



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

Distr.: General  
15 February 2024

Original: English  
English, French and Spanish only

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

**Eighty-eighth session**

Geneva, 13–31 May 2024

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

**Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under  
article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms  
of Discrimination against Women**

**Replies of Singapore to the list of issues and questions in  
relation to its sixth periodic report\*\*\***

[Date received: 3 February 2023]

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

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



## I. Introduction

1. Singapore is fully committed to advancing the status and well-being of our women. To this end and in line with our commitment to Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, since the submission of Singapore's Sixth Periodic Report ("Periodic Report"), Singapore published the White Paper on Singapore Women's Development (hyperlinked) ("White Paper") in March 2022. The White Paper was developed in consultation with Singaporeans and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) representing diverse backgrounds over a year-long nationwide engagement and was unanimously endorsed by the Singapore Parliament in April 2022. To build a fairer and more inclusive society, the White Paper espouses a partnership approach where men and women partner each other as equals, including in the family. Families are the bedrock of society where equal partnership between men and women is nurtured and promoted. Singapore recently launched "A Singapore Made for Families 2025 (MFF 2025)" (hyperlinked), a national plan to create a Singapore where families are supported across different chapters of their lives, and thus enable both men and women to pursue their aspirations.

## II. Reply to paragraph 1 of the list of issues and questions (CEDAW/C/SGP/Q/6)

2. Singapore takes its treaty obligations seriously, including CEDAW. The principles of CEDAW and the CEDAW Committee's general recommendations have been incorporated into the training of judges, lawyers, prosecutors, police officers and other law enforcement officers, to ensure that we continuously improve to meet our CEDAW obligations. Please see [197] to [200] of the Periodic Report.

3. In addition, the Singapore Judicial College (SJC) continues to emphasise the importance of understanding the psychology of sexual assault victims through its foundational milestone programmes for newly appointed judges and judicial officers, as well as its training programme for justices' law clerks. In 2022, SJC partnered with PAVE, Singapore's pioneer Protection Specialist Centre (PSC), to conduct a customised training programme for judicial officers to enhance their insights on contexts involving domestic violence, such as those in a familial or partner relationship. The courts also conduct periodic complementary court-specific training programmes, especially in their specialist areas set out in [77(a)] of the Periodic Report.

4. The Law Society of Singapore offered training on "Managing Biases and Creating Inclusive Leadership Habits in a Law Firm" in 2022 and "Trauma-informed Conduct of Sexual Offence Trials" in 2021 as part of the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) offerings for lawyers. CPD requirements are mandatory for all practising lawyers in Singapore. SG Her Empowerment (SHE), an independent non-profit charity, also provides training on gender-based online harms (GBOH) for pro-bono lawyers serving at the SHECARES@ Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (SCWO) legal clinic; and engages a wide range of stakeholders including lawyers and law students on GBOH-related topics through workshops/seminars.

5. The Attorney-General's Chambers (AGC), which houses the central prosecuting agency of Singapore, has a specialist cluster of prosecutors who deal with cases involving vulnerable witnesses, including women and girls who are victims of sexual crime. These prosecutors receive specific forensic interview training (both in plenary and practicum formats) in prosecuting such cases on a yearly basis, and attend

biennial forensic training conducted by The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children.

6. The Singapore Police Force (SPF) provides specialised training for frontline officers and investigation officers to ensure that interviews and investigations with victims of family violence and sexual offences are conducted sensitively and professionally.

7. There are also gender-sensitive legal provisions that protect the rights of women when searching accused persons. For example, under Section 25(3) of the Misuse of Drugs Act and under Section 51(2) and Section 51AA (3) of the Immigration Act, women may only be searched by female officers of respective law enforcement agencies.

8. As stated at [43] of the Periodic Report, the Committee's previous Concluding Observations were made available on the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF)'s public webpage, and promptly circulated to Ministries and public service agencies via email upon receipt.

### **III. Reply to paragraph 2 of the list of issues and questions**

9. Singapore continues to achieve high employment and literacy rates for women, despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, the employment rate of females aged 25 to 64 was 75.1 per cent (versus 73.3 per cent in 2019) and the literacy rate for resident females aged 15 years and over was 96.4 per cent (versus 96.1 per cent in 2019). We also take a longer-term and calibrated approach that goes beyond the pandemic to support all Singaporeans and especially those in need, including vulnerable women.

10. Singapore recently extended the Covid-19 Recovery Grant until 31 December 2023 to provide continued support to individuals whose financial and employment circumstances are affected by the current economic climate.

11. In public health, we adopt a risk-based approach for the design and implementation of COVID-19 control measures and preventive measures. For example, we identified pregnant women and persons with pre-existing health conditions as higher risk groups and introduced measures to reduce their risk of infection. Other measures were taken such as working from home, to protect the population, especially the vulnerable groups including elderly women.

12. In addition to COVID-19 support measures outlined in [15] and [173] of the Periodic Report, we have rolled out several packages of over S\$3.5 billion to provide cost-of-living relief for all Singaporean households in view of the rise in global inflation, with more support for lower to middle income groups. This included a S\$1.5 billion package in June 2022 to provide targeted and immediate relief for areas such as essentials and utilities bills, and another S\$1.5 billion in October 2022 to provide further relief for all Singaporean households in areas such as essentials, transport and education. Together, the support packages will fully cover the increase in cost of living for lower-income households on average, and more than half of the increase in cost of living for middle-income households on average in 2022.

### **IV. Reply to paragraph 3 of the list of issues and questions**

13. The Government does not condone discrimination against women. Singapore provides for equal protection for women as part of our Constitution, including the protection of women from unfair discrimination. This is enshrined in Article 12(1),

which provides that “All persons are equal before the law and entitled to equal protection of the law.” The Court of Appeal in its decision of 28 October 2014 (i.e. *Lim Meng Suang and anor vs AG*) at [187] was clear that Article 12(1) would “apply to all persons regardless of ‘gender, sexual orientation and gender identity’”. In its more recent decision of 28 February 2022 (i.e. *Tan Seng Kee v AG*) at [303], the Court of Appeal emphasised that the rights enshrined in Article 12(1) are so fundamental and basic and that the court will avoid taking any approach that “renders Article 12(1) toothless”.

14. Over the years, the Government has comprehensively reviewed and updated legislation to enhance the rights and protection of women, and bridge legislative gaps. In addition to the Constitution, their rights are protected in legislation such as the Women’s Charter (WC), the Children and Young Persons Act, the Employment Act (EA), Penal Code (PC), and the Protection from Harassment Act (POHA). For example, to enhance protection of women, having taken into account extensive feedback from stakeholders, the Government will be making amendments to the WC to better protect survivors of family violence and enhance accountability and rehabilitation of perpetrators (see report by Taskforce on Family Violence ([hyperlinked](#)) and Annex A for details). The White Paper also included concrete action plans to address discrimination, e.g. enacting workplace fairness legislation.

