

# **SINGAPORE'S REPORT 2024**

Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPA) (1995)

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## Section One: Highlights

Singapore is committed to ensuring that women remain integral and equal members of our society. Gender equality in Singapore is founded on the principle of equal opportunities for women and men based on meritocracy. Ensuring that both women and men have access to fundamental resources, such as education and healthcare, all citizens are provided equal opportunities to pursue their goals across differences spheres in society.

Over the last five years, renewed efforts were made to advance and empower women in Singapore. In 2020, the Government launched a year-long nationwide Conversations on Singapore Women's Development where we consulted close to 6,000 Singaporeans from all walks of life. 2021 was dedicated as the Year of Celebrating SG Women to celebrate the pioneering spirit of Singapore women, their achievements and contributions to our nation. In 2022, the White Paper on Singapore Women's Development was published, which was shaped by feedback from the Conversations and serves as a 10-year roadmap outlining 25 collective action plans towards a fairer and more inclusive society.

As part of Singapore's commitment to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPA), we continue to adopt a practical and outcomes-based approach to chart our progress in the 12 areas identified by the BDPA<sup>1</sup>.

In alignment with these 12 areas, Singapore has identified five key areas of focus around women's development which were highlighted in the White Paper, namely ensuring equal opportunities in the workplace, recognition and support for caregivers, protection against violence and harm, other support measures for women, and mindset shifts. Steady progress is being made in the implementation of the 25 action plans in the 5 key areas laid out in the White Paper, and the Government will undertake a mid-point review in 2027.

The Government will continue to strengthen the ethos of fairness and justice in our society – where women and men partner each other as equals, progress together and pursue their aspirations freely and to the fullest. We will continue to work with individuals and other stakeholders to advance women's progress in Singapore, and to build a fair and inclusive society.

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<sup>1</sup> 12 areas listed in BDPA: Women in poverty, education and training, women's health, violence against women, women and armed conflict, women and the economy, women in power and decision making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, human rights of women, women and the media, women and the environment, the girl-child, taking into consideration our national circumstances and aspirations.

## Section Two: Priorities, achievements, challenges and setbacks

Singapore has continued to make progress in women's development, maintaining strong international rankings on gender equality, and sustained improvements in health and education outcomes.

### A. Increased Women's Participation in the Labour Force

In recent years, Singapore women have made great strides in the labour force and enjoy equal opportunities in the workplace. The Government introduced initiatives to encourage family-friendly workplace practices such as Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) to enable women to participate in the economy more fully. Resident employment rate for women aged 25-64 has increased from 72.3% in 2018 to 76.6% in 2023. There has also been an upward trend in the share of women among Professional, Managerial, Executive and Technician (PMET) occupations and in leadership roles.

Barriers are reduced and removed to hinder women's career progress. In efforts to better support more women to enter, return to, remain and progress in the workforce, we have increased access to FWAs and other family-friendly workplace practices. The Government has recently introduced guidelines on FWA Requests, which will come into effect on 1 December 2024. The mandatory guidelines will shape the right norms and expectations around FWAs, by setting out how employees should request for FWAs and how employers should handle FWA requests.

Nevertheless, workplace discrimination remains a concern amongst some employees. To combat this issue, the Government will be introducing the Workplace Fairness Legislation in Parliament later this year, which will strengthen protections against workplace discrimination on the basis of sex, marital status, and caregiving responsibilities among other protected characteristics. The Government is committed to work closely with employers to build supportive workplaces that help both male and female employees balance their responsibilities within and outside work.

### B. Recognition and Support for Caregivers

Caregivers are the cornerstones of our families and caregiving becomes a more significant responsibility as the Singapore society faces an aging population. While more men are seen stepping up in caregiving duties, women still bear a disproportionate share of the caregiving load.

#### **Supporting caregivers**

A suite of measures has been rolled out by the Government through the Caregiver Support Action Plan launched in 2019. This includes respite care services, to ensure caregivers are able to take breaks to care for themselves, and setting up of outreach teams to support caregivers in self-care through health and wellness activities, stress management and future-planning. Caregivers are also linked up with support groups and counselling services where needed.

#### **Sharing caregiving responsibilities between men and women**

The Government has encouraged more equal sharing of parental responsibilities that can help women better balance work and family responsibilities and maximise their potential at work. Government-Paid

Paternity Leave was introduced in 2013 and was increased by an additional two weeks on a voluntary basis in 2024, to a total of four weeks. Employers who offer the additional leave will be reimbursed by the Government. In 2024, Unpaid Infant Care Leave was also doubled to 12 days per year per parent, in the child's first two years, so that parents can take more time off to care for and bond with their child, or to settle caregiving arrangements.

We aim to make the additional two weeks of Government-Paid Paternity Leave mandatory as soon as possible and also consider how paid parental leave can be further increased to better support parents' needs while managing impact on business costs and operations.

## C. Protection against Violence and Harm

Singapore does not tolerate any form of violence against women. Protecting women from violence requires a strong partnership among Government agencies and community partners as no one should suffer abuse in silence.

### a) **Legislation**

Through legislation and enforcement, the Government continues to take seriously any incident of sexual violence against women, including rape and outrage of modesty. These measures have evolved to meet the changing context and nature of harms such as emerging trends in the online sphere.

In 2019, we conducted a comprehensive review of the Penal Code and made significant updates to our offences. In particular, penalties were enhanced for offences committed against vulnerable victims, including very young minors below 14, domestic workers, persons suffering from disability and victims in close or intimate relationships with the offender.

In 2021, the Penal Code was further amended to enhance penalties for certain sexual offences, including outrage of modesty.

The Penal Code amendments serve to enhance deterrence and allow the courts to deal with egregious cases more severely.

In February 2024, as part of the Criminal Procedure (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill, a new sentencing option was introduced – the Sentence for Enhanced Public Protection – which will allow for a serious offender, such as serial serious sex or violent offenders, to be detained until he or she no longer poses a significant threat to public safety.

### b) **Family violence**

In 2023, the Women's Charter was amended to strengthen protection for victim-survivors, and enhance rehabilitation and accountability of perpetrators of family violence. We also launched the 24-hour Domestic Violence Emergency Response Team (DVERT) where social work professionals from the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) will respond jointly with the Police for domestic violence cases with immediate safety risks.

### **c) Online harms**

In this digital era, online harms have emerged as a new form of threat to women's safety. Most recently, the Government has also introduced a suite of legislative measures to deal with harmful online content and behaviour, including those targeted at women and girls:

- In November 2022, the Government amended the Broadcasting Act to empower the Government to issue directions to providers of Online Communication Services (OCSs) to disable access to egregious content found online from being accessed by Singapore users, for example, content that advocates or instructs on physical or sexual violence.
- A Code of Practice for Online Safety was introduced in July 2023 to require designated social media services with significant reach or impact in Singapore to put in place measures to minimise Singapore users' exposure to harmful online content, including sexual or cyberbullying content.
- The Online Criminal Harms Act came into effect in February 2024. It introduced levers to enable the authorities to deal more effectively with online criminal activities such as the non-consensual dissemination of intimate images and the distribution of child sexual abuse material. The Act empowers law enforcement agencies to issue Directions to online service providers, other entities, or individuals to restrict the exposure of users in Singapore to online criminal content and activity.
- In 2019, new offences were added into the Penal Code to deal with technology-facilitated sexual offences, including the whole spectrum of offences involving child abuse materials.

## **D. Other Support Measures for Women**

### **a) Enhanced healthcare support for women**

Women enjoy strong health outcomes in Singapore, along with high life expectancy. Healthcare services have been improved for different groups of women such as caregivers, mothers, and the elderly. These aim to provide women greater opportunities and agency to achieve their aspirations.

The healthcare system is constantly enhanced and improved to meet increasing demands from an ageing population. The Government continues to invest heavily in building new healthcare infrastructure and upgrading existing ones – hospitals, community hospitals, senior care facilities – to ensure high quality yet affordable care for all, including for older women. We are also expanding the range of social and long-term care services in the community to meet our seniors' desire to age in place.

### **b) Support for minority groups**

Singapore is a small, densely populated city-state with a diverse society comprising Malays, Chinese, Indians, Eurasians and individuals from many other ethnicities. Singapore is committed to balancing our Constitutional duty to protect the personal and religious rights of minorities.

Our constitution provides that all persons are equal before the law, and entitled to equal protection of the law. We have institutional safeguards to ensure our Parliament will always be multi-racial.

Our former President, Mdm Halimah Yaacob, who was elected in 2017, was Singapore's first female Malay President. The rights of the minorities are protected by the Presidential Council for Minority Rights, which serves as an independent safeguard against the enactment of racially discriminatory laws. The Presidential

Council scrutinises Bills passed in Parliament and subsidiary legislation to consider whether there would be any unequal disadvantage to persons of any racial or religious community.

The Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act was amended in 2019 to help the Government respond more effectively to incident of religious disharmony, and strengthen our safeguards against foreign influence that threaten our religious harmony. The amendments came into force in 2022.

### **c) Support for single mothers**

The Government is committed to provide necessary support and care for women who are in vulnerable situations, which includes single mothers who are divorced or widowed.

Under the Alliance for Action (AfA) to Strengthen Marriages and Family Relationships, the Government has worked with community partners to strengthen support for single parents, the majority of whom are mothers. This includes access to alternative childcare arrangements, emotional support and employment opportunities.

To better support women undergoing divorce, the introduction of Divorce by mutual agreement (DMA) on 1 July 2024 as a sixth fact that can be used to prove the irretrievable breakdown of marriage, couples will be able to reduce acrimony in the divorce process. The Government is also working towards enhancing programmes and policies to support parents to make informed decisions in the best interest of the children.

Furthermore, the Government has introduced a new Maintenance Enforcement Process (“MEP”), which was introduced as part of the Family Justice Reform Act, that was passed in Parliament in 2023. The MEP will deter the non-payment of maintenance (e.g. child and spousal maintenance) and make enforcement easier when there is non-payment of maintenance. This is done through the establishment of a new unit of Maintenance Enforcement Officers (MEOs) who will conduct fact-finding on the parties’ financial situation, and are empowered to obtain financial information directly from specified third parties such as banks and certain Government agencies if the parties fail to provide the financial information. The MEOs will also conduct conciliation to help parties find an amicable and feasible solution. Respondents who cannot pay will be channelled to appropriate assistance, while respondents who refuse to pay maintenance can be dealt with more decisively by the Courts. These measures are intended to create more sustainable outcomes and reduce the need for repeat applications.

### **d) Support for women with disabilities**

The Government is committed to building an inclusive society where persons with disabilities are enabled to pursue their aspirations, achieve their potential, and participate as equal, integral, and contributing members of society.

Singapore’s efforts to achieve this vision are guided by our national roadmaps, called the Enabling Masterplans. These long-term plans guide the efforts of the Government, people, and private sectors to build a more inclusive Singapore. It takes a systemic whole-of-life approach to supporting persons with disabilities, in areas such as education, employment, independent living, and public spaces. All iterations of the masterplans, including the latest Enabling Masterplan 2030 (EMP2030), were developed in close consultation with persons with disabilities.

## E. [Mindset Shifts](#)

While Singapore women have achieved significant progress over the years, fundamental mindset shifts are needed to make the next bound of progress.

Conscious and unconscious biases continue to exist, and we see this manifested in various ways, including in the home where women tend to take on more caregiving responsibilities, and in the workplace where men are reluctant to take up their paternity leave because of the fear of being perceived to be less committed to their jobs. Whole-of-society mindset shifts are needed to overcome stereotypes – it starts from the home where parents model respectful and equitable relationships, from schools where we educate our young, and in society where we can raise awareness on the importance of ensuring that our words and actions do not perpetuate gender biases.

## F. [Impact of COVID-19 on Implementation of BDPA](#)

Singapore saw the impact of COVID-19 on the economy, yet there were marginal disparities in its employment effects between genders. Notably, the female employment rate rose from 2019 to 2021. A favorable trend observed amidst the pandemic was the increased adoption of FWAs, helping both genders in balancing professional and obligations at home. These arrangements have allowed women to participate more fully in employment, as resident employment rate for females aged 25-64 have increased from 72.3% in 2018 to 76.6% in 2023.

However, the pandemic has shone a spotlight on persistent discrepancies in gender roles at home, with women shouldering a disproportionately higher load.

To address some of these impacts, measures were put in place to provide more support for women in businesses; healthcare including mental health; and education by increasing access that girls have.

## G. [Singapore's Ongoing Priorities](#)

The five areas above will continue to be our ongoing priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in Singapore.

As part of the White Paper, 25 collective action plans were set out in these five areas by the Government and the community, reflecting whole-of-society efforts required to advance Singapore women's development. They aim to support the diverse aspirations of and challenges faced by Singapore women at different life-stages, centring around our shared values of fairness, equality, respect and solidarity.

For instance, to strengthen protection against workplace discrimination, the new Workplace Fairness Legislation will be introduced in Parliament this year. To provide more support for caregivers, the Government has introduced guidelines on Flexible Work Arrangement (FWA) Requests, which will come into effect this year.

To address issues around women's participation in the workplace, especially in leadership roles, we have revised Singapore Exchange Listing Rules and Practice Guidance to the Code of Corporate Governance to



support greater board diversity, including gender diversity. We will continue to increase women's representation on boards with efforts led by the Council for Board Diversity.

To reduce caregivers' financial strain, Singapore has enhanced the Home Caregiving Grant (HCG) and expanded the Seniors' Mobility and Enabling Fund (SMF). Furthermore, to enhance support for caregivers of persons with disabilities (PWDs) and children with developmental needs, Singapore has enhanced inclusion and support for preschool children with developmental needs and their caregivers.

## Section Three: Progress in the implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action since 2020

### Inclusive development, shared prosperity, and decent work

#### A. Promoting Gender Equality in the Workplace

Over the decades, Singapore has made significant progress in providing equal opportunities in the workplace for both men and women. Our women have made great strides in both the private and public sectors and are leaders in many fields.

Women are highly educated and enjoy equal opportunities in the workplace. Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) and other family-friendly workplace practices have enabled women to participate in the economy more fully. The resident employment rate for females aged 25-64 has increased from 72.3% in 2018 to 76.6% in 2023 (Table 1). The gap between male and female employment rates has also narrowed in the past 5 years from 16.6 percentage points in 2019 to 12.4 percentage points in 2023.

There has also been an upward trend in the proportion of women employed in Professional, Managerial, Executive and Technician (PMET) occupations and traditionally male-dominated areas. The share of women aged 15 & over among PMET occupations has also increased, from 44.4% in 2018 to 46.7% in 2023 (Table 2). The share of women aged 15 & over among STEM occupations has increased from 31.1% to 34.3% in the past 5 years (Table 3).

**Table 1: Resident Employment Rate Aged 25 to 64 (%)**

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Men	88.9%	88.8%	87.9%	88.9%	89.6%	89.0%
Women	72.3%	73.3%	73.2%	75.1%	76.2%	76.6%

**Table 2: Women's Share among employed residents aged 15 & over in PMET occupations (%)**

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
44.4%	45.3%	45.6%	45.9%	46.1%	46.7%

**Table 3: Women's Share among employed residents aged 15 & over in STEM occupations (%)**

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
31.1%	32.0%	32.4%	32.2%	32.5%	34.3%

Source: Comprehensive Labour Force Survey, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

The unadjusted median gender pay gap<sup>2</sup> of full-time resident employees aged 25-54 in Singapore has narrowed from 16.3% in 2018 to 14.3% in 2023. One key reason for the gender pay gap is occupational differences. When comparing men and women with similar characteristics in age, education, occupation, industry, and usual hours worked, the adjusted gender pay gap was lower at 6.0%<sup>3</sup> in 2023. The adjusted gender pay gap in Singapore reflects unmeasured characteristics, such as differences in the effects of parenthood and caregiving responsibilities, which women tend to shoulder more than men.

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To promote greater gender equality in the workplace, Singapore has put in place legislation, measures, and programmes to empower women's participation in all sectors including non-traditional sectors and facilitate women's return to the workforce.

#### **a) Legislation and guidelines in the workplace**

The Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) was set up in 2006 by the tripartite partners (Ministry of Manpower (MOM), National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), and Singapore National Employers Federation), to promote the adoption of fair, responsible and progressive employment practices. TAFEP looks into all cases of workplace discrimination and asks employers to correct deficient practices (e.g. through fair employment workshops, clinics). It may also refer cases to MOM, which takes enforcement action where warranted. The Tripartite Alliance also conducts education and outreach to employers so that employers can take ownership of ensuring workplace fairness.

