



Singapore People's Party
Manifesto for GE 2020

A BETTER TOMORROW

ACCOUNTABILITY. COMMITMENT. EMPATHY.

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Foreword

Fellow Singaporeans,

Every 5 years, we have the opportunity to exercise our democratic right to vote. Soon, you will have the chance to do the same. In this manifesto, we hope to help you understand some of the SPP's policy positions and guiding principles. Although it is unlikely that we will be in a position to implement policy as we will not form the government, these are matters that we will advocate for in Parliament, should we be given the honour of serving you.

Our policies and positions are designed to tackle not just the short-term issues posed and/or exacerbated by COVID-19, but also take a long-term approach as some things do warrant a fundamental rethink instead of mere cosmetic change.

Our Manifesto is prefaced and built upon our three guiding principles of Accountability, Commitment and Empathy. Policies may shift, opinions may change, and different solutions may be required for different times. What will always be consistent are the values that underpin our policies and actions.

Accountability – We believe that it is our role to ensure that the powers that be remain accountable to the people. Accountability can and should be improved through both action and institutional reform.

Commitment – We are always committed to adding value to the lives of Singaporeans. Both on the ground and in Parliament, we have always strived for the betterment of lives. Since 1994, we have been consistently committed to serving you, the people of Singapore.

Empathy – In Singapore, there is no shortage of great ideas. Many of our leaders may have the best credentials and solutions, but we cannot forget the value of empathy and the human touch. At the SPP, compassion and empathy is at the heart of what we believe in.

As you peruse our manifesto, do keep in mind that this is simply the start of a conversation. In Singapore, it is essential that we have a contest of ideas, a multitude of narratives, and credible alternatives so that the best results for Singaporeans can be produced.

Although we have split our manifesto into 10 sections for ease of reference, it should be viewed holistically as some ideas cut across categories.

In the process of drafting this manifesto, we have had the privilege of working with some of the brightest minds and kindest souls. We put on record our appreciation for their time and efforts. Without their contributions, this would not have been possible. In some areas, we advocate for incremental change. In others, we believe it is necessary to have a paradigm shift.

In all areas, we look forward to igniting debate and starting a conversation about what is best for Singapore and her people. We look forward to working together with you towards a better tomorrow.



Empowering our youth

It is an often-cited cliché that the youth are the leaders of tomorrow, but we at SPP believe that they can be the leaders of today, too. All over the world, young leaders are rising up and making themselves heard. At SPP, we don't just pay lip service to the youth. We walk the talk. We have the youngest CEC amongst all opposition parties in Singapore and our Assistant Secretary General, Mr Ariffin Sha, is 22 years-old. In the preparation of this manifesto, we have engaged with and sought the views of many young people from diverse backgrounds. SPP is committed to policies and ideas that empower our youth.

1. Reducing the voting age from 21 to 18

The current age of 21 is arbitrary and disenfranchises many young people. By most, if not all, definitions, a 18 year-old is an adult. 18 year-olds should have a say in policies and laws that affect them.

The youth of Singapore has a strong political consciousness. They have a rich history of shaping political discourse. If it were not for the student activists who were pivotal in the push for Singapore's independence, we may still be singing "God Save the Queen" instead of Majulah Singapura. This "wokeness" can be witnessed even today, as young people are spearheading the fight against climate change, amongst other causes.

Allowing 18 year-olds to have a say in the state of affairs in Singapore adds a fresh perspective that will lead to a more vibrant contest of ideas.

2. Allowing the use of parent's CPF monies for education

Currently, the CPF Education Scheme allows members to use CPF savings from their Ordinary Account (OA) to pay for their children's tuition fees. The student has to repay the amount withdrawn, with interest, in cash into the payer's OA. Repayment starts one year after the student graduates or leaves the institution.

However, only full-time subsidised courses at approved local educational institutions are included under this scheme. We propose that this scheme be extended to all tertiary institutions, including ones overseas. As long as the current safeguards within the scheme are in place, it would be arbitrary to limit it to only local approved institutions.