## **V. Reply to paragraph 4 of the list of issues and questions**

15. The White Paper addresses key issues in areas most salient to Singapore women raised during the year-long Conversations on Singapore Women’s Development (“Conversations”) which involved nearly 6,000 participants from various walks of life, including ethnic and religious minorities.

16. For women in vulnerable and marginalised situations, protection from violence and harm is a key concern. In this regard, the White Paper articulated measures such as a revised sentencing framework for sexual and hurt offences to ensure that the sentences imposed reflect the seriousness of such acts as gross violations of our fundamental values. Such legislative amendments complement existing legislation, such as the PC and POHA, which contain various provisions protecting women from harm, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, nationality, and sexual orientation.

17. For women whose circumstances may not be specifically addressed in the White Paper, different offices in the Government provide targeted support for specific groups, such as migrant domestic workers (Ministry of Manpower (MOM)).

## **VI. Reply to paragraph 5 of the list of issues and questions**

18. Government-funded civil and criminal legal aid are available for Singapore Citizens (SCs) and Permanent Residents (PRs) who pass the means and merits tests. In assessing applicants for legal aid, special consideration may be given to applicants with extenuating circumstances, e.g., additional financial needs, under the respective civil and criminal legal aid discretionary frameworks. Foreigners who require legal help, including migrant women, can also approach various organisations such as Pro Bono SG, the Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics, and the Archdiocesan Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People.

19. Developing and strengthening the skills, instincts and abilities of our prosecutors to address gender stereotypes that may potentially affect access to justice is an ongoing effort. New prosecutors attend general training at a basic level twice yearly and at an advanced level yearly. We have a specialist cluster of prosecutors

who deal with vulnerable witnesses and receive specific training in prosecuting cases involving such witnesses on a yearly basis.

20. As highlighted in [3] above, SJC has programmes to enhance the understanding of newly appointed judges and judicial officers when dealing with sexual assault victims.

21. To sensitise law students to gender-related issues, the Singapore Institute of Legal Education (“SILE”) also provides candidates preparing for the Part B of the Singapore Bar Examinations with exposure to materials on gender-related issues such as gender-based violence as part of their Preparatory Course. The SILE intends to address issues on gender inequality in future iterations of the Part B Course.

## VII. Reply to paragraph 6 of the list of issues and questions

22. There were two women sentenced to death between 2017 and 2022. Both were convicted on drug trafficking charges and had exhausted their avenues of appeal. The “gendered vulnerabilities” mentioned did not feature in either case.

23. In deciding on the appropriate sentence to be imposed on an accused person, the Court takes into account all relevant circumstances and mitigating factors. In this connection, the Criminal Procedure Code 2010 provides for the prosecution and the accused person (whether represented by counsel or not) to address the Court before sentence is passed.

24. Any act in the exercise of the right of private defence is not an offence pursuant to section 96 of the Penal Code 1871. In addition, Chapter 4A of the Penal Code 1871 provides for a right of private defence, which includes a right of self-defence, to all accused persons. Where the right of private defence is proven, an accused person will not be guilty of an offence (i.e. it is a complete defence). This applies to all offences and is not restricted to capital offences.

25. With regard to the specific offence of murder, section 300 of the Penal Code 1871 also sets out several exceptions (or partial defences) that, if proven, will mean that the accused person is not guilty of murder (which may attract capital punishment), and can only be found guilty of the lesser offence of culpable homicide under section 299 of the Penal Code 1871 (which does not attract capital punishment). In particular, Exception 2 provides that culpable homicide is not murder if the accused person, in the exercise of the right of private defence, exceeds the power given to him or her by law, and causes the death of the person against whom he or she is exercising such right of defence, without premeditation and without any intention of doing more harm than is necessary for the purpose of such defence.

26. As the defence of private defence is a full defence under Singapore criminal law, a person who successfully pleads the defence of private defence will not be convicted, and capital punishment will not be applied.

27. Additionally, the High Court cannot record a guilty plea in a capital charge. Even if the accused wishes to plead guilty, the prosecution must prove each element of the offence beyond reasonable doubt. Regardless of whether the defendant appeals after conviction, every case in which capital punishment is imposed is reviewed by the Court of Appeal before the capital sentence can be carried out.

28. All accused persons who are charged with a capital offence are assigned free legal counsel under the Legal Assistance Scheme for Capital Offences (“LASCO”), administered by the Supreme Court. There is no means test or eligibility criteria to satisfy, and this scheme is available to all persons regardless of gender or nationality.

29. The offer of assignment of LASCO counsel also extends to appeals where capital punishment is an issue and to the filing of a petition for clemency where the Court of Appeal has upheld or imposed a sentence of capital punishment. In some circumstances, LASCO counsel may continue representing an accused person where capital punishment is no longer in issue, such as where the Prosecution indicates that it will not seek capital punishment, but the charge remains a capital one or where the charge is reduced to a non-capital charge and the accused person elects to plead guilty to the non-capital charge without claiming trial.

30. Two LASCO counsel are usually assigned at the trial and appeal stages, comprising: (a) one “Lead Counsel”, who must have at least 7 years of experience in legal practice and have conducted at least 2 capital trials and 2 capital appeals; and (b) one “Assisting Counsel” who must have at least 5 years of experience in legal practice and have conducted at least 2 capital trials or 1 capital trial and 1 capital appeal. When defending an accused person, LASCO counsel must endeavour to provide, in their professional opinion, the best possible defence available under law to the accused person.

### **VIII. Reply to paragraph 7 of the list of issues and questions**

31. We use a decentralised, but mutually-reinforcing system of legislation, regulation and institutional oversight to protect human rights to ensure efficient mainstreaming and protection of Singaporeans’ interests throughout our society.

32. In addition to the multiple robust mechanisms in place for Singaporeans to have their concerns addressed directly and expeditiously further elaborated in [51] and [52] of the Periodic Report, Singapore welcomes independent feedback to improve support for women in Singapore, and regularly engages representatives of women organisations and the community. For example, the Periodic Report was prepared in consultation with NGOs and parliamentarians, and took into consideration the Conversations where Singaporeans and NGOs shared feedback and aspirations for Singapore women.

33. We will continue to review these mechanisms to ensure that we continue to be able to implement our obligations under CEDAW in the most effective way within the context of Singapore’s national circumstances.

