



**Convention on the Elimination  
of All Forms of Discrimination  
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women**

**Sixth periodic report submitted by Singapore under article  
18 of the Convention, due in 2021<sup>\*,\*\*</sup>**

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\* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

\*\* The annexes to the present report may be accessed from the web page of the Committee.



## Foreword

2021 is a significant year for Singapore.

We celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Women's Charter, a landmark legislation that institutionalised the equal standing of men and women in marriage and provided for the welfare and protection of women in Singapore.

We concluded our year-long and nation-wide Conversations on Singapore Women's Development in September 2021. This is part of a broader Government effort to engage Singaporeans and discuss how we can help Singapore women make further progress. Feedback and suggestions from the Conversations are being reviewed, and the Government is preparing a White Paper on action plans to be presented to the Parliament of Singapore in early 2022.

It was in this spirit that we designated 2021 as the Year of Celebrating SG Women to celebrate the pioneering spirit of Singapore women, their achievements and contributions to our nation. With respect as the cornerstone of the rapport and partnership between men and women, we celebrate their multi-faceted roles across society and appreciate the challenges that they face.

Singapore is pleased to present our Sixth Periodic Report on the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This Report covers the new legislation, policies and initiatives Singapore introduced from 2016 to 2021, to improve the protection of and support for women in Singapore.

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected women disproportionately and exposed them to greater vulnerabilities. Like many countries, Singapore faced significant challenges brought about by the pandemic. This affected women in Singapore in various ways, such as added challenges balancing work and family commitments. We have outlined initiatives to address the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic faced by women in this Report.

The Government is fully committed to advancing the status and well-being of women in Singapore. We adopt a practical and outcomes-based approach to fulfil Singapore's CEDAW obligations, taking into consideration our unique national circumstances and aspirations. We adopt this approach instead of an ideological one to the realisation of human rights. It is in this context that we have given serious consideration to the Committee's previous Concluding Observations (CEDAW/C/SGP/CO/5) at the 68th CEDAW session and recommendations by the Committee's Rapporteur in March 2020 (MK/follow-up/Singapore/75); and have implemented them in the most optimal way.

The Government will continue to strengthen the ethos of fairness and justice in our society – where men and women 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.

Sun Xueling  
Minister of State  
Ministry of Social and Family Development  
Ministry of Education

## Executive summary

1. Singapore acceded to CEDAW on 5 October 1995. It came into force for Singapore on 4 November 1995.
2. The Sixth Report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women covers the key initiatives introduced and developments in Singapore from 2016 to 2021. In accordance with Article 18 of CEDAW, the Sixth Report also responds to the Committee's 2017 Concluding Comments ([CEDAW/C/SGP/CO/5](#)) at the 68th CEDAW session, and recommendations by the Committee's Rapporteur on follow-up in March 2020 (MK/follow-up/Singapore/75).
3. Singapore continues to build an environment where both men and women are equally empowered to achieve their potential and career aspirations.
4. Since the Fifth Report in 2015, the Government has made progress in key areas to improve and enrich the lives of women in Singapore. We also introduced additional measures to support the vulnerable, including women, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### A. Protection of women

#### Legislative amendments to strengthen protection for women

5. Singapore has robust legislation to protect women from violence. Various amendments to strengthen existing legislation were made in the past few years. For example, the Protection from Harassment Act was amended in 2019 to better protect victims from harassment, intimate partner violence and related anti-social behaviour, such as cyberbullying, stalking and sexual harassment. The amendments also introduced a specialist Protection from Harassment Court, which, among other things, adopts simplified procedures to provide expedient relief to victims.
6. In 2019, we also amended the Penal Code to repeal martial immunity for rape without qualification, which protects all women from sexual abuse, regardless of their relationship to the perpetrator. In addition, new offences relating to technology-facilitated sexual crimes such as voyeurism were created. In 2021, the Penal Code was amended to increase the penalties of selected sexual offences, to enhance deterrence and ensure that egregious cases are punished more severely.

#### Protection from family violence

7. In September 2021, the multi-stakeholder Taskforce on Family Violence – which examined various forms of family violence including physical, psychological and sexual violence – released a set of recommendations to improve immediate support for victims of family violence, enhance protection for them, prevent violence from recurring and raise awareness of early warning signs. The Government has accepted, in principle, all the recommendations of the Taskforce and will work with community partners to implement the recommendations over the next few years. Violence against any person is not condoned, and these recommendations are intended to support all persons affected by family violence, regardless of nationality, gender, race, religion or sexual orientation.
8. The Government recognised that movement restrictions introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic might have affected victims' abilities to seek help. Hence, the Government intensified the "Break the Silence" campaign during the period of

COVID-19 movement restrictions (referred to as “Circuit Breaker”<sup>1</sup> in Singapore) through free-to-air television, radio and online advertisements to raise awareness on family violence and encourage victims and witnesses to report abuse and violence.

### **Measures to combat Trafficking in Persons (TIP)**

9. The Government does not tolerate the trafficking of women and has taken decisive action to combat TIP to support and protect victims. We recognise that effectively countering TIP entails not only law and enforcement action, but also requires mobilisation of relevant stakeholders and the community. Hence, we developed the National Approach Against Trafficking In Persons (2016–2026), charting a “4P” approach to combat TIP, comprising (i) Prevention of Human Trafficking; (ii) Prosecution of Offenders; (iii) Protection of Victims; and (iv) Partnering Stakeholders.

### **Protecting migrant domestic workers (MDWs)**

10. Singapore regularly reviews its laws and policies concerning MDWs to ensure that they stay relevant. All MDWs are protected under the Penal Code and the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act. Amendments to the Penal Code took effect in 2020 to double the maximum punishment for persons convicted of causing hurt, assault, sexual offences and wrongful restraint or confinement against MDWs. The withholding of work permits or passports against MDWs’ wishes is illegal. By end-2022, employers will be required to provide their MDWs with at least one rest day a month that cannot be compensated away.

## **B. Support for women in workplaces**

### **Tackling workplace discrimination and workplace harassment**

11. In July 2021, the Tripartite Committee on Workplace Fairness was set up to further strengthen Singapore’s efforts to tackle workplace discrimination. In August 2021, it was announced that the existing Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices (TGFEP) will be enshrined in law and this will strengthen protection for women, inter alia, against discrimination or unfair treatment at the workplace. A tribunal will also be created to hear discrimination cases, including those involving discrimination against women. Singapore also takes a serious stand against workplace harassment, including sexual harassment at the workplace. In 2019, a Workplace Harassment Resource and Recourse Centre was set up to provide advice and assistance to employers and affected individuals on workplace harassment matters.

### **Supporting flexible working arrangements and promoting work-life harmony**

12. Singapore continues to support all workers, including women, to enter and remain in the workforce, while managing both work and personal commitments. We have done so by supporting and promoting the adoption of flexible work arrangements and other work-life harmony strategies. This includes the introduction of the Tripartite Standards on Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs), Unpaid Leave for Unexpected Care Needs and Work-Life Harmony in 2017, 2018 and 2021 respectively. Together, these encourage and recognise employers who have put in place policies that support their employees’ work-life harmony.

13. In 2019, the Government convened a Citizens’ Panel on Work-Life Harmony to engage and work with Singaporeans to co-create new ways to strengthen work-life

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<sup>1</sup> The Circuit Breaker (April–June 2020) is similar to what is referred to as a lockdown in other countries.

harmony. In February 2021, the Alliance for Action on Work-Life Harmony was also launched to build a community of stakeholders to develop and drive work-life harmony initiatives and resources. The latter concluded successfully in September 2021 with the ground-up development of several work-life harmony tools by participants. These will be used by employers in Singapore to improve work-life harmony.

#### **Support for workers during the COVID-19 pandemic**

14. The Government recognised that there may be new work stressors resulting from changes to work content and practices (e.g., mandatory work-from-home) during the pandemic. Caregivers, many of whom are women, may face even greater stressors, balancing their work and home responsibilities. To address this, a Tripartite Advisory on Mental Well-Being at Workplaces was issued in 2020 to offer guidance to employers on supporting their employees' mental well-being. Recommendations include implementing and encouraging the take up of FWAs, setting clear expectations on after-work hours' communications and establishing return-to-work policies to support employees with mental health needs. Separately, the Government also launched the iWorkHealth tool, an online self-administered psychosocial assessment tool to help employers and employees identify and manage workplace stressors.

15. In addition, the Government introduced support measures for Singaporeans, both men and women, to help address loss of income and employment due to the pandemic. These include the Temporary Relief Fund, the COVID-19 Support Grant, and the Self-Employed Person Income Relief Scheme in 2020, as well as the COVID-19 Recovery Grant in 2021. Every Singaporean also received a one-off cash pay-out from the Care and Support package, Solidarity Payment and the Solidarity Utilities Credit.

#### **Advancing the cause of women on boards**

16. We have widened our attention to include public and people sector boards, beyond corporate sector boards. In 2019, the Council for Board Diversity was reconstituted from the Diversity Action Committee to promote a sustained increase in the number of women on boards of listed companies, statutory boards and non-profit organisations in Singapore.

### **C. Support for women in the society and family**

#### **Support for caregivers**

17. Singapore has invested substantially in enhancing professional caregiver services to better support caregivers, especially those who are working. For example, to support families with young children, the Government remains committed to making quality preschools affordable and accessible.

18. In 2019, the Caregiver Support Action Plan was launched to strengthen support for caregivers of seniors in the community, in addition to existing programmes and assistance that caregivers benefit from. This includes initiatives in (i) care navigation; (ii) caregiver respite services; (iii) financial support; (iv) caregiver empowerment and training; and (v) workplace support.

#### **Promoting equal partnerships in the family**

19. The Government has progressively enhanced parental leave schemes to support parents in caring for young children, particularly to support fathers to play a bigger

role in raising their children. For example, in 2017, the second week of Paternity Leave was made mandatory, and Shared Parental Leave was increased from 1 to 4 weeks. Furthermore, MSF has also been working closely with partners, such as Families for Life (FFL) and Centre for Fathering, to provide programmes and online resources for mothers and fathers, so that they can better cope with greater family and household demands at home. These efforts aim to encourage active fathering and shared parental household responsibilities messages such that fathers and mothers will support each other in their parenting journey.

#### **Strengthening marriages and family relationships**

20. In August 2021, the Government launched the Alliance for Action to Strengthen Marriages and Family Relationships. It will partner FFL, non-government organisations, community partners and religious organisations, and build on the current initiatives. It will look at outreach efforts to families through and with community partners, mentoring newlyweds, effective parenting, support for single parents, families with early risks and strengthening marriages and families in faith communities.

### **D. Support for women’s health and well-being**

#### **Taking care of women’s health**

21. In January 2021, an inter-agency taskforce was set up to oversee the development of a Child and Maternal Health and Well-being Strategy and Action Plan to better support women and their children. The Taskforce will put in place 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. 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.

#### **Mental health and well-being**

22. The Government recognises the importance of supporting the mental health and well-being of Singaporeans. The National Care Hotline was set up in April 2020 to provide emotional support and psychological first aid to individuals and families affected by the pandemic. In July 2021, an Interagency Taskforce on Mental Health and Well-being was set up to oversee the development, coordination and implementation of national efforts to enhance the mental health and well-being of the Singapore population.

### **E. Education to combat gender stereotypes from young**

#### **Education in schools to address gender stereotypes**

23. The Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) curriculum builds the foundation for respectful, responsible and caring relationships through fostering positive attitudes towards self and others. Topics on gender roles and gender stereotypes in CCE teach students the importance of valuing one’s unique qualities, strengths and talents, regardless of gender. The Education and Career Guidance lessons and resources in the MySkillsFuture<sup>2</sup> portal offer a balanced representation of

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<sup>2</sup> MySkillsFuture is a one-stop online portal for Singaporeans to make informed learning and career choices.

gender across careers and encourage students to explore a variety of education and career pathways, resources and information. The CCE curriculum has been further enhanced and has been implemented progressively from 2021. For example, in the enhanced CCE lessons, students learn to appreciate that all families are different, and that shared parental roles and familial responsibilities based on unique family situations contribute to love, care and support for them. Students learn to appreciate that the roles and responsibilities of each parent, which can be different and complementary, are equally important, whilst recognising individual and familial differences, cultural context and the importance of not ascribing gender stereotypes in parenting. Through these lessons, positive mindsets and attitudes towards roles in the family are nurtured in our students from young.

## **F. Contextualized adoption of Muslim Law**

24. Over the years, Muslim law in Singapore has been regularly reviewed and the Muslim community has adopted more contextualised and adaptive practices to support the needs of Muslim women and families. For example, the MUIS Fatwa Committee has released fatwas (religious rulings) over the years to protect financial welfare of Muslim women and their dependents under Faraidh (Muslim inheritance law). This includes the Fatwa on joint-tenancy which was further enhanced in 2019 to recognise the wife as an equal partner (in terms of house ownership) regardless of her financial contribution to the purchase of the house. These new rulings enable families to safeguard the financial welfare of female members of the family, as well as dependents, through properly planned nominations while keeping true to the higher objectives of Muslim law.

### **Public consultation**

25. The preparation of the Sixth Report was a useful exercise to take stock, identify challenges and engage stakeholders on the progress of women in Singapore.