3. Increasing youth engagement in policy-making

It is vital that the youth of Singapore have a say in the policies that will affect them. The government must consider their voices by establishing a non-partisan youth-led committee that engages the various student organisations that exist in tertiary institutes today. By investing more efforts into genuine engagements, the youth of Singapore will become active citizens who will feel included in the policy-making process. It will also make adulthood a little easier as young people will be able to make more informed policy decisions.





Lowering the cost of living

The cost of living in Singapore has been on the rise. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of our wages. It is therefore of utmost importance that we do what we can do mitigate the impact of rising costs, especially for those who may be disproportionately affected by the same.

1. No further increase of GST

The GST is a regressive tax that affects the lower and middle class population disproportionately. This is especially so when essential items are not exempt from GST.

In the Budget preceding GE 2015, the Government noted that it has raised the revenue needed for public spending for the next 5 years. Memorably, at GE 2015, PM Lee argued that GST will only be increased if there was "Profligate spending and irresponsible, unsustainable plans." However, in 2018, it was announced that the GST will be increased to 9%. Although this GST hike has been postponed to 2021, we question the necessity of the hike.

The Government has had a healthy budget surplus in the past years. Further, the Government can also tap on various other mechanisms to increase revenue like a higher income tax for the top 1% or re-introducing estate duty. There is no reason for the Government to increase the GST where it can use other more equitable measures to increase revenue that have not yet been exhausted. Until the contrary is proven, an increase in GST is simply unjustifiable.

2. Increased cash supplement under silver support scheme

A study by the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy concluded that single elderly households require no less than S\$1,379 to maintain a basic standard of living. In Parliament, Minister for Manpower Josephine Teo shared that almost 75% of elderly persons received monthly CPF payouts of less than \$500. These figures paint a worrying picture as it shows that a significant number of our aged population may not have the means to maintain even a basic standard of living. Unlike working adults, the aged will suffer the brunt of the rising cost of living as their relative earning capacity is lower.

Currently, eligible Singaporeans receive quarterly payouts of \$180 - \$900. This is clearly insufficient to maintain a basic standard of living. We propose that the quantum of the cash supplement be doubled and that the cash supplement be distributed monthly, instead of quarterly. In addition, those who qualify for the Silver Support Scheme should also have free travel on public transport. The quantum should also be regularly reviewed (instead of only once every 5 years) to track increases in the cost of living.

3. Introduce minimum wage

A nationwide study should be commissioned to determine the amount needed for one to maintain a basic standard of living. Following the study, a national minimum wage should be instituted and pegged to the amount required for one to meet their basic needs in Singapore. This is a long overdue policy that will help to ensure that people, despite inequality, are not deprived of a basic standard of living. It will also help to prevent the exploitation of workers.





Combating the climate emergency

Climate Change is an existential issue. It would not be an exaggeration to say that many of the other matters discussed in this manifesto would become moot in the face of a climate emergency. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that Singapore tackles climate change in an evidenced-based and aggressive manner.

In the course of preparing our climate change policies, we have had the pleasure of working with the trailblazers SG Climate Rally ("SGCR"). SGCR have put forth a thorough call to action on combating climate change that we support. We look forward to continue supporting SGCR and the good work that they do.

Many of the measures the Government proposed during the National Day Rally 2019 are unfortunately reactive. Singapore has never been afraid to be world-leaders and pioneers in policy, and there is no reason why we should not lead by example in the fight against climate change. Our three proposed policies on climate change are more than merely reactive. Instead, they aim to tackle the root of the issue in proactive, creative and effective ways.

1. Divestment from carbon intensive operations and resources

Divestment is one of the most effective tools that can be harnessed to take our society into a more sustainable future. While the enactment of the Carbon Pricing Act in January 2019 was a step in the right direction to push Singaporean companies to review and decarbonise their energy portfolio, more needs to be done to combat climate change. We call for mandatory public disclosure to be made for all SGX listed companies on their carbon emissions portfolio, investments in carbon-intensive operation and resources and a roadmap to divest from them.