### **IX. Reply to paragraph 8 of the list of issues and questions**

34. The Government engages many CSOs such as SCWO, the national coordinating body for women’s organisations in Singapore, and their member organisations to engage a wide range of Singaporeans to understand their aspirations for Singapore women. The Government is partnering with community partners to implement the White Paper action plans over the next decade.

35. Freedom of speech and expression is enshrined in Article 14 of our Constitution, and may only be restricted by law as Parliament considers necessary or expedient in the interest of the security of Singapore or any part thereof, friendly relations with other countries, public order or morality and restrictions designed to protect the privileges of Parliament or to provide against contempt of court, defamation or incitement to any offence.

36. Our legislation allows women activists and CSOs to freely express their views and safely carry out their work and activities on women’s rights and gender-related issues.

## **X. Reply to paragraph 9 of the list of issues and questions**

37. Even though Singapore has made significant progress, more can and needs to be done to counter gender stereotypes through education, nationwide campaigns and partnership with the community via a whole-of-society effort.

38. As noted in [63] and [64] of the Periodic Report, there is a balanced treatment of gender representation within the school curriculum. The Ministry of Education (MOE) continues to highlight experiences, contributions, and achievements of women alongside their male counterparts as content examples and ensures that 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. Through our Character and Citizenship Education curriculum, which is taught in all national schools, we continue to build appreciation of the equity of roles in the family, respect for both genders online and in-person, being mindful of gender stereotypes when considering education and career pathways, and keeping safe online while being a positive peer influence.

39. On tackling domestic violence, as highlighted in [201] and [202] of the Periodic Report, the Government in partnership with the community, has intensified nationwide public education efforts on what constitutes domestic violence and resources to equip the community to safely intervene.

40. In relation to gender stereotypes of online behaviour, the Government has taken decisive action to tackle GBOH to make legislative changes and increase awareness, in consultation and partnership with stakeholders. Details of such action are set out below at [45] to [47].

## **XI. Reply to paragraph 10 of the list of issues and questions**

41. In alignment with UN's Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses (Revision 3) and as explained in [60] of the Periodic Report, the concept of 'reference persons' has been adopted in place of 'head of household' in our key household surveys.<sup>1</sup> 'Reference persons' are gender neutral and refers to the oldest member, main income earner, owner-occupier of the house, person who manages the household affairs, or person who supplied the information pertaining to other members.

## **XII. Reply to paragraph 11 of the list of issues and questions**

42. Singapore does not condone harmful practices and where harm to an individual can be established in a procedure, the procedure should be avoided. Female genital mutilation is not a recognised medical procedure in Singapore.

43. Singapore does not track the prevalence of this practice.

## **XIII. Reply to paragraph 12 of the list of issues and questions**

44. As one of the safest countries in the world, Singapore has been ranked first in Gallup's Global Law and Order report since 2017. Nonetheless, every case is one too

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<sup>1</sup> These key surveys include the Census of Population, General Household Survey, Household Expenditure Survey, and the Comprehensive Labour Force Survey. Published data on household statistics have also incorporated the update.

many, and more can and needs to be done to address new forms of gender-based violence against women and girls, such as in the online realm. We also note that 43 per cent of about 1,000 respondents in a January 2022 poll perceived that stricter enforcement of relevant laws was the most effective solution to reduce such online harms and 57 per cent of respondents are unaware or only slightly aware of help-seeking avenues if they experienced online harms.

45. The Government has partnered stakeholders in the people, public and private sectors to take decisive measures to counter online harms and increase awareness of such harms and help-seeking avenues:

(a) Ascertained the impact of online harms in Singapore through a sensing poll and scoped out areas for future research;

(b) Created greater awareness about online harms and digital safety through measures such as consolidating online safety resources and developing an education roadmap for future online safety programmes;

(c) Mobilised and equipped individuals to support victims of online harms through measures such as providing pro-bono legal clinics; and

(d) Strengthened the ecosystem to respond to online harms through working with NGOs (e.g. SHE), engaging technology companies on simplified reporting for harmful online content and creating a first responders training manual.

46. Parliament has also passed an Online Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill. The Bill, which is targeted to come into force in early 2023, places responsibility on Online Communication Services (OCSs) to ensure online safety of Singapore users on their service (see Annex B for details).

47. This is in addition to new offences that Singapore has introduced in 2020 (see Annex C) to combat the increase in technology-facilitated crimes.

48. Marital immunity for rape was abolished in January 2020. This means that women are protected from sexual abuse, regardless of their relationship with the perpetrator. There are legal provisions that criminalise sexual activity with a child, regardless of consent, with severe penalties for these offences. For example:

(a) Rape or sexual assault of a minor under the age of 14 (Sections 375 and 376 Penal Code). This offence is punishable with imprisonment for up to 20 years and a fine;

(b) Sexual penetration of a minor under the age of 16 (section 376A Penal Code). This offence is punishable with imprisonment for up to 10 years, (or up to 20 years if the offender was in an exploitative relationship with the minor) a fine, or both;

(c) Exploitative sexual penetration of minor aged 16 or over but under 18 (section 376AA Penal Code). This offence is punishable with imprisonment of up to 15 years and a fine.

49. Acts of physical violence are criminalised under Singapore law. To increase deterrence against domestic violence, enhanced penalties were introduced in 2020 so that perpetrators can be punished with up to twice the maximum penalty provided for the offence if the offence was committed in the context of an intimate or close relationship (e.g., in the same household) (Sections 74C and 74D of the Penal Code).

50. The offence of rape does not include all forms of non-consensual acts. It is limited to non-consensual penetration of the victim's vagina, anus, or mouth with the man's penis.

51. Other forms of non-consensual sexual acts are criminalised under separate offences. For example, the offence of sexual assault with penetration carries the same maximum penalty as rape, i.e., imprisonment of 20 years. The offence of outrage of modesty (which does not require penetration) is punishable by up to 10 years imprisonment if death, hurt, wrongful restraint, or fear of instant death, instant hurt or instant wrongful restraint was caused.

#### **XIV. Reply to paragraph 12(a) of the list of issues and questions**

52. Please see [3] to [6] above for our response regarding the Government's commitment to capacity building for all relevant professionals and information on other relevant professionals.

53. Police officers are trained to respond to and support victims of crime as part of their basic police training. Officers are sensitised to the vulnerability of victims of sexual offences and learn how to support victims of crime. They also attend briefings facilitated by members of the regional Family Violence Working Groups, which provide officers with the knowledge and skills to deal professionally and effectively with victims of crime.

54. SPF actively reviews its procedures to continually improve protection and support for victims of sexual offences, regardless of gender. For example, SPF will establish a new Sexual Crime and Family Violence Command this year to oversee investigations into sexual crime and family violence, which will be staffed by police officers who specialise in investigating such cases. To raise public awareness of sexual crime and the investigation process in such cases, SPF has launched a revamped one-stop webpage (*hyperlinked*) on 27 December 2022 that contains information on sexual crime, investigation processes, victim care measures and available victim support services.

