

SNTUC REPORT

Organisation Name: Singapore National Trades Union Congress (SNTUC)

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Submission Date: 29 September 2017

Submission On: Fifth Periodic Report of the Republic of Singapore to the UN Committee on CEDAW (68th Session)

State: Republic of Singapore

Who We Are

The Singapore National Trades Union Congress (SNTUC) is a national confederation of trade unions as well as a network of professional associations and partners across all sectors in Singapore.

SNTUC's objectives are to help Singapore stay competitive and working people remain employable for life; to enhance the social status and well-being of our members and working people; and to build a strong, responsible and caring labour movement. SNTUC's vision is to be an inclusive labour movement for all collars, ages and nationalities. SNTUC is at the heart of the Labour Movement, which comprises 58 affiliated unions, two affiliated associations, 10 social enterprises, six related organisations as well as a growing ecosystem of U Associates and enterprise partners.

Apart from protecting the rights and advancing the interests of our working people, SNTUC also strives to support working families through the various stages of their lives and moderate their cost of living.

Through this report, we would like to share our views on **Articles 7** and **11** of the Fifth Periodic Report of the Republic of Singapore to the UN Committee on CEDAW.

Overall, the situation of working women has improved over the years, with some changes made to the relevant legislations, government funding schemes, etc. There are still some areas of improvement which SNTUC would like to call for, as elaborated in the following report.

Article 7: Political and Public Life

About half of the 900,000 workers represented by Singapore National Trades Union Congress (SNTUC) are women. Four out of 20 members appointed to the SNTUC Central Committee (the highest policy-making body of the labour movement) for the term from 2015 to 2019 are women, including our second female President, Ms Mary Liew.

As a testimony of Singapore's progress on women agenda, one of SNTUC's former Deputy Secretary-General, Mdm Halimah Yacob, was recently elected as our country's first female President.

Article 11: Employment

Singapore has seen the rise in the employment rate of women, reaching 72.1% in 2016 for women aged 25 to 64¹. This encouraging trend must be sustained by progressive workplace practices and policies to retain female talent.

Promoting Work-Life

There have been immense efforts by the tripartite partners (Singapore Government, SNTUC and Singapore National Employers Federation) to promote and encourage organizations to adopt effective work-life strategies, including flexible work arrangements (FWAs). Through the Work-Life Grant under the WorkPro² Scheme, a government funding scheme introduced in 2013, SNTUC has assisted close to 200 companies to implement FWAs and benefitted 10,000 employees, both male and female.

Further acknowledging the positive impact that FWAs have in supporting working mothers and caregivers, a new set of Tripartite Standards³ on FWAs will be launched this year. Employers who adopt the standards will further differentiate themselves as employers of choice.

As the Singapore workforce profile shifts towards one with majority of the workforce being tertiary-educated, the number of Professionals, Managers, Executives and Technicians (PMETs) in the labour force has also risen to 55% in 2016. Advancements in technology has significantly impacted the way work can be carried out and with better infrastructure and equipment, a new flex workforce is on the rise. The Singapore government should also look at helping employers learn how to

¹ Labour Force in Singapore Advance Release 2016: http://stats.mom.gov.sg/iMAS_PdfLibrary/mrsd-labour-force-in-singapore-advance-release-2016.pdf#page=6

²WorkPro: <http://www.mom.gov.sg/workpro/>

³Tripartite Standards: <http://www.mom.gov.sg/employment-practices/tripartism-in-singapore/tripartite-standards>

manage the flex workforce effectively as well as to offer more options of FWAs to cater to the varied needs of the workforce.

For the benefit of retention, the Singapore government could further incentivize companies to offer *Job Sharing* as a more accessible form of FWA to working mothers. This FWA option allows working mothers to take on a shared workload with another co-worker thereby enabling her to be more effective in balancing work and family rather than leaving the workforce totally. By providing Job Sharing, employers may also attract mothers who have left the workforce to re-enter.

Facilitating Return to Work

Corresponding with a growing PMET workforce, a large proportion of women who chose to put their careers on hold and stay at home to care for their family members are highly educated. From an online poll that SNTUC conducted early this year, 72.6 per cent of 529 surveyed stay-at-home individuals hold at least a Diploma or Degree. Recognising the challenges faced by these women in returning to the workforce, the Singapore government has responded to SNTUC's call to support the re-entry of PMETs with a new Returner Work Trial⁴ scheme in September 2017. With targeted training and placement assistance, the scheme aims to enable returners to transit seamlessly back into the workforce.

Supporting Re-employment

To enable mature workers to continue working beyond the statutory retirement age of 62, should they want to, the Singapore government has enacted the Retirement and Re-employment Act (RRA) in January 2012 which encompasses all mature workers including females. Through our continual advocacy, SNTUC is heartened to note that the RRA was further amended in July 2017 to allow for a higher re-employment age ceiling to 67.

Jointly with the tripartite committee overseeing the implementation of age friendly initiatives to support the RRA, SNTUC is actively promoting and assisting companies in implementing age friendly policies and practices at the workplace through WorkPro.

Enhanced Leave Schemes

The intervention by the Singapore government's enhancements to the various family-friendly leave schemes have helped to alleviate the pressure on working couples to balance their work and family commitments. With enhanced paid maternity, paternity, child care and shared parental leave, the Singapore government is also sending a strong signal on the equal role which fathers play in parenting.

⁴ Paid Work Trial Scheme to Help PMET Jobseekers: <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/initiative-launched-get-economically-inactive-pmets-back-work>

With an aging population, Singapore's Old Age Support Ratio stands at 5.4 (5.4 adults per elderly person) in 2016⁵. It was 13.5 in 1970 and 7.4 in 2010. This has resulted in a growth in the "sandwich generation"; that is working adults who have to take care of their children as well as their aged parents. The Singapore government has supported the SNTUC-initiated U Flex Family-Friendly Grant in 2014⁶ to encourage employers to provide family friendly leave to help fulfil the added caregiving responsibilities that working couples have to shoulder.

The one-year pilot programme benefited more than 13,000 employees whose employers implemented family care leave and family support schemes. Beyond the U Flex Family-Friendly Grant, SNTUC has continued in this effort to encourage unionised companies to take the lead in providing family-friendly leave entitlements over and above the legislation. With these positive results, the government should consider extending the benefits of *paid family care leave* to all workers through legislation.

Protection Against Workplace Harassment

In Singapore, the Protection from Harassment Act (POHA) provides a legal framework for standards on socially-acceptable range of behaviour within and outside the workplace. The provisions cover a wide range of conduct, including cyber bullying, stalking and sexual harassment. The tripartite partners in Singapore have jointly issued a Tripartite Advisory on Managing Workplace Harassment⁷ following the passing of the POHA in March 2014. The advisory promotes and encourages employers to put in place preventive measures and recommends proactive management and remedial actions for harassment occurring at the workplace on voluntary basis.

With the launch of various Tripartite Standards to form a comprehensive map that helps employers build fair and progressive workplaces, it is timely to consider a recommendation to put in place a new set of *Standard for Managing Workplace Harassment* that also includes violence.

⁵Understanding the Old Age Support Ratio: https://www.singstat.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/statistics/visualising_data/old-age-support-ratio2016.pdf

⁶New \$500,000 grant to help employers implement family-friendly practices: <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/new-500000-grant-to-help-employers-implement-family-friendly-practices>

⁷Tripartite Advisory: <http://www.mom.gov.sg/newsroom/press-releases/2015/1223-tripartite-advisory-on-managing-workplace-harassment>