

→ CHAPTER 3

RESPECTING AND REWARDING EVERY JOB



As a people, we have worked hard to build a thriving and highly productive economy with diverse jobs and opportunities for Singaporeans. Despite this, many of us still worry about our jobs. We worry that we are missing out on the 'good jobs' in the economy.

Many participants of the Forward SG engagements shared that Singapore needs to embrace a wider variety of career pathways. We need to go beyond what we have traditionally thought of as 'good jobs', which was predominantly defined by the size of our pay cheques.

To be clear, we have always had a strong drive to put our best foot forward to succeed at what we do. This mindset of pursuit of excellence is precious for Singapore. It is important that we retain this core value as a society.

At the same time, our conversations with Singaporeans show a growing desire for 'good jobs' to go beyond the pay cheque — to include a sense of meaning and purpose, and the opportunity to develop mastery of skills.

We must do more to tilt the scales and narrow the wage gaps across professions. Mindset shifts alone cannot effect societal change. The types of jobs in our economy, levels of job remuneration and career prospects across various industries must also be consistent with what we value.

In addition, in a rapidly changing economy, we need to help Singaporeans take ownership of their careers and better seize opportunities to match their skills and aspirations across different seasons of life.

A successful career should involve a lifelong pursuit of new and different skills. These skills will allow us to thrive in multiple, diverse job roles and professions. With greater churn in the economy, we can also expect more workers to be involuntarily unemployed from time to time. We will have to do more to help Singaporeans through these career transitions and enable those who are unemployed to reskill, find new jobs and bounce back from setbacks.



We will collectively make several shifts when it comes to jobs and careers to:

▶ **Further reduce wage gaps across professions**



▶ **Empower Singaporeans to build career agility and resilience**



▶ **Invest more in Singaporeans, even as we keep our economy open**



NTUC's #EveryWorkerMatters Conversations

“How do we create a future of work that is better for workers and for Singapore?”

This was one of the questions that the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) sought to answer through its #EveryWorkerMatters Conversations (#EWMC).

Over 12 months, NTUC engaged 42,000 workers of all ages, professions and sectors in 8,000 hours of dialogues to understand their concerns and aspirations. The goal was to collectively shape the compact around work for current and future generations.



Images credit: NTUC

DURATION



**8,000 hours
over 12 months**

PARTICIPANTS



42,000

workers of all ages,
professions, and sectors

PURPOSE

To understand their concerns and aspirations, and to collectively shape the compact around work for current and future generations.

Through the conversations, NTUC has distilled a Workers' Compact that represents the Labour Movement's commitment to workers.

OUR WORKERS' COMPACT

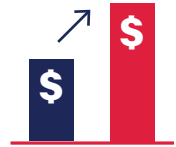
NTUC will continue to champion for:

- 01 Youths to be supported in their vision of success
- 02 Mid-career workers to be supported in their pursuit of deep skills
- 03 Caregivers, especially women, to have peace of mind in balancing work and caregiving
- 04 Older workers to have fair employment and training opportunities in a multi-generational workforce
- 05 No worker to be left behind in the nation's progress

The Forward SG Workgroup supports the Workers' Compact, which has informed the recommendations and ideas set out in this report. We will work with NTUC to realise the Workers' Compact.



Further Reduce Wage Gaps Across Professions



We need to further reduce wage gaps across professions to avoid entrenching a rigid hierarchy of jobs based on salary sizes, and to recognise and reward all jobs more fairly.

Our efforts over the years to uplift our lower-wage workers have had a positive impact. Government moves like Workfare, the Progressive Wage Model (PWM) and the Local Qualifying Salary (LQS) have helped to reduce our income inequality.



We will continue to regularly review these schemes that uplift our lower-wage workers.



As we press on with these moves, we also need to better recognise the diverse contributions of those who work in 'hands' and 'heart' jobs.

They include our professional tradespeople like electricians and plumbers, as well as many in the healthcare and aged care sectors looking after our patients and seniors.

We believe society should reward Singaporeans who are keen and adept at such work fairly. They provide high quality and skilled services that are and will remain essential to our daily lives. They also contribute to our collective higher standard of living. But they may not be as well regarded as those who are engaged in 'head' work, such as those holding knowledge-related, white-collar roles.