#### **XV. Reply to paragraph 12(b) of the list of issues and questions**

55. On the issue of burden of proof, the WC Section 65(1) states: "The court may, **upon satisfaction on a balance of probabilities** that family violence has been committed or is likely to be committed against a family member and that it is necessary for the protection of the family member, make a protection order restraining the person against whom the order is made from using family violence against the family member." Should there be an urgent need for protection at the point of application for a Personal Protection Order (PPO), the court may grant an Expedited Order (EO), which is issued without trial. The EO is a temporary Order that is valid for 28 days, or until the trial for the PPO application, whichever is earlier, and can be further extended by the Court until the conclusion of the trial (Refer to Annex D for new court rules to make the application process less burdensome, including for married or divorced women applying under WC).

56. With the enactment of POHA in 2014, unmarried women who are victims of intimate partner violence can obtain protection under POHA through a Protection Order (PO), or, in urgent cases, an Expedited Protection Order (EPO). The PO/EPO can require the perpetrator to stay away from the shared residence (i.e., domestic exclusion order), thus creating a safe domestic environment for the victim. Recent amendments were made to POHA to enhance the penalties for offences against victims in an intimate relationship with the offender. In addition, breaching a PO/EPO under POHA is a criminal offence and the perpetrator may be fined and imprisoned, similar to breaches of PPOs under the WC.

## **XVI. Reply to paragraph 12(c) of the list of issues and questions**

57. Corporal punishment is not administered on female residents in alternative care settings and juvenile rehabilitation centres. In addition, Section 89 of the Penal Code does not expressly authorise corporal punishment. It is a general defence under criminal law for acts done by guardians (or with their consent) in good faith for the benefit of a child.

## **XVII. Reply to paragraph 13 of the list of issues and questions**

58. The Family Court may issue a counselling order to the PPO applicant (victim), PPO respondent (perpetrator) and/or their children, if it is necessary for the protection or personal safety of the victim. The intent of the counselling order is to help family members learn more respectful behaviours to resolve conflict and provide them with the necessary support and skills to ensure their safety. Unless the victim agrees to attend counselling together with the perpetrator, or their case workers assess that they are both ready, the victim need not attend counselling together with the perpetrator.

59. While persons who are issued the counselling order must attend counselling, the State has not, in practice, subjected victims who refuse to attend counselling to any consequences. Instead, social service agencies will work with and encourage such victims to attend counselling to provide them with the support and skills to ensure their safety. Perpetrators who are issued a counselling order and fail to attend their counselling sessions may be prosecuted for contempt of Court.

60. To better ensure the safety of victims and hold perpetrators accountable, upcoming amendments to the WC will increase the penalties for breaches of court orders. MSF intends to make breaches an offence to deter perpetrators from skipping counselling.

## **XVIII. Reply to paragraph 14(a) of the list of issues and questions**

61. Singapore is party to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (TIP), especially Women and Children, which supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and the ASEAN Convention on Trafficking in Persons. We fully comply with our obligations on TIP. There are no legal obstacles to bringing the perpetrators of trafficking to justice as defined in the UN TIP Protocol. The Prevention of Human Trafficking Act 2014 (PHTA) defines the offence of TIP based on an internationally accepted definition of TIP (i.e., UN TIP protocol). According to Section 3 of the PHTA, the three limbs of act, means and purpose must be met for a case to be considered as a human trafficking offence. TIP cases that do not meet all three limbs may instead be prosecuted under other statutes such as the WC, PC, Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (EFMA) or EA.

62. The definition of key terms such as “coercion”, “exploitation” and “sexual exploitation” are comprehensively set out in Section 2 of the PHTA. Some terms have been scoped broadly to give our Courts sufficient latitude to apply them to cases without requiring terms such as “forced labour” and “deception” be defined. In some cases, the definition of key terms in the PHTA are more detailed than in the TIP Protocol (see Annex E for details).

## **XIX. Reply to paragraph 14(b) of the list of issues and questions**

63. Singapore has a strong ecosystem of various stakeholders to combat TIP. The Government has established an inter-agency Taskforce to combat TIP. The Taskforce comprises agencies involved in law enforcement (Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and MOM), Foreign Policy and International Collaboration (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Prosecution (AGC), Support Systems (MSF), and formulation of legal and trafficking-related policies (Ministry of Law, MHA, MOM, and Ministry of Health).

64. The Taskforce not only coordinates whole-of-government strategies and regularly reviews TIP laws and policies, but also engages stakeholders regularly to collaborate and discuss Singapore's TIP efforts to ensure that Singapore's efforts to combat TIP remain effective, relevant and sustainable.

65. Singapore's national approach against TIP for the period 2016–2026 continues to be based on the 4Ps framework: prevention, prosecution, protection, and partnership. To effectively implement the framework, relevant officers receive regular and specialised training necessary to apply gender-sensitive investigation methods and to identify and refer victims of trafficking at an early stage.

66. Judiciary. Please see [3] above on capacity building for the judiciary.

67. Police and border control officers. They are 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. As part of basic police training, officers are trained to respond to and support victims of crime. As elaborated in [6] above, 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.

68. Prosecutors and law enforcement officers. They 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.

69. Social workers. They are sensitised to respond to victims of crimes (sexual abuse/assault/trafficking etc.) in an accepting and non-judgmental manner. They are 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. They are also trained to deal with trauma and identify and refer victims for psychological support when required.

70. The Government contributes to the funding of NGOs that provide support services, such as shelters for TIP victims. The Government also provides funding to support ground-up civil society projects that raise awareness of TIP issues through the TIP Public Awareness Grant, which is a core initiative under the National Approach.

## **XX. Reply to paragraph 14(c) of the list of issues and questions**

71. Women who are exiting prostitution and are facing financial difficulties can apply for ComCare assistance. ComCare supports lower-income persons who have difficulty meeting their basic living expenses. Eligible recipients may receive monthly cash assistance for living expenses, assistance with utility and medical bills, as well as referrals to other agencies where applicable (e.g. employment assistance or counselling).

## XXI. Reply to paragraph 15 of the list of issues and questions

72. Singapore has a high literacy rate for women, where educational efforts are positioned broadly to cater to all students, including those with disabilities and special needs. All Singaporeans have equal and full access to quality education. Within our schools and institutions, support is provided to students via a needs-based approach, where students are provided targeted support based on their educational and family needs. Please see Annex F and [111] of the Periodic Report for Singapore's initiatives to ensure sufficient support for vulnerable students from low-income families.