##### *i. Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices (TGFEF)*

The TGFEF require organisations to adopt fair and merit-based employment practices. All employers in Singapore are expected to adhere to the TGFEF.

According to the Guidelines, employers must recruit and select employees on the basis of merit (such as skills, experience or ability to perform the job), and regardless of personal characteristics. Employers are also expected to remunerate employees fairly, taking into consideration factors such as ability, performance, contribution, skills, knowledge and experience.

##### *ii. Introduction of Workplace Fairness Legislation*

In August 2023, the Government accepted the Tripartite Committee on Workplace Fairness' recommendations to introduce a Workplace Fairness Legislation to strengthen our overall framework. The Committee recommended that the law prohibit common and familiar forms of workplace

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<sup>2</sup> The unadjusted gender pay gap is calculated as:  $[1 - \text{Median income of women} / \text{Median income of men}] \times 100\%$ .

<sup>3</sup> More information on the adjusted gender pay gap can be found at <https://stats.mom.gov.sg/Pages/Update-on-Singapores-Adjusted-Gender-Pay-Gap.aspx>.

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<sup>5</sup> More information on the adjusted gender pay gap can be found at <https://stats.mom.gov.sg/Pages/Update-on-Singapores-Adjusted-Gender-Pay-Gap.aspx>.

discrimination – these are based on (a) age, (b) nationality, (c) sex, marital status, pregnancy status, caregiving responsibilities, (d) race, religion, language; and (e) disability and mental health conditions.

With legislation, we can provide individuals an avenue to seek redress, and take more calibrated enforcement action against those who discriminate in the workplace.

The law is expected to be tabled in Parliament later this year.

#### **b) Enabling women’s fuller participation in the workplace**

Singapore continues to support all workers, including women, to enter and remain in the workforce, while managing both work and personal commitments. This includes working closely with Tripartite Partners and relevant stakeholders to promote the adoption of flexible work arrangements and other work-life harmony strategies, and build employers’ and HR capabilities to do so.

The Tripartite Standards on Flexible Work Arrangements, Unpaid Leave for Unexpected Care Needs and Work-Life Harmony were introduced in 2017, 2018 and 2021 respectively to encourage the adoption of best practices on flexible work arrangements, enhanced leave schemes and work-life harmony initiatives. The Alliance for Action on Work-Life Harmony in 2021 also brought together a community of stakeholders including employers, HR practitioners and employees to co-create work-life harmony initiatives and resources.

The proportion of employers who offered at least one FWA on a sustained basis rose from 47% in 2014 to 68%<sup>6</sup> in 2023. Among employees aged 25-64 who required at least one scheduled FWA, 84%<sup>7</sup> had access to the FWA that they required in 2022, up from 66% in 2014.

In April 2024, Singapore introduced a new set of Tripartite Guidelines on FWA Requests, which will require employers to properly consider FWA requests from employees. The mandatory guidelines will shape the right norms and expectations around FWAs, by setting out how employees should request for FWAs and use them, and how employers and supervisors should handle FWA requests.

#### **c) Increasing women’s participation in non-traditional sectors**

Singapore’s women-representation in enterprise leadership, entrepreneurship, and non-traditional sectors such as technology continues to be encouraging.

In 2021, Singapore had the world-highest proportion of female CEOs. According to a study by Deloitte, around one in eight companies in Singapore had female CEOs, which was the highest proportion globally and more than double the global average<sup>8</sup>.

In 2021, majority women-owned companies accounted for a quarter (25.5%) of economic active companies where Singapore residents hold more than 50% ordinary shares. Meanwhile, majority men-owned companies accounted for 64.7% of such companies. The top four industries for majority women-

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<sup>6</sup> Including newer forms of scheduled FWA (shift-swapping, time banking, employees’ choice of day off, and flexi-shift), the proportion was 73% in 2023. These were collected for the first time in 2022/2023.

<sup>7</sup> Including newer forms of scheduled FWA (shift-swapping, time banking and employees’ choice of day off), the proportion was 88% in 2022. These were collected for the first time in 2022. 2022 is the latest available data.

<sup>8</sup> Taken from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/business/companies-markets/singapore-posts-highest-percentage-of-women-ceos-globally-deloitte>

owned companies are professional services, wholesale trade, education and personal services, and retail trade.

In the 2022 IMD World Digital Competitiveness Ranking, Singapore is ranked 4th globally, and the top Asian country in the 2022 IMD World Digital Competitiveness Ranking. We also have one of the highest proportions globally of women in the technology workforce. Women comprise 41% of our tech workforce, higher than the global average of 28%.

*i. Industry support*

The government's partners in the business community also have initiatives to support women entrepreneurs, such as the Women in Sustainability & Environment (WISE) launched in 2021, which aims to ensure a strong, equal voice and representation of women in the business of sustainability whether as a consumer, investor or professional.

In 2019, the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) started the SG Women in Tech (SG WiT) initiative with support from community and industry partners, to attract, retain and develop women talent in the infocomm workforce. As of today, the programme has reached more than 123,000 people.

The SG Women in Tech Corporate Pledge was introduced to encourage companies to implement concrete measures to attract, retain and develop more women in tech. To date, 64 companies including MNCs like Amazon, PayPal and Microsoft, and local unicorns like Razer and Shopee have come on board with concrete measures to support women, such as coaching and mentorship programmes, as well as a commitment to fair hiring practices.

There is also a Girls in Tech movement which provides a platform for young female students to pursue their interest in tech, and eventually a tech career.

We have also worked with industry on the SG100 Women in Tech List, to profile women from diverse backgrounds and ages who have successful tech-related careers. These role models inspire, motivate and mentor younger women in the industry, and help to challenge the false perception that men are more suited for careers in tech.

At the community and private sector level, there are efforts by women's organisations such as United Women Singapore. United Women Singapore, in partnership with Citi Foundation, launched the "STEM First" programme to provide female students with STEM training and mentorship. The UWS Girls2Pioneers programme, into its 10<sup>th</sup> year, also empowers and encourages young women to take up STEM subjects and pursue careers in these fields.

**d) Career facilitation support**

Workforce Singapore's (WSG) and NTUC's Employment and Employability Institute's (e2i) suite of career facilitation services and programmes provide support to all jobseekers, including women looking to return to the workforce. Since 2018, WSG and e2i have nearly doubled the number of women placed in jobs. Close to 50% of WSG and e2i job placements are women, similar to the share of the labour force (47.2% in 2023).

Jobseekers who need employment assistance can approach WSG's Careers Connect, NTUC's e2i career centres, or Jobs and Skills Centres across Singapore. Jobseekers can also tap on the MyCareersFuture

portal to search for jobs that best suit their skillsets. Jobseekers can also participate in WSG's career advisory and workshops, which allow them to receive advice and guidance on job search strategies such as resume writing, interview techniques, leveraging on networking platforms and job portals to improve outcomes of their job search.

#### **e) Protection for Migrant Domestic Workers (MDWs)**

Singapore's approach to safeguarding MDWs' well-being is to legislate protection for MDWs under the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (EFMA). The EFMA regulates the employment of MDWs and protects their well-being, e.g. ensuring the provision of medical care, proper accommodation, adequate food and rest, a safe working environment, and timely payment of salaries.

On medical care, the EFMA ensures comprehensive protection by requiring all employers to bear the medical expenses of their MDWs. Employers are required to purchase medical insurance (with a coverage of at least SGD \$60,000 a year) and personal accident insurance (with a coverage of at least SGD \$60,000 a year) to help them meet their obligations. Employers are not allowed to pass on the cost of medical expenses to their MDWs, and action is taken against those who breach our laws.

In addition to EFMA, Singapore has also put in place a comprehensive framework that includes regularly educating employers and MDWs on their rights and obligations, and working closely with partners to conduct interviews, post-placement checks and recreational activities and training courses for MDWs.

Further, the Penal Code was amended in 2019 to enhance protection for MDWs. Employers, members of the employers' household and employment agents who abuse MDWs are liable to be punished with up to twice the maximum penalty for an offence.

### **B. Strengthening Support for Caregiving and Domestic Work**

Countries all over the world are facing the problem of ageing populations. Singapore is one of them. In fact, we have one of the world's lowest fertility rates. And at the same time, one of the world's longest life expectancies. Therefore, it is exceptionally important for Singapore to adapt and respond to the needs and priorities within our society as a result of our changing demographics, in particular at the workplace. We continue to support all workers, including parents and caregivers, to enter and remain in the workforce, while managing both professional and personal commitments.

We have done so through various work-life harmony strategies. This includes encouraging the adoption and utilisation of flexible work arrangements and progressively strengthening parental and caregiver leave benefits to ensure they continue to meet the needs of our society.

#### **a) Supporting caregivers**

The 2022 survey on Quality of Life (QOL) in Singapore by the National Council of Social Service found that:

- About 40% of caregivers are male, while the majority of caregivers are women (60%).
- Caregivers reported a slightly lower overall quality of life compared to non-caregivers.
- However, there were no significant differences in the QOL scores between male and female caregivers.

Through the Caregiver Support Action Plan launched in 2019, the Government has rolled out a suite of measures to support caregivers, including respite care services, to ensure caregivers are able to take breaks to care for themselves, and setting up of outreach teams to support caregivers in self-care through health and wellness activities, stress management and future-planning. Caregivers are also linked up with support groups and counselling services where needed.

To better support caregivers, the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) serves as a one-stop resource to help caregivers access the support they need. It provides tailored and bite-sized online resources and rolled out the Care Services Recommender on the SupportGoWhere portal. Respite care options for caregivers of seniors were also expanded to include more home-based and ad hoc respite, so that caregivers have time for self-care and can better manage work, family and personal commitments. The Government also worked with AIC to set up caregiver community outreach teams to provide socio-emotional support for vulnerable caregivers with or at risk of developing mental health conditions.

Caregiver Support Networks have also been established to provide platforms for caregivers to engage in activities and leverage the social capital among people with common experiences for socio-emotional support in the community. These build on existing measures to support families in their caregiving duties, such as the Caregivers Training Grant and the ElderCarer Foreign Domestic Worker Scheme.

#### **b) Increased parental leave**

Working mothers and fathers are entitled to 16 weeks of Government-Paid Maternity Leave and two weeks of Government-Paid Paternity Leave respectively. On top of paternity leave, fathers can tap on up to four weeks of Shared Parental Leave to help them in caring for and bonding with their newborn.

To further encourage fathers to support their spouses in caring for their newborns and play a bigger role in raising their children, the Government has doubled Government-Paid Paternity Leave from 2 weeks to 4 weeks from January 2024 on a voluntary basis. Employers who grant the additional leave will be reimbursed by the Government. Government-Paid Paternity Leave was introduced in 2013, and in recent years, take-up rates have increased from 47% in 2016 to 53% in 2021. This reflects that more fathers are playing an active role in raising their children, which can help more mothers to stay active in the workforce.

Each working parent can also tap on six days of Childcare Leave per year if their youngest child is below seven years, and two days of Extended Childcare Leave per year if their youngest child is aged between seven and 12 years. In addition, they are also entitled to Unpaid Infant Care Leave, which has been increased from 6 days to 12 days per year from January 2024, to help them care for their child in the first two years.

Taken together, these enhancements increased parental leave for a working couple from 22 weeks to up to 26 weeks in their child's first year.

#### **c) Enhanced childcare services**

Over two years, beginning in 2022, the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) is working to provide an additional 22,000 full-day preschool places. This is part of the larger goal to grow the number of Government-supported preschool places so that 80% of preschoolers can have a place in a Government-supported preschool by around 2025, up from over 65% in 2023 (Table 4).

#### **Table 4: Number of Full-Day Preschool Places (Infant Care and Childcare Places)**

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of full-day preschool places	175,930	181,386	190,491	197,097	209,552

Source: Ministry of Social and Family Development

ECDA will also launch an infant childminding pilot in the second half of 2024 to grow affordable, safe and reliable childminding services as an alternative infant care option for parents. The pilot aims to serve 500 infants in the first year. Parents using full-day childminding services under the pilot can expect to pay around SGD \$700 per month, which is similar to what a median-income family pays for full-day infant care at Government-supported centres after Basic and Additional subsidies.

#### d) Increased eldercare services

The Ministry of Health (MOH) has been growing the capacity of community care services, such as home, day and residential care services, to better serve the care needs of our seniors and their caregivers. Since 2015, we added 5,200 day care places, so that seniors can access day care services near their home, as well as 5,400 home care places for home-bound seniors. We have also added 5,800 nursing home beds to cater to frail seniors with less family support. As at end-2022, we have 8,700 day care places, 12,300 home care places and 18,100 nursing home beds.

We have enhanced support schemes that help to reduce caregivers' financial strain, such as increasing the quantum of the Home Caregiving Grant (HCG) to defray caregiving costs for eligible persons with at least permanent moderate disability in the community. In 2023, the HCG was enhanced from SGD \$200 per month to up to SGD \$400 per month to defray caregiving costs, with more help provided to eligible lower-income households. The number of HCG beneficiaries has increased since scheme inception in 2019, with about 44,000 beneficiaries receiving the HCG in 2023 (Table 5).

**Table 5: Number of Unique HCG Grant Beneficiaries**

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of Unique HCG Grant Beneficiaries	13,000	28,000	34,000	38,000	44,000

Source: Ministry of Health

Note: The numbers are rounded off.

The Caregiver Training Grant (CTG) has also been enhanced for caregivers to learn to better care for their loved ones and themselves. From Apr-2024, caregivers can tap on up to SGD \$400 in CTG subsidies per year, double that of SGD \$200 before. We will also allow caregivers to tap on their SkillsFuture Credit to pay for eligible caregiver courses, to further reduce the cost of training. With these, we intend to scale up the number of subsidised training places for caregivers, to 4,400 each year across 200 courses. More places will be added, if needed, to ensure that the needs of caregivers are met.

In 2023, MOM also expanded the Household Services Scheme via a 2-year pilot programme to provide participating companies with more migrant workers to offer basic child- and elder-minding services. Under this scheme, households who need household services on an ad hoc basis can engage the services of such companies to provide home cleaning, grocery shopping, and child- or elder-minding services.

#### e) Campaigns for mindset shifts



The Government has been promoting the importance of shared parental responsibilities, through working with community partners such as Families for Life Council and the Centre for Fathering (CFF) on three key family movements in Singapore – Families for Life, Dads for Life, and Mums for Life movements.

These movements seek to strengthen family ties with the aim of increasing marriage stability and family resilience, as well as advocating the importance of shared parenting and household responsibilities between mothers and fathers.

The Centre for Fathering runs several campaigns throughout the year to reinforce and signal the importance of fathers' active involvement in their child's development. One of the campaigns is the Great Companies for Dads Awards, which engages and recognises companies that nurture a family-friendly work culture through their policies and initiatives.

In April 2021, United Women Singapore (UWS) launched a Boys Empowered Programme to help boys and young men between 12 – 25 years old to understand the connection between negative gender stereotypes and perpetration of violence against women. The programme creates safe spaces for boys to unpack and examine their notion of masculinity and unlearn some of the notions that may lead to harm toward others and themselves. Since the launch of the initiative, UWS has reached out through workshops and a speaker series to community groups, Institutes of Higher Learning and Singapore Prisons (Juvenile).

### C. Macroeconomic and Fiscal Policy Environment

Singapore's economy continues to do well. In 2023, Singapore's real GDP grew by 1.1%. The Ministry of Trade and Industry has maintained the real GDP growth forecast for 2024 at 1.0% to 3.0%. Our per Capita GDP at current market prices stands at SGD \$113,779, as of 2023. Singapore women also continue to make great strides in many areas, such as education, leadership, community and contribute in turn to Singapore's economy.

The Government continues to dedicate resources to advance and empower women in Singapore. Government Expenditure on social development has increased from SGD \$36.6b (7.1% of GDP) in Financial Year 2019, to SGD \$56.1b (7.8% of GDP) in Financial Year 2024. This includes Government Expenditure relating to health, education, and social protection.

For example, provision of childcare services alleviates caregiving needs which fall disproportionately on women, and enable women to participate in the workforce. We have doubled Government expenditure on the early childhood care and education sector from SGD \$1 billion in 2018, to SGD \$2.2 billion in 2023 (0.3% of GDP of SGD \$673.3 billion in 2023).