2. Mandatory environmental impact assessments & disclosure

An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) outlines the potential environmental impacts of any proposed development. Under current legislature, there is no mandate for contractors and developers to undertake an EIA and make reports publically available. We call for EIAs to be made mandatory, particularly for any construction works taking place near national parks or nature reserves in Singapore and have their reports made available on a public depository. This will enable a more informed and inclusive decision-making process to ensure that our ecological resources are protected and conserved.

3. Holistic extended producer responsibility scheme

One of the main pillars of the Resource Sustainability Act (RSA), passed by Parliament in September 2019, is the introduction of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme for electronic waste by 2021. Under the Zero-Waste Master Plan, the EPR will also be extended to packaging waste by 2025. While packaging and electronic waste form a sizable portion of Singapore's waste mix, other waste streams should be included under the umbrella of the EPR scheme. This enables a more holistic and integrated approach to waste management in Singapore. We call for the inclusion of all waste streams to be addressed under the EPR scheme.



Strengthening retirement adequacy through CPF

In 1955, the CPF was a relatively straightforward scheme – both the employer and employee contribute 5% every month and the sum can be withdrawn when the contributor is 55 years-old. Over the years, the goal posts have shifted and the CPF scheme has become increasingly complex. One of our founding fathers, Mr Toh Chin Chye, argued that it amounted to “a breach of fundamental principles”.

In our opinion, the most fundamental principle that has been breached is that of autonomy. It is only fair that Singaporeans have a say over how they utilise their own savings. The often-cited justification for this is the fear that contributors may elect to squander their savings away in a short amount of time. However, there is a lack of empirical evidence to support the assertion. In any case, we submit that just like how we don’t ban driving due to a minority of irresponsible drivers, it also makes no sense to prevent the majority of contributors from receiving their hard earned monies due to the purported actions of a hypothetical minority.

Another justification our Government has for increasing the withdrawal age and sum is retirement adequacy. In Singapore, CPF and retirement adequacy are almost inextricably linked, or so they say. The real picture, however, is worrying. Minister Josephine Teo revealed in Parliament that only 53% of contributors achieved the minimum sum and that 74% of contributors receive less than \$500 a month. This is clearly insufficient for retirement adequacy. Simple tweaks to the CPF system cannot ensure retirement adequacy. The SPP believes that the CPF scheme must be revamped to better reflect its fundamental principles and ensure retirement adequacy.

1. Ensuring retirement adequacy

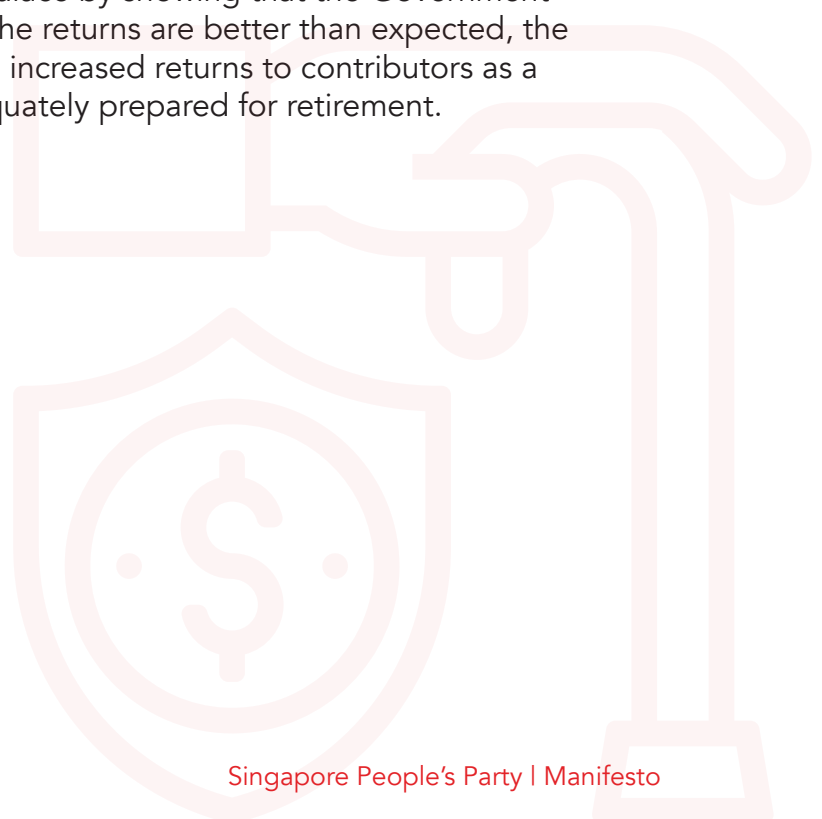
In 2018, the CPF paid just \$450 per month to persons aged 65 to 69 years old and less than \$300 to those above the age of 70. This falls short of \$1,379 - the sum that is required for the elderly to ensure a basic standard of living. This clear gap in the retirement income system is concerning for a scheme that was designed precisely to allow Singaporeans to retire comfortably. Whether through top-ups or supplementary schemes, a fundamental re-think of the CPF scheme is necessary to ensure that it serves its purpose.