73. Singapore's inclusive education policy supports the education of children with disabilities and other developmental and learning needs. Among school-going children, about 80 per cent of students with disabilities and special educational needs are enrolled in General Education schools and have access to the same baseline provisions<sup>2</sup> as their peers. Students with disabilities who would benefit from more intensive and specialised assistance, and a customised curriculum, are enrolled in Government and community-funded alternative specialised settings, known as Special Education (SPED) schools. Parents make informed decisions based on the advice of professionals who have observed or worked with the child to consider the most educationally appropriate setting that best meets the educational needs of their child.<sup>3</sup> To facilitate participation and interaction opportunities between SPED and General Education students, meaningful joint activities are organised through school partnerships<sup>4</sup> between SPED schools and General Education schools.

74. Students with disabilities in General Education schools benefit from specialised manpower, including teachers and school-based personnel trained in inclusive education practices in all schools. General Education schools take a systematic approach to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities through structures such as Case Management Teams, which coordinates intervention programmes and support services<sup>5</sup> for students with disabilities in their respective schools. Schools can also tap on the Support for Special Needs Grant<sup>6</sup> as well as advice from Educational Psychologists. Students in SPED schools benefit from specially trained teachers, a customised curriculum and pedagogy, and receive a wide range of support from allied professionals. SPED teachers attend a specialised pre-service training,<sup>7</sup> the Diploma in Special Education, and can attend customised in-service courses conducted by training institutions.

75. In mainstream schools, Physical Education (PE) lessons are modified as necessary so that students with disabilities can participate in PE with their peers. MOE will continue to train more PE teachers in planning and conducting inclusive PE lessons.

76. Non-citizen children can access national schools, or can also access private schools such as international schools.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, school counsellors, support from teachers, and curricula.

<sup>3</sup> For example, SPED students who have taken national examinations can join General Education secondary schools or post-secondary institutions, with support to help them transition smoothly.

<sup>4</sup> School Partnerships (Gen Ed-SPED) is a school-led partnership programme, where a planned and gradual approach seeks to develop self-confidence and the needed social-communication skills to foster successful interactions between students with disabilities and their peers.

<sup>5</sup> These include itinerant services from disability organisations and assistive technology to enhance accessibility to learning for students who are blind, deaf or have physical disabilities.

<sup>6</sup> Schools may use the Support for Special Needs Grant to purchase resources and fund learning activities that provide support for students with disabilities.

<sup>7</sup> Provided at the National Institute of Education.

## **XXII. Reply to paragraph 16 of the list of issues and questions**

77. As part of MOE's sexuality education curriculum, MOE continues to teach students age-appropriate knowledge and skills to understand themselves, how to maintain healthy relationships, and make wise, informed and responsible decisions on sexuality matters. Please see [112–114] of the Periodic Report for details.

## **XXIII. Reply to paragraph 17 of the list of issues and questions**

78. The employment rate for women aged 25 to 64 has been growing steadily over the past two decades, and grew further from 73.3 per cent in 2019 to 76.2 per cent in 2022 despite the pandemic.

79. Singapore's adjusted gender pay gap, which compares the incomes of men and women with similar characteristics such as industry, occupation, age, and education, improved from 8.8per cent in 2002 to 4.3per cent in 2020.

80. The tripartite partners (i.e. MOM, National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) and Singapore National Employers Federation) have been progressively stepping up efforts to increase the number of women within the labour force with a multi-pronged approach. This is a key area in the White Paper, which has action plans to enable more women to participate more fully in the workplace and strengthen workplace fairness, for instance:

(a) Strengthening fair opportunities for women in the workplace: We are taking a stronger stance against unfair employment practices by enacting workplace fairness legislation, which will strengthen the protection of workers, including women, against workplace discrimination, with discriminatory employers being subject to enforcement action:

(i) The Tripartite Committee on Workplace Fairness (TCWF) is proposing for legislation to require employers to have proper grievance-handling processes in place so that they are well equipped to manage any reports of workplace discrimination or harassment. The TCWF is also looking at protecting confidentiality of identity and prohibiting retaliation, with the aim of providing more assurance to those who experience discrimination or harassment at the workplace that it is safe to come forward with their grievances. The TCWF is consulting widely, including with workers, employers, the human resources community and NGOs, and is expected to complete its deliberations in 2023. See Annex G for details on ensuring fair opportunities for women in the workplace;

(b) Encouraging flexible work arrangements (FWAs):

(i) Singapore will be introducing a new set of Tripartite Guidelines on FWAs by 2024, which will require employers to consider FWA requests from employees fairly and properly. Such arrangements will enable more balanced sharing of caregiving responsibilities between women and men;

(ii) The proportion of employees who were working in establishments offering at least one FWA on a regular and sustained basis increased from 65per cent in 2015 to 86per cent in 2020. Among employees aged 25–64 who required FWAs, 9 in 10 had access to the FWA that they required in 2020, up from 6 in 10 in 2014;

(c) Supporting back-to-work women through mentorship, networking and training opportunities to help more women return to the workforce:

(i) Workforce Singapore’s (WSG) broad-based employment facilitation programmes and services, as well as SkillsFuture Singapore’s (SSG) training programmes provide support to all jobseekers, including women looking to return to the workforce after a period of absence, depending on their specific needs. From 2019 to 2021, WSG has collectively placed more than 68,000 women across their programmes and services (see Annex H for examples of initiatives to support back-to-work women);

(d) The Government is committed to enhancing access to affordable, quality preschools to build a Singapore made for families, so that caregivers, including women, can work with a peace of mind. We have more than doubled the number of full-day preschool places over the past decade, to over 200,000 today, enough to accommodate every resident child aged three and above. About 90 per cent of Singaporean children aged 3 to 6 years are enrolled in a preschool today.

81. As stated in [189] and [190] of the Periodic Report, amendments to the POHA came into effect on 1 June 2021 to make it easier for victims to obtain POs and EPOs.

82. Between 1 June 2021 to 31 December 2021, the specialist Protection from Harassment Courts (PHC) received 346 PO applications. A total of 404 PO applications were filed in 2021. By contrast, 149, 171 and 148 PO applications were filed each year from 2018 to 2020 respectively. Lawyers and voluntary welfare organisations interviewed by The Straits Times in an article titled “Record number of protection orders against harassment filed and granted in 2021” dated 30 October 2022 attributed the increase in applications to greater awareness of POHA in recent years, as well as the ease by which POHA applications can be made because of online processes, lowered costs and expedited hearings.

