

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF WOMEN & CHILD DEVELOPMENT

LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION No. 165
TO BE ANSWERED ON 02.02.2024

'REDUCTION IN CRECHES'

165. DR. T. SUMATHY (a) THAMIZHACHI THANGAPANDIAN

Will the Minister of WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the Government is aware that the number of creches has been reduced to 3900 in 2023 as opposed to 25,000 creches in 2013;
- (b) if so, the steps taken/being taken by the Government to address this decline in the number of creches in the country, if not, the reasons therefor;
- (c) whether the Government is aware of the apparent inadequacy of the number of creches allocated under the 'New Palna Scheme', with only 17,000 envisioned, in stark contrast to 25,000 creches that were operational in 2013; and;
- (d) if so, the steps taken/being taken by the Government to mitigate the fallout of the reduction in creches in the country and if not, the reasons therefor?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT
(SHRIMATI SMRITI ZUBIN IRANI)

(a) to (d): Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme (RGNCS) for the Children of Working Mothers was launched as a central sector scheme w.e.f. 1st January 2006 by merging the National Crèche Fund with the Scheme of Assistance to Voluntary Organizations for crèches for Working/Ailing Women's Children. The Scheme was implemented through the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) and two voluntary organizations, namely Indian Council for Child Welfare (ICCW) and Bhartiya Adim Jati Sevak Sangh (BAJSS) in States/UTs. The funding pattern of the scheme was 90:10 where in 90 was Centre and 10 was Implementing Agency which were the voluntary organisations. State/UT governments were not the stakeholders in the scheme, so monitoring and supervision was inadequate.

In view of complaints regarding irregularities in management of crèches by BAJSS, 5631 creches were temporarily transferred to CSWB with effect from 18 November 2008. A writ petition, W.P.No.11116/2015, had been filed in the Honorable Delhi High Court alleging misappropriation of funds by ICCW, one of the implementing agencies. In this regard, Honorable Delhi High Court had directed that States/UTs have to verify the functioning of those crèches. Subsequently, RGNCS was discontinued w.e.f. 31 December 2016.

From 01.01.2017 onwards, the Crèche services were provided by the Ministry of Women and Child Development through the erstwhile 'National Crèche Scheme (NCS)', for Children of Working Mothers, a Centrally Sponsored Scheme, wherein Stand-alone Crèches were being operated through NGOs as implementing agencies.

The Ministry introduced *Palna* sub-scheme under *Mission Shakti* for all States/UTs w.e.f. 01 April 2022, for providing day care facilities and protection to children. *Palna* is a Centrally sponsored scheme ensuring the participation of State/UT government to ensure better day-to-day monitoring and proper implementation of scheme.

The Government of India has decided to implement Palna through Anganwadi Centres (AWC), which are the world's largest childcare institutions dedicated to providing essential care and support to children ensuring delivery of care facilities till the last mile. These AWCs are operated by the Ministry of Women & Child Development. The Ministry has now decided to extend the services of childcare through Anganwadi-cum-Crèches (AWCC) under Palna. The Ministry is focusing on opening more AWCCs in such places where concentration of working women, especially those in unorganised sector, and will cover larger group of needy women in rural and urban areas. . This will ensure whole day childcare support ensuring their well-being in a safe and secure environment. AWCC initiative aims to increase the women work force participation in the economy. The objective of *Palna* component is to provide quality crèche facility in safe and secure environment for children (from ages 6 months – 6 years), nutritional support, health and cognitive development of children, growth monitoring, immunization, education etc.

Proposals for establishment and operation of Crèches are received from the respective State Governments/UT Administrations, who are also responsible for contributing their corresponding share for the implementation of the Scheme. During the 15th Finance Cycle, a total of 17,000 AWCCs have been envisioned to be set-up, out of which, 5631 AWCCs have been approved till date, as per proposals received from various States/UTs. As on 30.11.2023, 2249 Gol aided Standalone Crèches are operational.

The number of 17,000 AWCCs envisioned to be set-up during the period of 15th Finance Cycle is only a target figure, and is not at all a limiting factor. Continuous efforts are being made to approve and operationalise as many AWCCs, as are required by the States/ UTs.

The Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for AWCCs has been released by this Ministry on 21.12.2023, and a copy of which is available on the website of the Ministry. Also, this Ministry in consultation with the Ministry of Labour & Employment has released National Minimum Standards and Protocol for Crèches (Operation and Management) on 30.01.2024, which provide a comprehensive framework for setting up and running of Crèches in India by any individual/ service agencies/ corporations/ companies/ universities/ hospitals/ care service providers/ government organizations /non-governmental organizations etc., emphasizing the institutionalization of care services to support and promote female labour force participation. A copy of these minimum standards and protocol is available on the website of this Ministry.