2. Allowing partial withdrawals on compassionate grounds

Currently, to withdraw CPF funds on other grounds, contributors must meet an extremely narrow set of conditions. We believe that when contributors are faced with a dire situation or a rainy day, they should be allowed to partially withdraw their CPF monies to tide over tough waters. At the very least, they must be allowed to "borrow" from their CPF monies. The prerequisites for withdrawal on compassionate grounds should also be widened and dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

3. Publication of CPF investment returns

In the interests of transparency and accountability, the return on investments from the investment of CPF monies should be made public. Publication will also help to retain the trust of the populace by showing that the Government can pay off its debts. On years when the returns are better than expected, the Government should also distribute the increased returns to contributors as a bonus to help members be more adequately prepared for retirement.





Greater democracy

Every morning, millions of Singaporeans recite the words “towards a democratic society” in our pledge. This serves as evidence that our founding fathers did not think of democracy as a state of affairs that they have achieved. Rather, they were prescient enough to note that democracy is something that we must continuously strive towards. Here, SPP presents three ways that we embody the pledge by strengthening democracy in Singapore.

1. Freedom of Information Act

The enactment of a Freedom of Information Act (“FOIA”) will serve 2 main purposes:-

Firstly, a FOIA will serve as a potent antidote against the spread of fake news. By allowing for the free flow of information and public access to information, fake news will be easily debunked without the need to employ any mechanisms of the state. Singaporeans are a reasonable people; if information is readily available, they will be a lot less likely to fall prey to fake news. Facts, not the force of the law, is the most effective weapon in the fight against fake news.

Secondly, a FOIA will help to level the playing field by solving the information dissymmetry that currently exists in policy discussion. Academics, politicians and civil society representatives often find themselves handicapped and run the risk of perpetuating fake news when they discuss and debate public policy. With information being readily available and legislation that mandates the Government to declassify documents after stipulated periods of time, we can ensure that there will be more informed debate that will lead to better ideas for all Singaporeans.

The Freedom of Information Working Group Singapore ("FOISG") are a group of students that have also advocated for a Freedom of Information Act. We wholeheartedly support their proposal. More information on the proposed Freedom of Information Act can be found at www.foisg.com

2. Enacting a Fixed Terms of Parliament Act

The enactment of a Fixed Terms of Parliament Act ("FTP"). will govern the date of elections. This is not a novel idea and it has been adopted in some other jurisdictions, like the United Kingdom. The FTPA will remove the Prime Minister's discretion in relation to the timing of elections. The FTPA will help to level the playing field by giving all parties adequate notice of elections. The FTPA will also lead to regularized timelines for the EBRC reports prior to elections. Ultimately, the FTPA will lead to more fairness and stability.

3. Mandatory Public Declaration of Assets for Elected Officials

In the interests of transparency and keeping Singapore corruption-free, we propose that all elected officials publicly declare their assets. This will help to ensure transparency and accountability. It will also lead to a reduction in conflicts of interest.