83. Statistics on the breakdown of harassment cases (including sexual harassment cases) filed with the PHC from its operationalisation on 1 June 2021 to 30 June 2022 (see Annex I for details), as follows:

<i>Breakdown of harassment cases filed with the Protection from Harassment Court</i>	<i>1 June–31 December 2021</i>	<i>1 January–30 June 2022</i>
Sexual Harassment	34	33
Workplace Harassment	78	62
Cyber-bullying	114	90
Doxxing	121	88
Harassment by debt collectors, moneylenders, or creditors	38	18

84. The Government continually monitors the effectiveness of the PHC, including by collecting data on sexual harassment cases (amongst other types of harassment cases) filed in the PHC, including the number of PHC cases filed for POs and the number of POs issued.

## **XXIV. Reply to paragraph 18(a) of the list of issues and questions**

85. Singapore continues to enhance efforts and review policies to safeguard migrant domestic workers (MDWs)’s well-being in Singapore. Based on a survey conducted by MOM in 2021, more than 9 in 10 MDWs surveyed were satisfied with working and living in Singapore and would recommend their family or friends to work in Singapore as an MDW. MDWs also reported high levels of satisfaction across various areas of well-being, such as accommodation, emotional support and sufficiency of

food provided (over 90per cent). Over 90per cent of MDWs surveyed indicated that they had received their salaries on time.

86. As explained in [149] of the Periodic Report, protections for MDWs are legislated under EFMA. EFMA regulates the employment of MDWs and protects their well-being. This includes comprehensive protection on areas including the provision of proper accommodation, adequate rest, medical care, a safe working environment, and timely payment of salaries. The Government continually reviews legislation such as EFMA and other measures to safeguard MDWs' well-being in Singapore.

## **XXV. Reply to paragraph 18(b) of the list of issues and questions**

87. All domestic workers, local or foreign, are not covered by the EA given that the nature of their work differs from non-domestic workplaces. As stated above, the well-being of MDWs is addressed under the EFMA. As stated in [150] of the Periodic Report, in the area of medical care, the EFMA offers comprehensive protection by requiring all employers to bear the medical expenses of their MDWs. To help employers meet this obligation, they must purchase Personal Accident Insurance, which provides pay-outs in case of accidental death or permanent disability, and medical insurance for their MDW's inpatient expenses. MOM has plans to enhance the medical insurance coverage.

88. As stated in [151] of the Periodic Report, employers must provide MDWs with proper accommodation and adequate food. MOM has drawn up guidelines on these areas so that employers are aware of their responsibilities and MDWs are aware of what must be provided.

89. On rest, under the EFMA, MDWs are entitled to one rest day per week, but can agree with their employers to be compensated if the rest day is not taken. From 1 January 2023, employers are required to grant their MDWs with at least one rest day each month that cannot be compensated.

## **XXVI. Reply to paragraph 18(c) of the list of issues and questions**

90. The EFMA requires employers to pay the MDW's salary monthly and no later than 7 days after the last day of the salary period. Further, employers must declare the MDW's salary to MOM and pay minimally what is declared. Employers are not allowed to prevent or restrict access by MDWs to their salary or monies, regardless of whether the MDW consents. Employers who default on salary payments can be fined up to S\$10,000 and jailed up to 1 year.

91. Employers and employment agencies are not allowed to withhold the personal property of any migrant worker, including MDWs. Under the Passports Act, it is an offence to withhold a passport that belongs to someone else. The EFMA disallows employers from withholding other personal documents, including the work permits of their workers. The mobile phone of an MDW is also her personal property and the MDW has the right to keep it.

92. MOM educates all first-time MDW employers, through the Employer Orientation Programme, on their responsibilities of care towards their MDWs, as well as how to manage their relationships. First-time MDWs also attend the Settling-in-Programme, where they are educated on their conditions of employment, how to work safely, and their rights and responsibilities.

93. MDWs with employment issues, including non-payment of salary, deprivation of food, refusal to pay medical expenses, can report these via multiple channels,

including a toll-free MOM MDW helpline. Those who require advice or wish to report concerns can also contact their relevant embassies and NGOs.

94. Singapore takes a very serious view of violence perpetrated against MDWs. Complaints of abuse are investigated by the SPF. As highlighted in [149] of the Periodic Report, the Penal Code was enhanced in 2020 such that the employer of an MDW or a member of the employer's household convicted of abusing the MDW would face up to double the maximum penalties prescribed for the offence. Those convicted will also be permanently barred from future employment of MDWs.

95. MOM takes proactive steps to better detect signs of abuse and employment issues. For example, MOM had enhanced the six-monthly medical examination process from August 2021 to explicitly require doctors to check for signs of suspicious and unexplained injury. In conjunction with the enhancements, MOM also discontinued home-based medical examinations to ensure that MDWs see their doctors in the clinic to better enable doctors to detect issues. Further, as stated in [151] of the Periodic Report, from April 2021, MOM-appointed officers conduct random house visits to check that MDWs have adjusted well and have no well-being issues, and from December 2021, employment agencies are required to conduct at least one post-placement check within the first three months of the MDW's placement, to ensure that MDWs and their employers are adjusting well to the new employment relationship and to offer support if needed.

## **XXVII. Reply to paragraph 18(d) of the list of issues and questions**

96. Generally, an employer's consent is required before an MDW can seek new employment in Singapore. This is to balance the interests of MDWs to have the scope to change jobs and the interests of their employers for stability and predictability in the employment relationship.

97. Notwithstanding this, like other employer-employee relationships, employment contracts between the employer and the MDW generally allow both the employer and the MDW to terminate their employment relationship at any time with notice as contractually agreed. The MDW would be able to return home and look for another employer thereafter.

## **XXVIII. Reply to paragraph 18(e) of the list of issues and questions**

98. Regarding the Domestic Workers Convention, Singapore is committed to protecting the well-being of MDWs. To this end, MDWs in Singapore are protected by a comprehensive framework of laws and enforcement measures that account for the different work arrangements of the domestic workplace. As explained in [156] of the Periodic Report, Singapore ratifies international treaties only if we can fully comply with them and it is in our national interest to do so. Although we have not ratified the Domestic Workers Convention, we agree with its spirit and will continue to review our ability to ratify the said Convention and improve labour standards for our MDWs.

## **XXIX. Reply to paragraph 19 of the list of issues and questions**

99. All Singaporeans have access to affordable and quality healthcare including reproductive and sexual health services at inpatient and outpatient settings. There are existing protocols to ensure that patients facing language barriers are supported. The healthcare staff in Singapore hospitals and clinics are diverse in ethnicity and thus

can communicate appropriately with patients who can only speak certain languages. Further, health-related public communications are disseminated in multiple languages. For instance, information regarding COVID-19 was disseminated in the four national languages to ensure wider access to information, including by ethnic minorities.