26. This Report was prepared by the Office for Women's Development of the Ministry of Social and Family Development, with input from the Inter-Ministry Committee on CEDAW and other agencies. Together with the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (the national coordinating body for women's organisations in Singapore), the Committee held two rounds of consultation sessions with over 30 civil society organisations in August and September 2021. We also held a consultation session in August 2021 with 19 parliamentarians, 6 of whom were male. Participants contributed actively to the discussion regarding this Report and Singapore's implementation of CEDAW. Their feedback from these sessions, as well as the nation-wide Conversations on Singapore Women's Development, were considered in this Report where relevant, and relayed to agencies for review.

**Glossary of terms**

AIC	Agency for Integrated Care
AfA	Alliance for Action
AMLA	Administration of Muslim Law Act
CHAS	Community Health Assist Scheme
CPC	Criminal Procedure Act
CPF	Central Provident Fund
CYPA	Children and Young Persons Act
EFMA	Employment of Foreign Manpower Act
HPB	Health Promotion Board
ICA	Immigration & Checkpoints Authority
IMC on CEDAW	Inter-Ministry Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
IMDA	Infocomm Media Development Authority
LTVP	Long-Term Visit Pass
LTVP+	Long-Term Visit Pass Plus
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOM	Ministry of Manpower
MRHA	Maintenance of the Religious Harmony Act
MSF	Ministry of Social and Family Development
MUIS	Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (Islamic Religious Council of Singapore)
NUS	National University of Singapore
OWD	Office for Women's Development
PHTA	Prevention of Human Trafficking Act
POHA	Protection from Harassment Act
ROMM	Registry of Muslim Marriages
SCWO	Singapore Council of Women's Organisations
SPF	Singapore Police Force
TAFEP	Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices
TGFEP	Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices
TCWF	Tripartite Committee on Workplace Fairness
VAA	Vulnerable Adults Act
WSG	Workforce Singapore

## I. Part one

### General background

#### Demographic characteristics

##### *Population trends*

27. We are a small, densely populated and diverse island city-state of 5.5 million persons as at June 2021. 3.5 million are Singapore citizens, while 0.49 million have permanent residency status. The remaining 1.47 million are non-residents working and living in Singapore. 639,000 residents are aged 65 years and above, about one in six residents. Our population density is 7,485 persons per square kilometre, one of the highest in the world.

28. Singapore has one of the world's most diverse population. In terms of composition, 74.2 per cent are Chinese, 13.7 per cent are Malay, 8.9 per cent are Indian and 3.2 per cent are from other ethnic groups. The main religions in Singapore are Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Taoism and Hinduism. The 2020 Census of Population showed that 80.0 per cent of Singapore residents aged 15 years and above professed to have some religious faith or spiritual belief. 31.1 per cent were Buddhists, 18.9 per cent were Christians, 15.6 per cent were Muslims, 8.8 per cent were Taoists and 5.0 per cent were Hindus. To maintain harmony in this highly dense and diverse population, all races and religions are treated equally.

29. Singapore's resident total fertility rate was 1.10 in 2020, compared to 1.20 in 2016. There were 38,590 live births in 2020, of which 20,023 (52 per cent) were males and 18,566 (48 per cent) were females. See Article 12 for infant and maternal mortality rates, under-five mortality rate and life expectancy of resident population.

#### Socioeconomic indicators

##### *Standard of living*

30. The United Nations' (UN) Human Development Report 2020 ranked Singapore 11th out of 189 countries. This reflects Singapore's consistent good performance in the quality and standard of living in the areas of life expectancy, educational attainment and real income.

31. Singapore's socioeconomic performance can be attributed to continued political stability, quality judicial performance and high integrity of government. The Transparency International (TI) Corruption Perception Index (CPI) 2020 ranked Singapore as the 3rd least corrupt country in the world with a high score of 85, a score which Singapore has maintained since 2018. Besides our consistently good showing under the TI-CPI, the Political and Economic Risk Consultancy (PERC) also ranked Singapore as the least corrupt country in its 2020 Report on Perceptions of Corruption in Asia, the US and Australia, a position that Singapore has held on to since 1995.

32. In 2020, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was S\$469 billion while GDP per capita was S\$82,503. Singapore's economy contracted 5.4 per cent in 2020 due to the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic.

33. The median gross monthly income from work (including employer Central Provident Fund (CPF))<sup>3</sup> of full-time employed residents in Singapore was S\$4,534 in

<sup>3</sup> The CPF is a compulsory comprehensive savings and pension plan for working Singaporeans and permanent residents primarily to fund their retirement, healthcare and housing needs in Singapore. It is funded by contributions from employers and employees.

2020, compared to S\$4,056 in 2016.<sup>4</sup> In real terms,<sup>5</sup> median income grew by 2.5 per cent p.a. in the recent five years from 2016 to 2020.

***Rate of inflation***

34. The annual inflation rate for 2020 was -0.2 per cent.

***External debt***

35. Singapore has no public sector external debt.

**CEDAW in Singapore**

36. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) came into force for Singapore on 4 November 1995. Between January 2000 to October 2015, Singapore had submitted five periodic reports to the UN CEDAW Committee.

37. On 25 October 2017, Singapore presented the Fifth Report to the Committee. The delegation was led by Associate Professor Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim, then Senior Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Social and Family Development and the Ministry of Education. Singapore also submitted an interim report in November 2019 on some of the recommendations requested by the Committee.

38. As a responsible member of the international community, Singapore takes its international obligations seriously. Singapore will only ratify a treaty when we are able to comply with the obligations. Our focus is on the full and effective implementation of commitments we have undertaken. At the same time, Singapore continually reviews possible ratification of other human rights treaties through a process coordinated under our Inter-Ministry Committee on Human Rights. While Singapore may not be party to a particular human rights treaty yet, it does not mean that our outcomes are not already fully or largely in compliance with its objectives. Apart from CEDAW, Singapore is also a party to various other international human rights instruments, some of which are specific to women. In addition, Singapore is a member of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, which is a regional inter-governmental body to promote the rights of women and children.

39. Treaties do not automatically become part of the laws of Singapore unless they are specifically incorporated into the legal system. Singapore gives effect to its obligations under CEDAW in domestic laws such as the Women's Charter. Aggrieved parties are thus able to seek legal recourse to the Courts by citing an equivalent provision in domestic law.

## **II. Part two**

### **Article 1: Discrimination**

40. The Constitution of Singapore is the supreme law in Singapore. Article 12(1) of the Singapore Constitution enshrines the principle of equality of all persons before the law and it specifically provides that "All persons are equal before the law and entitled to the equal protection of the law." This principle continues to be upheld.

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<sup>4</sup> Comprehensive Labour Force Survey, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM.

<sup>5</sup> Deflated by Consumer Price Index for all items at 2019 prices (2019=100).

## **Article 2: Policy measures**

### **Constitutional and legislative framework**

41. The principle of equality of all persons before the law is enshrined in the Singapore Constitution. This provision encompasses the protection of women against unfair discrimination.

42. Women and girls in Singapore enjoy strong protection of their legal rights. In addition to the Constitution, their rights are protected in legislation such as the Employment Act, the Women's Charter, Children and Young Persons Act, Penal Code, Criminal Procedure Code, the Protection from Harassment Act and the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act. These pieces of legislation are regularly reviewed to ensure that they are updated, remain relevant as society evolves and fit the purpose of protection of women and girls against discrimination and harm. An aggrieved woman is able to seek redress under the applicable laws and to report violations to the relevant authorities.

### **National machinery for the advancement of women**

43. There are two main national bodies overseeing women-related matters in Singapore: the Office for Women's Development (OWD) under the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) and the Inter-Ministry Committee (IMC) on CEDAW. The IMC comprises Government ministries and public sector agencies, which coordinate and implement initiatives under their purview to better address the needs of women. This includes the collection of data, disaggregated by sex, age and ethnicity on areas under their purview. Such data is widely and publicly available in the statistics published by the Department of Statistics, such as the Census of Population 2020. OWD is the national focal point on issues related to women's development and empowerment, and for international cooperation pertaining to women. OWD is also the secretariat for the IMC on CEDAW. To ensure the timely dissemination of the Committee's Concluding Observations in line with the Committee's request at paragraph 49 of the Concluding Observations, the Concluding Observations were made available on MSF's website after OWD received them from the Committee. The Concluding Observations were also promptly disseminated to the ministries and public service agencies represented at the IMC on CEDAW, and were reviewed, followed-up on and taken into consideration in the preparation of this Report.

44. In September 2021, the year-long, nation-wide Conversations on Singapore Women's Development was completed by the Government, together with community and civil society partners. They include the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations, NTUC Women and Family Unit and People's Association Women Integration Network Council.

45. The Conversations are part of a broader Government effort to engage a wide range of Singaporeans, understand their aspirations for Singapore women and chart the roadmap for further advancement of Singapore women. 160 Conversations were organised, involving nearly 6,000 participants from all walks of life. Feedback and ideas shared at the Conversations will be consolidated into a White Paper, which will be debated in Parliament in early 2022.

### **Gender mainstreaming**

46. Regarding paragraph 13 (c) of the Concluding Observations, we adopt a stakeholder approach towards gender mainstreaming in Singapore. That is, we take

into account the impact of our policies on women at all levels and stages in the course of designing, planning and delivering programmes.

### **Commitment to Beijing declaration and platform for action and sustainable development goals**

47. Regarding paragraph 47 of the Concluding Observations, Singapore remains committed to achieving the goals set at the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPA), as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The BDPA and SDGs (specifically SDG 5 on Gender Equality) continue to serve as reference points in the formulation of our policies, and implementation of this Convention in Singapore.

### **Agenda for sustainable development (2030 Agenda)**

48. In line with paragraph 48 of the Concluding Observations, Singapore supports the 2030 Agenda, and is committed to support efforts to implement and achieve the SDGs globally. The Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP) is Singapore's flagship technical assistance programme, through which the Government shares our development experience with other countries. More than 132,000 government officials from over 180 countries and territories have participated in the SCP since it was established in 1992 and there has been a steady increase in women's participation over the years. For example, women's participation has increased 6 per cent over two four-year periods, i.e. from an average of 36 per cent for the period 2013–2016, compared to an average of 42 per cent for the period 2017–2020. We continue to encourage more women officials to participate. See Annex A for more information.

### **Corporate tax policies**

49. Regarding paragraph 33 of the Concluding Observations, Singapore's corporate tax policies comply with internationally agreed standards, for example those set by the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes (GF) and the Inclusive Framework on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (IF). GF and IF comprise more than 160 and 130 tax jurisdictions respectively. Singapore is subject to periodic peer review by members of GF and IF and has been assessed to be compliant with the internationally agreed standards, such as standards for exchange of information requests, automatic exchange of financial account information and country-by-country reports of multinational enterprises and corporate tax incentives.

## **Article 3: Guarantee of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms**

50. Singapore is fully committed to the protection and promotion of the human rights of our citizens including women. We take a practical, non-ideological approach to realise human rights in Singapore, taking into account our national circumstances and aspirations. Our goal is to build an inclusive and cohesive society, where our people lead meaningful and fulfilling lives. Respect for the fundamental human rights is enshrined in our Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a key driver to help us achieve this goal.

51. Regarding paragraph 15 of the Concluding Observations, even without a specific national human rights institution, there are multiple robust mechanisms in place for Singaporeans to have their concerns addressed directly and expeditiously. Our parliamentarians, including the Prime Minister, hold weekly "Meet-the-People" sessions in their respective electoral constituencies during which issues or concerns can be raised directly with them. Special attention is paid to the interests of vulnerable

groups, including women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities, through institutions such as National Trades Union Congress for Workers' Rights, and the Presidential Council for Minority Rights. An IMC on Human Rights comprising 15 government agencies also tracks and reviews the implementation of our human rights commitments and obligations, as well as engages civil society on issues raised by them. The Government also has in place feedback and engagement channels such as the REACH (Reaching Everyone for Active Citizenry at Home) website, surveys and dialogues to seek views from and engage the public across a range of issues.

52. In respect of paragraph 46 of the Concluding Observations, Singapore has ratified the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention on 20 August 2010. The Government has given further consideration to the Optional Protocol to the Convention. The Optional Protocol will not be ratified at this time. The Government notes that the Optional Protocol serves to strengthen the implementation of the Convention within the jurisdiction of each State Party by giving the Committee the competence to receive and consider communications submitted in accordance with Article 2 of the Protocol. In Singapore, there are existing mechanisms to address individual complaints of gender discrimination. These mechanisms are not limited to Government channels but includes independent mechanisms such as the judiciary. Other channels are also available for women and women's groups to give feedback (including complaints) on women-related issues. Any member of the public can write to the relevant Ministry or government agency or media outlets about policies that affect them. Complaints received by Ministries or government agencies are followed up accordingly. Singapore has not received any feedback that there are insufficient feedback channels; nevertheless, Singapore will continue to monitor and review if more such channels should be set up.

## **Article 4: Special measures**

### **Enabling environment for women**

53. Singapore remains committed to protecting women against discrimination and to ensuring the achievement of de facto or substantive equality of women with men in the enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. In response to Paragraph 17 (a) of the Concluding Observations, all relevant officials are aware of the concept of temporary special measures as set out in Article 4 (1) of the Convention.