Protecting our sandwiched generation

Our Sandwiched Generation are in a most unenviable position as a great responsibility rests on their shoulders. In addition to looking after their growing children, they also have to tend to the needs of their aged parents. All these, of course, is in addition to taking care of themselves. They are Singaporeans, Parents and Filial Children. More often than not, they have to look after their parents as their parents failed to adequately save up for retirement. The problems they face are particularly acute, especially for the less fortunate. In the short-term, we must help to ease the burdens that our Sandwiched Generation face. In the long-term, we must ensure that today's Sandwiched Generation is adequately prepared for their own retirement so that the Sandwiched Generations will become a thing of the past. Policies must be specifically calibrated to address the unique set of short-term and long-term challenges that our Sandwiched Generation face.

1. Allowing parentcare leave

Similar to childcare leave, employees would be allowed to take Parentcare Leave to look after their parents when they are unwell and accompany them to medical appointments.

2. Flexi-work arrangements

Due to the advent of technology, it is becoming increasingly common for employees to work off-site. Such arrangements should be encouraged and incentivised as it allows employees to ensure greater work-life balance as they are able to spend more time with their children and parents without compromising on productivity. Flexi-work arrangements may also help to reduce costs for employers, creating a win-win situation for all.

This can also be compounded with guidelines to reduce or stop work-related tasks after the defined work day has ended. A system which promotes mental well-being and encourages leisure time can result in increased productivity for workers. This, in turn, can raise standards of living, particularly for lower-income groups, and reduce income disparity, which is related to lower incidences of mental illness.

3. Lower income tax for new parents and higher tax reliefs for living with parents

In light of the increasing cost of living, the current tax reliefs for first-time parents and working adults who stay with their parents are insufficient. We propose that the current subsidies should form the baseline. For those in the lower-income brackets, they shall receive increased tax reliefs so that those who need more support will receive the same. The current one size fits all strategy will not be of much help. These figures should also be revised periodically to account for inflation and other relevant considerations.





Improving mental health

Mental Health is an important issue in Singapore. A nationwide study conducted by IMH concluded that 1 in 7 people in Singapore have experienced a mental disorder in their lifetime. To put this in perspective, 1 in 9 Singaporeans suffer from diabetes. If we can muster the resources to declare a “war on diabetes”, we must also acknowledge the serious mental health issues that Singaporeans face and address it.

Mental health does not discriminate based on age, but it does seem like the young and the old are acutely affected. The number of young Singaporeans seeking help from IMH has increased by 190% from 2016 – 2019 and 20% of Singaporeans aged 70 and above exhibit signs of depression.

What use is great economic growth and prosperity when, as a nation, we face serious issues with our mental health? The SPP believes in making mental health a national priority. By making the unprecedented move of including mental health in an Election Manifesto, we hope to normalize the idea of debating and discussion mental health policies at a national level. Here, we present 4 policies that will help to improve the state of mental health in Singapore.

1. Improving accessibility to mental health professionals

The average waiting time for new subsidised appointments to see psychiatrist or psychologist is about 1 month. This long waiting time is not ideal. The Government should consider measures to improve the accessibility of mental care by making it available at all government health institutions. In National Service institutions, Educational institutions and facilities that house the elderly, there is an especially acute need for ready access to mental health professionals.