## Poverty eradication, social protection, and social services

### A. Promoting Access to Work for Women

The Government will continue to empower all women, including low-income women, to enter or re-enter, remain and progress in the workforce.

MOM works with tripartite partners and community stakeholders to provide networking, mentorships and training opportunities to inspire and nurture women in entering and progressing in their careers of choice. There is a variety of career facilitation and training programmes offered by Workforce Singapore (WSG). This includes Career Trial, which is a short-term trial for host companies and jobseekers to assess job fit before considering formal employment, with a training allowance provided by the Government during the trial. There are also retention incentives for jobseekers who are hired and stay on after the trial. Jobseekers who may require reskilling can tap on Career Conversion Programmes (CCPs). CCPs provide employers with salary support for new hires to move into new occupations or sectors that have good prospects and opportunities for progression, with higher support given to those who may require more help, e.g. older jobseekers or jobseekers who may be out of the workforce for an extended period of time.

For low-income working mothers who work irregular hours, a childminding service launched in 2022 by a local NGO Daughters of Tomorrow operates beyond regular childcare and student care centre hours to help cater to their unique work hours and enable them to remain employed. This service has expanded from nine rental public housing blocks in its infant phase to its current island-wide reach as of January 2024.

#### **a) Promoting access to work for older women**

For older women in particular, skills upgrading and job search assistance will be helpful in enabling them to enter and remain in the workforce.

The Senior Employment Credit (SEC) and Part-Time Re-employment Grant (PTRG) provide support for employers to hire and retain senior workers, including older women. The SEC provides wage offsets of up to 7% to employers who employ Singaporean workers aged 60 and above earning up to SGD \$4,000 per month. More support is given for older age bands. The PTRG provides up to SGD \$125,000 in funding support for employers who offer part-time re-employment, flexible work arrangements and structured career planning (SCP) to senior workers. This will provide more flexible work options to attract and retain senior workers, and encourage them to stay in the workforce.

Mature mid-career individuals aged 40 and above can also consider the Mid-Career Pathways Programme (MCP), a full-time attachment programme launched in 2020 that allows individuals to widen their professional networks and gain meaningful industry-relevant skills and experience to facilitate their transition into full-time employment. Training allowance is co-funded by the Government during the attachment period and trainees will be employed in the host organisation at the end of the attachment if their performance is satisfactory.

The “Earn and Save” Bonus in the new Majulah Package, which will provide working seniors with an annual Central Provident Fund (CPF)<sup>9</sup> bonus of up to SGD \$1,000, will encourage more women in their 50s to join the workforce and improve their retirement adequacy.

As part of broader efforts to support seniors’ participation in the workforce, the minimum statutory retirement and re-employment ages have been increased to 63 and 68 respectively in 2022 and will be

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<sup>9</sup> CPF is a key pillar of Singapore’s social security system. CPF helps Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents set aside funds for housing and healthcare to build a strong foundation for retirement. ([CPF](#))

raised further to 64 and 69 respectively in 2026. This will bring us another step closer to our eventual goal of setting retirement and re-employment ages at 65 and 70 respectively by 2030.

Under the Retirement and Re-employment Act, it is an offence for employers to dismiss senior workers on the grounds of age before the minimum statutory retirement age of 63. Employers must also offer re-employment to senior workers up to the age of 68 if they are medically fit and have satisfactory work performance. If employers are not able to offer re-employment to eligible senior workers, they must provide a one-off Employment Assistance Payment (EAP).

## B. Access to Social Support

In Singapore, like many other countries, the traditional pillars in our social support system are education, housing, healthcare, work, and retirement. Over the last twenty years, social spending by the Government has quadrupled. In Budget 2024, half of the total ministry expenditure is committed to social spending, and a substantial portion of this is spent on structural schemes and not temporary measures.

To support cost-of-living, the Government has announced enhancements to the Assurance Package at Budget 2024 including:

- An additional SGD \$600 in Community Development Council (CDC) Vouchers for all Singaporean households
- Cost-of-Living Special Payment of between SGD \$200 and SGD \$400 in cash. This will be extended to adult Singaporeans with Assessable Income of up to SGD \$100,000, and who do not own more than one property.
- An additional one-off U-Save rebates to help Singaporean households living in Housing Development Board (HDB) flats cope with increases in their utility bills. In total, eligible HDB households can expect to receive two-and-a-half times the amount of regular U-Save rebates, or up to SGD \$950, in FY2024. This will cover about four months of utility bills for those living in 3- and 4- room flats.
- An additional one-off Service and Conservancy Charges (or S&CC) Rebate for Singaporean households living in HDB flats. Together with the regular S&CC rebates, eligible HDB households will receive up to four months of such rebates in FY2024.

While the Package is available to all eligible Singaporean households, we have also ensured that larger households, particularly those with seniors and children, get more support. For example:

- A lower-income household of four, with two young children living in a 3-room HDB flat, will receive about SGD \$5,500 in benefits in FY2024. This comprises cash, MediSave top-ups, U-Save and S&CC rebates, and CDC Vouchers.
- A middle-income household of four, with two young children living in a 4-room HDB flat, will receive about SGD \$3,000 in benefits.
- A middle-income household with six persons – a larger family – including two seniors and two young children living in a 5-room HDB flat, will receive about SGD \$8,000 in benefits.

The Child Development Account (CDA) is a special co-savings account. When a CDA is opened at participating banks, the CDA First Step Grant will be automatically deposited into the CDA and the

Government will co-match each dollar deposited into the CDA, up to the maximum Government co-matching cap. The Government also provides ad-hoc top-ups to the CDA, which children of unwed parents are also eligible to receive. Recent enhancements to the CDA, announced at Budget 2023, also apply to all parents, including single unwed parents.

**a) Strengthening social support for the lower-income, including women**

*i. ComCare*

ComCare supports lower-income households that need help with meeting their basic living expenses. It complements the role of the family and community, and is part of the multiple lines of assistance the Government provides to lower-income households.

ComCare Short-to-Medium Term Assistance (SMTA) provides temporary financial assistance for lower-income individuals or families who are temporarily unable to work, looking for a job or earning a low income and require assistance for basic living needs. Short-to-Medium-Term Assistance is typically granted for 3 to 6 months in the first instance, and renewed if the household continues to require support. Among households assisted with SMTA in FY2022, 48% of the main applicants<sup>10</sup> were female.

ComCare Long-Term Assistance (LTA) provides long-term support to those permanently unable to work due to old age, illness, or disability, and have limited or no means of income and family support. Among households assisted with LTA in FY2022, 34.2% of the main applicants were female.

ComCare Interim Assistance (IA) provides immediate financial assistance for lower-income individuals or families who require urgent and temporary financial relief.

*ii. Workfare Income Supplement Scheme (WIS)*

The Workfare Income Supplement Scheme (WIS) encourages all lower wage workers, including women and persons with disability, to work and build up their CPF savings by providing payouts of up to SGD \$4,200 a year to top up their CPF savings and supplement their income in cash.

Workfare will be enhanced from 2025. Eligible persons with disabilities will continue to receive the highest tier of WIS payments, regardless of age. Workers earning less than SGD \$500 who are unable to work more due to their personal circumstances, including persons with disabilities, will qualify for WIS on a concessionary basis.

*iii. ComLink+*

Community Link (ComLink) was rolled out nationwide in 2021 to uplift lower-income families with children towards Stability, Self-reliance and Social mobility (3S). To better enable ComLink families that are taking active steps to improve their lives to achieve the 3S outcomes, ComLink was enhanced (viz ComLink+) and has been progressively rolled out nationwide since July 2023.

ComLink+ introduces the following enhancements:

- Dedicated family coaches who will coach, motivate, and journey with families over the longer term

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<sup>10</sup> Main applicant refers to the household member who applied for and whose household was assisted by ComCare. Each household assisted by ComCare has one main applicant.

- ComLink+ Progress Packages to give more support to those who do their part
- Extend support to selected families with children, not living in public rental housing, facing similar challenges

*iv. Student Care Fee Assistance (SCFA)*

Fee assistance for children from lower-income working families enrolled in MSF-registered Student Care Centres.

*v. Preschool Subsidies*

We are concerted in our efforts to support lower-income families, including to ensure that they can consistently afford to send their children to preschool by age 3. About 8 in 10 children aged 3 to 4 years old from lower-income families are enrolled in preschool, compared to the national average of about 9 in 10.

Universal basic subsidies for childcare and infant care are available to all Singapore Citizen children. Families with gross monthly household income of SGD \$12,000 and below can also receive means-tested additional subsidy, of up to SGD \$710 for infant care and up to SGD \$467 for childcare.

Starting from end-2024, all lower-income families with a gross monthly household income of SGD \$6,000 and below will qualify for the maximum childcare subsidies for their income tier. These families will pay as low as SGD \$3 a month for full day childcare in a government-supported preschool.

*vi. KidSTART*

KidSTART is a nationwide programme that supports lower-income families with children up to six years old, to enable them to have a good start in life. It supports parents with the knowledge and skills to nurture their children's early development, including their physical and socio-emotional health and well-being, and works with community and corporate partners to support families holistically.

*vii. ProjectDian@M<sup>3</sup>*

Project Dian@M<sup>3</sup> strengthens support for Malay/Muslim families living in public rental flats by connecting them with national and community initiatives.

**b) Strengthening social support for older women**

Singapore has measures in place to support seniors in meeting their basic retirement needs and building up their retirement savings through the CPF system and other targeted support measures. This includes non-working women who left the workforce due to caregiving responsibilities. The Government also supports seniors in other key areas of retirement. This can range from universal measures for all seniors, such as MediShield Life for healthcare, to targeted support schemes for seniors who need the most help, such as ComCare financial assistance and CHAS Blue for healthcare. All of these moves complement the support for women to return to the workforce.

The Central Provident Fund (CPF) is a mandatory social security savings scheme for Singaporeans and Permanent Residents, which supports their retirement, healthcare, and housing needs in Singapore. It is a key pillar of Singapore's comprehensive social security system. The monthly CPF contributions made by Singaporeans and their employers over their working lives attract relatively high stable interest rates. The

compounded savings form the bedrock of most Singaporeans' retirement funds. The Government has also put in place measures to support seniors who need help in meeting their basic retirement needs, including caregivers who may not have consistently worked throughout their lives:

- Incentives are provided to encourage families to top up their and their loved ones' CPF accounts through the CPF Retirement Sum Topping Up (RSTU) Scheme. The Government enhanced the RSTU in 2022, increasing the tax relief cap for top-ups to self and loved ones from SGD \$7,000 to \$8,000.
- The Matched Retirement Savings Scheme (MRSS) also helps to boost the retirement savings of older Singapore Citizens, including caregivers, who have yet to accumulate the current Basic Retirement Sum in their CPF. The Government matches every dollar of cash top-up made to eligible members, up to an annual cap. MRSS will be enhanced in 2025. First, it will be extended to those above the age of 70 (in addition to those aged 55-70 today), to enable more Singaporeans to meet their retirement needs, with the help of their families, employers and the community. The annual matching cap will also be increased from SGD \$600 to \$2,000, with a lifetime matching cap of SGD \$20,000.
- The Silver Support (SS) scheme provides quarterly cash supplements of up to SGD \$900 to seniors who had low or no incomes during their working years and now have less retirement savings. About two-thirds of the SS recipients are women, including caregivers who were not able to work much when they were younger. SS will be enhanced in 2025 – the qualifying per capita household income threshold will be raised and quarterly payments will be raised by 20%.
- The Majulah Package will be introduced to support Singaporeans born in 1973 and earlier to build up their retirement and healthcare adequacy. The Package has three components, which will be disbursed from end-2024 onwards:
  - A one-time MediSave Bonus of SGD \$1,500 or \$750 for all seniors born in 1973 and earlier;
  - A one-time Retirement Savings Bonus of between SGD \$1,000 to \$1,500 for seniors with retirement savings below the Basic Retirement Sum; and
  - A yearly Earn and Save Bonus of up to SGD \$1,000 for lower- to middle- income working seniors who earn up to SGD \$6,000 per month, with more going to those with lower incomes.
  - Those who are not working, including caregivers, will benefit from the MediSave Bonus and Retirement Savings Bonus, as well as other support measures beyond the Majulah Package.

### **c) COVID-19 social support measures**

The Government's first priority was to minimise the social impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable segments of our population.

Temporary assistance schemes, including the Temporary Relief Fund, COVID-19 Support Grant, Self-Employed Person Income Relief Scheme, Job Support Scheme (JSS) and Grocery Voucher schemes, were established. Beyond grants, more flexibility was also exercised in providing immediate assistance to affected individuals through the ComCare Interim Assistance, and lengthened the duration of ComCare Short-to-Medium-Term Assistance for households in need.

More than 480,000 Singapore residents were supported, with around SGD \$543 million disbursed across various COVID-19 support schemes - namely the Temporary Relief Fund, COVID-19 Support Grant, COVID-19 Recovery Grant – Temporary, and COVID-19 Recovery Grant.

Singaporean households received about SGD \$2,200 per member on average from COVID-19 schemes in 2020, with households in the lower income quintiles generally receiving more benefits compared to those in the upper income quintiles.

- Jobs Support Scheme (JSS)<sup>11</sup>: More than SGD \$28 billion was disbursed under the Jobs Support Scheme (JSS) from April 2020 to December 2021, which provided wage support for employers and helped them retain local employees during the pandemic.
- Self-employed persons (SEPs) whose livelihoods were affected by COVID-19 were supported through schemes including the SEP Income Relief Scheme (SIRS)<sup>12</sup>. About SGD \$1.8 billion was disbursed to over 200,000 SEPs under SIRS.
- Financing schemes were also introduced to support enterprises in accessing loans. Altogether, the Temporary Bridging Loan Programme (TBL), Enterprise Financing Scheme – Working Capital Loan, and Enterprise Financing Scheme-Trade Loan supported over 27,000 enterprises in accessing loans of over SGD \$24.7 billion over the period of March 2020 to December 2021.

### C. Access to Low-Cost Legal Services

Singapore is committed to ensuring effective access to justice and ensuring that all persons have adequate legal advice and representation of good quality regardless of their financial status, gender or nationality. For accused persons who are charged with a capital offence, free legal counsel under the Legal Assistance Scheme for Capital Offences (“LASCO”), administered by the Supreme Court, is available. There is no means test or eligibility criteria to satisfy for the scheme.

For women facing criminal charges which are not punishable by capital punishment, if they satisfy the requisite means and merits tests, they have access to legal representation via the Public Defender’s Office, a department under the Ministry of Law.

For persons who do not qualify for aid with the Public Defender’s Office, they may also turn to the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme (“CLAS”), administered Pro Bono SG, which offers free legal counsel for those who are charged with certain non-capital offences. Under CLAS, a volunteer lawyer is assigned to represent the person in court after they have passed the means and merits test.

Applicants may also approach Pro Bono SG’s various Community Legal Clinics and Community Law Centres across Singapore for legal advice.

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<sup>11</sup>The Jobs Support Scheme (JSS) provides wage support for employers to retain their local employees (Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents) during this period of economic uncertainty. Under the Job Support Scheme, the Government co-funds a proportion of the first SGD \$4,600 of gross monthly wages paid to each local employee up to March 2021.

<sup>12</sup> The Self-Employed Person (SEP) Income Relief Scheme (SIRS) provides cash payouts of SGD \$3,000 each end-May, July and October 2020 to help Singaporean SEPs with less means and family support.

## D. Health Outcomes

Women enjoy strong health outcomes in Singapore, along with high life expectancy (Table 6). We aim to provide quality medical services that are affordable for all Singaporeans, including women. Healthcare services have been improved for different groups of women such as caregivers, mothers and the elderly. The government's expenditure on health has also increased over the years (Table 7). These efforts provide women greater opportunities and agency to achieve their aspirations.