54. Singapore believes that every society should be given the time and space to advance human rights, including women's rights, in a way that best takes into account its unique and evolving social and cultural context. In Singapore's experience, even without temporary special measures, women have made significant progress over the last few decades and have been empowered by the enabling environment in Singapore. Our approach is founded on the principle of meritocracy where equal opportunities are available to both men and women. This allows our women to be recognised for their own abilities and efforts. Temporary special measures such as mandatory quotas to increase women's representation may result in women being stigmatised due to perceived tokenism.

55. Women have been able to participate fully and equally in all spheres of life and at all levels. According to the UN Human Development Report 2020, Singapore ranked 12th out of 162 countries, and second in Asia on the Gender Inequality Index (GII) with a score of 0.065.<sup>6</sup> Singapore's score of 0.065 puts it above the average

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<sup>6</sup> The score ranges from 0 (men and women fare equally) to 1 (women fare as poorly as possible in all measured dimensions).

global GII score of 0.436 and reflects the opportunities available to Singapore women in areas such as political and public life (see Article 7), education (see Article 10) and employment (see Article 11).

### **Council for Board Diversity**

56. Singapore is committed to accelerating progress towards the equal participation of women in key decision-making roles in the economic field. To this end, the Government formed the Council for Board Diversity (CBD) in January 2019, which comprises eminent leaders from the private, public and people sectors, to promote and achieve a sustained increase in the number of women on boards of listed companies, statutory boards and non-profit organisations.

57. The CBD has set targets for increasing women's representation on boards of all companies listed on Singapore Exchange (SGX) to 25 per cent by 2025 and 30 per cent by 2030. Singapore has shown encouraging progress in this aspect, with women's representation on the boards of listed companies increasing from 13.1 per cent in 2017 to 18.0 per cent as at June 2021. Singapore also aims for all statutory boards and non-profit organisations to achieve 30 per cent women's representation on their boards as soon as possible. As of June 2021, statutory boards have achieved 28.8 per cent women's representation, an increase from 23.3 per cent in 2018, and the non-profit organisations achieved 28.1 per cent women's representation, an increase from 27.4 per cent in 2018.

## **Article 5: Sex role stereotyping and prejudice**

58. The Government acknowledges that traditional mindsets which place expectations on women to assume the main caregivers' role at home may hold them back from pursuing their career aspirations. This issue has been magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic, which increased the demand for care work (e.g., due to the closure of schools), the burden of which falls more heavily on women. Therefore, we are committed to supporting women by building a society of equal opportunities and eliminating gender stereotypes.

### **Combatting discriminatory stereotypes**

59. To expand women's role beyond caregiving and combat discriminatory stereotypes about women's and men's roles, a cultural and mindset shift needs to take place. Paragraphs 5.3–5.7 highlight some of Singapore's other efforts to address this.

#### ***Elimination of 'Head of Household' concept***

60. In response to paragraph 19 (b) of the Concluding Observations, Singapore wishes to highlight that the "reference persons" concept has been adopted in place of "head of household", for the purpose of data collection in Singapore's Census of Population 2020.

#### ***Promoting equal partnerships in family***

61. We have enhanced our leave schemes over the years to support fathers to play a bigger role in raising their children. In 2017, the Government legislated the second week of Government-Paid Paternity Leave, and increased Shared Parental Leave from one to four weeks. Childcare and Infant Care Leave entitlements are also extended equally to working fathers and mothers. As the parental leave provisions are statutory entitlements, it is mandatory for employers to offer such leave to eligible employees. Taken together, these provisions will enable fathers to take up to eight weeks of leave in total in their child's first year, to bond with their newborns and care for their wives.

62. Public awareness-raising campaigns, programmes and activities have helped to progressively eliminate traditional stereotypes about the roles and responsibilities of women. In addition, the Government also works closely with community partners such as Families for Life Council and Centre for Fathering on the 3 key family movements in Singapore – Families for Life (FFL), Dads for Life and Mums for Life movements. These 3 complementary movements look at strengthening family ties and resilience with the aim of increasing marriage stability, as well as advocating the importance of shared parenting and household responsibilities between mothers and fathers.

***Education on mindsets and attitudes***

63. The Government continues to address and eliminate gender stereotypes in education and mass media. Special attention is given to educational materials and curriculum to ensure that gender stereotypes are not perpetuated, and that girls and boys are depicted as having equal access to various resources and opportunities. To cultivate a shift in mindsets, the Government has enhanced its Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) curriculum in 2021 to build appreciation of the equity of roles in the family, respect for both genders and emphasise the importance of not ascribing to gender stereotypes when considering education and career pathways.

64. There is a balanced treatment of gender representation within the formal curriculum with deliberate efforts across subjects to counter gender stereotypes. The experiences, contributions and achievement of women are highlighted alongside those of their male counterparts as content examples. In addition, students have opportunities to discuss issues related to women's development, particularly in the languages and humanities subjects at the secondary and pre-university levels.

***Portrayals of men and women in the media***

65. The Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA)'s content codes for linear TV and radio services state that programmes should not encourage or in any way lead to discrimination against any section of the community on account of race, religion, gender, age, occupational status or disability. Service providers should exercise sensitivity regarding humour that may offend good taste and decency e.g. jokes based on negative stereotyping or caricatures in relation to race, religion, gender, age or disability, which can cause hurt or humiliation.

***Affordable, quality and accessible caregiver services***

66. Singapore has invested substantially towards enhancing professional caregiver services to support our men and women to pursue their career and familial aspirations.

***Improving access to affordable and quality preschools***

67. The Government is committed to making quality preschools accessible and affordable. Annual government expenditure in the early childhood sector will more than double over the next few years, from around S\$1 billion in 2018.

68. Since 2012, Singapore has more than doubled the number of full-day preschool places from around 90,000 to around 190,000 today. This will grow to more than 200,000 places by 2023. By around 2025, 80 per cent of preschoolers will have a place in a Government-supported preschool, up from nearly 60 per cent today.

69. Preschool services have been made more affordable through universal subsidies for all families with Singaporean children enrolled in childcare and infant care programmes, and additional means-tested subsidies for low- and middle-income families. Since January 2020, subsidies have been enhanced. Families with working

mothers and a gross monthly household income of S\$12,000 and below benefit from the means-tested Additional Subsidy, up from an income ceiling of S\$7,500 previously. The Additional Subsidy amount was also increased across all eligible income tiers. Low-income working families will pay just S\$3 a month for full-day childcare or S\$1 a month for half-day kindergarten services at Government-supported preschools.

### ***Strengthening eldercare services***

70. Likewise, for families with elderly persons to look after, the Ministry of Health (MOH) provides subsidies for a range of eldercare services to address the care needs for eligible seniors, including day care, home care and respite care services, to alleviate the financial and physical burden of caregiving to support both men and women caregivers.

71. To support seniors (including elderly women) to age-in-place, MOH has grown the supply of aged care services over the years, especially in home and community care (e.g., home medical, home nursing and centre-based day care). Since 2015, MOH has expanded the number of home and day care places by 70 per cent, to support seniors to age-in-place. For seniors who are frail and have limited family support, we have also increased nursing home bed capacity by 30 per cent since 2015.

72. Beyond increasing the supply of aged care services, MOH is focusing on enhancing the quality and variety of our care services. For example, MOH has improved the design and living environment of nursing homes, as well as strengthened dementia care capabilities. MOH is also working closely with the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) to improve the quality of aged care services, through initiatives such as capability-building programmes and sector forums for service providers to share good practices.

73. In addition, MOH has enhanced caregiver support measures. For example, in 2019, MOH launched the Caregiver Support Action Plan to strengthen support for caregivers of seniors in the community, in addition to existing programmes and assistance that caregivers benefit from. Since then, MOH, together with partner agencies, has rolled out a range of support measures including care navigation, respite care, financial support, caregiver empowerment and training and workplace support. (See [Annex B](#))

## **Article 6: Exploitation of women**

74. Singapore does not tolerate the trafficking of women and has taken decisive action to combat trafficking in persons (TIP) and support and protect victims.

75. Regarding paragraph 23 (a) of the Concluding Observations, the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act (PHTA) is Singapore's primary legislation against TIP crimes and is in full compliance with the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking In Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

### **National effort**

76. Effective countering of TIP entails not only laws and enforcement action, but the mobilisation of relevant stakeholders and the community. Through extensive consultations with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), businesses and academics, Singapore developed the National Approach against Trafficking In Persons (2016–2026), comprising a “4P” approach to combat TIP:

(a) Preventing trafficking. The severe penalties for human trafficking offences under the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act (PHTA) reflect the seriousness of such offences and serve as a deterrent. A public that is aware of TIP crimes, and stakeholders trained to identify and deal with TIP crimes, are critical to prevent trafficking and protect victims. The TIP Public Awareness Grant launched in 2016 has encouraged public education initiatives, including a photo exhibition, film screenings, conference for businesses and a song by a local artiste, that raise awareness of TIP;

(b) Prosecuting traffickers. The PHTA 2015 is Singapore's legal framework to combat TIP and enables us to target traffickers operating from overseas. Enforcement agencies conduct regular operations on activities that are TIP-linked, including vice and illegal labour. Since the enactment of the PHTA, 12 accused persons have been charged in court with seven of these cases resulting in convictions. The sentences meted out by the Courts are based on the merits of each case. Imprisonment terms of more than six and a half years and fines of up to S\$30,000 have been passed for more egregious cases;

(c) Protecting victims. Working with social service agencies, the Government provides food, shelter, medical care, counselling services and specialised intervention tailored to the circumstances of each victim. The Government fully funds shelters for the cost of caring for trafficking victims;

(d) Partnering stakeholders. Singapore partners international organisations, such as INTERPOL and the UN Office of Drugs and Crimes, and foreign law enforcement counterparts, to combat TIP at the global level. To strengthen cooperation with our regional partners, Singapore ratified the ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children in 2016. At the force-to-force level, officers from the Singapore Police Force (SPF) and Ministry of Manpower (MOM) work closely with overseas law enforcement agencies and foreign embassies. Domestically, civil society organisations are invaluable partners in caring for TIP victims, and the buy-in of businesses to adopt responsible sourcing is key to eliminating the demand of workers from illicit sources.

### **Capacity-Building programmes**

77. Relevant officers receive regular and specialised training necessary to apply gender-sensitive investigation methods and early identification and referral of victims of trafficking. See Annex C for more details:

(a) Judiciary. All Judges and Judicial Officers undergo a mandatory Induction Programme when they are first appointed. They undergo continuing judicial education at the Singapore Judicial College (SJC) and at the courts to which they are appointed. In addition to SJC programmes, from time to time, the courts conduct complementary court-specific training programmes, especially in their specialist areas. The Family Justice Courts also conduct training, which includes the development of knowledge and skills to equip the Judges and Judicial Officers to deal sensitively and appropriately with cases involving violence against women, relational and family issues;

(b) Prosecutors, law enforcement and border control officers. As part of their basic police training, police officers are trained to respond to and support victims of crime. During frontline police training, officers are sensitised to the vulnerabilities of sexual crime victims and trained to provide support and care for victims of crimes;

(i) Police officers and border control officers are also trained to look out for travellers who exhibit TIP tell-tale indicators (e.g., nervousness, signs of distress) at the checkpoints. These travellers will be referred to the Duty Office

where officers will conduct preliminary interviews to assess the need for appropriate follow up with either the SPF or MOM;

(ii) Prosecutors and law enforcement officers attend conferences/workshops conducted by international experts to learn best practices in the handling of TIP cases. Such training helps officers to develop a better understanding of the legal and practical issues typically involved in such cases;

(c) Social workers. Social workers are sensitised to respond to victims of crimes (sexual abuse/assault/trafficking etc.) in an accepting and non-judgmental manner. They 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, they are trained to sensitise them to deal with trauma (common amongst victims of crime and violence), and also trained to identify and refer victims for psychological support when required.

### **III. Part three**

#### **Article 7: Public and political life**

78. Women in Singapore contribute actively to the economy. Equal opportunities are provided for men and women to be in leadership positions.

##### **Women in Politics**

79. Women in Singapore are able to enter politics based on their own merits. Regarding paragraph 25 (b) of the Concluding Observations, 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.

80. Female representation in Singapore Parliament is increasing, without temporary special measures being put in place. Women occupied 31 out of 104 seats in the 14th Parliament of Singapore (which commenced in August 2020), making up almost 30 per cent of Parliament. This percentage is higher than the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)'s average of 25.5 per cent and in line with UN's target of 30 per cent women lawmakers in each parliament. In September 2017, Madam Halimah Yacob, who was formerly the Speaker of Parliament, was appointed the first woman President of the Republic of Singapore. As of May 2021, there are nine women political office holders, up from six in October 2015. The presence of women in Parliament and in Government ensures that women's issues and perspectives are given due attention, through thorough discussions in the formulation of policies, national directives and laws.

##### **Women in the public service and the judiciary**

###### ***Public sector***

81. 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.

82. As part of these talent and leadership development programmes, officers are given equal access to a core set of developmental initiatives that includes milestone

courses and mentorship/coaching programmes at various stages of their careers to better prepare them for leadership roles and responsibilities.

83. Women made up 52.8 per cent of the public service, which comprises the civil service and statutory boards, as of 2020. Six of the 25 Permanent Secretaries and ten of the 37 Deputy Secretaries were women as of 2020. Women also made up 42.4 per cent of decision-making positions at Director-level and above, as of 2020.

### ***Judiciary***

84. Women made up 24.1 per cent of Judges in the Supreme Court, 48.6 per cent of Judicial Officers in the Supreme Court, 46.1 per cent of Judicial Officers in the State Courts, and 56.1 per cent of Judicial Officers in the Family Justice Courts, as of 2020.