I feel that in our society, blue-collared jobs are not being recognised and are paid less. Through mainstream media and our parents' mindsets, the emphasis [is] only on jobs and courses that [lead to jobs that] earn [higher] salaries, like being a lawyer, doctor or in banking and finance."

- Mr Muhammad Kashari Bin Kassim, Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS), MSF Care Pillar Engagement with Post-Secondary Education Institutions (PSEIs), 2 February 2023



We would like to better recognise skilled trades and help more locals who have a knack for such work enter and progress in these trades.

It takes time to hone these skills, and those who develop a deep mastery should be able to earn a good living. However, without structured training and career pathways, individuals entering these trades have to navigate and chart their own path in acquiring work experience and skills. This can be daunting.

Together with NTUC, industry associations and Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs), we will develop new initiatives to provide better support in these areas. If society is more supportive of individuals pursuing these careers, we can create a virtuous cycle, where society in turn benefits from better and more reliable services.



We will also pay more attention to uplifting the prospects of our young Institute of Technical Education (ITE) graduates.

We are especially concerned about the growing gaps between the starting salaries of graduates from ITE and that of graduates from polytechnics and autonomous universities.

These salary gaps can be narrowed over time if ITE graduates upgrade and refresh their skills. Many already do so by getting a diploma or more in their working years. This enables them to secure better career prospects with higher salaries.



We want to encourage and enable more ITE graduates to upskill and upgrade early, and give greater recognition to those who do so.

We will study how we can help younger ITE upgraders defray the costs of obtaining a diploma. When they graduate, we can also top up their Central Provident Fund (CPF) to give them a head start to purchase a home or save for their retirement.

Essentially, all of us must recognise the important work that our fellow citizens undertake to keep our society functioning and do our part to improve their wage prospects. Beyond narrowing wage gaps, we must value and respect everyone for who they are and what they do, including those doing the manual and care jobs that we all rely on. All will gain when the most vulnerable amongst us are better off.

Empower Singaporeans to Build Career Agility and Resilience



In today's fast-changing economy, we will need to adopt a mindset of building career agility and resilience. We must be prepared to actively acquire new skills. As old jobs disappear or are transformed, we must also be prepared to seek new job roles that better utilise our skills.

The Government has taken steps in this direction, such as piloting the Job-Skills Integrators initiative. As set out in Chapter 2, we will provide more support for Singaporeans through a big push with SkillsFuture. But the Government cannot do this alone — this upgrading of skills must be matched by industry demand so that the new skills lead to better jobs and careers.

We will provide more support for Singaporeans to move to better jobs and careers in several ways, by:



Enabling individuals to make longer-term career plans

Just as we take active steps to maintain our physical health, individuals should proactively take charge of their career health to achieve their long-term career goals.

Through digital tools and career guidance services, we aim to give Singaporeans more personalised recommendations on careers and skills pathways.

This will help Singaporeans to figure out what skills are in demand, and which skills and experiences they need for new career pathways. Singaporeans will then be able to make better informed decisions on training and longer-term career plans.



Improving job matching

We will study how jobseekers can be better matched to jobs that utilise and reward their skills. Availability and accessibility of skills information in the labour market is important to enable hiring based on transferable skills and experience.

To improve the use of such information, we will explore ways of sharing reliable occupation and training data with employers and hirers.

At the same time, we will continue supporting businesses to strengthen their human capital development capabilities and equip their workers for new roles as businesses evolve.



Providing more support for vulnerable groups

We will support integration of persons with disabilities (PwDs) and ex-offenders into the workforce. Over the years, the Government has put in place schemes to encourage businesses to employ these individuals, as well as programmes to help them secure jobs.

We ask businesses to join us in employing these individuals and facilitate their integration into the workforce.

Image credit:
NTUC





With people as our key strategic resource, we must critically think about how to create opportunities to develop a resilient and relevant workforce. Greater dialogue between human resource (HR) practitioners and the education system will open up possibilities for students, educators and employers, allowing both sides to gain a deeper appreciation of the competencies that are valued and how to better develop them."

- Ms Low Peck Kem, President of Asia Pacific Federation of Human Resource Management, Immediate Past President of Singapore Human Resource Institute



In a volatile economic environment, we will have to expect that more of us may be displaced from our jobs despite our level best.