**Table 6: Life Expectancy at Birth for Women/Maternal Mortality Rate (2018 – 2023)**

<b>Life Expectancy at Birth for Women/ Maternal Mortality Rate</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Female Life Expectancy at Birth (Years)	85.5	85.9	85.9	85.5	85.2	85.2
Maternal Mortality Rate (per 100,000 Live Births)	10	3	0	3	3	3

Source: Immigration and Checkpoint Authority of Singapore and Singapore Department of Statistics

**Table 7: Expenditure for Health (FY 2019 – FY 2023)**

<b>Expenditure For Health</b>	<b>FY 2019</b>	<b>FY 2020</b>	<b>FY 2021</b>	<b>FY 2022</b>	<b>FY 2023 (Revised Estimates)</b>
Expenditure	S\$11,319 Million	S\$15,260 Million	S\$17,322 Million	S\$17,112 Million	S\$17,946 Million

Source: Ministry of Finance

### **a) Expanded health services for women**

Singapore introduced the Healthier SG national initiative in 2023 to focus on preventive care for eligible residents, including women.

Specific health services continue to be made available and expanded for women, including sexual and reproductive health services, maternal health, and HIV services.

#### *i. Gender-specific health campaigns*

Nationally recommended health screenings, including breast cancer screening in older women, are fully subsidised for enrolled citizens.

For cervical cancer prevention, MOH fully subsidises human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination for all Secondary 1 and 2 female students as part of Health Promotion Board's school-based health programme. HPV vaccination is also subsidised for eligible female Singaporeans aged 9 – 26 at Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS) GP clinics and polyclinics.

Singapore is close to attaining the World Health Organization's 2030 target of 90% of girls being fully vaccinated with the HPV vaccine by the age of 15, with 89.4% of females aged 15 having received the nationally recommended doses of the HPV vaccine in 2022.

#### *ii. Sexual and reproductive health*



Singapore has a well-established healthcare system and contraception is generally accessible. Contraceptives such as birth control pills, condoms and intrauterine devices (IUD) are available through healthcare providers and pharmacies. The quantity, quality and cost may vary based on the specific method and brand chosen.

In 2021, about 10,000 Singapore resident females aged 15–49 were prescribed contraceptive medications/device in public healthcare institutions. These figures may include females who are using oral contraceptives for menstrual cycle regulation as the reason for prescription was not differentiated.

In Singapore, abortion is regulated under the Termination of Pregnancy Act (TOPA), and is legal before 24 gestational weeks. Abortion can only be carried out after 24 weeks if it is immediately necessary to save the life or to prevent grave permanent injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman.

Under the TOPA, all pregnant women seeking abortion in Singapore are required to undergo pre-abortion counselling with a trained counsellor. The pregnant woman can only give her written consent to abortion at least 48 hours after the counselling session. This is to allow her time to carefully consider her decision for abortion. Those who require further support and follow-up are also directed to the Family Service Centres or help-lines.

Parental consent for counselling is not required as there were concerns that mandating parental consent for such abortions may compel these minors to risk their lives by seeking unsafe abortions elsewhere. Minors seeking abortions are encouraged to inform and discuss with their parents and family on their decision to undergo abortion.

### *iii. Mental health*

Over the years, MOH has worked with partner agencies, healthcare institutions and community service providers to develop and expand mental health services for persons who require care and support.

According to the 2022 National Population Health Survey (NPHS), a larger proportion of females (18.6%) reported poor mental health compared to males (15.2%). This survey also found that females were more willing to seek help from healthcare professionals and informal support networks compared to males, which could have contributed to more females reporting poor mental health. Moreover, experts in mood disorder as well as those with a lived experience of mental illness have elaborated on the tendency of males downplaying the symptoms of depression due to gender norms as well as stigmatisation.<sup>13</sup>

As mothers and expectant mothers may also be at risk of postnatal and antenatal depression, NUH, SGH and KKH each have programmes providing antenatal and postnatal mental health screening.

New measures to tackle mental health have been implemented since the pandemic (read more below).

### *iv. Gender-responsive training for health service providers*

Healthcare professionals such as doctors and nurses play an important role in providing healthcare services and are trained to support patients with empathy, sensitivity and due consideration of their specific care needs, which encompass the risk factors associated with the development of mental health issues in women.

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<sup>13</sup> Addis ME (2008) Gender and depression in men. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 15, 153–168.

v. *HIV*

Singapore adopts an integrated approach to the care, treatment and support of persons living with HIV, regardless of gender. The majority of HIV patients are managed as outpatients in public hospitals by a multi-disciplinary team that provides medical and nursing care, social services, counselling and other support. Singapore recognises that with effective treatment, people living with HIV can lead normal and productive lives. MOH takes steps to ensure that people living with HIV have access to necessary treatment.

Means-tested subsidies and other forms of financial assistance are also available to those in need. In an inpatient setting, patients receive subsidies according to the public hospital subsidy framework. As of 1 September 2020, 16 antiretroviral drugs have been placed on the Standard Drug List (SDL) and Medication Assistance Fund (MAF). Singaporeans who require further assistance can receive support through MediFund, which is an endowment fund set up by the Government to support the medical bills of needy Singaporeans. Long Term Visit Pass (LTVP) holders who experience financial difficulties for their medical treatment can approach Medical Social Workers to work out viable financial arrangements such as instalment payments.

The Government funds programmes at hospitals to enhance medical management, social support, and counselling for people living with HIV. Apart from healthcare institutions, people living with HIV are also able to obtain support from community-based organisations.

**b) Strengthening support for maternal health**

Significant efforts have been made to support our children and their families' health, including Antenatal services, Childhood Developmental Screenings and Vaccinations, and School Health Service. Nonetheless, more could be done to leverage the whole-of-society effort to address the multi-faceted nature of child and maternal health issues, to achieve healthier future generations.

As such, an inter-agency taskforce was convened in January 2021 to oversee the development of a 5-year Child and Maternal Health & Well-being (CAMH) Strategy and Action Plan. The Taskforce sought to look at cross-cutting issues that would require multi-agency, cross-domain effort to collectively address. In its report published on 14 June 2024, the Taskforce has put forward nine key recommendations centred around three key thrusts under the Strategy, which have been translated into 48 initiatives to drive better outcomes for children and their families, and maximise the development of our young. 28 out of the 48 initiatives have been implemented, with the remainder progressively implemented over the next two years.

The Strategy and Action Plan recommends policies, solutions, and programmes to support women to enhance their physical health, mental health and overall well-being starting from the preconception stage through pregnancy and the post-natal stage into motherhood. It also takes a life course approach and addresses key health risks, issues, and wider determinants of health for mothers and their children of different age segments, spanning from pre-conception phase till the age of 18 years old.

Through this effort, every pregnant woman will have equitable access to quality maternal care services including pre-natal check-ups, obstetrics services, neo-natal care and breastfeeding and lactation support.

**c) Strengthening healthcare support for older women**

The Ministry of Health is committed to keeping healthcare affordable for all Singaporeans, including older women, and will be conducting a review of MediShield Life, a national health insurance scheme that covers major health episodes which usually occur unexpectedly in older persons.

To better protect against catastrophic healthcare expenditures, the Ministry of Health will study increasing claim limits for surgeries and hospital stays, enhancing coverage of outpatient treatments, and expanding coverage to new groundbreaking treatments (such as Cell, Tissue, and Gene Therapy Products).

MediShield Life premiums are kept affordable for older cohorts through a combination of means-tested premium subsidies and MediSave top-ups under the Pioneer Generation Package, Merdeka Generation package, Majulah Package, and the Goods and Services Tax Voucher scheme. Singaporeans who face difficulty paying their premiums beyond Government subsidies, MediSave and family support can also apply for Additional Premium Support. No one will lose MediShield Life coverage due to genuine inability to pay premiums.

Seniors, including older women, can also receive additional support through Active Ageing Centres, located island-wide within the communities. Singapore is expanding the number of Active Ageing Centres and its service offerings to build strong networks for seniors, connecting them with suitable social and lifestyle activities geared to supporting an active and healthy journey even as they age.

The Live Well Age Well programme (LWAW) that is jointly implemented by the Health Promotion Board and People's Association offers activities such as physical exercises, as well as educational sessions on topics like healthy eating and mental health. Most initiatives under LWAW are well-attended by older females, e.g. Move It, Feel Strong group exercise sessions and the Healthy Ageing Promotion Programme for You (HAPPY) to improve frail seniors' functional ability through dual tasking exercises.

#### **d) COVID-19 measures for healthcare**

Singapore has implemented several measures to mitigate the long-term negative impact of COVID-19 on women's physical and mental health. These measures include:

- Ensuring healthcare services remain accessible to all, including women, during the pandemic, by maintaining essential healthcare services and providing telemedicine options for continuity of care.
- Providing mental health support to address the psychological impact of the pandemic on the population, including women, such as through helplines, online counseling services, and mental well-being programs.
- Providing gender-sensitive services to address the challenges commonly faced by women, such as those related to caregiving responsibilities or perinatal health and mental health concerns.
- Raising awareness about the importance of the individual's physical and mental health during the pandemic, including that of women's, and providing information on available support services.
- Mobilising community organisations and support groups to provide assistance and support to individuals in need, including women, and ensuring access to necessary resources and information.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought to light many mental health and well-being issues, including those relating to workplaces. The Tripartite Partners worked closely to better support the mental well-being of workers by encouraging employers to provide mental well-being support in workplaces. These include:

- Tripartite Advisory on Mental Health and Well-Being at Workplaces to provide practical guidance on measures that employers can adopt to support their employees’ mental well-being. The advisory includes an updated list of Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) providers that is curated to increase awareness of EAP services and their offerings (e.g. indicative pricings, languages offered, modes of counselling and areas of specialisations, beyond basic contact details).
- Playbook on Workplace Mental Well-being to supplement the Tripartite Advisory and provide actionable guidance (i.e. plug-and-play templates such as creating safe spaces for conversations and setting up a peer support system). These aim to help organisations implement initiatives to support their employees’ mental well-being.
- iWorkHealth Tool, a free online, psychosocial health assessment tool which companies can use to regularly assess their employees’ mental health and identify workplace stressors. (We have also launched the iWorkHealth Lite for companies to conduct pulse survey to monitor their employees’ state of mental well-being more frequently).
- Total Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) Programme to provide organisations free access to qualified consultants who can advise them on how to manage safety and health in an integrated way, and intervention programmes such as mental well-being workshops.
- Mental Health Toolkit for Employers to provide information and resources for employers to develop a mental health-friendly culture, recruit individuals with mental health conditions, as well as support their recovery and return to work.

#### E. Education Outcomes and Skills

Singapore invests heavily in education to help our people achieve their full potential (Table 8). Our principles of meritocracy and equal access to opportunities have ensured that all Singaporeans have equal access to education.

**Table 8: Expenditure on Education (FY 2019 – FY 2023)**

<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>FY 2019</b>	<b>FY 2020</b>	<b>FY 2021</b>	<b>FY 2022</b>	<b>FY 2023 (Revised Estimates)</b>
Expenditure	S\$12,723 Million	S\$12,260 Million	S\$12,910 Million	S\$13,061 Million	S\$14,080 Million

Source: Ministry of Finance

Women in Singapore have made great strides in education since independence. They have achieved high literacy rates: 96.4% in 2021 (for resident females aged 15 years and older) as compared to 32.8% in 1960. The proportion of university graduates who are female has been stable at around 50% from 2013 to 2022, signalling there has been equal representation of male and female students in universities.

##### **a) Access to education**

As education remains an important social leveller, we are committed to providing high-quality and affordable education to all Singaporeans, regardless of their background. Primary school education is compulsory for Singapore citizens under the Compulsory Education Act. Our enrolment and completion rates are high, and we have achieved near-universal completion of secondary education, with over 97% of each Primary 1 cohort progressing to a post-secondary education institution. Education is heavily subsidised at all levels for Singaporeans. Teachers are critical to the success of our education system. We

therefore invest in having a high-quality teaching workforce by ensuring that the teaching profession is attractive and respected and provide our teachers with professional development opportunities for their continued growth and development.

Our schools also actively partner with other agencies and community stakeholders to provide target academic, social-emotional and financial support for students from disadvantaged families. A key initiative is the Uplifting Pupils in Life and Inspiring Families Taskforce (UPLIFT), which was set up in October 2018 to strengthen support for disadvantaged students and their families through providing after-school care and support, as well as facilitating stronger school-community partnerships.

Through these efforts, about eight in 10 students with attendance issues in 2020 improved their attendance to 90% or better in 2021.

#### **b) Eliminating gender stereotypes**

Measures have been taken to ensure that gender stereotypes are not perpetuated in the education system. All students study the full range of subjects, including mathematics and science. In secondary schools and Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs), students are encouraged to explore a variety of educational pathways and career options based on individual interest and aptitude; and not to be limited by gender stereotypes.

Women are well-represented in traditionally male-dominated courses; with close to 40% of students studying STEM subjects courses at our IHLs being female. Targeted efforts through career fairs and Open Houses help to raise student awareness of STEM-related job opportunities and industries such as IT and cybersecurity.

Students are encouraged to deepen and pursue their interest in STEM through internships, competitions, talent development programmes including programmes designed specifically for talented female students, many of which are offered by partner organisations. For example, as part of IMDA's Singapore Women in Tech initiative, IMDA and five polytechnics have an ongoing collaboration to retain and develop female students' interest in a career in tech through talks, workshops, competitions, and mentorship opportunities.

Initiatives such as the Nanyang Technological University's Promotion of Women in Engineering, Research and Science (POWERS) programme encourages women to pursue careers in STEM fields. Launched in 2021, over 600 female students have benefited from POWERS, through mentorship programmes and workshops and seminars, which equip them with professional and personal skillsets to embark on STEM careers.

#### **c) COVID-19 measures**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, MOE closely monitored the disruptions to schooling and took steps to ensure that all students' learning and development were not compromised.

Schools acted quickly to transition to Full Home-Based Learning, while maintaining face-to-face learning for vulnerable students and children of essential workers. The efforts of our teachers to engage students, coupled with learning resources such as the Singapore Student Learning Space that MOE had developed, helped to minimise disruption to teaching and learning.

MOE also ensured that all students had access to computers and the Internet for home-based learning. In 2020, schools loaned out more than 20,000 computing devices to students who lacked digital access. In 2021, every secondary school student was equipped with a personal laptop or tablet for learning – seven years ahead of the original target. IMDA also offered subsidised computers and free broadband to low-income families who required digital access for home-based learning.

## Freedom from violence, stigma, and stereotypes

Singapore does not tolerate any form of violence against women. Robust legislation are in place to protect them from gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and domestic violence.

- The Penal Code criminalises all acts of violence and sexual crimes, and there are heavy penalties if an offence is made out, particularly if committed against vulnerable victims.
- The Women’s Charter provides protection for women from family violence, including allowing the Family Court to make protection orders restraining the perpetrator from committing acts of family violence against victim-survivors. Breaching such orders is an arrestable offence.
- If the abuse is against a child, the child can also be protected under the Children and Young Persons Act.
- The Protection against Harassment Act (POHA) protects individuals from harassment and anti-social behaviour.

In addition to statutory protection, we recognise that protecting women and girls from violence requires a strong partnership with our community partners. As such, we have put in place measures that allow us to tap the expertise and services across the social and private sector such as schools, workplaces and religious and grassroots organisations to better support victims of gender-based violence who require assistance.

### **A. Eliminating Gender-Based Violence**

#### **a) Intimate partner violence**

Victims of violence, including unmarried women who are victims of intimate partner violence, can obtain protection under POHA through a Protection Order (PO), or, in urgent cases, an Expedited Protection Order (EPO).

As part of a PO, the court can make a domestic exclusion order. The POHA was amended recently to enhance the penalties for offences against victims in an intimate relationship.

The Penal Code was also amended in 2019 to better protect victims from intimate partner violence. Offenders who commit offences against victims with whom they were in a close or intimate relationship are now liable to be punished with up to twice the maximum penalty for the offence.

#### **b) Domestic violence**

##### *i. Changes in legislation*

Amendments were made to the Penal Code in 2019 (which came into effect on 1 January 2020) to enhance the protection of women and girls. Offences against the body (including wrongful confinement, hurt, and rape) may be punished with up to twice the maximum punishments for these offences if committed against a person that was in a “close” or “intimate” relationship with the offender at the time of the offence. This allows perpetrators of domestic violence to be punished much more severely.

The marital immunity for rape was also repealed. The full, unqualified repeal of marital immunity for rape will protect all women from this serious form of sexual abuse, regardless of their relationship to the perpetrator.

In 2023, the Women’s Charter was amended to strengthen protection for victim-survivors, and enhance rehabilitation and accountability of perpetrators of family violence. The amendments clarified that the definition of family violence includes physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse. Illustrations of egregious coercive control behaviours that constitute emotional and psychological abuse were also introduced in the amended Act.