### ***Women in decision-making positions***

85. Singapore actively supports women's participation in decision-making positions. For example, Singapore ranked first in Asia in fostering growth for women entrepreneurs according to Dell's 2019 Women Entrepreneur Cities Index. Singapore also tied with Italy for having the highest proportion of companies with women as chief executive officers (15 per cent), according to Credit Suisse's Gender 3000 2019 report. Initiatives as outlined at paragraphs 7.9 and 7.10 below are consistent with the Committee's recommendations in paragraph 25 (c) of the Concluding Observations to raise awareness and support women's participation in decision-making positions.

86. In January 2019, the Diversity Action Committee (DAC) was reconstituted into the CBD and widened its scope from increasing the representation of women on boards of all companies listed on SGX to including all statutory boards and non-profit organisations. The CBD engages stakeholders on the appointment of women onto boards, carries out activities to raise public awareness of the importance of board diversity through having women directors, works with partners to develop a pipeline of board-ready women and partners the Government in developing policies and programmes that impact women on boards. (See Article 4)

87. The CBD is complemented by ground-up efforts such as Singapore Council of Women's Organisation (SCWO)'s BoardAgender initiative. BoardAgender advocates for gender-balanced boards through meaningful dialogues and introduced a mentoring programme for aspiring women directors in 2021.

### **Women's participation in NGOs**

88. More Singaporean women are actively involved in the grassroots movement, with a growth of 11 per cent between 2016 (16,882 female grassroots leaders) and 2020 (18,635 female/grassroot leaders). The profile of these female grassroots leaders is varied, including youth, home makers, working professionals and businesswomen.

89. The OWD of MSF works closely with the three apex women bodies – SCWO, People's Association Women's Integration Network Council (PA WIN) and the National Trades Union Congress Women and Family Unit (NTUC WAF) to address issues facing women in Singapore. See Annex D for more information.

## **Article 8: International representation and participation**

### **Participation in regional and international women's meetings and at the United Nations**

90. Singapore provides equal opportunities for women to represent the Government at the international level and to participate in the work of international organisations. Singapore delegations to international meetings and international organisations comprise men and women, with women delegates selected on equal terms as men, i.e. based on their relevant experience, portfolios and areas of expertise. Based on this selection criteria, women have led Singapore delegations to international meetings and are appointed Heads of Missions to international organisations. For example, Singapore has had two women Permanent Representatives to the UN in New York, and several women Deputy Permanent Representatives.

91. Singapore participates actively in various regional and international meetings where we share our experience in women's empowerment.<sup>7</sup> The Singapore Women's Rights Representative on the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) held the ACWC chairmanship in 2020, and the vice-chairmanship in 2019.

92. Singaporean women are well represented at the UN with 25 women out of 35 Singaporeans in the UN Secretariat.<sup>8</sup> For example, Ms Aruna Thanabalasingam serves in a senior position as a Director in the UN Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance. Dr Noeleen Heyzer served as the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific from August 2007 to January 2014, the first woman to have taken on that role. Her other roles include being the Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General for Timor-Leste (2013 to 2015), member of the UN Secretary-General's High Level Advisory Board on Mediation (since September 2017), and UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Myanmar (since October 2021).

### **Foreign service**

93. All positions in the Foreign Service are open to women on an equal basis as men, i.e. based on individual qualifications, educational background and relevant experience. As at October 2021, there are 258 women out of a total of 541 foreign service officers (i.e. 48 per cent, an increase from 44 per cent in 2016). As of November 2021, there are 13 women Ambassadors/Heads of Mission.

## **Article 9: Nationality**

### **Equal rights to nationality**

94. Singaporean men and women have equal rights to change or retain their nationality, if they meet Singapore's legal and policy requirements.

<sup>7</sup> These include, but not limited to: (i) Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Women and Economy Forum; (ii) East Asia Gender Equality Ministerial Meeting; (iii) ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women; (iv) Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Committee on Women (ACW) and ACW Plus Three ("Plus Three" refers to Japan, People's Republic of China and Republic of Korea) Meeting; (v) Women Parliamentarians of ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly Meeting; (vi) United Nations Economic & Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and Its Regional and Global Outcomes; and (vii) the annual sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women.

<sup>8</sup> As at January 2020.

95. Singaporean men and women also have equal rights with respect to the nationality of their children who are born in the context of a legal marriage. For children born outside of a legal marriage, only Singaporean women have rights with respect to their children acquiring Singapore citizenship.

96. Children whose parents are foreigners and are born in Singapore will not automatically acquire Singapore citizenship, as it is not an entitlement. The laws are in place to encourage foreign parents to apply for citizenship for their child from their home country in a timely manner. This would apply to all regardless of gender of the parent and/or children.

#### **Refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons**

97. Singapore is not in a position to accept any persons seeking political asylum or refugee status, regardless of their ethnicity or place of origin, because of our physical limitations as one of the smallest and most densely populated countries in the world. Consequently, we have no plans to establish national asylum and refugee legislation or ratify the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol, the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, or the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

98. Nonetheless, Singapore views the humanitarian treatment of such persons very seriously. We may, on compassionate grounds assist such persons, in particular those who are pregnant or handicapped, to seek proper food and shelter and make arrangements for them to depart Singapore at the earliest opportunity to a third country. For such cases, Singapore is prepared to work with organisations willing to provide assistance, such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to repatriate or send persons in need to a third country within an acceptable timeframe.

99. The Government has released statistics on the number of stateless persons, including gender-disaggregated data, in response to parliamentary questions. As at 30 November 2020, there were 1,109 stateless persons living in Singapore. 76 per cent of them were Permanent Residents (PRs) and were eligible for various benefits accorded to PRs such as in healthcare, housing and education.

100. Stateless persons can apply for PR and Singapore citizenship. The Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) evaluates each application based on a range of criteria including length of stay in Singapore, family profile, economic contributions, education qualifications, age and family ties to Singaporeans. The ICA also takes into consideration the applicant's circumstances, including the reasons behind the person's statelessness.

## **IV. Part four**

### **Article 10: Education**

101. All Singaporean children have equal access to quality education. Under the Compulsory Education Act, all Singaporean children residing in Singapore between the ages of six and 15 must regularly attend a national primary school. Thereafter, students can choose from a range of education institutions and programmes that cater to different strengths and interests. Every Singaporean child is thus given the opportunity to complete at least 10 years of general education.

### **Literacy and educational attainment of women<sup>9</sup>**

102. Singapore has a high literacy rate for women. The literacy rate for the resident population aged 15 years and older is 97.1 per cent in 2020. The literacy rate for resident females aged 15 years and older improved from 95.4 per cent in 2016 to 95.8 per cent in 2020. The mean years of schooling for resident females aged 25 years and older is 10.9 years in 2020, up from 10.3 years in 2016. Among residents aged 25 to 34 years in 2020, 79.8 per cent have tertiary<sup>10</sup> qualifications, up from 77.5 per cent in 2016. For the same age group in 2020, 82.7 per cent of females have tertiary qualifications, up from 79.6 per cent in 2016.

103. Drop-out rates in primary and secondary schools are very low. In 2020, the cohort drop-out rates for females in primary schools and secondary schools was less than 1 per cent.

### **Institute of technical education, polytechnic and university education**

104. In 2020, women made up 39 per cent, 48 per cent and 50 per cent of the full-time student enrolment at the Institute of Technical Education (ITE), polytechnics and universities respectively.

105. Women have consistently been well-represented in traditionally male-dominated courses. For example, the enrolment of women for the following courses in 2020 was as follows:

- (a) 25 per cent of the electronics/info-communications technology courses in ITE;
- (b) 52 per cent of the architecture and building courses, 64 per cent of the natural, physical and mathematical sciences courses, and 27 per cent of the information technology courses in polytechnics; and
- (c) 54 per cent of the natural, physical and mathematical sciences courses, and 58.9 per cent of architecture and building courses in universities.

### **Specialized independent schools**

106. All our national schools offer programmes catering to their students' aptitudes and interests. Among them are Specialised Independent Schools, which cater to students with talent and strong interests in specific fields such as the Arts, Sports, Mathematics and Science, and applied learning. In 2020, girls made up 47 per cent of the students in the Singapore Sports School; 23 per cent in the National University of Singapore High School; 27 per cent in the School of Science and Technology and 80 per cent in the School of the Arts. The girls enrolled in these schools have performed well, winning medals in various local and international competitions.

### **Equal opportunities and access to education**

107. The Government invests heavily in education to ensure that it remains affordable. For Financial Year 2021, our Government invested S\$13.62 billion (US\$10.13 billion) or 2.7 per cent of our GDP in education. Our educational policy of holistic development allows Singaporeans to have access to a range of pathways to pursue their aspirations, regardless of background and gender.

<sup>9</sup> See MOE Education Digest for more statistics: <https://www.moe.gov.sg/-/media/files/about-us/education-statistics-digest-2021.pdf?la=en&hash=66F301F1705A29404802981D2B8D4E96F8AAE5CC>.

<sup>10</sup> Polytechnic, professional qualification and other diploma, or university qualifications.

***Eliminating gender stereotypes in career choices***

108. The Ministry of Education (MOE) recognises that students may become influenced by inaccurate media portrayals or other implicit biases present in society into pursuing stereotypical gender roles in careers. The Education and Career Guidance (ECG) curriculum, as part of the CCE in schools, encourages students to explore a variety of education and career pathways. Resources and information, such as industry videos and write ups, which offer a balanced representation of both genders across careers are also available in the MySkillsFuture Student Portal. ECG Counsellors in secondary schools, Junior Colleges/Centralised Institutes, Polytechnics and the ITE, guide students to recognise how gender stereotypes may limit education or career pathways. They also guide students to better understand their interests and skills, and encourage them to explore career sectors aligned to their interests and skills.

109. In schools, both boys and girls have equal access to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects. Singapore also continues to encourage students, both boys and girls, to consider careers in STEM so that they can benefit from the digital future. For example, the Applied Learning Programme in STEM aims to help primary and secondary school students develop an interest in STEM and acquire dispositions and skills that allow them to apply STEM knowledge in addressing real-world problems.

110. All students have opportunities to join a wide variety of student development experiences such as co-curricular activities (CCAs), Outdoor Adventure Learning, Student Leadership Development and overseas trips. The vast majority of CCAs are accessible to both genders. As the students grow up with these learning experiences, students and their parents will recognise that gender does not limit one's opportunities for learning and participation.

**Support for disadvantaged students**

111. Singapore believes that every child, regardless of gender or background, should have a good start in life. The Government, in partnership with multidisciplinary professionals, is expanding outreach to children aged 0–6 from low-income families under the KidSTART programme to provide upstream and holistic support for children's health, social and development needs. In 2018, the Government established the Uplifting Pupils in Life and Inspiring Families Taskforce (UPLIFT) to strengthen support for students from disadvantaged families regardless of gender, to enable them to reach their full potential.

**Sexuality education**

112. In MOE's Sexuality Education curriculum, students are taught age-appropriate knowledge and skills to understand themselves, how to maintain healthy relationships, and make wise, informed and responsible decisions on sexuality matters. Topics such as respecting boundaries of self and others, recognising and seeking help for violence, and consequences of protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) are taught. Schools are also supported with resources and training.

113. The curriculum also includes topics on gender and gender stereotypes. Students are taught the importance of not stereotyping. They learn to appreciate one's unique qualities, strengths and talents, and to respect and empathise with others. More details are in Article 5.

114. The concept of reproduction is introduced in the Science Syllabus at the upper primary level and elaborated further in the Science Syllabus at the lower secondary

level as well as the Biology syllabus at the upper secondary level. Under these secondary level syllabi, topics on the reproduction systems, menstrual cycle, contraception, STIs and effective protections against STIs, as well as evaluation of the issues and consequences relating to abortion and pre-marital sex, are covered.

## **Article 11: Employment**

115. Singapore is committed to the principle of meritocracy. Employers are encouraged to recruit, select and promote employees based on merit (such as skills, experience or ability to perform the job). Our labour policies seek to create a flexible labour market that protects workers, allows businesses to thrive and creates quality jobs.

### **Fair employment practices**

116. Broadly, employment outcomes, such as employment rates and income from work, for various demographic groups have improved over time, including for women. Nevertheless, MOM continues to take a strict stance against workplace discrimination. Under the Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices (TGFEP), all employers are expected to abide by merit-based principles of employment. MOM takes action against errant employers who have breached the TGFEP, such as discriminating against jobseekers on the basis of gender. For greater deterrence, these penalties were raised in January 2020. Previously, employers found to have breached the TGFEP were debarred from hiring new foreign workers for at least six months. MOM has doubled the minimum debarment period to 12 months, with more egregious cases facing a longer debarment period of up to a maximum of 24 months. In addition, there are provisions under the Employment Act for employees to seek redress for wrongful dismissal, including on discriminatory grounds.

117. As discrimination is at its root a mindset issue, we have been strengthening educational efforts (e.g., workshops, publicity campaigns) aimed at correcting misperceptions and stereotypes about certain groups of workers, such as women and older workers.