- ▶ Involuntarily unemployed workers often face a dilemma between accepting a job offer immediately and taking time to search for a job that better fits their skills, experience and aspirations.
- ▶ Some rush into jobs that do not fit them in order to continue paying the bills. These workers may then find themselves entrenched in ill-fitting jobs in the long term.

The Labour Movement has advocated that the Government does more to better assure Singaporean workers that they will not have to face employment setbacks alone.

We agree with this call and believe it is time to introduce a new support scheme for involuntarily unemployed jobseekers.



The job search was a pretty stressful experience. Previously, my company was closing down and [I] was told to leave. I had gone through 10 interviews. I have to find what is comfortable for me, taking into account the different commitments that I have. [Having] no income scared me as I could not find a new job when the previous job was ending."

- Middle-aged participant at the Forward SG Empower Pillar Engagement, 14 October 2022

In designing this scheme, we will draw lessons from practices around the world.

- ⊗ Overly generous and poorly designed unemployment benefits can inadvertently make it more attractive for involuntarily unemployed workers to stay unemployed, rather than to return to the workforce. We must avoid such negative incentives.
- ✓ Our scheme should support re-employment, not unemployment.
 - (i) It should encourage workers to do their part and take personal responsibility for their careers.
 - (ii) It should encourage workers to get back on their feet — to continue working towards their career goals and find jobs that utilise their skills and experience.

With these considerations in mind, the scheme could have the following features:



Financial support that is conditional upon workers doing their part to actively search for jobs every month.



Targeted assistance for involuntarily unemployed workers in the lower and middle-income groups, who are more likely to face financial pressures.



Appropriately sized benefits to preserve the incentive to return to the workforce. These benefits will be complemented by existing social assistance schemes for more vulnerable households and with training allowance from SkillsFuture for those who undertake substantial reskilling.

Importantly, the scheme is not just about providing financial help. We will provide active career guidance and employment facilitation support to help involuntarily unemployed workers identify suitable career pathways, access training if needed, and bounce back stronger from setbacks.

Citizens' Panel on Employment Resilience

“How might we strengthen our employment resilience?”

This was the challenge statement for the 59 participants in the Ngee Ann Kongsi-Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) Citizens' Panel on Employment Resilience, organised in partnership with Ministry of Manpower (MOM) over four sessions in February and March 2023.

During the animated discussions, some participants raised concerns that many workers did not proactively manage their own careers until a need arose — for example, when facing retrenchment, career stagnation or job dissatisfaction. This passive approach towards shaping one's career could be due either to a lack of awareness of the resources available or an overabundance of information that is daunting for workers to navigate.

DURATION

 **4 sessions**

in February and March 2023

PARTICIPANTS

 **59**



Citizens' Panel on Employment Resilience

To help workers develop greater awareness of career and training pathways, the Citizens' Panel recommended the following:

- ▶ **A 'career passport'** that provides skills and qualifications data and personalised career insights to support workers in making job and course decisions.
- ▶ **A 'career gym'** that offers personalised career guidance for the broad middle.
- ▶ **New standards for employers** to better manage their workers' career aspirations and allow them to stay adaptable and employable.

Another key concern raised was the need to pay the bills while job hunting. This may discourage unemployed workers from taking on training programmes that could prepare them for new jobs.

- ▶ **Support for unemployed workers**
The Citizens' Panel therefore recommended support to help unemployed workers transit into new roles that fit their abilities and aptitudes. Participants indicated that financial support for unemployed workers would help provide them greater assurance to seek out better job opportunities.



Invest More in Singaporeans Even as We Keep Our Economy Open



It is essential that Singapore stays open to the world. This has been a strength for us. Our openness to capital, ideas, technology and people from around the world enables us to grow our economy and create good jobs for Singaporeans. Today, we have an economy primed to seize new opportunities in areas such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and sustainability.

Global businesses and home-grown enterprises are keen to hire Singaporeans because of the quality of our Singaporean workers. We are known for our skills, drive and integrity. But there are simply not enough Singaporeans to fill all the jobs available.

Most Singaporeans understand the need for a complementary foreign workforce. We have been big-hearted and accepting of those who are different from us. But Singaporeans too have anxieties about jobs and competition in a globalised and fast-changing economy.



We understand the anxieties. We will manage the inflow of the foreign workforce and ensure it remains complementary to Singaporeans.