To empower victim-survivors to better protect themselves, we also introduced new Court orders, namely the Stay Away and No Contact Orders, in addition to the current Domestic Exclusion and Counselling Orders. To strengthen the Government’s ability to intervene in family violence cases, we also introduced Emergency Orders, which are issued on site in high-risk cases to better protect victim-survivors at the onset of violence, while further action is taken to ensure their safety, such as applying for a Personal Protection Order or Expedited Order. The amendments also further empowered the Court to make additional rehabilitative provisions, raised penalties<sup>14</sup> and strengthened enforcement<sup>15</sup> against breaches.

*ii. Strengthening public education efforts*

MSF’s Break the Silence public education campaign was refreshed in 2021. The campaign aims to increase awareness of different types of abuse, including non-physical abuse, and to encourage survivors and bystanders to seek help. As part of the campaign, MSF has also introduced the use of the “Signal for Help” hand sign so that survivors can call for help, discreetly. The campaign will be enhanced in 2024 to highlight the important message that domestic violence is not a private affair and a whole-of-society effort is required to stamp out abuse cases. To make it easier for victim-survivors of violence and the community to report violence and get immediate help, MSF launched the National Anti-Violence and Sexual Harassment Helpline (NAVH) in 2021. MSF also introduced an online text-based channel as an additional mode of reporting to make it easier for persons to report violence and seek help.

MSF has also been equipping our partners and the larger community with the knowledge to spot and report signs of domestic violence. From June 2020 till April 2024, more than 8,600 people across the people, public, and private sectors have been trained under the Domestic Violence Awareness Training programme.

**c) Sexual violence**

*i. Changes to legislation*

We maintain severe penalties for incidents of rape in our Penal Code, which is punishable with up to 20 years’ imprisonment.

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<sup>14</sup> Breaches of Personal Protection Order/Domestic Exclusion Order/Expedited Order/Stay Away Order/No Contact Order/Electronic Monitoring Order are arrestable offences and will be punishable with a fine of up to SGD \$10,000, or imprisonment of up to 12 months, or both, for a first conviction. Any breach of a Counselling Order, assessment order for the purpose of Mandatory Treatment, or a Mandatory Treatment Order will be an offence punishable with a fine of up to SGD \$2,000.

<sup>15</sup> These powers enable MSF’s enforcement officers to detect and investigate offences, and include powers to enter premises or seize documents for evidence of an offence.



In 2019, amendments to the Penal Code removed marital immunity for rape and enhanced penalties where offences are committed against victims in an intimate or close relationship with the offender, domestic workers, and persons with disabilities. New sexual offences were also introduced to deal with technology-facilitated offences, including using a child to produce child abuse materials.

Further amendments to the Penal Code in 2021 (which came into effect on 1 March 2022) were introduced to enhance deterrence by increasing the prescribed penalties for certain sexual offences. For instance, the maximum imprisonment term for outrage of modesty cases was increased from two to three years.

*ii. Increasing victim support*

Forensic medical examinations of victims may be required in serious sexual crimes cases such as rape and sexual assault by penetration.

If required, victims of sexual crime may be brought to the One-Stop Abuse Forensic Examination (OneSAFE) Centre, located at Police Cantonment Complex, or a hospital to undergo forensic medical examination conducted by medical professionals. The OneSAFE Centre allows sexual crime victims to undergo the necessary forensic and medical examinations in a private facility in the Police Cantonment Complex. The OneSAFE Centre will serve adult rape victims whose cases are reported within 72 hours of the assault, and who do not require other medical attention.

The Singapore Police Force (SPF) also formed the Sexual Crime and Family Violence Command in 2023. This was to raise the standards of investigations and provide better oversight of the management of sexual crime and family violence cases.

*iii. Gender sensitivity training*

The Government firmly believes that mandatory and recurring capacity-building programmes are important to equip relevant officers with the skills necessary to deal with cases of gender-based violence against women and to treat victims in a gender-sensitive manner.

*a. Judges and judicial officers; police officers, prosecutors*

All appointed Judges and Judicial Officers undergo a mandatory Induction Programme at the Singapore Judicial College (SJC) which includes gender-sensitivity training for cases involving violence against women, whether in the context of an intimate relationship or in the family. The Induction Programme also provides an update on substantive law and cases on related issues.

The SJC also organises periodic training workshops and lectures for Judges and Judicial Officers on these same areas. For example, in 2018, the SJC worked with senior forensic and clinical psychologists to deliver a workshop on “Understanding the Psychology of Sexual Assault Victims”. This workshop specifically addressed the misconceptions surrounding sexual offending and victim behaviours. Such capacity building programmes will continue to be held in the future.

Judges sitting on the Protection from Harassment Court, a specialised Court dedicated to dealing with harassment matters, also attend training by PAVE on domestic violence.

Police officers are trained to identify vulnerable victims and treat them sensitively to reduce the likelihood of re-traumatisation. During interviews, female officers are present to assist in the interviews where

necessary. This comprehensive triage process is applied to anyone who might be a potential victim. Investigations into crimes such as sexual assault or abuse follow the same process.

New prosecutors with the Attorney-General's Chambers, which houses the central prosecuting agency, undergo general training which covers sex crimes and crimes of violence. Prosecutors who deal with cases involving vulnerable witnesses, including women and girls who are victims of sexual crime, receive specific forensic interview training (both in plenary and practicum formats) in prosecuting such cases on a yearly basis, and attend biennial forensic training conducted by The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children.

b. *Social workers*

Social workers are trained to respond sensitively to all persons in need, taking into consideration the context of their experience and its impact on them. For victims of crimes (sexual abuse/assault/trafficking etc) and violence, Social Workers are sensitised to respond to them in an accepting and non-judgmental manner. Social Workers are also equipped with the knowledge and skills to explore and assess the impact of the experience on the victims' psychosocial and emotional functioning; and provide them with the required support. In addition, in-service training is provided to sensitize Social Workers to issues of trauma which is common amongst victims of crime and violence; so that Social Workers are equipped to identify and refer victims for psychological support when required.

c. *Healthcare workers*

For sex abuse cases, there will be a multidisciplinary interview (MDI) involving the police and the gynaecologist at the same time, so that the patient does not need to repeat their story (which risks re-traumatisation). If it is a female patient being examined by a male gynaecologist, there will be another female nurse in the room as well for patient safety. This is protocol not just for sex abuse cases, but the general protocol for all medical examinations involving male doctors and female patients. These services are applicable to women regardless of language and ethnicity.

iv. *Efforts in schools*

Our schools and IHLs are committed to provide a safe and supportive environment for all students. We take a serious view of any form of sexual harassment and bullying, including gender-based bullying. School rules and disciplinary frameworks are clearly and regularly communicated to staff and students.

Schools and IHLs provide readily accessible channels (e.g. through form teachers/class advisors, counsellors, incident reporting helplines or whistleblowing units) for the safe reporting of cases and take educative, preventive and intervention measures to address them promptly. Parents can also raise issues with their children's respective schools.

Through the curriculum, students are taught the importance of respect, care, empathy and how to establish and respect boundaries for themselves and others. They are taught to understand the consequences of overstepping these boundaries. Students are also equipped to look out for their peers in distress and to seek help from trusted adults in school. In the IHLs, there are compulsory modules on respect and appropriate behaviour for students.

When alleged sexual harassment or bullying is reported, trained school personnel will investigate and provide counselling support for students involved and decide on appropriate disciplinary action.

#### **d) Harassment in workplaces**

##### *i. Legislation*

POHA has been an effective tool in combatting harassment since its inception. POHA also tracks the number of workplace harassment cases, amongst other types of harassment cases, filed. As at 31 December 2022, and out of the 866 Protection Order applications<sup>16</sup> filed from 1 June 2021 to 31 December 2022, 203 cases involved workplace harassment.

##### *ii. Multipronged approach*

Beyond enforcement, the Government and our tripartite partners also adopt a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach to tackling workplace harassment.

The Government together with our tripartite partners have introduced a Tripartite Advisory on Managing Workplace Harassment, which complements the law by providing guidance to employers and employees on preventing and managing harassment at the workplace to ensure a safe and harmonious workplace. For example, employers are guided to implement a workplace harassment prevention policy and to provide information and training on workplace harassment to staff.

Our Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) also supports the ecosystem in two key ways. First, when workplace harassment cases are surfaced, it will ask the employer to carry out a proper, independent investigation into the incident, if the employer has not done so. The Tripartite Alliance will also require the employer to provide an update on the disciplinary actions taken against the harasser if the report was found to be true, and to address the concerns raised by the affected individual. To prevent future incidents of workplace harassment, it will also work with the employer to put in place proper harassment prevention policies and procedures that are aligned with the Tripartite Advisory. For employers that are not cooperative or refuse to heed its advice, it can refer the matter to MOM to take action against them.

Second, the Tripartite Alliance conducts regular courses to train key personnel to adopt policies to prevent and manage workplace harassment. In 2019, it expanded its efforts by setting up a Workplace Harassment Resource and Recourse Centre, to provide support for employees who have encountered workplace harassment. MOM and the Tripartite Alliance will continue to raise awareness of the Centre, so that employees can feel safer and more confident in seeking help.

MOM and the Tripartite Alliance will also continue our close collaboration with key stakeholders (e.g. tripartite partners, police and non-Government organisations such as AWARE, Daughters Of Tomorrow, Mums@Work Singapore and Singapore Council of Women's Organisations) to strengthen existing case management and referral partnerships for workplace harassment, as well as provide more specific guidance and training for employers, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, to put in place proper grievance handling processes and workplace harassment policies to help and support affected employees.

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<sup>16</sup> A Protection Order application may involve more than 1 type of harassment.

## **e) Eliminating violence against marginalised groups**

### *i. Legal Protections for women with disabilities*

In 2020, the amended Penal Code took effect to ensure criminal laws take a robust approach to prevent and combat exploitation, abuse of, and violence against persons with disabilities.

- Sections 74A. For certain offences committed against vulnerable persons (i.e. individuals who, by reason of mental or physical infirmity, disability or incapacity, are substantially unable to protect themselves from abuse, neglect, or self-neglect), the court may sentence the offender to enhanced punishments of up to twice the maximum penalties if the offender knew or ought reasonably to have known that the victim was a vulnerable person.
- Sections 304B and 304C criminalise causing the death of a vulnerable person by sustained abuse, and causing or allowing the death of a vulnerable person in the same household.
- Section 335A penalises persons who had the custody, charge, or care of vulnerable persons and failed to take reasonable steps to protect them from neglect, or physical or sexual abuse.
- Section 376F criminalises the procurement of sexual activity with a person with mental disability.

### *ii. Education of persons with disabilities to protect them from violence*

The special education schools deliver a customised curriculum for students with disabilities who have higher support needs. These schools place a strong emphasis on life skills (e.g. communication, social-emotional), healthy relationships and sexuality and personal safety. We are working with schools to strengthen curriculum delivery through Teaching and Learning Syllabuses that have been co-developed by the MOE and key stakeholders. Some homes for persons with disabilities may try and tailor initiatives to raise awareness of how their residents can protect themselves from abuse and violence, based on the profile of residents. For residents who are able to comprehend such instruction, homes would attempt to educate them, e.g. using pictorial illustrations.

## **f) Measures to resource organisations working to prevent and respond to GBV**

MSF works with the Protection Specialist Centres to provide counsel and support to victim-survivors of violence and their families, and refer female survivors of domestic violence (and their children) to MSF-funded Crisis Shelters, in situations where there is no safe and suitable alternative accommodation option.

At these shelters, the social service professionals work with the residents to address their safety, financial or emotional concerns, and also assist them in securing longer-term and stable housing arrangements. There is no cap on the length of stay at these shelters.

## **B. Technology-Facilitated Violence**

The online space has transformed our lives, bringing new opportunities for people and businesses. However, it is also increasingly being exploited by criminals. For example, in Singapore, we have had to

deal with cases such as the dissemination of voyeuristic and intimate images on a variety of online platforms. The online space poses higher risks due to the anonymity and greater speed with which the malicious spread of voyeuristic and intimate material can happen and cause harm to victims.

A 2023 survey conducted by SG Her Empowerment (SHE), a local civil society organisation, found that female youths were more at risk for online harms of a sexual nature. 22% of female youths reported experiencing sexual harassment online, compared to 12% of male youths.

We have introduced a series of legislative levers against internet intermediaries to slow or stop the malicious spread of such material. We have also imposed higher penalties on offenders who harm vulnerable victims online. With this in mind, we will regularly review and update our laws to ensure that they remain effective in the face of new challenges.

#### **a) Legislation**

The Government recognises the growing concerns on online harms and has introduced and amended laws to deal with such harms. To improve the protection of vulnerable victims, we have amended our criminal laws to reflect developments in technology-related crimes, with particular attention paid to sexual offences.

##### *i. Amendments to Penal Code*

Singapore amended the Penal Code in 2019 to better tackle technology-facilitated crimes:

- a. **Child abuse material:** We have criminalised the entire spectrum of activities pertaining to child abuse material, from production to distribution and possession of such material (s377BG – s377BL Penal Code). Our legislation expressly provides that child abuse material includes digital materials and covers offences committed through the use of technology and the Internet. Furthermore, the Penal Code amendments also ensure that Singapore citizens or permanent residents who commit acts overseas cannot escape criminal liability.
- b. **Sexual communication with minors:** We have criminalised certain forms of sexual communication with minors (whether below the age of 16, or between 16 and 18 if they are in an exploitative relationship with the offender). Such offences cover communications that take place online, as long as either the victim or the offender was in Singapore at the time of the communication. This takes into account the possibility of offences committed across jurisdictions via the Internet.
- c. **Voyeurism:** Singapore replaced a more general criminal provision on insulting the modesty of women with purpose-built provisions criminalising various forms of voyeurism. Specific forms of voyeurism include the operation of equipment to observe a victim’s private regions, as well as to record an image of a victim. We have also legislated for harsher penalties where voyeuristic images or recordings are distributed, since online distribution can be extremely harmful to victims.
- d. **Intimate images or recordings:** The phenomenon of “revenge porn” and other such forms of intimidation has been facilitated by the widespread availability of recording devices and access to the Internet. To counter this phenomenon, Singapore has criminalised both the distribution of and the threat to distribute such intimate images or recordings.

- e. Sexual exposure/cyber-flashing: Singapore has also criminalised the non-consensual exposure of genitals, whether in the physical or virtual space, such as sending unsolicited images of genitals via an electronic medium to another person (also referred to as “cyber-flashing”).

Further amendments were made to the Penal Code in 2021 to increase the penalties for certain technology-facilitated crimes against minors. The maximum imprisonment term for engaging in sexual activity in the presence of a minor or causing a minor to view a sexual image (where the minor is below 16 years of age, or between 16 and 18 years of age and in an exploitative relationship with the offender) was increased from one to two years.

We have scoped our laws to provide protection even in cases involving emerging technologies like “deepfakes” facilitated by artificial intelligence. For example, our offences relating to intimate images were drafted to cover images that have been *altered* to depict a victim, such as when an offender transplants a victim’s face onto an image of someone else engaging in a sexual act.

*ii. Amendments to POHA*

POHA protects victims from harassment, alarm or distress through the use of threatening, abusive or insulting words, behaviour or communications. Intimate image abuse, of which revenge porn is an example, may amount to harassment. If so, then the perpetrator may be criminally liable for the offence of harassment, and the victim may be able to obtain a POHA Protection Order (PO). However, the primary offences which address such misconduct are found in the Penal Code.

Additionally, a victim of harassment may be able to obtain a self-help civil remedy in the form of a PO to require the harasser to stop the harassment. This includes removing the intimate image and not publishing the intimate image further. The PO may also require an internet intermediary to disable access to the intimate image.

POHA was amended in 2019 to further protect victims by criminalising the publication of personally identifiable information (e.g., photographs, contact numbers, addresses or employment details) with (a) the intention of causing harassment, alarm or distress to another person; or (b) with the intent to cause the victim to believe unlawful violence would be used or to facilitate the use of unlawful violence, or knowing/having reasonable cause to believe that it would be likely to have these effects. For the avoidance of doubt, the new offences do not stop people from legitimately sharing information, such as posting videos of an incident to give a factual account of the incident, or to seek help identifying the perpetrators of crimes.