118. In July 2021, a Tripartite Committee on Workplace Fairness (TCWF) was convened to review the framework for workplace fairness in Singapore. After consulting tripartite partners (unions and employer federations), it was announced that the TGFEP will be enshrined in law. This widens the range of enforcement levers against errant employers, sends a stronger signal that Singapore does not tolerate workplace discrimination, and will strengthen protection for women, inter alia, against discrimination or unfair treatment at the workplace. The TCWF is deliberating on the scope of the legislation and will make its recommendations in the first half of 2022.

119. We have ratified the International Labour Organisation Convention No. 100 on Equal Remuneration. This Convention aims for men and women workers to have equal remuneration for work of equal value.

### **Women's participation in the workforce**

120. Women's participation in Singapore's workforce has progressively increased. Singapore's resident labour force comprised 2,345,500 people in 2020. The resident labour force participation rate was 68 per cent in 2020, similar to that in 2016. In 2020, 61.2 per cent of the resident female population aged 15 and over were in the labour force, up from 60.4 per cent in 2016. Our female resident employment rate for those aged 25 to 64 has risen from 72.1 per cent in 2016 to 73.2 per cent in 2020. Singapore is ranked 9th out of 37 OECD countries for female full-time employment.

121. The percentage of women in the workforce who are in Professional, Managers, Executives and Technicians (PMET) has risen from 53.7 per cent to 59.2 per cent of females from 2016 to 2020. Women's income has also increased, as median gross monthly income from work (including employer CPF) of full-time employed female residents rose from S\$3,803 in 2016 to S\$4,374 in 2020.

122. Women are also not prevented from seeking employment in any industry or occupations. Compared to the past, women have made great inroads into traditionally male-dominated areas. For example:

(a) The proportion of women lawyers continued to be healthy at 43 per cent in 2021;

(b) The proportion of women doctors increased from 40 per cent in 2016 to 42 per cent in 2020;

(c) Women made up 30 per cent of research scientists and engineers in 2019, up from 27 per cent in 2009. Since 2007, the rate of increase in the number of female scientists and engineers has consistently outpaced or matched that of their male counterparts. Between 2018 and 2019, the number of female research scientists and engineers grew faster at 8.0 per cent, compared to males at 6.9 per cent;

(d) Singapore has several illustrious female scientists who won multiple awards. The National Research Foundation (NRF) Fellowship awards outstanding, early-stage career researchers engaged in leading impactful research in Singapore, providing a five-year research grant of up to \$3 million support. 25.5 per cent of the NRF Fellowship recipients from 2013–2018 were female;

(e) The proportion of females among employed residents in STEM occupations rose from 30 per cent in 2016 to 32 per cent in 2020;<sup>11</sup>

(f) Women make up 41 per cent of the tech workforce in Singapore, well above the global average of 28 per cent;<sup>12</sup>

(g) Muslim women have filled up key positions in national Muslim institutions established by the Administration of Muslim Act in Singapore. For example, women made up 20 per cent of full members and about 16 per cent of associate members in the Fatwa Committee, which issues religious guidance to Muslims in Singapore. In addition to the Syariah Court being led by a female chief jurist, female jurists and legal professionals form about 66 per cent of the Syariah Court's full-time bench, and 20 per cent of the Appeal Board.

123. Women also make up an increasing proportion of private sector employers in Singapore – 30 per cent in 2020, up from 28 per cent in 2016.

### **Addressing Gender Pay Gap**

124. In January 2020, MOM and Associate Professor Jessica Pan from the National University of Singapore released a joint study on the adjusted Gender Pay Gap (GPG) in Singapore. The adjusted GPG compares the incomes of men and women with similar characteristics such as industry, occupation, age, usual hours worked and

<sup>11</sup> Comprehensive Labour Force Survey, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM. STEM refers to these occupations: Science & Engineering Professionals; Health Professionals; Information & Communications Technology Professionals; Physical & Engineering Science Associate Professionals; Health Associate Professionals; Information & Communications Technicians.

<sup>12</sup> BCG Report, 2020, 'Boosting Women in Technology in Southeast Asia'.

education. Our adjusted GPG<sup>13</sup> improved from 8.8 per cent in 2002<sup>14</sup> to 4.3 per cent in 2020.<sup>15,16</sup> These findings have been useful in informing the Government's efforts to strengthen our approach to address Singapore's GPG.

***Supporting women to access occupations of their choice and remain in the workforce***

125. The difference in Singapore's adjusted and unadjusted GPG shows that occupational segregation is a key factor which needs to be addressed in order to reduce the unadjusted GPG. The Government seeks to address this by (i) ensuring that both men and women can access the occupation of their choice; and (ii) supporting women to remain in the workforce while minimising disruption to their career and loss of experience due to time taken off for family responsibilities.

126. In this regard, Singapore also encourages and supports women to pursue careers in higher-paying occupations. This includes programmes to encourage female students to pursue STEM subjects and careers, and increased recognition and mentorship efforts for females in the STEM fields (See Article 10).

127. Regarding paragraph 29 (d) of the Concluding Observations, the Government continues to support all workers, including women, to enter and remain in the workforce while managing both work and personal commitments through encouraging the greater adoption of flexible work arrangements (FWAs) and other work-life harmony strategies. This includes recognising progressive employers through the implementation of the Tripartite Standard (TS) on FWAs and developing and sharing FWA implementation resources.

128. In addition to the TS on FWAs launched in 2017, the TS on Unpaid Leave for Unexpected Care Needs was launched in 2018 to encourage employers to provide additional leave support to employees during unexpected caregiving exigencies. As of end June 2021, over 9,000 employers have adopted the TS on FWAs, up from under 5,000 a year ago, and almost 3,000 employers have adopted the TS on Unpaid Leave for Unexpected Care Needs, up from under 2,000 a year ago. Today, the vast majority of employees are benefitting from FWAs. In 2020, 93 per cent of employers offered some form of formal or ad-hoc FWAs.

129. Tripartite partners are progressively implementing the recommendations submitted by the Citizens' Panel on Work-Life Harmony in 2019. We have over 100 Work-Life Ambassadors from all walks of life to further support employers in implementing work-life harmony practices at the workplace and have developed a new TS on Work-Life Harmony, which was launched in April 2021. In February 2021, the Alliance for Action (AfA) on Work-Life Harmony was launched with the support of tripartite partners to rally the community to (i) improve awareness of the importance of work-life harmony and best work-life practices; (ii) support workplaces and the wider community to adopt work-life practices; and (iii) support companies in specific sectors to overcome challenges and implement work-life practices, including FWAs. The AfA on Work-Life Harmony concluded successfully in September 2021, with the ground-up development of work-life harmony tools by participants which will be used by employers in Singapore.

<sup>13</sup> Refers to adjusted median gender pay gap of full-time resident employees aged 26 to 64.

<sup>14</sup> Singapore's Adjusted Gender Pay Gap, published in January 2020, by Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM.

<sup>15</sup> Update on Singapore's Adjusted Gender Pay Gap, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM.

<sup>16</sup> Singapore's unadjusted median GPG of full-time resident employees aged 25 to 54 had also improved from 16.0% in 2002 to 14.4% in 2020. Source: Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM.

130. Finally, the TCWF is looking at proposing legislation to better ensure workplace fairness, including between both genders. The proposed legislation is also expected to help reduce the gender pay gap.

### **Supporting women to stay employable and future-ready**

131. To support women to better reconcile their professional and personal aspirations and commitments, Singapore has taken steps to (i) promote a more balanced share of parental responsibilities; and (ii) provide affordable, quality and accessible preschool and eldercare services to support both men and women caregivers. (See Article 5)

132. To help women stay employable, there are various national schemes and initiatives to facilitate their upskilling and help them stay responsive to a changing workforce.

### ***Supporting women to remain in or re-join the workforce***

133. Women seeking to enter the workforce can tap on Workforce Singapore's (WSG) broad-based suite of employment facilitation services and programmes to take on or transit to new jobs, depending on their specific needs. One such programme is the Career Trial, where there is a trial period for the employer and jobseeker to assess the compatibility of the jobseeker with the job, considering factors such as the occupation, industry and jobseeker profile. During the trial duration of up to three months, jobseekers receive a training allowance from the Government. There are also retention incentives for jobseekers who are hired after the trial.

134. Jobseekers who require career assistance can visit WSG's Careers Connect and NTUC-Employment and Employability Institute's (NTUC-e2i's) career centres, which are also accessible through any of the 24 SGUnited Jobs and Skills Centres in Housing Development Board estates. Jobseekers can also tap on the MyCareersFuture portal, a government-run website which enables more efficient and effective job searches by matching the jobs to the jobseekers' skillsets.

135. Women can also tap on subsidies for self-sponsored training (e.g., SkillsFuture Credit, SkillsFuture Mid-career Enhanced Subsidy for Singaporeans aged 40 or older).<sup>17</sup> Such training facilitates the upskilling of women outside the workforce in preparation to re-enter the workforce, and also helps women already in the workforce adapt better to the workplace.

### ***Employment of senior female workers***

136. Notwithstanding the various efforts to promote shared parental responsibilities and better work-life harmony, which will also support the employability of older women, the Tripartite Workgroup on Older Workers issued a set of recommendations that provide a clear roadmap for the workforce to achieve productive longevity over the next decade. Specifically in relation to senior female workers, the Workgroup hopes that by helping such workers to continue working if they wish to, their income security and retirement adequacy can be better supported. The recommendations were accepted in full by the Government in August 2019.

137. One of the Workgroup's key recommendations includes raising the statutory minimum Retirement Age (RA) and Re-employment Age (REA) from the current 62 and 67 years to 65 and 70 years respectively by 2030. This will provide more opportunities for all older workers, including our women workers, to work longer if

<sup>17</sup> Introduced in 2015, SkillsFuture is a national movement to provide Singaporeans with lifelong learning opportunities to develop to their fullest potential and to help the local workforce remain adaptable in the face of disruptions.

they wish to and achieve retirement adequacy. The Government had announced a S\$1.5 billion Senior Worker Support Package in 2020 to help employers adjust to the changes brought about by the Workgroup's recommendations, including the increase in RA and REA.

138. The Government will also increase the CPF contribution rates for senior workers from 1 January 2022 to help build up retirement adequacy for senior workers.

139. As a result of our measures to support employment for senior workers, including female senior workers, the resident employment rate for female senior workers aged 55–64 has increased from 54.5 per cent in 2016 to 56.4 per cent in 2020, while that for female senior workers aged 65 and above has increased from 17.4 per cent in 2016 to 20.6 per cent in 2020. In spite of the economic recession last year, female senior worker employment for those aged 55–64 rose from 55.9 per cent to 56.4 per cent, while employment for those aged 65 and above rose from 19.6 per cent to 20.6 per cent.

140. The Government will continue to partner our tripartite partners closely to strengthen efforts to build an inclusive workforce and progressive workplaces that value senior workers. We aim to educate workplaces on how to better engage mature and senior employees in structured career planning, redesign jobs to raise workplace longevity and provide part-time re-employment opportunities to allow more senior workers to remain in the workforce.

### **Workplace sexual harassment**

141. Regarding paragraph 31 of the Concluding Observations, Singapore takes a serious stand against sexual harassment, including workplace sexual harassment. We have adopted a multi-pronged approach to protect workers from workplace harassment:

#### ***Protection from Harassment***

142. Legislation is in place to criminalise egregious offences, such as outrage of modesty. These offences are punishable under the Penal Code or can be taken up under the Protection from Harassment Act (POHA). This includes offences committed in workplace settings.

#### ***Ensuring effective grievance handling procedures***

143. It is also important to ensure effective grievance handling procedures within companies, so that employees feel safe and supported in raising workplace harassment issues.

144. The TGFEP requires employers to put in place proper procedures to handle grievances independently, objectively and confidentially, including those related to workplace harassment. This is supplemented by the Tripartite Advisory on Managing Workplace Harassment which guides employers and employees on how to prevent and manage harassment at the workplace. Employers who receive complaints of harassment are required to conduct investigations objectively and fairly, find a workable solution, respond to the affected persons, and take steps to prevent reoccurrence. The Tripartite Alliance for Fair & Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) works with tripartite partners to conduct regular courses to train key personnel such as HR, line managers and supervisors to adopt and implement policies to prevent and manage workplace harassment. TAFEP also publishes guides and resources to advise employers and employees on how to better prevent and manage harassment at the workplace.

145. TAFEP's Workplace Harassment Resource and Recourse Centre was established in 2019, to provide support and recourse for affected workers who have encountered workplace harassment. When a harassment case is reported to MOM and TAFEP, besides rendering support to the affected employee, MOM and TAFEP will require the company to conduct an investigation and provide TAFEP a report of its findings. TAFEP will assess whether the employer has carried out the case inquiry properly and require it to close any gaps in its grievance handling procedure as required under TGFEP. MOM can also take action against employers who fail in their duties to provide a safe environment for employees or refuse to improve their grievance handling processes, for example, by curtailing their ability to access foreign manpower. This approach has worked well, companies which MOM and TAFEP have engaged on such issues have been cooperative in improving their policies and processes to deal with workplace harassment complaints.

146. At the same time, TAFEP works with the affected employee and employer to adjust work arrangements and provide closure to the affected employee. Where appropriate, TAFEP offers advice to the affected employee on lodging of police reports, possible civil remedies, as well as referrals for emotional support at organisations such as the Family Service Centres and Samaritans of Singapore (SOS).