- ▶ **We will continue to update our manpower policies and rules to ensure that the flow of various categories of foreign employees is well-managed and of the right calibre.**

This year, the Government implemented the Complementarity Assessment Framework (COMPASS) for Employment Pass (EP) applicants. This transparent, points-based system enables businesses to clearly understand how the Government assesses and approves EP applications.

- ▶ **We will uphold fair employment practices and take a strong stance against discrimination at the workplace.**

Following extensive consultations with tripartite partners, the Government will enact the Workplace Fairness Legislation (WFL) in 2024. The WFL will give our agencies more regulatory levers to act against discriminatory employers.

- ▶ **We will also do more to support skills and technology transfer from multinational corporations (MNCs) and foreign professionals.**

This will help to raise the capabilities of our local businesses and workers.

We ask all employers to support fair employment practices and consider candidates fairly for a job. Similarly, we urge non-Singaporeans to respect our norms, our way of life and make the effort to fit in. We also ask that Singaporeans continue to welcome and accept those who are different from us.

We are committed to investing more in every Singaporean. Some of this enhanced support has been sketched out in this and the previous chapter.

Additionally, we also want to increase support for those with the potential to stand out — locally or globally — as specialists and leaders in their respective fields and industries.



We would like to develop and nurture more Singaporeans, especially for top regional roles in MNCs. We know that employers will look for the best people around the world to fill such jobs and select them by merit. Through our conversations with leaders in these corporations, we know that they often value global or regional experience and are looking for workers with overseas exposure to take charge of a regional office or manage teams across different countries.



We will work with various stakeholders, including employers and industry associations, to encourage more Singaporeans to venture overseas as part of their career development. Singaporeans with families who take up overseas roles often worry about their children's education and how they can adjust when they come back. We will find ways to help their children integrate smoothly back into our schools.



RESPECTING AND REWARDING EVERY JOB IN A SNAPSHOT

Together, we have built a thriving and highly productive economy. Yet, many of us are still anxious about our jobs, in expectation of more economic volatility ahead.

We will need to broaden our society's definition of success and good jobs, and embrace a wider variety of career pathways, while continuing to pursue excellence in what we do. The types of jobs in our economy, levels of remuneration and career prospects across various industries must also be consistent with what we value and aspire to.

Working hand in hand with individuals, employers and unions, we will do more in the following areas:



Further reduce wage gaps across professions

- ▶ We will continue to regularly review the schemes that uplift our lower-wage workers, such as Workfare, PWM and LQS.
- ▶ We ask that our communities and employers join us in better appreciating and fairly remunerating those doing 'hands' and 'heart' jobs. They include our professional tradespeople like electricians and plumbers, as well as those in the healthcare and aged care sectors.
- ▶ We will narrow the salary gaps between ITE graduates and graduates from polytechnics and autonomous universities. We will enable more ITE graduates to upskill and upgrade early, and provide more help for them in their upgrading journey.



Empower Singaporeans to build career agility and resilience

- ▶ We will provide more support for Singaporeans to secure better jobs and careers that make full use of their skills. We ask employers to do their part too, by hiring from a wider talent pool, investing in their workers and rewarding skills.
- ▶ We will empower Singaporeans to take ownership of their careers and make longer-term career plans with greater access to information and effective career guidance services.
- ▶ We ask employers to join us in doing more to support vulnerable groups, including PwDs and ex-offenders, as they seek to integrate into the workforce.
- ▶ We will introduce a new support scheme for involuntarily unemployed jobseekers to assure Singaporean workers that they will not have to face employment setbacks alone.



Invest more in Singaporeans, even as we keep our economy open

As we keep our economy open:

- ▶ We will ensure that the foreign workforce remains complementary to Singaporeans by continually managing the flow and calibre of foreign employees.
- ▶ We will ensure that employers uphold fair employment practices and take a strong stance against discrimination at the workplace. We will support skills and technology transfers from MNCs and foreign professionals to our local businesses and workers.
- ▶ We urge Singaporeans to continue to be big-hearted and accepting of those who are different from us.
- ▶ We ask non-Singaporeans to respect our norms, our way of life and make the effort to fit in.
- ▶ We will do more to better support Singaporeans with the potential to shine — locally and globally — as specialists and leaders in their respective fields and industries. In particular, we would like to develop and nurture more Singaporean corporate leaders, especially for top regional roles in MNCs.