*iii. Enactment of Online Criminal Harms Act*

The Online Criminal Harms Act has come into effect since February 2024. It introduces levers to enable the authorities to deal more effectively with online criminal activities such as the non-consensual dissemination of intimate images and the distribution of child sexual abuse material.

The Act empowers law enforcement agencies to issue Directions to online service providers, other entities, or individuals to restrict the exposure of users in Singapore to online criminal content and activity.

*iv. Amendment to Broadcasting Act*

The Online Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act, which came into effect on 1 February 2023, introduced a new part to the Broadcasting Act (BA) to regulate Online Communication Services (OCSs), which includes social media services (SMSs). The amendments tackle the issue of online safety on OCSs in an accretive and outcome-driven manner and empowers the IMDA to do the following:

Issue directions to disable access by Singapore users to egregious content found on OCSs. Egregious content is defined in legislation and includes content that advocates or instructs on physical violence against humans, sexual violence, and content that is child sexual exploitation material.

Designate OCSs with significant reach or impact to comply with Codes of Practice. IMDA issued the Code of Practice for Online Safety – Social Media Services (CoP for SMSs) in July 2023 to require designated SMSs to have systems or processes in place to minimise Singapore users' exposure to harmful content, with additional protection for children.

This includes having in place community guidelines, providing users with access to tools and reporting mechanisms to help them manage their own safety, and publishing annual online safety reports on their measures and levels of safety. The CoP for SMSs identifies six categories of harmful content, which includes sexual content, violent content, and suicide and self-harm content.

#### **b) Public education**

The national Digital for Life (DfL) movement launched in 2021 galvanises the community to help citizens of all ages and walks of life embrace digital as a lifelong pursuit. Our community partners have come onboard to produce resources as well as conduct workshops, webinars, and family activities to engage caregivers, youths, and members of the public on online safety.

Recently, IMDA also launched bite-sized resources on the Digital for Life portal to support parents in guiding their children's online interactions. For instance, the Online Safety Digital Tools Resource Kit is a series of infographics developed in collaboration between the Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI) and tech companies such as Google, Meta, ByteDance and X. The resource kit compiles online platforms' safety features to teach users how to manage their safety online and report online harms encountered.

#### **c) Victim support**

Victims of online harassment or online harms can refer to DfL resources for the various options available on reporting harmful content and behaviours on social media services.

Targets of online harms, including online harassment may also seek help from Singapore's support centre, SHECARES@SCWO. The centre is set up by SG Her Empowerment (SHE), in collaboration with Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (SCWO) and provides free counselling and pro-bono legal counselling. The centre assists with filing police reports and in-app reports with main Internet platforms through its community partnerships. It also has a partnership with Police where there is a pilot initiative to provide support for select serious sexual assault cases by interviewing the victim on-site at the centre.

TOUCH Community Services is another resource for victims. TOUCH runs a cyber wellness hotline, which is manned by counsellors and social workers. The hotline receives a consistent volume of around 32 calls per month from parents and schools on cyber wellness issues, where about 90% of the calls are related to excessive device use. The remaining 10% are on cyberbullying and online safety.

### C. Portrayal of women and girls and discrimination/gender bias in the media

MCI and IMDA regulate media content to protect younger audiences from age-inappropriate content, and at the same time enable mature audiences to make informed choices over a diverse range of content. We regularly consult our advisory committees, made up of members of the public from all walks of life, on specific titles as well as content guidelines and regulations.

We adopt the general principle that media content with higher reach and impact should be subject to more stringent content regulatory requirements. Our regulatory approach has to be sensitive to societal norms and values, and we take reference from prevailing norms.

IMDA's content codes for TV and Radio<sup>17</sup> and advertising<sup>18</sup> state that programmes and advertisements should not encourage or in any way lead to the discrimination against any section of the community on account of race, religion, gender, age, occupational status or disability.

Broadcasters are required to exercise sensitivity regarding humour that may offend good taste and decency, including jokes based on gender stereotypes, which can cause hurt or humiliation.

Content Codes for the various mediums (including films and publications) also indicate that content should be sensitive to prevailing social norms/community standards.

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17 IMDA's Content Code for Nationwide Managed Transmission Linear Television Services.

18 IMDA's Television and Radio Advertising and Sponsorship Code.



## Participation, accountability, and gender-responsive institutions

### A. Promote Women's Participation in Public Life and Decision-Making

Singapore encourages women's participation in politics and public life.

The principle of meritocracy, where both men and women are provided equal opportunities, applies in Singapore. Women are well represented at senior decision-making levels.

#### a) **Women in politics**

Female participation in politics has improved significantly. Women in Singapore are able to enter politics based on their own merits. Various political parties in Singapore consciously and continually seek suitable women candidates. Equal visibility is also given to women who are candidates or elected representatives as media in Singapore is non-discriminatory against women.

Singapore had our very first woman President who served in office from 2017 – 2023. The proportion of women increased from 23.8% for the 13<sup>th</sup> Parliament to 29.8% for the 14<sup>th</sup> Parliament. This is comparable to the OECD average of 30.1% in 2019, higher than the Inter-Parliamentary Union average of 25.5%, and in line with the UN's target of 30% women lawmakers in each parliament.

Singapore remains committed to accelerating the progress of women's participation in areas where women may still be underrepresented, such as politics, and where further effort is needed to bring about greater equality. This ensures that women's issues and perspectives are given due attention, through thorough discussions in the formulation of policies, national directives, and laws.

#### b) **Women in civil service and judiciary**

In the Singapore Public Service, women are appointed to leadership positions based on the principles of equal opportunity and meritocracy. These principles also apply to selection for talent and leadership development programmes in the public sector. Candidates, both men and women, are nominated and selected for such programmes based on their performance and leadership potential.

Women's representation in the public service leadership is nearly as much as men. Our statistics show that:

- Women make up 44% of decision-making positions at Director-level and above as of 2022.
- Women form 46% of officers on the key leadership development programmes for the Public Service (viz. the Administrative Service and Public Service Leadership Programme), which aim to develop officers for senior leadership positions (viz. PS, DS, CEO), as of December 2022.

Women have achieved the following in the judiciary (as of 2023):

- 51.3% of Judicial Officers in the Singapore Courts (comprising of the Supreme Court, State Courts, and Family Justice Courts) are women,
- 29% of Judges in the Supreme Court are women.

### c) Women in leadership positions

Through raising awareness and engaging key board decision makers on the importance of board diversity and working with stakeholders to develop a pipeline of board-ready women, the Council for Board Diversity (CBD) aims to jointly promote and achieve sustained increases in women’s representation on the boards of the top 100 companies listed on the Singapore Exchange (SGX), Statutory Boards, and top 100 Institutions of a Public Character (IPC).

The Government works with the CBD to achieve measurable targets to increase women’s representation on the boards of top 100 companies listed on the SGX to 25% by 2025 and 30% by 2030. CBD also set targets to increase women’s representation on the boards of the top 100 IPCs and Statutory Boards to 30% as soon as possible.

In 2022, the SGX Listing Rules were also revised to require companies to disclose their board diversity policy, including gender diversity policy. This places emphasis on director tenures and diversity in board composition.

As of 2023, both Statutory Boards and top 100 IPCs have exceeded the 30% target of women on boards. For the top 100 SGX-listed companies, the percentage of women on boards tripled from 7.5% in 2013 to 23.7% in 2023, and is making headway towards the target of 25% (Table 10).

**Table 10: Representation of Women on Boards (%)**

	2013	2018	2020	2023
Top 100 Companies listed on SGX	7.5%	15.3%	17.7%	23.7%
Statutory Boards		23.3%	27.5%	32.7%
Top 100 IPCs		27.6%	29.0%	31.0%

Source: Council for Board Diversity

*Note: Data collection by the CBD on percentage of women on the boards of Statutory Boards and top 100 IPCs commenced in 2018.*

More women are being appointed to board leadership roles (Table 11). This helps to dispel notions of tokenism, as boards appoint the most-suited candidate with the requisite competencies for leadership, regardless of gender.

**Table 11: Women in Board Leadership Roles (%)**

	2018	2023
Top 100 Companies listed on SGX (% board leadership positions held by women)	9%	17%
Statutory Boards (% women board chairs)	16%	20%
Top 100 IPCs (% chaired by women)	15%	19%

Source: Council for Board Diversity

Furthermore, more women appointed to company boards are first-time-directors. For instance, nearly three-quarters (74%) of all women who embarked on a new board position at a Top 100 company in 2023 were first-time directors, an increase compared to 57% in 2022. This indicates a willingness to embrace a growing talent pool of directors and board-ready leaders in Singapore.

#### **d) Women's participation in the community**

The People's Association (PA) gives equal opportunities to both female and male grassroots leaders, to take on leadership positions in Grassroot Organisations. Incidentally, we have seen an increasing number of women grassroots leaders, over the years.

A number of them serve in the 107 Women's Executive Committees (WECs) that oversee Women programming at the Grassroots. The WECs actively reach out to women in the community and provide them volunteering opportunities with PA. Centrally, the PA Women's Integration Network (WIN) Council, the co-ordinating body of the WECs, encourages women representation in community leadership. Regular networking sessions are also organised for WEC leaders to build meaningful bonds and share best practices. Courses and workshops such as 'Leadership in Action', 'Coaching in Action', are made accessible to all grassroots leaders to better equip them in their roles.

Through these efforts, more Singaporean women are actively involved in the grassroots movement, with a growth of 16% between 2016 (16,882 female grassroots leaders) and 2023 (19,525 female grassroots leaders). The profile of these female grassroots leaders is varied. It includes youth, home makers, working professionals and businesswomen.

Women's participation and representation in community leadership is also seen in Community Development Councils (CDCs). These councils have been bridging communities by strengthening local social infrastructure, building social resilience and social capital, and promoting the culture of giving back. The councils are represented by different community segments including women. This will ensure programmes and initiatives organised by CDCs are inclusive and cater to the needs of various community segments. Some female councillors also take the lead in functional committees under the CDCs.

The councils will support the Mayors appointed for each district to galvanise residents and the support of diverse community partners, and help the community stay connected, resilient and cohesive. The CDCs and Mayors form a bridge between residents and the Government, and strengthen Singapore's social safety net. They function not only as the hands and legs to implement programmes for the community, but are also the eyes and ears to identify emerging needs and gaps in social support.

## **B. Increase Women's Access to Expression and Participation in Decision-Making in the Media through ICT**

### **a) Enhancing digital and ICT capabilities**

Female representation in ICT has improved in recent years. In 2017, 28% of the intake to ICT courses in our local universities were female; this figure increased to 30% in 2020.

Our schools and IHLs play an important role in nurturing young talents in STEM. To provide support for ICT and media-related studies at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, we have the SG Digital Scholarship. In the past five years, we have seen a rise in the number of top female tech talent being

awarded this by IMDA, and they are pursuing courses in Cybersecurity, Information Technology, and STEM. In 2021, 31% of SG Digital scholarships were awarded to female recipients, an increase from 18% five years ago.

The Singapore Digital Office was established in June 2020 during COVID-19 to help raise the digital adoption levels of less digitally savvy groups such as seniors, to equip them with skills to go online safely and enrich their lifestyles in an increasingly digital future.

Under the Seniors Go Digital initiative, the Singapore Digital Office employs Digital Ambassadors to provide basic digital training to seniors such as on e-communications, Government digital services and e-payment, through one-to-one coaching, small group learning and Learning Journeys to libraries and supermarkets. These sessions are conducted in vernacular languages such as Malay, Chinese and Tamil for different audiences. Seniors also learn about cyber risks and threats and staying safe online.

With the rapid pace of technology advancement, the digital literacy and skills needed to use digital technologies in a safe and responsible manner will continue to evolve. IMDA has introduced the new Digital Skills for Life (DSL) framework in January 2024, which aims to equip Singaporeans with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to navigate the digital space, carry out daily tasks and stay safe online.

#### **b) Accessibility and affordability of ICTs**

Singapore seeks to ensure a baseline level of digital access for all households, in the form of broadband connectivity at home and access to at least one computing device.

To make these digital resources more affordable for those facing financial constraints, the Government had implemented digital access subsidy programmes, targeted at the lowest 10 – 20% of income earners. Earlier interventions like the NEU PC Plus and Home Access programmes subsidised computers and provided broadband connectivity for low-income households with students and Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), benefitting more than 46,000 households since 2020.

A new DigitalAccess@Home scheme was launched in April 2023, replacing the NEU PC Plus and Home Access Schemes, to provide subsidised internet access and devices to lower income households to support their lifestyle needs, including work and social activities. As of December 2023, the DigitalAccess@Home scheme has supported about 6,800 lower-income households.

The Mobile Access for Seniors (MAS) scheme was launched in June 2020, providing assistance to lower-income seniors who want to go digital and enjoy mobile services but lack the means to do so. This scheme offers a 2-year subsidised mobile plan and a subsidised smartphone. Since 2020, over 11,000 lower-income seniors have benefitted.

### **C. Singapore's National Women's Machinery**

Singapore has three entities that oversee women-related matters and coordinates across government.

First, the Inter-Ministry Committee on Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which coordinates the “whole-of-government” implementation of CEDAW in Singapore. The Inter-Ministry Committee comprises 12 Ministries and public sector agencies. Members

of the Inter-Ministry Committee are responsible for monitoring, implementing and coordinating laws, policies and initiatives within their own agencies' purview to ensure compliance with the Convention and to address the needs of women.

Second, the Inter-Agency Committee on the White Paper on Singapore's Women's Development. The inter-Agency Committee comprises 15 ministries and public sector agencies who are accountable for the implementation of the 25 action plans over a 10-year period starting 2022.

Third, the Ministry of Social and Family Development's Strategy and Women's Development, which is the national focal point for women matters and steers whole-of-Government policies and strategies to empower women to pursue their aspirations freely and to the fullest, in equal partnership with men in the family and in society. The Division's work is crucial in advancing the government's efforts to create a more inclusive and supportive society and has a direct impact on the lives of women and families in Singapore. It supports the Inter-Ministry Committee on CEDAW and the Inter-Agency Committee on the White Paper and monitors policies to ensure appropriate and timely implementation of gender-sensitive measures and policies.

### **Consultations with women's organisations**

The Government organises regular dialogue sessions, focus group discussions and public forums to actively obtain the public's views on policies and proposed legislative changes, including those related to supporting the aspirations of women. These discussions are crucial for the Government to understand the challenges faced by women, and the effectiveness of existing policies and further gaps that need to be addressed.

The views are taken into consideration when determining the agenda of the Inter-Ministry Committee and Strategy and Women's Development Division.

## Peaceful and inclusive societies

### A. Women, Peace, and Security

#### a) **Actions taken to build and sustain peace, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, and implement the women, peace, and security agenda**

Singapore's implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda is largely driven through ASEAN platforms, particularly the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on WPS. Through this plan, we work closely with our neighbours to share best practices and create collaborative partnerships to further promote women's participation and leadership in preventing conflicts and sustaining peace.

We participate actively in regional discussions to advance the WPS agenda. Most recently, this was at the 10th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) in November 2023, during which a Joint Statement on WPS was adopted by the ADMM-Plus ministers. Among other things, Singapore and the other Defence Ministers reaffirmed their commitment towards promoting equal opportunities for women in the defence sector.

Outside of ASEAN, we are a member of the Group of Friends of WPS in New York, which brings together like-minded states to discuss and coordinate positions on WPS issues at the UN. In 2023, Singapore joined the call for the UN to set a standard requiring women to comprise half of all personnel involved in peace-setting processes as well as to urge the UN Security Council to consider targeted sanctions against those who perpetuate sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflict.

#### b) **Actions taken to increase leadership, representation, and participation of women in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, humanitarian action and crisis response, at decision-making levels in situations of armed and other conflicts, and in fragile or crisis settings**

Singapore is committed to ensuring that women are empowered to lead and participate in peace and development issues across the region.

Singapore's approach to empowering women is founded on the principle of meritocracy, where equal opportunities are afforded to men and women. We believe that this allows our women to be recognised for their own abilities and avoids tokenism.

For instance, half of our foreign service officers are women. The proportion of female officers in senior leadership positions, including Ambassadors, doubled from 15% in 2010 to 31% in 2023.