2. Unpaid mental health leave

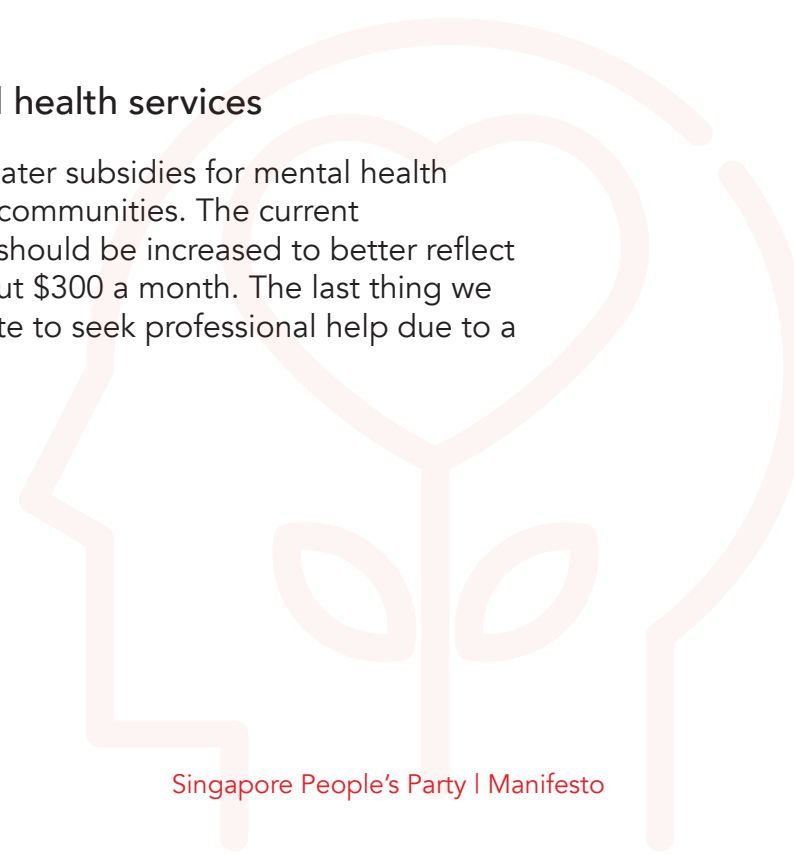
90% of psychological conditions in working Singaporeans are caused by workplace stress. Employees should be able to take unpaid mental health leave to cope with work burn-out and attend to their mental health needs.

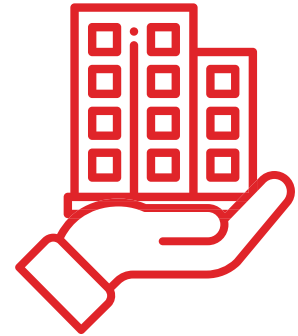
3. More appropriate sentencing options for offenders

Mandatory Treatment Orders (“MTOs”) are one of the most progressive sentencing options for offenders in Singapore. However, the prerequisites for one to be sentenced to an MTO are stringent. We echo the Honourable Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon’s recent call for Parliament to review the criteria for sentencing under MTOs to allow offenders suffering from mental health disorders to be sentenced more appropriately so that they can get the help they need.

4. Greater subsidies for mental health services

We call on the Government to provide greater subsidies for mental health services, especially for the disadvantaged communities. The current withdrawal limits of \$500 (from Medisave) should be increased to better reflect the actual costs of treatment, which is about \$300 a month. The last thing we would want as a nation is for one to hesitate to seek professional help due to a lack of resources.





Affordable housing

Almost 90% of Singaporeans reside in HDBs. The first generation of Singapore's leaders once promised that the value of our HDBs will never decrease. There is little doubt that this promise has been reneged upon as it is inevitable that the value of HDBs will decrease as the expiry of the lease becomes closer.

We also must not lose sight of another founding principle of the HDB policy – affordability. HDBs are becoming increasingly unaffordable for younger Singaporeans and first-time buyers, and our policies in relation to the pricing of flats have to be re-evaluated.

1. Extending the lease buyback scheme

After a period of 5 years, all HDB owners should be given the option to sell their leases back to the HDB at a price that is near the market value. This initiative will allow a win-win situation for both homeowners and the HDB.

Homeowners will take comfort in the fact that they will always be able to liquidate their remaining lease for a reasonable price.

The HDB will be able to increase its "stock" of flats and have the option of availing it to first-time buyers or renting it out to Singaporeans who may not be able to afford public housing. The latter option will also allow the HDB to spread out the rental flats as the congregation of rental flats (under the current system) can have undesirable socio-economical consequences.