100. In 2022, Singapore published its multi-year strategy centred on preventive care to improve the health of our population. “Healthier SG” aims to prevent individuals from falling ill and empower individuals to improve their health by transforming “sick systems” (focusing on treating diseases) into “health systems” with health-enabling environments and systems that empower individuals to improve and manage their health proactively.

101. All Singapore residents have access to health services and screening. This provides the opportunity for doctors to address the social determinants of health which influence health behaviours (e.g. perception of chronic diseases, screening participation).

102. In addition, Singapore set up an inter-agency Taskforce on Child and Maternal Health and Well-being in 2021 to develop a national strategy addressing cross-cutting issues to enhance support for women and their children, and improve their health outcomes. The strategy includes policies and initiatives that support women’s physical health, mental health, and overall well-being from preconception, through pregnancy to motherhood. This effort will help every pregnant woman gain equitable access to quality maternal care services including pre-natal and post-natal check-ups, maternal mental health screening and support, obstetrics services, neo-natal care, breastfeeding and lactation support.

103. Singapore also recognises that cultural differences may influence lifestyle and health behaviours across ethnic groups, and these may contribute to disparities in health outcomes (i.e. obesity, cancer and diabetes rates).

104. Based on findings from the National Population Health Surveys (NPHS), which look at the trends of several health indicators corresponding to the different segments of the Singapore population, Singapore has set up a Workgroup to close disparities in health outcomes between ethnic groups through the implementation of year-round healthy living activities, which aim to improve health and well-being. The Workgroup is supported by the Health Promotion Board (HPB) which develops culturally relevant programmes to improve the health status of the different communities (see Annex J for examples on community-targeted health strategies), in partnership with community partners.

105. The Women’s Health Committee (WHC), comprising multi-ethnic stakeholders from community outreach and advocacy organisations, Government agencies and a diverse pool of health experts, actively looks at increasing awareness and encouraging all women, regardless of ethnicity, to take action to improve their health and well-being at all stages of life. The WHC currently focuses on cancer screening, bone health and young women’s health.

106. Healthcare professionals such as doctors and nurses play an important role in providing healthcare services relating to sexual and reproductive health, as well as family planning, and are trained to support patients with empathy, sensitivity and due consideration of their specific care needs. (See Annex K for examples of measures to avoid discriminatory treatment in access to healthcare services).

### XXX. Reply to paragraph 20 of the list of issues and questions

107. As described in MFF 2025, all citizen children will enjoy benefits that support their growth, development and caregiving, regardless of their parents' marital status. These include:

- (a) Education subsidies;
- (b) Childcare and infant care subsidies;
- (c) Healthcare subsidies;
- (d) MediSave Grant for Newborns;
- (e) MediShield Life coverage from birth;
- (f) Foreign Domestic Worker Levy Concession.

108. In 2016 and 2017, we further extended support to unwed parents through the Government-Paid Maternity Leave and the Child Development Account (CDA), which includes the CDA First Step and matched co-savings from the Government. For single parents in financial need, our Social Service Officers provide support such as ComCare cash assistance for basic living expenses, as well as assistance with household and medical bills.

109. Family Service Centres (FSCs) also work with women and their children to address their social and emotional needs by providing case management and referral support services. Complementing these services are community-based support for single parents at Project Athena, HELP FSC, *Persatuan Pemuda Islam Singapura* (PPIS)<sup>8</sup> *As-Salaam*; as well as faith-based support like Empowering Single Parents Network to support them in their single parenting journey.

110. In addition to the above and with reference to [212] of the Periodic Report, MSF's Alliance for Action to Strengthen Marriages and Family Relationships has a dedicated Focal Area on "Support for Single Parents", where it consulted single parents, including unwed parents, to galvanise and support community initiatives that support single parents in their parenting journey. Some initiatives include a pilot childminding service for working parents who require caregiving services outside childcare centres' operating hours and a one-stop portal that provides information and resources for single parents, and training content to help volunteer befrienders better engage and support single-parent families.

111. The Government is committed to ensure that no child is left without adequate shelter to grow up in. Currently, unwed parents may purchase a new two- or three-room flat from Housing Development Board (HDB) in a non-mature estate or a resale flat in any estate. Those who cannot afford to buy a flat and have no other housing options may be considered for public rental flats, if it is in their child's best interests. HDB will continue to review every request from unwed parents holistically and work with social workers to render them housing assistance in the best interest of their children.

112. However, our Marriage and Parenthood policies seek to promote and strengthen the institution of family and encourage parenthood within marriage. Hence, certain policies and benefits including the Baby Bonus Cash Gift are designed as measures to support the raising of children within families, and are therefore not extended to single unwed parents.

<sup>8</sup> Otherwise known as Singapore Muslim Women's Association.

113. Families who wish to have more children can receive Government benefits as highlighted in [107] above. Lower-income families, regardless of the number of children they have, benefit from various forms of government support such as financial assistance, education, medical and housing subsidies. On top of this comprehensive support, there are other social assistance schemes which are more targeted. The Home Ownership Plus Education (HOPE) scheme is a voluntary programme that provides additional support for lower-income families who choose to keep their families small.

### **XXXI. Reply to paragraph 21 of the list of issues and questions**

114. As our society ages, Singapore continues to review policies and measures for older women take into account their specific needs.

115. As stated at [43] of the Periodic Report, the Government ministries and public sector agencies coordinate and implement initiatives under their purview to better address the needs of women. This includes data collection, disaggregated by sex, age, and ethnicity. Currently, such data is widely available in the statistics published by the Department of Statistics, such as the Census of Population 2020, including various demographic and socio-economic topics such as highest qualification attained, literacy, economic characteristics and difficulty in performing basic activity. Data on the health and caregiving needs of all Singaporeans, including older women, are collected through population-based studies such as the NPHS and the Retirement and Health Study by the Central Provident Fund Board which are disaggregated by age, sex, and ethnicity. These studies are further supplemented by research findings from Singapore's social service agencies and academic institutions, and provide insights which the Government uses to refine our policies and measures.

116. Singapore recognises the importance of mindset shifts, where men and women partner each other as equals, including in the family. For instance, as part of the action plans in the White Paper, our education curricula includes building appreciation of the equity of roles in the family and the Government working closely with community partners such as Families for Life and Centre for Fathering to promote active fatherhood and shared parenting responsibilities to shift mindsets. Other action plans include the Government working with employers and the unions to entrench FWA as a workplace norm to better balance work and caregiving responsibilities (see [80(b)] above for details) and increasing financial support through an enhanced Home Caregiving Grant to ease the caregiving journey.