Career progression within the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) is meritocratic and based on the principle of "best person for the job". The Ministry of Defence and the SAF are committed to providing fulfilling professions for our servicewomen, and today, there are more than 1,700 uniformed servicewomen serving in the SAF, comprising around 8% of the uniformed regulars. Servicewomen in the SAF take on a diverse range of roles, such as combat engineers, infantry, pilots, and naval officers, and they have also contributed to the success of many of our multinational peace support operations.

Female police officers have been involved in United Nations operations since 1998, in which the first female officer was deployed for the UN Joint International Observers' Group to Cambodia. In 2007, we also had the first female commander to lead a 20-members contingent of the Singapore Police Force (SPF) to the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT).

## B. International Humanitarian Law

### a) **Measures to combat illicit arms trafficking**

As a global transit and transshipment hub, we are cognisant of the important role we play in international regulatory efforts.

To regulate the transfer of arms, Singapore has a robust export control regime underpinned by three main pieces of legislation, namely the:

- Strategic Goods (Control) Act 2002,
- Regulation of Imports and Exports Act 1995, and
- the Arms and Explosives Act 1913.

We regularly review and update our export control regime to ensure that Singapore remains fully compliant with our international obligations on arms transfers, to contribute to the eradication of the illicit arms trade and armed violence against civilians, indiscriminate of gender.

### b) **Measures to combat drugs**

Singapore is committed to achieving a drug-free society.

Singapore's drug-control strategy is targeted at reducing both drug supply and demand. Our strategy involves a suite of mutually reinforcing measures. All of them are needed to work together – preventive drug education, tough laws and robust enforcement, evidence-based rehabilitation and reintegration.

#### *i. Preventive Drug Education (PDE)*

Preventive Drug Education (PDE) is a key tenet of the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB)'s mission to enforce, educate and engage our people for a drug-free Singapore. Singapore's overarching anti-drug strategy is harm prevention, where prevention is on the forefront to ensure a Singapore without drugs, where everyone can live, work, and play safely.

In this effort, we work in close collaboration with key partners and stakeholders.

To inculcate in primary, secondary and post-secondary school students the importance of living a drug-free life from young, anti-drug and healthy lifestyle content is incorporated into school curricula for students from Primary 4. School-based PDE programmes are also held annually in each school to build on their character development and life-skills.

Recognising that youths today are highly exposed to global influences through online activities, CNB's engagement strategy has evolved beyond traditional media and physical outreach activities to include digital touch points, such as Instagram and Tik Tok. Our social media efforts are focused on creating youth-centric contents which imbue PDE messages in a subtle manner – to provide a compelling and evidence-based narrative of building a drug-free Singapore. The goal is to engage followers to amplify CNB's PDE messages online, by sharing the contents with friends.

In Aug 2023, a new Inter-Ministry Committee (IMC) on Drug Prevention for Youths, comprising political office holders from various ministries, was formed in response to the drug problem among youths, with a focus on drug prevention. As part of the IMC initiative, DrugFreeSG Champions, comprising teachers, counsellors, youth leaders and social workers, are appointed to amplify anti-drug messages through various means and better engage with the youth population to help them resist the temptation of drugs. Another key initiative of the IMC is to designate every third Friday of May, starting from 2024, as "Drug

Victims Remembrance Day”, to remember the victims of drug abuse by creating awareness of how family and society, apart from drug abusers, are harmed by drugs.

Community-driven advocacy is the cornerstone of CNB’s engagement strategy, to generate a multiplier effect that galvanises our community to support the drug-free cause. CNB actively works with various community groups to boost awareness of the harmful effects of drugs.

CNB partners the community-led National Council Against Drug Abuse (NCADA), to educate youths, parents and educators on the harms and consequences of drug abuse and grow the anti-drug advocacy movement within the community.

CNB also works closely with the community through culturally nuanced anti-drug awareness effort such as the Dadah Itu Haram (DIH)<sup>19</sup> campaign and the BEN<sup>20</sup> campaign for the Malay/Muslim community and the Tamil speaking community, respectively. CNB also rallies organisations and individuals to advocate for Singapore’s anti-drug approach, where they would be encouraged to play a part in achieving Singapore’s drug-free vision through active citizenry.

CNB also conducts training sessions for its volunteers. The sessions cover topics on Singapore’s approach to drug control, including sharing sessions by ex-abusers to provide volunteers with a better understanding of the drug situation in Singapore and the harms of drug abuse. In addition, CNB works with regional and international PDE counterparts to build advocacy beyond Singapore. For e.g., CNB nominates its youth advocates as Singapore’s representative at the annual UNODC Youth Forum, to share our drug control policies and develop joint youth statements at the CND.

*ii. Firm Laws and Rigorous Enforcement*

The Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA) is the main legislation for drug offences in Singapore. It provides for the enforcement powers of CNB and the penalties for various drug offences, including trafficking, manufacturing, importation or exportation, possession and consumption of controlled drugs. Since 2012, the MDA has been amended to deter adults from targeting children for drug activities or engaging in contaminative activities. In 2012, amendments were introduced to enhance punishments against those who recruit young persons (defined as any person who is below 21 years of age) for drug activities or supply them with drugs. In 2019, further amendments were made to better protect children and young persons from the harms of drugs by making it an offence for an adult who possesses illicit drugs, knowing that a child (below 16 years of age) is likely to be present in a place, to knowingly or recklessly leave drugs or drug utensils within easy access of the child. It is also an offence for an adult to permit or not take reasonable steps to prevent a young person from consuming illicit drugs in the adult’s possession. In addition, the laws were amended to allow the Director of the Central Narcotics Bureau to require parents or guardians to attend counselling with the youth drug abuser (under 21 years of age) placed in the Youth Enhanced Supervision scheme.

In March 2023, a series of new MDA amendments were tabled in the Singapore Parliament to address challenges CNB has observed. Two of the amendments were (1) more stringent penalties, including

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<sup>19</sup> Dadah Itu Haram stands for ‘Drugs are Forbidden’.

<sup>20</sup> Bothaiporulai Ethirthu Nirpom stands for ‘We Stand United Against Drugs’.



caning, for the possession of certain drugs<sup>21</sup> if the quantities are above defined weight thresholds, and (2) a new framework to deal with psychoactive substances that were not yet listed as controlled drugs in the MDA. The former sought to more accurately address the harms posed by those who demand large quantities of drugs as such actions invariably drive-up demand locally and may cause downstream law and order issues. The new framework aimed to allow authorities to better address the threat from new psychoactive substances (NPS). This is a proactive approach targeted at dealing with NPS that are not yet listed as controlled drugs in the MDA but are already in circulation in the recreational drug scene.

The Intoxicating Substances Act (INSA) provides the legal framework for inhalant offences, such as inhaling or using, supplying or offering to supply intoxicating substances. It also provides for the enforcement powers of CNB and the power to commit an inhalant abuser for treatment and rehabilitation.

CNB also prevents the proliferation of drugs through intelligence, operations and investigations, guided by robust laws and policies. CNB collaborates with Home Team, local and international partners to stem the flow of drugs into and within Singapore.

### *iii. Structured Rehabilitation and Aftercare Programmes*

Singapore's regime weans drug abusers off addiction and prepares them for life outside the Drug Rehabilitation Centres (DRCs) and prisons. Ex-abusers who are released are supervised by CNB to facilitate their re-integration into society through a coordinated aftercare network.

The Singapore Prison Service (SPS) and Yellow Ribbon Singapore (YRSG) have been driving efforts to minimise re-offending.

Building on existing efforts, SPS will embark on another major transformation initiative this year – Corrections 2030. It is anchored on three key strategies.

#### *a. Strengthening Families of Inmates to Reduce Inter-Generational Offending*

By increasing the social and community capital of inmates, SPS will start a positive ripple effect to uplift and strengthen their families for better social mobility outcomes. This will help inmates and their families to break the intergenerational cycle of offending and re-offending.

SPS works closely with MSF and Family Service Centres (FSCs) to support inmates and their family. Since April 2024, inmates and their family with challenges in their marriages are referred to Strengthening Families Programme@Family Service Centre (Fam@FSC) for marriage support and counselling.

#### *b. Maximising Employability and Career Opportunities of Ex-Offenders*

Gainful employment raises self-esteem and provides financial stability, thus reducing re-offending risks. SPS and YRSG will continue to build economic capital by upskilling and deepening the skills of inmates and desistors for more resilient career pathways, as well as by building a strong coalition of partners and employers to promote inclusive hiring of ex-offenders and reduce stigmatisation in society

The YR Sandbox allows ex-offenders to explore job opportunities in emerging and fast-growing sectors;

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<sup>21</sup> Morphine, Diamorphine, Opium, Cocaine, Cannabis, Cannabis resin, Cannabis mixture and Methamphetamine

this will be expanded to include the hospitality and tourism sectors in 2024.

Under 'Project Beyond Hiring', YRSG equips workplace supervisors with skills to support and empower ex-offenders under their employment. In 2024, YRSG will expand the project to more employers across industries such as logistics and hospitality.

**c. Mobilising Community Partners to Better Support Rehabilitation**

SPS will engage the whole of society to strive for a safer, more inclusive and cohesive Singapore, through research and evidence-informed correctional practices. This includes cultivating a shared vision across people, private and public sector for community-driven efforts to support inmates and ex-offenders, as well as to empower desistors as community leaders.

Volunteers and community partners who work with inmates, ex-offenders and their families have been receiving basic corrections-related training from SPS. SPS will make such training more effective through a revised Development Framework for Offender Rehabilitation Personnel. Under this framework, SPS will equip volunteers with specific competencies needed for their work, such as grief and trauma management.

**d. National Addictions Management Service (NAMS)**

The National Addictions Management Service (NAMS) is located within the Institute of Mental Health (IMH), provides treatment and support for patients with addictions. Such patients are managed holistically by a multidisciplinary team of healthcare professionals using a combination of two approaches- Pharmacological and non-pharmological management. In addition to the above, National Addictions Management Service also assists patients to secure placements in community-based aftercare services, as well as apply for financial assistance schemes as required. In 2023, a total of 347 females and 1,857 males underwent treatment at NAMS for alcohol or drug addiction<sup>22</sup>.

**c) Measures to combat trafficking**

Singapore takes a serious view of Trafficking in Persons (TIP) and remains committed to strengthening our efforts to eliminate it. Every victim of abuse, including TIP victims, gets the help that he or she needs, and is treated with care and dignity by Singapore authorities. Our sustained efforts in combatting TIP have resulted in Singapore being ranked in Tier 1 in the United States' annual TIP Report for four consecutive years since 2020.

National Approach Against TIP (2016 – 2026)

Singapore takes a Whole-of-Government approach to combat TIP, consisting upstream prevention measures, a strong legal framework, adequate victim support measures, and partnership with local and international stakeholders. Our comprehensive approach is laid out within the National Approach against Trafficking in Persons, 2016-2026, and is designed to protect all vulnerable segments of society from such harms, including women and girls. The National Approach is developed based on the '4 Ps framework' of 'Prevention', 'Prosecution', 'Protection', and 'Partnership'.

*i. Prevention*

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<sup>22</sup> Data provided by NAMS

Singapore has actively taken steps to prevent, combat, and suppress TIP.

- Enhanced border security measures and proactive detection at checkpoints over the past decade have made it significantly more difficult for TIP and human smuggling into Singapore. The frontline enforcement officers are regularly trained to maintain competency in identifying and handling TIP cases and in keeping up to date with TIP trends.
- There are multiple open channels for TIP victims to seek assistance or be detected, such as Police's general '999' hotline, a dedicated hotline and a dedicated Trafficking email channel, and engagement with Police officers conducting enforcement raids and from NGO referrals.
- The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) engages migrant workers pre-emptively to ensure they understand their employment rights and know where to seek help in Singapore. This happens even before they come to Singapore as well as when they arrive on our shores. This heightens their awareness to trafficking and decreases their risk of being exploited here.
- We continue to expand capabilities in understanding psychological coercion through professional research study, using the key findings to develop evidence-informed tools and enhance training in victim identification and investigation.

*ii. Prosecution*

Singapore has put in place an effective end to end criminal justice response to TIP crimes.

- The Prevention of Human Trafficking Act 2014 (PHTA) is the primary legislation against TIP, it defines the offence of TIP based on an internationally accepted definition of TIP. There are severe penalties under the PHTA and other legislative levers, to deter traffickers. First-time offenders can be sentenced to mandatory imprisonment for up to 10 years, a mandatory fine of up to SGD \$100,000, and be liable to caning up to 6 strokes. Penalties are enhanced for recalcitrant offenders where they can be sentenced to mandatory imprisonment for up to 15 years, a mandatory fine of up to SGD \$150,000 and mandatory caning up to 9 strokes.
- PHTA is complemented by a broader legislative arsenal to address the complex nature of TIP effectively and comprehensively. For cases that may not fulfil the PHTA elements wholly can be pursued under a wide toolkit of legislation. This includes the Penal Code 1871 (PC), Women's Charter 1961 (WC), Employment of Foreign Manpower Act 1990 (EFMA) and Employment Act 1968 (EA).
- Singapore regularly reviews and update our legislation to keep up with emerging trends, such as amending the Women's Charter to enhance law enforcement levers against vice perpetrators, and the Criminal Law Reform Act and Penal Code to accord minors more protection against sexual predators.

*iii. Protection*

Singapore has established an appropriate victim care and support framework that looks after the needs of all victims of trafficking.

- Singapore works closely with NGOs to provide a range of victim support services to TIP victims. Alleged TIP victims need not wait for their cases to be established as TIP cases before they can receive the necessary support. The types of victim support services available to TIP victims extend beyond shelter and counselling services to include medical care, translation services, consular support, temporary job placement, regularised stay in Singapore via Special Passes, home leave, and special care after case conclusion.
- The One-Stop Abuse Forensic Examination (OneSAFE) Centre allows for interviews and forensic examinations by medical professionals to be conducted within a single location, with specialised facilities that offer privacy and convenience to victims, i.e. the victim only needs to recount the traumatic experience once. The OneSAFE Centre was redesigned and expanded in 2023 with a dedicated victim care area to further enhance privacy and comfort during the investigation process.
- In partnership with NGO Hagar Singapore, the Project Supporting Persons After Trafficking (SPARK) was implemented in 2023. Project SPARK seeks to enhance support for TIP victims in the initial period as they recover and settle into a new stable routine whilst assisting the authorities in the case. The enhanced support is in the form of a care package, each worth SGD \$750, consisting of basic necessities. Project SPARK complements existing forms of assistance for TIP victims such as shelter, counselling, medical care, and temporary job placement.

#### *iv. Partnerships*

Singapore has established a strong ecosystem comprising both domestic and international stakeholders to put forth a whole of Singapore response against TIP.

Internationally, Singapore is committed to our efforts in building international partnerships to prevent trafficking and enhance victim protection and care.

We remain an active and contributing member of the international community by sharing best practices and raising awareness on TIP through participation in various regional and international platforms such as the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC), ASEAN Heads of Specialist Anti-Trafficking Units, INTERPOL Human Trafficking Expert Group (HTEG) and INTERPOL Specialised Operational Network (ISON), Bali Process, and UNODC Working Group on TIP.

Under our mutual legal assistance (MLA) framework, Singapore is able to provide and seek MLA, to and from foreign jurisdictions for a wide range of offences, including TIP offences, on the basis of reciprocity.

### **C. Rights of the Girl Child**

Singapore has legislative safeguards in place to protect and ensure access to justice for those who are particularly vulnerable, including children. The Children and Young Persons Act provides for the welfare, protection and rehabilitation of children and young persons.

#### **a) Promoting awareness and participation in social, economic, and political life**

In the national curriculum, students are exposed to a healthy representation of both women and men in all levels of schooling. The experiences, contributions, and achievements of women are highlighted alongside that of their male counterparts. Students also have opportunities to discuss issues related to women's development, particularly in the languages and humanities subjects.

#### **b) Measures to combat gender discrimination**

The Government continues to address and eliminate gender stereotypes in education and mass media.

Singapore takes a holistic and age-appropriate approach to promote gender equality and counter gender stereotypes across the education system. The Character and Citizenship Education has been enhanced to address mental models and stereotypes more directly, especially those that impact women in their career choices and familial roles.

Students are exposed to a healthy representation of both women and men at all levels of schooling. The experiences, contributions, and achievements of women are highlighted alongside that of their male counterparts. Students have opportunities to discuss issues related to women's development, particularly in the languages and humanities subjects.