2. Extending SERS

In light of the fact that the value of HDB flats would decrease towards the end of the 99-year lease period, SERS should be extended to all estates. This is the least that the Government can do to make good on the promise of the first generation of leaders that the HDB is an asset.

3. Abolishing ethnic quota

Singapore turns 55 this year. After 55 years of nation-building and sharing about the values of integration, tolerance and multiculturalism, it may be the case that the ethnic quota has served its purpose.

The ethnic quota also may be prohibitive to sellers from minority races looking to sell their HDB flats as, due to a smaller pool of potential buyers, they may have to price their flats lower than a flat which has no eligibility criteria for buyers. Malay, Indian and Eurasian homeowners should not have the values of their homes affected due to the ethnic quota policies. The time is ripe for it to be abolished.





Holistic education

By most measures, our education system is admirable. Our students and schools regularly fare well in international standards and rankings. The Government's recent moves to remove streaming and to move towards subject-based banding is a step in the right direction. One area where there is room for improvement is in making the education system more holistic. Here we present three ideas that will make the education system more holistic.

1. Introducing environmental education into syllabus

We echo SG Climate Rally's call to incorporate and integrate environmental consciousness into our education system. Environmental education should be included in the study of subjects like history, mathematics, physics, biology, etc. This way, we can ensure that Singaporeans are armed with the necessary knowledge, empathy and skills to live a sustainable lifestyle and play their role in combating the climate emergency. This will also help to deepen student's understanding of climate change as not just an environmental issue but also a social, cultural and political one.

2. Introducing financial literacy into syllabus

Many students emerge out of the education system being financially illiterate. At both a primary school level and the secondary school level, students should be taught fundamental financial skills like saving, budgeting, etc. At a more advanced level, they should also be taught about CPF, taxes, investing, etc. This will ensure that our students are ready for the workforce and will ensure they make more financially sound decisions.

3. Smaller teacher-student ratios

Schools should strive to have smaller student-teacher ratios so that each student will be able to receive more attention from the teachers. This will also give teachers a more manageable workload and will be able to tailor their approach to better suit individual needs. Teachers should also be given less administrative work to allow them to focus primarily on their work in the classroom.



Strengthening our workforce

Singapore is built on the back of our workforce. In a rapidly changing and increasingly globalised world, we must ensure that the heart of our workforce – the Singaporean Worker – remains relevant and protected. From what we have gathered on the ground, we find that the three following concerns weigh heavily on the minds of the Singaporean Worker – the influx of foreign workers, the possibility of retrenchment and ageism. In relation to all of these issues, we urge the Government to codify existing guidelines into law to compel employers to adopt best practices.

1. Unemployment insurance and retrenchment rights

In times of economic recession or hardship, our workers should not have to struggle to maintain a basic standard of living. We propose that unemployment insurance should be mandated for all Singaporean workers. This unemployment insurance can be funded through contributions from both employees and employers. This will help to tide the employees through a period of 6 months while they upskill or look for new jobs.

Employers should also be required to give employees retrenchment benefits in accordance with the TAFEP guidelines. These retrenchment guidelines and recommended benefits should be codified in law to prevent inequitable retrenchment and to guarantee the rights of employees.

2. Review of free-trade agreements

Singapore has entered into more than 20 FTAs with other nations. FTAs should be regularly evaluated and, if necessary, re-negotiated to ensure that they serve the best interests of the Singaporean Worker. FTAs should not be a mechanism for the Singaporean Workforce to be displaced and should aim to complement the Singaporean Worker.

The Government should also be more transparent in showing evidence of how FTAs have benefited the Singaporean Worker. FTAs should not serve the interests of employers and conglomerates but should also benefit the workers of Singapore.

3. Abolishing the retirement age

Many of our older workers are healthy and have a wealth of knowledge and experience to share. However, due to ageism and/or the retirement age, they may be prevented from doing so. Our elder folks should not be forced to work, but at the same time they should also not be forced to retire. Therefore, by abolishing the retirement age, seniors who wish to continue to work can do so.

