination programmes for adolescence was commenced on 20 September 2021. The vaccination programme aimed to control spread of COVID-19 infection among the adolescence, and as preparation for the re-opening of school and learning institution. It was targeted that 80% of adolescence age 12 to 17 years old be inoculated with COVID-19 vaccine. The adolescence COVID-19 vaccination was voluntary and free for all adolescence living in Malaysia including non-citizens. As up to date, on 11 February2022, 91.3% of adolescence age 12 to 17 are partially vaccinated while 88.8% are fully vaccinated. In order to increase accessibility to the programme, vaccines were given through numerous government and private facilities such as hospital or clinics. In addition, outreach programmes to school and remote localities were also conducted by MOH and private health sectors.

Youths in Malaysia have shown tremendous strength in weathering through the storms. They have proven to be resilient, innovative and resourceful. Despite the challenges, they have participated and championed various social courses from distributing food aids or PPEs to the frontliners, assisting the underprivileged groups and assisting in disaster recovery efforts. In addition, youth-led organisations also participated in providing cash, e-hailing and companionship for the marginalised groups including B40, indigenous groups, people with disabilities and elderly who require transportation services to vaccination centres.

### Malaysia Vaccine Support Volunteers (MyVac)

Malaysia Vaccine Support Volunteers (MyVac) is an inter-agency initiative spearheaded between the MoYS, MoH and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI). The primary role of MyVac is to mobilise non-health volunteers mostly youths in assisting the vaccination process at the 427 non-health vaccination centres in Malaysia. A total of 319,164 volunteers had registered as MyVac volunteers and more than 20,000 volunteers were involved in this initiative.

### Rakan Muda-Sports Bubble Volunteers (RM-SBV)

RM-SBV is a government initiative to ensure adherence to the sports and recreation SOPs while returning to sports during the pandemic through community-driven and people-centric approach. The initiative also promotes volunteerism in youths where youths play role as advocates to assist sport industry players and general publics to adhere to the SOPs. There about 5,000 registered RM-SBVs.

### Aid Delivery

Access to food and other aids during the pandemic is particularly challenging due to various reasons such as mandatory quarantine, loss of income and lack of transport. Youth and youth organisations have undertaken many innovative initiatives to assist those affected. These include crowdfunding, delivering food, groceries and Personal Protective Equipment as well as providing transportation/ companion services for those in need to vaccination centres.

# YOUTH RECOGNITION MEASURES

### National Youth Day and Youth Awards *Anugerah Wira Belia* COVID-19 Award 2020

Malaysia celebrates National Youth Day on the 15th of May every year in appreciating the roles and contributions of youth as national development partners. The celebrations during the pandemic has been switched to online and hybrid formats. In conjunction with the celebration, there will be an award presentation ceremony known as *Anugerah Perdana Belia Negara* (APBN) or National Youth Award. This award was given to recognise and appreciate individuals and youth organisations that have made significant contributions to the development of youth in Malaysia. In 2020, a special award category was created in recognising the young unsung heroes/heroines on their selfless contribution to society during the pandemic.

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