MCI and IMDA regulate media content to protect younger audiences from age-inappropriate content, and at the same time enable mature audiences to make informed choices over a diverse range of content. Advisory committees, made up of members of the public from all walks of life, are regularly consulted on specific titles as well as content guidelines and regulations.

#### **c) Access to education, skills development, and training**

Singapore's educational policy is inclusive and supports the education of children with disabilities as well as other developmental and learning needs. MOE works closely with SG Enable and the Special Education (SPED) sector to ensure that SPED schools are adequately resourced to support students with higher support needs. The majority of children with disabilities and special educational needs are enrolled in mainstream schools and around 20% of them are enrolled in Government and community-funded SPED schools. As part of Singapore's ongoing efforts towards building a more inclusive society, Singapore's Compulsory Education framework has included children with moderate to severe disabilities since 2019.

#### **d) Access to healthcare**

Mental Health Education is offered in our schools and IHLs. Lessons and outreach efforts help to raise awareness on mental health. Students are equipped with knowledge and skills to regulate emotions, manage expectations and these are reinforced in activities beyond the classroom. Peer support structures in all schools and IHLs facilitate help-seeking among peers and from trusted adults. They have dedicated time and space for educators trained in mental health literacy to check-in and monitor students' well-being. Students who require additional support will be referred to counsellors, mental health professionals or community resources.

#### **e) Eliminating violence for girls**

The Children and Young Persons Act provides for the welfare, care, protection and rehabilitation of children and young persons under 18 years of age. Ill-treatment of child or young person is an offence punishable, (i) in the case where death is caused to the child or young person, by a fine not exceeding SGD \$40,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 14 years or both; (ii) in any other case, by a fine not exceeding SGD \$8,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 8 years or both.

Under the Penal Code (PC), for the offences of sexual penetration of a minor (s376A PC), sexual grooming of a minor (s376E PC), sexual communication with a minor (s376EB PC), sexual activity or image in presence of a minor (s376ED PC), and involving a child in the production of child abuse material (s377BG PC), if the victim is under the age of 16, the perpetrator is liable for the offence regardless of whether the victim consented to the act.

While the age of consent is 16, to protect minors above the age of 16 but under the age of 18, sexual offences covering minors below the age of 16 were extended to cover minors between 16 and 18 years of age where the perpetrator was in an exploitative relationship with the minor (s376AA, s376EA, s376EC, s376EE, s377BL PC). If the perpetrator was in an exploitative relationship with the minor, the perpetrator is liable for the offence regardless of whether the victim consented to the act.

In addition, if a person engages in commercial sex with a minor below 18 years of age (s376B PC), the person is also liable regardless of whether the victim consented.

#### **f) Policies eradicating child labour**

Children and young persons are restricted in the type of work they can do. The type of work children and young persons can do is governed by Part VIII of the Employment Act and the Employment of Children and Young Persons Regulations.

It is permissible to employ children and young persons aged 13 years to 16 years, but there are restrictions in the type of work they can do. In industrial settings (e.g. construction, transportation and manufacturing), children aged 13 to less than 15 years are not allowed unless working with family members. For young persons aged 15 to less than 15 years, employers must notify the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) and submit a medical report within 30 days of starting work.

#### **g) Eradicating child, early, and forced marriage**

Under the Women's Charter, civil marriages between persons either of whom is below 18 years of age are void.

The only exception to this provision is where the marriage is authorised by a Special Marriage Licence issued by the Minister. Such marriages authorised by Special Marriage Licence have been falling over the years. In the last two years, there were no such marriages. While MSF has no plans at present to remove the option of a Special Marriage Licence, we will continue to closely scrutinise any application and ensure that approval is given only in meritorious cases.

##### *i. Muslim law*

Under the Administration of Muslim Law Act, for Muslim marriages, the minimum legal age of marriage is 18 years for both boys and girls.

There is a legal exception for girls to marry at a younger age under special circumstances. Muslim marriages involving minors under 18 years of age are only allowed (a) under exceptional circumstances with the approval of the Kadi, and (b) with the consent of the minor's parents/legal guardian. In practice, Muslim marriages involving at least one party aged below 18 years are rare and has declined from 0.2% in 2018 to 0.1% in 2022.

Robust safeguards are in place to ensure the long-term interest of the minor. For instance, marriage preparation programmes and parental/guardian consent are mandatory for couples where at least one party is between 18 and 20 years of age.

The Government, in partnership with Malay/Muslim organisations, carries out public education and engagement initiatives to help couples fully understand the commitment of marriage, especially if couples are proposing to marry early. For example, the Registry of Muslim Marriages has introduced the mandatory Bersamamu (With You) programme since 2019 where the Kadi has a face-to-face session with the couple before solemnisation and continues to befriend the couple for up to two years after their solemnisation. With continued public education, we are confident that further progress can be made on this issue.

## Environmental conservation, protection, and rehabilitation

### A. Integrating Gender Perspectives and Concerns into Environmental Policies

Singapore strongly supports the multilateral framework on climate change.

Since the Paris Agreement was adopted, Singapore has submitted and enhanced our Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)<sup>23</sup> and our long-term low-emission development strategy. We also launched the Singapore Green Plan 2030 (Green Plan)<sup>24</sup>, which charts ambitious and concrete targets over this decade, strengthening Singapore's commitments under the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Paris Agreement, positioning us to achieve our long-term net zero emissions aspiration by 2050.

Stakeholders, including women and girls, have been widely consulted on the Green Plan and our climate goals. The policies under our Green Plan, notably those under the resilient future pillar, aim to build Singapore's defence and resilience against climate change, to better safeguard the lives and livelihoods of all Singaporeans, including women and children.

While Singapore does not have specific climate change policies targeted at women, initiatives are in place to encourage more women to be involved in sustainability and taking the lead in the fight against climate change.

- In 2021, a not-for-profit society, Women in Sustainability and Environment (WISE), was formed to advocate for women as consumers, investors, and professionals championing sustainability.
- Many Singaporean women have also been stepping up to fight climate change. These include Minister for Sustainability and the Environment Grace Fu who facilitated the ministerial consultations on Article 6 of the Paris Agreement at COP-26 and COP-27, as well as on Mitigation at COP-28.
- At COP-28, we also included youth delegates, of whom 60% were females, in our delegation to empower them to join global climate action.

Additionally, many of the known climate change communicators and advocates are female which is testament to the prominence of female voices in leading climate change advocacy in Singapore. The Government has worked with and supported a number of female climate change communicators.

### B. Building Environmental and Climate Resilience

Singapore strongly supports the multilateral framework on climate change. Like other small island developing States, Singapore contributes little to global emissions but is disproportionately vulnerable to

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<sup>23</sup> NDCs are commitments that countries make to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change impacts.

<sup>24</sup> The Singapore Green Plan 2030 consists of five pillars, namely: (i) City in Nature; (ii) Energy Reset; (iii) Green Economy; (iv) Resilient Future, and; (v) Sustainable Living, underpinned by Green Government as enablers.



the impact of climate change, such as rising sea levels, rising temperatures and extreme weather patterns. While our high level of urbanisation means that our women are not disproportionately affected by the effects of climate change, our geographical characteristics demand that we address climate change to ensure the survival of all Singaporeans.

The Government adopts a science-based and proactive heat resilience strategy, which has three prongs. First, implementing national-level cooling strategies to benefit all segments of our society, including the vulnerable. Second, strengthening the community's resilience, especially among more vulnerable population segments. Third, deepening our scientific understanding of the impact of rising temperatures. For instance, the Cooling Singapore 2.0 project also investigates the impact of heat on different segments of the population, such as the elderly and children.

Singapore, women are well-represented in the planning profession. They hold leadership positions and serve on boards both in the public and private sectors. For example, women make up 65% of the planning professionals who work at the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), Singapore's national land use planning and conservation agency. The current Chief Planner and three former Chief Executive Officer / Chief Planner of URA are women. Public consultation is an integral part of planning for Singapore. URA seeks to be as inclusive and representative as possible in the way it consults and involves stakeholders and members of the public of different demographics, including women, in the urban planning process. URA's latest review of the Long-Term Plan involved more than 15,000 people from all walks of life from July 2021 to April 2022. The public engagement exercise culminated in a public exhibition to showcase the ideas and strategies for the future, and reached a total of 200,000 people.

## Section Four: National institutions and processes

### A. Singapore's National Strategy and Action Plan for Gender Equality

Singapore is fully committed to advancing the status and well-being of our women.

On the international level, Singapore acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) on 5 October 1995. Since then, Singapore has submitted six reports to the UN CEDAW Committee. Singapore also attended the 88<sup>th</sup> Session of the CEDAW constructive dialogue on 16 May 2024.

In line with our commitment to Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, since the submission of Singapore's Sixth Periodic Report for CEDAW, Singapore published the White Paper on Singapore Women's Development in March 2022.

In the White Paper, 25 concrete action plans were set out by the Government and the community in five main areas highlighted in Section Two. These action plans aim to support the diverse aspirations of and challenges faced by Singapore women at different life-stages, centring around our shared values of fairness, equality, respect and solidarity.

These action plans will be implemented over a ten-year roadmap. The Government will continue to review and enhance measures to support Singapore women in the coming years together with community partners and will conduct a mid-point review in 2027.

The Government has also published a progress report on women's development in 2024 and will continue to do so annually. The report provides an update on progress made since the White Paper was published, including in the areas of women's empowerment in the workplace, support for caregivers, protections from violence and harm and mindset shifts.

### B. Budget and Allocation of Resources

Singapore ensures that all citizens have equal access to fundamental resources such as education, healthcare and social protection. Government expenditures are considered by Parliament during the annual Budget and Committee of Supply Debates, where members debate the policies and programmes of ministries for the upcoming year, before a vote is taken to pass the Supply Bill. As such, there is parliamentary scrutiny over the implementation, outcome, and impact of policies, including policies related to women's development and promotion of gender equality.

The Inter-Agency Committee on the White Paper on Singapore Women's Development takes a gender-sensitive perspective on issues that have differing impact on women and men, and strives to ensure a fair distribution of resources by the agencies within the Committee to support sustainable, inclusive development for Singaporean women.

Our approach aims to build a fairer and more inclusive society, where the public, and private sectors work together and with individuals to support the advancement of women. We coordinate efforts across the Whole-of-Government to ensure that the impact of our policies on women is taken into account at all levels and stages in the design, planning and delivery of programmes.

For example, in drafting the White Paper on Singapore Women’s Development, the Government coordinated efforts across various Ministries and agencies to introduce and review policies, and enhance resources that will better support the aspirations of Singapore women. Many of the policies in the White Paper were developed to address the needs and aspirations of women, and budgetary resources are allocated to support the implementation of these policies.

### C. Stakeholder Participation

In 2020, the Government launched a whole-of-society review of Singapore women’s development. Through a year-long nationwide Conversations on Singapore Women’s Development, we consulted and gathered views from 30 partner organisations and close to 6,000 Singaporeans to chart the way forward on this fundamental issue. These Conversations assessed current initiatives aimed at empowering women and expressed our shared hopes and ambitions for women in Singapore. Feedback from the Conversations shaped the White Paper on Singapore Women’s Development published in March 2022 and were unanimously endorsed by the Singapore Parliament. The White Paper reflects the shared vision of Singaporeans and outline 25 collective action plans in five main areas we are prepared to take collectively, towards a fairer and more inclusive society.

Consultation and collaboration with civil society is important and integral towards our efforts to progress women’s development and the implementation of our action plans and commitments to international platforms such as CEDAW and BDPA. The Government organises regular dialogue sessions, focus group discussions and public forums to actively obtain the public’s views on policies and legislative changes that will support the aspirations of women. These channels of communication and collaboration are crucial for the Government to understand the challenges faced by women, and the effectiveness of existing policies and gaps that need to be addressed.

In preparing this national report, the Strategy and Women’s Development Division worked closely with relevant Government ministries, civil society organisations, the private sector, and other stakeholders. This ensured an inclusive and thorough review process at the national and sub-national levels.

### D. CEDAW Action Plan and Timeline

The Government is fully committed to our obligations under CEDAW. Since our accession to CEDAW almost 30 years ago, the Convention has been an important resource and reference point for us in shaping and guiding our policies to uphold and strengthen women’s rights. We work towards empowering women to pursue their aspirations freely and to the fullest, in equal partnership with men, and in the family and in society.

Singapore submitted our 6<sup>th</sup> periodic report to CEDAW in 2021 and attended the 88<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Constructive Dialogue in Geneva, Switzerland on 16 May 2024, with a 23 person Singapore delegation including representatives from 9 Government ministries.

As part of Singapore’s efforts to raise awareness of the Convention, the MSF website has a dedicated section for information about CEDAW, and how it is being implemented in Singapore. Our periodic

reports, interim reports, details of our constructive dialogues, and previous concluding observations by the CEDAW Committee are available on the website.

## Section Five: Data and statistics

### A. Progress in Gender Statistics

The Government ministries and public sector agencies coordinate and implement initiatives under their purview to better address the needs of women. This includes data collection, disaggregated by sex, age, and ethnicity. Currently, such data is widely available in the statistics published by the Department of Statistics, such as the Census of Population 2020, including various demographic and socio-economic topics such as highest qualification attained, literacy, economic characteristics and difficulty in performing basic activity.

We use a variety of quantitative and qualitative national indicators to monitor and ensure that the specific needs of women are met, including their health, employment, and retirement needs. These include annual national surveys, such as the National Population Health Survey.

The Government also conducts focused studies into areas of interest, such as the ongoing Retirement and Health Study and the national engagement sessions as part of Healthier SG, 2023 Action Plan for Successful Ageing and the Forward Singapore exercise. These areas include providing opportunities for Singaporeans to age actively and better supporting their care needs. Recommendations were carefully studied by the Government, with findings and reports from these studies made publicly available.

### B. Priorities for Strengthening National Gender Statistics Over Next Five Years

We will continue to prioritise the five key areas highlighted in Section Two earlier. Specifically, we will step up on efforts to examine statistics that track mindset shifts. Mindset shifts in society as the foundational factor undergirding the progress of Singapore women. While Singapore has achieved good progress in women's development, traditional gender stereotypes hinder women's further advancement.

We will also track statistics around women's participation in the workplace and online harms which have emerged as a new form of threat to women's safety. Singapore women enjoy equal opportunities in the workplace today, and the Government is committed to continue empowering them to enter and remain in the workforce while managing both work and personal commitments. The Government also recognises the growing concerns on online harms and will continue to tackle the issue of online safety and protect victims.

### C. Gender-Specific Indicators that Singapore Prioritised for Monitoring Progress on SDGs

Singapore is committed to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to achieve sustainable and inclusive development for our citizens. We submitted our Voluntary National Review in 2023. An inter-ministry committee on SDGs comprising 33 government ministries and agencies tracks our progress of the SDGs. Singapore's statistics on SDG targets and indicators are published on the SingStat Website and are updated regularly. Among the 248 indicators from the UN SDG Global Indicators Framework, some are reported using alternative proxy indicators, including gender breakdown where relevant and available.

#### D. Data Disaggregation in Major Surveys in Singapore

In Singapore, we coordinate efforts across the Whole-of-Government to ensure that the impact of our policies on women are taken into account at all levels and stages in the design, planning and delivery of programmes.

National indicators are used to identify the specific needs of women, and to ensure that these needs are met. Some key relevant indicators include the health, employment and retirement needs of women. Data for these indicators are collected through various channels, including annual national surveys, such as the Comprehensive Labour Force Survey and the National Population Health Survey.

Furthermore, in drafting the White Paper on Singapore Women's Development, the Government coordinated efforts across various Ministries and agencies to introduce and review policies, and enhance resources that will better support the aspirations of Singapore women.

Singapore will continue to take a data-driven approach in the design of our policies and measure their outcomes. Singapore will also regularly publish relevant data for transparency and to ensure that our policies are relevant and appropriate for women.

## Section Six: Conclusion and next steps

Singapore's key priorities in advancing our efforts in women's development are the implementation of the action plans in the White Paper and reviewing the CEDAW Committee's Concluding Observations.

The Government will continue to review the effectiveness of our current legislation, policies, and programmes to protect, support, and empower all women. We will continue to work closely with our stakeholders across the whole-of-society to advance women's rights, and to achieve goals set at the BDPA and to our obligations under CEDAW.