147. TAFEP continues its efforts to raise awareness of workplace harassment and grievance handling through (i) mainstream and social media articles; (ii) advertisement campaigns to educate employers and employees on what constitutes workplace harassment and raise awareness of TAFEP's Workplace Harassment Resource and Recourse Centre; (iii) videos encouraging affected individuals to seek assistance; and (iv) strengthening partnerships to facilitate more referrals of workplace harassment cases to TAFEP.

### **Migrant Domestic Workers**

148. Singapore has put in place measures and guidelines to protect migrant domestic workers' (MDWs') welfare, ranging from pre-employment matters such as agency fees to in-employment matters such as rest days and medical insurance. The Government continuously reviews and improve measures to safeguard MDWs' well-being in Singapore.

#### ***Legislative protection***

149. MDWs are protected by a comprehensive framework of laws and enforcement measures that account for the different work arrangements of the domestic workplace. Regarding paragraph 35 (a) of the Committee's Concluding Observations, the well-being of MDWs is legislated under the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (EFMA) and the Employment Agencies Act. The EFMA safeguards the rights and well-being of all MDWs, including mandating that employers allow adequate daily rest and weekly rest days (or compensation in-lieu). By end-2022, employers will be required to provide their MDWs with at least one rest day a month that cannot be compensated away. The Government will not hesitate to take enforcement action against employers who compromise the well-being of their MDWs. We have also enhanced protections for MDWs against abuse. Amendments to the Penal Code took effect in 2020 to double the maximum punishment for persons convicted of causing hurt, assault, sexual offences and wrongful restraint or confinement against MDWs. The withholding of work permits or passports against MDWs' wishes is also illegal.

#### ***Well-being, health and safety***

150. Employers of all MDWs must provide their MDWs with acceptable accommodation, and adequate food, and are responsible for the MDWs' medical

expenses. Employers must purchase medical insurance of at least S\$15,000 (US\$11,400) for MDWs' inpatient expenses and Personal Accident Insurance of at least S\$60,000 (US\$45,560) against accidental death and permanent disability.

151. To complement our legislations, the Government has also drawn up guidelines for employers on wellbeing provisions for MDWs, which include what constitutes proper accommodation and adequate food. For example, to ensure proper accommodation, employers must ensure that MDWs are provided with basic amenities and a safe resting environment, including ensuring their modesty and privacy are taken care of. Since April 2021, officers appointed by MOM started conducting house visits to check how well MDWs have adjusted to their working and living environments and mediate if there are any issues surfaced. From 1 December 2021, employment agencies are also required to conduct at least one post-placement check with the MDW within three months after the MDW has joined the household, to check on her well-being and help ensure that the MDW and their employers settle smoothly into the new working relationship.

152. In response to paragraph 35 (b) of the Concluding Observations, in the event that an MDW encounters well-being issues in employment, they can approach MOM for help. Where there is a valid case, the MDW will be allowed to change employment without the need for employer's consent.

#### ***Partnership with NGOs***

153. Our NGOs such as Centre for Domestic Employees and Foreign Domestic Worker Association for Social Support and Training (FAST) are invaluable partners in helping MDWs understand their rights, responsibilities and avenues of assistance. NGOs co-implement programmes with the Government, such as conducting the Settling-in-Programme upon arrival, distributing handy guides, and building up a pool of MDWs ambassadors to disseminate information and share updates. NGOs also provide vocational training and financial literacy courses.

154. To support MDWs through the COVID-19 pandemic, NGOs have maintained 24-hour helplines for MDWs and have partnered with mental health advocacy associations such as Silver Ribbon to provide counselling services for MDWs who require mental health support. NGOs like FAST have also developed meaningful e-activities to keep MDWs engaged, such as online fitness classes.

#### ***Mandatory testing for pregnancy and sexuality-transmitted diseases***

155. In response to paragraph 35 (c) of the Concluding Observations to repeal the law requiring work permit holders to be deported on grounds of pregnancy, Singapore manages our population growth carefully to ensure that it is sustainable. The mandatory testing is for pregnancy and infectious diseases, and is required for the health and well-being of the household and population in general. Pregnancy testing also benefits female workers as it provides them with information on their pregnancy status and suitability for specific types of work.

#### **Ratification of the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) and the Domestic Workers Convention 2011 (No. 189)**

156. We note paragraph 35 (d) of the Concluding Observations to ratify the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), and the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Singapore's focus has been to ensure good labour outcomes. We take our treaty obligations seriously. We would only consider ratifying an ILO Convention if we can fully comply with it in law and in practice. Nevertheless, non-ratification of a treaty does not mean that the spirit of the treaty is not adopted in

Singapore. For example, Singapore takes workplace discrimination seriously and our current approach of education and enforcement protects jobseekers and employees against workplace discrimination, in line with the spirit of C111. To strengthen the framework for protection of workers of both genders, it was announced in August 2021 that the Government, after consulting tripartite partners, would be enshrining the TGFEP in law, which will give it more bite and expand the range of actions that can be taken against errant employers. This also sends a stronger signal that Singapore does not tolerate workplace discrimination.

## **Article 12: Health**

### **Singapore healthcare system**

157. Singapore's healthcare system is designed to ensure that everyone has access to different levels of healthcare in a timely, cost-effective and seamless manner. The MOH actively regulates public and private healthcare providers to ensure quality of care, as well as promotes healthy living and preventive health programmes. As a result of this broad overarching policy:

(a) Our infant mortality rate remains low at 1.8 per 1,000 resident live-births in 2020, compared to 2.4 per 1,000 resident live births in 2016. Maternal mortality also remains low at zero per 100,000 live births in 2020;

(b) Singapore has one of the lowest under-five mortality rates in the world. Our under-five mortality rate is 2.1 per 1,000 resident live births in 2020,<sup>18</sup> compared to 7.5 per 1,000 resident live births in 1990. This is a drop of about 70 per cent;

(c) Life expectancy at birth for the resident population continues to increase from 83.0 years in 2016 to 83.9 years in 2020.<sup>19</sup> Females have a longer life expectancy of 86.1 years (increased from 85.1 years in 2016), compared to 81.5 years for males in 2020.

158. In 2020, Singapore was ranked as the best place in the world for children to grow up, among 180 countries, in the Global Childhood report by non-profit organization 'Save the Children'.

### **Health-care affordability**

159. Singapore's health-care system has a mixed financing structure that is both universal and provides multi-layers of protection. It has been continually enhanced, including in recent years to stay relevant and keep healthcare affordable. See Annex E for initiatives on healthcare financing, which are available for both men and women.

### **Taking care of women's health**

#### ***Women's Health Committee***

160. The Women's Health Committee (WHC) is a standing committee formed in 2016, as a continuation of the efforts under the previous Women's Health Advisory Committee from 2012 to 2016. It is represented by multiple stakeholders from community outreach and advocacy organisations, healthcare partners and Government agencies to increase awareness and encourage women to take action to improve their health in three key areas: improving cancer screening rates, promoting good bone health, and inculcating healthy habits amongst young women. Various

<sup>18</sup> Year 2020 data for under-five mortality rate is preliminary.

<sup>19</sup> Year 2020 data for life expectancy at birth is preliminary.

initiatives have been, and will continue to be introduced. See Annex F for more information.

### ***Pregnancy services***

161. A multi-pronged approach has been adopted to equip parents and parents-to-be with the knowledge and skills on how to maintain healthy pregnancies and raise healthy children in the early development years. This includes national guidelines, health education and promotion programmes and community initiatives, as well as preventive health services in collaboration with healthcare institutions and community partners. See Annex F for more information.

162. In January 2021, Singapore set up an inter-agency Taskforce to oversee the development of a Child & Maternal Health and Well-being Strategy to better support women and their children. The Taskforce will put in place policies, initiatives 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 and into motherhood. 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, breastfeeding and lactation support.

### ***Vaccination and screening***

163. ‘Screen for Life’ is a national screening programme aimed to encourage eligible Singaporean citizens and Permanent Residents to go for recommended health screenings and the necessary follow-ups regularly. Under this programme, Singapore residents are offered population-level screening tests that are appropriate for their age and gender at General Practitioner (GP) clinics (under the Community Health Assist Scheme or CHAS),<sup>20</sup> polyclinics and participating community providers at subsidised rates. This includes cervical cancer screening for eligible women aged 25 years or above, and breast cancer screening for eligible women aged 50 years or above. Apart from the two women-centric cancers, the programme offers chronic disease screening (diabetes, hypertension and hyperlipidaemia) and colorectal cancer screening for recommended age groups.

164. Cervical cancer is mainly caused by human papillomavirus (HPV) infection, and hence, can be effectively prevented through HPV vaccination. In Singapore, HPV vaccination is recommended for females aged nine to 26 years old, as part of the National Childhood Immunisation Schedule and National Adult Immunisation Schedule since 2010 and 2017 respectively. In April 2019, fully subsidised HPV vaccination was introduced as part of the national school-based health programme. From 1 November 2020, subsidies were enhanced for nationally recommended vaccinations, which included HPV vaccinations, at CHAS GPs and polyclinics.

### ***Mental health and well-being***

165. Women with mental health and well-being needs are supported through national mental health plans such as the National Mental Health Blueprint and the Community Mental Health Masterplan. These plans outline measures to promote awareness of mental health issues, enable individuals, professionals and the community to identify mental health and well-being needs at an early stage, and increase availability and accessibility to community mental health services for those in need. See Annex F for more information.

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<sup>20</sup> CHAS enables Singaporeans with the CHAS card to receive subsidies for medical/dental care at participating General Practitioner and dental clinics.

166. An Interagency Taskforce on Mental Health and Well-being has been set up in July 2021 to develop an overarching national strategy on mental health and well-being and oversee the development, coordination and implementation of national efforts to enhance the mental health and well-being of the Singapore population, focusing on cross-cutting issues that would require multi-and inter-agency collaboration.

***Greater support during the COVID-19 pandemic***

167. The National Care Hotline (NCH) was set up in April 2020 to provide emotional support and psychological first aid to individuals and families affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. NCH is a close partnership between the public service, community agencies and the private sector. The hotline is manned by social service professionals and volunteers.

168. MOM, together with tripartite partners, Institute of Mental Health and other partners have issued two advisories offering guidance to employers on supporting their employees' mental well-being. Under the Tripartite Advisory on Mental Well-Being at Workplaces, recommendations include implementing and encouraging the take up of FWAs, setting clear expectations on after-work hours' communications and establishing return-to-work policies that support employees with mental well-being needs. MOM also launched the iWorkHealth tool, an online self-administered psychosocial assessment tool to help employers and employees identify and manage workplace stressors.

**Article 13: Economic and social life**

**Our Social Compact**

169. Singapore seeks to create an enabling environment where all Singaporeans have equal opportunities to thrive and contribute. Our social security system is premised on individual responsibility, family and community support. Additional support is given to men and women in need, whilst not undermining the principles of self-help and family responsibility.

**Support for older women**

170. The proportion of residents aged 65 years and above increased from 12.4 per cent in 2016 to 16.0 per cent in 2021. Elderly women aged 65 years and above, as a proportion of the female resident population, has also increased from 13.3 per cent in 2016 to 17.0 per cent in 2021. Singapore has put in place various initiatives to support seniors in their golden years, including those who are willing and able to continue working beyond retirement. With longer life spans and shorter careers due to family responsibilities, women who may be financially vulnerable when they reach old age, would benefit from these initiatives. This includes the 2014 Pioneer Generation Package, the 2016 Silver Support Scheme, and the 2019 Merdeka Generation Package. See Annex E for more information.

***Improving retirement adequacy of senior women***

171. Many women tend to bear the caregiving burden, and hence, they are likely to have low CPF balances. See Article 5 on initiatives to support caregivers and promoting equal partnerships within the family. To help these women, including older female caregivers, build up their retirement adequacy, Singapore has also put in place various schemes, several of which senior women with less resources will benefit more from. These schemes include the Workfare Income Supplement, Workfare Skills Support, Lease Buyback, Silver Housing Bonus, Silver Support and the Matched Retirement Savings. See Annex E for more information.

***Support for those without kin***

172. Older women who have neither savings nor immediate kin to rely on can tap on a range of financial support schemes such as Comcare<sup>21</sup> which is a key component of Singapore's social safety net. They can also approach any Social Service Office,<sup>22</sup> Senior Cluster Network,<sup>23</sup> or Family Service Centre<sup>24</sup> for assistance.

**Support for women facing job and income loss**

173. In light of the adverse economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government introduced support measures for Singaporeans, both men and women such as the Jobs Support Scheme, the SGUnited Jobs and Skills Package and Jobs Growth Incentive. Financial aid is also extended to those affected by the economic impact of the pandemic. See Annex G for more details.

**Article 14: Rural women**

174. This Article is not applicable to Singapore as we are a city state.

**V. Part five****Article 15: Law****Singapore's judiciary system**

175. Singapore is widely reputed to have a corruption-free and efficient judiciary. Singapore has consistently ranked first in Gallup's Global Law and Order Report from 2014 to 2020. In the WJP's Rule of Law Index 2021, Singapore was also ranked third for Order and Security, while maintaining its position as one of the top ten jurisdictions for Regulatory Enforcement, Absence of Corruption, Civil Justice and Criminal Justice.

176. The direct and indirect benefits of a sound, corruption-free and efficient judicial system are available to all Singaporeans, regardless of gender, age or ethnicity.

**Newly enacted law and recent law amendments**

177. The Vulnerable Adults Act (VAA) was enacted in 2018 to protect individuals who are incapable of protecting themselves from abuse, neglect or self-neglect due to a physical or mental infirmity, disability or incapacity.

178. Some laws were amended between 2015 and 2021 as follows:

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<sup>21</sup> Comcare provides social assistance to low-income households, comprising customised support and a combination of cash and/or in-kind assistance responsive to needs.

<sup>22</sup> Social Service Offices (SSOs) are set up island-wide in Singapore to serve needy residents near their homes. SSOs administer social assistance and provide referral for other forms of assistance such as job-matching and family services.

<sup>23</sup> Senior Cluster Networks are set up to support vulnerable seniors to age-in-place. Comprising senior activity centres, social workers and volunteers, the Networks reach out to vulnerable seniors to encourage them to stay engaged in the community and receive coordinated care. Seniors who are too frail to live alone can live in elderly-friendly group homes.

<sup>24</sup> FSCs are key community-based social work entities that provide social work intervention, with a focus on serving low-income and vulnerable individuals and families to help them achieve independence, stability and resilience.

### ***Women's Charter***

179. Under the Women's Charter, women experiencing family violence may apply for personal protection orders, which are supplemented by expedited orders and domestic exclusion orders. The Family Court can also order individuals affected by violence (victims, perpetrators and/or other family members) to undergo compulsory counselling under the Mandatory Counselling Programme.

180. The Women's Charter was amended in November 2019 to strengthen law enforcement against vice syndicates, especially those operating through online means.

181. The Women's Charter is designed to protect women in general, including sex workers from being exploited by pimps. The key changes include imposing tougher penalties to match the profits derived from vice crimes, extending extra-territorial application to section 146A to allow the Police to more effectively target trans-national vice syndicates and amendments to ensure that Police enforcement remains effective against the changing modus operandi of vice syndicates.

182. Singapore is intending to amend the Women's Charter in 2022 with the aim of improving marriage processes and incorporating therapeutic justice in the divorce process. See Article 16.

### ***Penal Code***

183. The Penal Code further covers a range of offences, including offences that can be committed in a familial setting, such as hurt and sexual offences. Protection is available in cases even where the woman is not married to her partner.

184. Amendments were made to the Penal Code in 2019 to enhance the protection of women and girls by:

(a) Enhancing penalties for select offences committed against: (i) persons that were in a "close relationship" or "intimate relationship" with the offender at the time of the offence; or (ii) children under 14 years of age.<sup>25</sup> Such offenders may be punished with up to twice the maximum punishment for the offence;

(b) Repealing marital immunity for rape. The full, unqualified repeal of marital immunity for rape will equally protect all women from sexual abuse, regardless of their relationship to the perpetrator;

(c) Introducing new offences that target sexual predators and enable authorities to intervene further upstream e.g., sexual grooming of minors under 16 and exploitative sexual grooming of minors of or above 16 but under 18;

(d) Expanding protection for minors of or above 16 but under 18 years of age from sexual activity committed in a relationship that is exploitative of the minor;

(e) Introducing new offences to better deal with technology-enabled crimes, such as voyeurism, distributing or threatening to distribute intimate image or recording. A new offence of sexual exposure was also introduced – this offence criminalises the non-consensual exposure of genitals, whether in the physical or virtual space, such as sending unsolicited images of genitals over an electronic medium to another person (also referred to as "cyber-flashing").

<sup>25</sup> Offenders who commit select offences (e.g., wrongful confinement, hurt, rape) against these persons may be punished with up to twice the maximum punishment for these offences. It is not a requirement that the victim must be married to the offender, for the enhanced penalties to apply. The court will consider a non-exhaustive list of factors to determine if a "close relationship" or "intimate relationship" was present.

185. Further amendments to the Penal Code were passed by Parliament in 2021. These increased the maximum penalties for: (i) outrage of modesty; (ii) engaging in sexual activity in the presence of a minor between 14 and 16 years of age or causing a minor between 14 and 16 years of age to view a sexual image; and (iii) engaging in sexual activity in the presence of a minor or causing a minor to view a sexual image where the minor is between 16 and 18 years of age and where the offender is in an exploitative relationship with the minor.

***Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) and Evidence Act***

186. The CPC and Evidence Act were amended in 2018. The amendments enhance the protection of women and girls by:

- (a) Preventing the defence from questioning an alleged victim of a sexual offence, or adducing evidence, about the alleged victim's physical appearance or sexual behaviour that is unrelated to the charge, except with the Court's permission;
- (b) Allowing alleged victims of sexual offences to give evidence via video-link;
- (c) Mandating that the Court holds hearings in camera while alleged victims of sexual offences are testifying, unless the alleged victims choose otherwise;
- (d) Allowing video-recorded statements of alleged victims of sexual offences to be admitted in evidence in lieu of oral testimony;
- (e) Allowing the use of shielding measures for alleged victims of sexual offences to give evidence without seeing the accused;
- (f) Prohibiting a person from publishing any information, or doing any act, that may lead to the identification of a complainant or an alleged victim of a sexual offence, where the person knows that the individual is a complainant or alleged victim of such an offence.

***Children and Young Persons Act (CYPA)***

187. In 2019, Parliament passed amendments to the CYPA to raise the age limit of a child or young person in need of protection or rehabilitation from below 16 years to below 18 years.

***POHA***

188. The POHA provides a range of civil remedies and criminal sanctions to better protect victims of harassment, including women. The POHA was amended in 2019 to strengthen the range of self-help measures, civil remedies and criminal sanctions. These amendments better protect victims, including women, from harassment, intimate partner violence and related anti-social behaviour, such as cyber bullying, stalking and sexual harassment:

- (a) POHA made unlawful stalking an offence;
- (b) Victims of harassment could also apply for Protection Orders requiring harassers to stop the harassing behaviour; and to prevent the spread of harassing communication;
- (c) The Courts were also empowered to grant, on their own motion, Expedited Protection Orders (EPO) in urgent cases. An EPO requires a lower standard of proof compared to Protection Orders – only prima facie evidence of the contravention (instead of the contravention being made out on a balance of probabilities) is required.

189. The amendments also introduced a specialist Protection from Harassment Court which adopts simplified procedures with expedited timelines for certain types of applications, thereby providing effective and expedient relief to victims. The Protection from Harassment Court was operationalised on 1 June 2021.

190. In response to paragraph 21 (d) and (e) of the Concluding Observations, under the amended POHA, if the respondent has been convicted of a specified hurt offence under the Penal Code; or a POHA offence, the requirement to show that the respondent has contravened POHA will be deemed satisfied and the victim will not have to prove his/her case more than once in separate proceedings. This eases the burden of proof for women applying for protection orders or expedited protection orders under POHA.

#### ***Maintenance of the Religious Harmony Act (MRHA)***

191. The MRHA was amended in 2019 to make it an offence to knowingly urge violence against persons and groups on the grounds of religion or religious beliefs. This protection is accorded to both religious groups and non-religious ones.

#### **Overarching measures to protect women and criminalize violence against women**

192. The Government reiterates that it does not tolerate any form of violence against all persons, including women, both within and outside the family context. We tackle this through a four-pronged strategy:

##### ***Legislative amendments***

193. Measures to protect women from family violence can be found in legislation such as the Women's Charter, Penal Code, VAA, CPC, CYP, POHA and PHTA (see Article 6). Specific legislation pieces and legal provisions are regularly reviewed and updated to better protect women and enhance their legal rights, including against gender-based violence (see above).

##### ***Multi-stakeholder approach***

194. In February 2020, a multi-stakeholder Taskforce which comprised members from social service agencies, NGOs, the Courts, hospitals and Government agencies, was set up to examine and better understand the family violence landscape in Singapore, identify areas for improvement and co-create recommendations to tackle the issue.

195. In the course of its work, the Taskforce examined extensive family-violence datasets and engaged a range of stakeholders which worked directly and indirectly with victims and perpetrators of family violence (frontline responders, psychologists, social workers, lawyers, women's organisations) and advocacy groups such as Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LBTI) groups – over several sessions. These included focus group discussions facilitated by the Taskforce's NGO members such as the SCWO, United Women Singapore and Casa Raudha Limited. These efforts deepened the Taskforce's understanding of the family violence landscape and helped in the development of recommendations to better support victims and rehabilitate perpetrators of family violence.

196. In September 2021, the Taskforce released its report with 16 recommendations to improve immediate support for victim of family violence, enhance protection for them, prevent violence from recurring and raise awareness of early warning signs. The Taskforce made its position clear that violence against all persons should not be condoned, regardless of nationality, marital status, gender, race, religion or sexual

orientation. The Government has accepted in principle, all the Taskforce's recommendations, and will work with community partners to implement the recommendations over the next few years. As part of these implementation efforts, the Government will also continue to study emerging forms of violence and review legislation to better protect victims.

### ***Capacity-building***

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

198. Legal practitioners are expected to be aware of and adhere to the rules pertaining to professional conduct. Rule 12(5) of the Legal Profession (Professional Conduct) Rules 2015, for example, provides that "A legal practitioner must not make any statement, or ask any question, which is scandalous, is intended or calculated to vilify, insult or annoy a witness or any other person, or is otherwise an abuse of the function of the legal practitioner." The Law Society of Singapore has published a Best Practices Toolkit, which outlines recommendations for legal practitioners in the conduct of cross-examinations of vulnerable witnesses, including women and girls who are complainants of sexual offences. The toolkit was updated in August 2019 to ensure alignment with the recommendations made by the Penal Code Review Committee in their report of August 2018. The Law Society Pro Bono Services also organises Criminal Legal Aid Scheme training programmes, of which some modules relate to sexual offences and vulnerable witnesses and clients. Law practitioners may opt for these programmes should they find this relevant to their practice.

199. The training on criminal law is also embedded as part of the profession training programme for our healthcare professionals. The training of forensic medical personnel and other medical personnel who may encounter such cases will have training that incorporates the criminal law provisions. For example, the Medical Social Worker module on Family and Interpersonal Violence which is included as part of the curriculum for MSF to attain their certification incorporates training on criminal law provisions.

200. Police officers are trained to be sensitive to the needs of all victims, including women as part of their basic police training.

### ***Public education and community awareness***

201. To improve community awareness on family violence, the Government has run the "Break the Silence" public education campaign since 2016 to (i) encourage conversations on family violence and what family violence constitutes; (ii) educate members of the public that family violence is not a private matter; and (iii) equip bystanders with resources on how to safely step in to help those who may be affected by family violence.

202. The campaign was intensified during the Circuit Breaker period during which movement restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic might have adversely affected victims' abilities to reach out for help. The Government also collaborated with community partners such as SCWO (with more than 60 member organisations) and Casa Raudha Limited (which runs a crisis shelter) to develop infographics on managing family conflict and dealing with family violence during the COVID-19 period. See Annex G for more information.

203. In February 2021, the Government officially launched the 24/7 National Anti-Violence Helpline (NAVH) to make it easier for victims of violence and

members of the public to seek help and report abuse. The Government encourages everyone to call the NAVH at 1800-777-0000 to make a report if they experience or witness violence.

204. The Government recognised that there were situations where sexual crime victims would have to go to the hospital for a medical examination, and separately to the Serious Sexual Crime Branch at the Criminal Investigation Department for interviews. In partnership with the Singapore General Hospital, the Police launched The One-Stop Abuse Forensic Examination (OneSAFE) Centre in 2017 to bring emotional support, medical attention and investigations for victims together in a private facility in the Police Cantonment Complex. This removes the need for the victims to travel between multiple locations and reduces trauma on them.

205. The SPF and Ministry of Law designed an information pamphlet to educate victims on investigation and court processes, including victim care and support measures, to encourage victims to step forward. Since April 2020, the pamphlets have been made available at all Neighbourhood Police Centres and on the SPF's website.

### **Monitoring key violence statistics**

206. Regarding paragraph 21 (a) of the Committee's Concluding Observations, the Government confirms that data, which is disaggregated by age, nationality and relationship between the victim and the perpetrator is collected for cases involving rape and outrage of modesty. This also includes the number of investigations, prosecutions, convictions and the sentences imposed on perpetrators for rape and outrage of modesty cases.

207. Other key statistics relating to violence against women include: the number of applications for Personal Protection Order/Expedited Order/Domestic Exclusion Order; the number of enquiries and new cases on family violence taken up by MSF's Adult and Child Protective Services and social service agencies; the number of reports of outrage of modesty; and the number of reports of rape. Some data are available publicly (see Annex H), while the remaining data are collected and used for our internal assessment of crime trends and policy reviews. The Government will continue to strengthen efforts in data collection and analysis, including in relation to family violence. This will enable the Government to better identify and tackle emerging trends.

## **Article 16: Marriage and family life**

### **State of the family in Singapore**

208. The family unit in Singapore remains strong. Majority of respondents in the Survey on Social Attitudes of Singaporeans 2019 reported having a close-knit family and being satisfied with their family life. Majority of Singaporeans continue to see marriage and parenthood as important life goals.

209. The marriage rate for females decreased from 41.6 per 1,000 unmarried resident females aged 15 to 49 years in 2016 to 34.9 in 2020. The median age at first marriage for brides increased from 28.3 years in 2016 to 28.8 years in 2020.

210. The divorce rate decreased from 6.6 per 1000 married resident females aged 20 years and over in 2016 to 6.1 in 2020. Those aged 35–39 years formed the largest proportion of female divorcees in 2020.

**Supporting marriage and parenthood**

211. Supporting Singaporeans in fulfilling their aspirations to get married and raise families is a national priority. The Government introduced the Marriage and Parenthood (M&P) Package in 2001 to provide comprehensive support to help couples start and raise their families. Over the years, the Government has made enhancements to ensure that the support keeps pace with changing needs. Key enhancements made to the M&P Package between 2016 and 2021 are at Annex I.

212. The Government will also continue to work with FFL and other community partners. For example, the AfA to Strengthen Marriages and Family Relationships started in 2021 and this whole-of-society effort seeks to nurture and co-create an ecosystem to strengthen marriages and family relationships. There are six focal areas, focusing on outreach to families through and with community partners, mentoring newlyweds, effective parenting, support for single parents and early-risk families, as well as strengthening marriages and families in faith communities.

**Laws governing marriage and divorce**

213. As a multi-religious society, Singapore has two legal regimes that govern marriage and divorce – civil law and Muslim law. The respective legislation are the Women’s Charter and the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA).

**Women’s Charter**

214. The Women’s Charter governs matters related to marriage and divorce. Enacted in 1961, it is a landmark piece of legislation that provides the legal basis for equality between husband and wife. See Annex J for more details.

215. Under the Women's Charter, the minimum legal age of marriage in Singapore is 18 years with parental consent. A person below 18 years of age wishing to get married has to apply for a Special Marriage License from MSF and attend a mandatory marriage preparation programme before he/she can marry. Marriage preparation programmes are also mandatory for couples where at least one party is 18 to below 21 years old.

216. Several amendments were made to the Women’s Charter over the years. For example, the Charter was amended in 2011 to strengthen the enforcement of maintenance orders, which included new enforcement measures such as community service orders, ordering defaulters to set up a banker’s guarantee against future defaults and financial counselling.

217. The Women’s Charter was also amended in 2016 to mandate marriage preparation programmes for minors who plan to get married, better support vulnerable persons in family violence and crisis situations and strengthen law enforcement against online vice.

218. Singapore intends to further amend the Women’s Charter in 2022 to improve marriage processes and strengthen therapeutic justice elements in the divorce process. For divorcees who face difficulty obtaining maintenance from their ex-spouse, Singapore will also be putting in place additional measures to provide a more efficient and effective means to enforce maintenance orders and minimise the need for repeat enforcement. These measures will be effected through the proposed Family Justice Bill which is expected to be introduced in Parliament in 2022.

219. Beyond the Women’s Charter, the Government has put in place various programmes to support couples who are contemplating, undergoing or have undergone divorce. MSF will be setting up 10 Strengthening Families Programme Family Service Centres (FAM@FSCs) by end 2022 to consolidate existing

programmes in the areas of marriage and divorce, and offer a new family counselling service to couples and families showing early signs of stress. See Annex K for other Government initiatives.

### **Muslim law**

220. Singapore is committed to moving towards a progressive understanding and practice of Islam. Over the years, Muslim law in Singapore has been regularly reviewed and the Muslim community has adopted more contextualised and adaptive practices to support the needs of Muslim women and families.

#### ***Reservations to Articles 2 and 16***

221. Singapore's reservations reflect our commitment to balancing our Constitutional duty to protect the personal and religious rights of the minorities, and to our efforts towards the elimination of discrimination against women. The AMLA allows the operation of Muslim law in Singapore in specific areas, such as in family and inheritance matters. The AMLA is administered by various agencies namely the Majlis Ugama Islam Singapore (MUIS, or the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore), Syariah Court (SYC) and Registry of Muslim Marriages (ROMM).

222. MUIS monitors developments in Muslim law practices in relation to Singapore's domestic context. The Fatwa Committee of MUIS<sup>26</sup> meets regularly to discuss points of Muslim law, review current practices and recommends new measures to address contemporary needs and challenges.

#### ***Article 16, paragraph 1(a)***

223. Although the AMLA provides for polygamy among Muslim couples, polygamous marriages are rare in Singapore and have steadily decreased from 0.4 per cent in 2010 to 0.18 per cent of Muslim marriages in 2020.<sup>27</sup> All applications for polygamous marriages are rigorously reviewed by ROMM. Only applicants deemed able to meet the stringent requirements are allowed to take a second wife. The first wife may voice her objection to ROMM. If the application is approved and the first wife is dissatisfied with ROMM's decision, she may go to the Appeal Board. Subsequent to the second marriage, the first wife may also file for divorce on the ground of her husband's inequitable treatment.

224. Although the AMLA requires a woman to have permission from a wali (legal guardian) for her marriage, the wali's decision may be overruled by the Kadi (officials of religious standings appointed by the President of Singapore to solemnize Muslim marriages), if the Kadi considers that the grounds on which the wali refuses to consent to the marriage are unsatisfactory. Moreover, ROMM ensures that the woman also has the right to be heard, even as the wali's permission must be sought.

#### ***Article 16, paragraph 1(c)***

225. Under the AMLA, both Muslim men and women may initiate a divorce on multiple grounds. The grounds on which women may seek divorce are wide-ranging

<sup>26</sup> The Fatwa Committee is an independent body of Muslim scholars, appointed by the President of Singapore to deliberate on issues affecting the administration of Muslim law.

<sup>27</sup> Polygamous marriages have decreased from 0.30% in 2016 to 0.18% in 2020.

and some are exclusive to women such as the husband's failure to perform marital obligations (including providing maintenance).<sup>28</sup>

226. While the AMLA stipulates an iddah (waiting period before a re-marriage is allowed) for a divorced woman only, the SYC does not issue either party with the Divorce Certificate until after the iddah lapses, and the ROMM does not allow the man to register another marriage during this period of iddah. Hence, both men and women are effectively subject to the same waiting period.

227. In a Muslim divorce, women have special rights against their husbands. Men are required to maintain their ex-wives during the iddah. Men are also required to provide a mutaah (consolatory gift) to their ex-wives. Other than these payments, the women may also claim for emas kahwin (compulsory marriage gift) and hantaran belanja (marriage expenses). Men do not have equivalent rights against their ex-wives.

228. Reflecting its commitment as well as the community's sentiments towards fair rights for divorce for Muslims regardless of gender, MUIS will continue to study Muslim legal practices in other Muslim countries and consider updates to the administration of Muslim divorces in Singapore. MUIS will continue to engage and consult women's groups, to understand the lived realities and the implications of the law in practice.

**Article 16, paragraph 1(h)**

229. With regard to the practice of Faraidh (Muslim inheritance law), the MUIS Fatwa Committee has issued several fatwas (religious rulings) to allow families to protect the financial welfare of Muslim women and their dependants upon the demise of a family member.

230. The following fatwas were issued over the years – Fatwa on joint-tenancy in 2008,<sup>29</sup> Fatwa on CPF nominations in 2009<sup>30</sup> and Fatwa on revocable insurance nomination in 2012.<sup>31</sup>

231. The Fatwa on joint-tenancy was further enhanced in 2019 to recognise a joint-tenancy contract as religiously valid, without having to draw up additional documents

<sup>28</sup> A man can initiate a divorce on grounds of talak, and fasakh, whereas a woman can initiate a divorce on grounds of taklik, fasakh and khuluk.

**Talak:** Divorce is effected by the pronouncement of talak. If a husband pronounces the talak other than before the Court, the law requires the Court to validate the talak before the divorce may be registered.

**Fasakh:** Dissolution granted by the Court on grounds recognised under Muslim law such as the husband not providing maintenance for three months or more, and the husband treating the wife with cruelty. Certain grounds also apply to the husband.

**Khuluk:** Divorce initiated by the wife and effected by payment of an amount, assessed by the Syariah Court, to the husband.

**Taklik:** Divorce initiated by the wife on the ground that the husband has breached one or more of the conditions of marriage agreed to by both parties at the point of marriage, e.g. desertion, non-maintenance and physical or verbal abuse.

<sup>29</sup> The Fatwa on joint-tenancy, issued in 2008, recognises the surviving spouse as the legal owner of property held jointly. Previously, the wife could only serve as the trustee of her deceased husband's share of the joint tenancy, which would subsequently be distributed to other beneficiaries.

<sup>30</sup> The Fatwa on Central Provident Fund (CPF) nominations, issued in 2009, recognizes that when Muslim CPF account holders make a nomination in favour of his wife or children, it is considered a valid *inter vivos* gift.

<sup>31</sup> The Fatwa on revocable insurance nominations was updated in February 2012 to allow Muslim policy holders to nominate their spouse or dependents to receive the full payout from the insurance company as a valid *inter vivos* gift.

to effect the right of survivorship. The new Fatwa clarifies the implications of both the joint tenancy and tenancy-in-common contract with regards to the method of the property distribution upon the demise of one of its owners. Under this new Fatwa, the wife is recognised as an equal partner (in terms of house ownership) regardless of financial contribution to the purchase of the house. This Fatwa will be consistent with (civil) joint-tenancy laws of disposition of estate.

232. MUIS held several rounds of engagement sessions with Asatizah (Muslim religious leaders), and also held several forums at local mosques, to explain the religious validity of the Fatwa decision and address queries and concerns from the ground. Generally, the Fatwa was well-received. Based on the survey conducted during the forums, more than 98 per cent of the respondents believe that the Fatwa will help resolve issues families were facing on the ground.

233. Moving forward, MUIS will continue to engage various groups such as our Asatizah, the Muslim Financial Planning Association and Muslim Legal Practice Committee, as we review the practice of Muslim law.

### ***Article 16, paragraph 2***

234. Muslim marriages involving minors under 18 years of age are only allowed (i) under exceptional circumstances with the approval of the Kadi, and (ii) with the consent of the minor's parents/legal guardian. In practice, marriages involving minors are the exception and constitute only 0.1 per cent of Muslim marriages registered in 2020 in Singapore, down from 0.3 per cent in 2016.

235. 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.

236. The Government, in partnership with Malay/Muslim organisations, carries out public education and couple engagement initiatives to help couples fully understand the commitment of marriage, especially if couples are proposing to marry early. For example, ROMM has introduced the mandatory Bersamamu (With You) programme since 2019 whereby 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.

### ***Sections 90 and 91 of AMLA***

237. We note the Committee's recommendation at paragraph 45 (e) of the Concluding Observations. Kadi (including the Registrar and Deputy Registrars of Muslim Marriages) and Naib Kadi are responsible for performing specific religious rituals in Muslim marriages, and Islam requires that these can only be performed by men. The appointment of these officials cannot be compared to the appointment of SYC Registrar and Presidents, given the differing religious considerations.

### **Raising Awareness of Gender Issues**

238. MUIS continues to address the needs of women through consultations and collaborations with women's groups. MUIS also increases interest in and widens the discussion on gender issues in Islam through events and programmes (see Annex L for more information).

### **Enhancing support to Singaporean families with migrant spouses**

239. As with most countries, the grant of Singapore PR to migrant spouses of Singapore Citizens (SC) is not automatic. Each application for PR is evaluated

holistically on a range of criteria to ensure that the SC spouse can support the family and that the marriage is stable. SC children from the marriage would be a plus factor.

240. The ICA's website provides the broad factors that are considered in their assessment of PR and SC applications. Similar to the immigration authorities across the world, ICA does not publicise the detailed criteria for PR and SC, or the reasons for rejection.

241. Migrant spouses who do not qualify for PR may apply for a Long-Term Visit Pass (LTVP) or Long-Term Visit Pass-Plus (LTVP+) which will allow them to remain in Singapore for the long-term with their families. As a safeguard, the ICA does not allow SCs or PRs who sponsor a migrant spouse's LTVP/LTVP+ to unilaterally cancel the pass. Migrant spouses who do not qualify for LTVP/LTVP+ can enter Singapore on a Short-Term Visit Pass.

242. The Government introduced the LTVP+ in April 2012 to provide greater support to Singaporean families with migrant spouses. The LTVP+ comes with a longer validity period of three years in the initial issuance, and five years upon renewal. LTVP+ holders are eligible for healthcare subsidies for inpatient services at restructured hospitals at a level similar to PRs. Similar to LTVP holders, LTVP+ holders are eligible to apply for a Letter of Consent (LOC) or Pre-Approved LOC (PLOC) to work. Migrant spouses with at least one Singaporean child from their marriage or who have been married to an SC for at least 3 years will be considered for the LTVP+ when they apply for renewal of their LTVP or submit a fresh LTVP application, subject to other prevailing criteria.

243. To help couples better plan for their future, the Government introduced a free online Pre-Marriage LTVP Assessment in January 2015, which helps couples to find out more information about each other and whether the migrant spouse would qualify for long term stay in Singapore after marriage.

244. To help SC-Non-Resident (NR) couples build a strong foundation for their marriage and for the NR spouse to assimilate into Singapore, MSF partnered Social Service Agencies and introduced the Transitional Family Support Programme (TFSP) in 2014. TFSP comprises the Marriage Preparation Programme and Marriage Support Programme. These programmes cover communication and conflict management in a cross-cultural context and offers practical advice on living in Singapore as a transitional couple. MSF also introduced the Friendship Programme in 2015, where a trained volunteer is matched to an NR spouse to help him or her integrate into Singapore. As at 2020, 99 per cent of the NR spouses who had taken part in the buddy programme reported that the programme helped them to be aware of where to get support when needed. As part of MSF's plan to provide more integrated support for couples' post-marriage, the TFSP will be subsumed under the FAM@FSC.