117. On ageing, Singapore adopts a holistic, whole-of-society policy approach towards enabling all Singaporeans, to optimise their physical, mental and social health as they age. The Action Plan on Successful Ageing (APSA) delivers more than 70 initiatives in the 12 areas such as health and wellness, learning, volunteerism, employment, housing, and transport. To meet the needs of all seniors today and tomorrow, the Ministerial Committee on Ageing has launched the refreshed Action Plan in 2023.

118. To ensure that policies and measures of the APSA and the Caregiver Support Action Plan are relevant to the needs of all Singaporeans, citizen engagement focus groups have been conducted to support policy development.

**XXXII. Reply to paragraph 22 of the list of issues and questions**

119. If an individual has to attend the Mandatory Co-Parenting Programme (CPP) (i.e. he or she is undergoing a divorce and has a minor child) and does not feel safe attending with their spouse, they can choose to attend alone.

120. Additionally, there are safeguards in place should there be safety concerns (either prior to CPP or during the CPP):

121. If parents have active safety concerns which are known to a counsellor prior to their attendance at CPP, the counsellor will refer the family to a PSC for support. For parents who are receiving support for family violence from the PSC, the PSC will conduct CPP for the known parent(s), individually or with their spouse.

122. In instances where safety concerns are raised by the parents, or identified by the counsellors during CPP, the family will be referred to a PSC.

123. There are provisions to allow parties to divorce within the first 3 years of marriage, e.g. exceptional hardship suffered by the plaintiff or of exceptional depravity on the part of the defendant, which can include family violence. In such cases, the court may grant leave to allow a writ for divorce to be filed before 3 years have passed. Each case will be determined on its facts.

124. Specialised support is also offered for survivors of family violence, who may approach any of the PSCs or PAVE's Integrated Services for Individual and Family PSC for support and assistance at any point. Additionally, PSCs collaborate with organisations who can offer legal assistance to the survivors, where necessary. Survivors of family violence may also be referred to crisis shelters, including Star Shelter and Casa Raudha, for shelter and support.

125. Foreign spouses of SCs or PRs are eligible to apply for the Long-Term Visit Pass (LTVP) with a validity period of one year on initial issue and up to two years on renewal. Some foreign spouses may also be granted Long-Term Visit Pass-Plus (LTVP+), which has a longer validity. Considerations include foreign spouses who have children who are SCs, marriage duration, ability of the sponsor to financially support the family, and good conduct of both the sponsor and the foreign spouse. LTVP+ holders are eligible for healthcare subsidies for in-patient services in restructured hospitals at a level similar to PRs. Foreign spouses of SCs or PRs who are on LTVP or LTVP+ can obtain a Letter of Consent (LOC) or Pre-Approved LOC to work in Singapore without their employers being subject to migrant worker levies or quotas. Please see [242] of the Periodic Report on eligibility to work in Singapore.

126. The granting of permanent residency to foreign spouses of SCs is not automatic as in most countries. Each application for permanent residency is assessed holistically against a range of criteria to ensure that the SC spouse can support the family and that the marriage is stable. Having SC children from the marriage would be advantageous to the application.

127. The broad factors considered when assessing applications for permanent residency are stated on the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority website, including family ties to Singaporeans, economic contribution, educational qualification, age and family profile. Similar to immigration authorities around the world, we do not publish detailed criteria for permanent residency and citizenship as this could lead to gaming and abuse of the system.

### **XXXIII. Reply to paragraph 23(a) of the list of issues and questions**

128. Under the WC, minors must be at least 18 years old to have their marriage solemnised. However, a Special Marriage Licence (SML) may be applied for if a party is below 18 years old. Prior to the approval of the SML, both applicants are required to complete a mandatory marriage preparation workshop, and strongly encouraged to attend a pre-natal workshop (if the female applicant is pregnant). Their application will then be thoroughly assessed by a qualified social worker appointed by MSF before a recommendation is made. In practice, such marriages are rare, and the number has declined from 11 (0.05 per cent) in 2017 to 1 (0.005 per cent) in 2021.

129. Consent is also required for parties to enter into marriage. The WC states that “no marriage shall be solemnized unless the person solemnizing the marriage is satisfied that both the parties to the marriage freely consent to the marriage.”

130. Although the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA) allows for the marriage of a girl below 18 years of age, it can only be done (i) under exceptional circumstances with the approval of the *Kadi* (solemniser) and (ii) with the consent of the minor’s parents/legal guardian. In practice, such marriages are rare, and the number has declined from 12 (0.2 per cent) in 2017 to 5 (0.08 per cent) in 2021.

### **XXXIV. Reply to paragraph 23(b) of the list of issues and questions**

131. The Registry of Muslim Marriages (ROMM) has strict safeguards in place to discourage polygamous marriages. Persons wishing to enter into a polygamous marriage must first apply to the ROMM to do so and go through a stringent application process.

132. The *Kadi*, in assessing whether to approve an application for polygamous marriage, considers factors such as the views of the applicant’s wife, the applicant’s financial capability to support more than one family, the applicant’s reason for wanting to enter into a second marriage. The *Kadi* must satisfy himself that there is no lawful obstacle to the marriage.

133. If a person applying to enter into a Muslim marriage in Singapore purports to be married overseas, whether in a civil or Muslim marriage, the ROMM will not allow that person to enter into a Muslim marriage in Singapore unless that foreign marriage is dissolved.

### **XXXV. Reply to paragraph 23(c) of the list of issues and questions**

134. Under the AMLA, both men and women can initiate divorce proceedings. A woman may apply for divorce in accordance with Muslim law on various grounds, some of which are exclusive to woman such as the husband’s failure to perform marital obligations.

135. In respect of all grounds of divorce, the relevant facts in a particular case must be proved, and the standard of proof is the same regardless of whether the divorce applicant is the husband or the wife.

136. As explained in [227] of the Periodic Report, upon divorce, Muslim men are also required to maintain their ex-wives during the *iddah* (waiting period before a divorced woman may marry another man) and obliged to provide *mutaah* (a consolatory gift), and repay any outstanding marriage expenses and *emas kahwin* (compulsory marriage gift).

137. As for other ancillary matters such as division of matrimonial assets, or custody, care and control of the children, both men and women may make claims and are entitled to receive shares from the division of matrimonial assets, and obtain custody of and access to children as the Court sees fit based on the paramount consideration of welfare of the child.

### **XXXVI. Reply to paragraph 23(d) of the list of issues and questions**

138. The *Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura* (MUIS) Fatwa Committee has released fatwas (religious rulings) over the years to allow families to protect the financial welfare of Muslim women and their dependents upon the demise of a family member. 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 available alternative tools and instruments, in addition to the *faraidh* (Muslim Inheritance Law) (see [232] of the Periodic Report for details on efforts to raise public awareness of these fatwas).

139. MUIS has also conducted public outreach efforts through various platforms such as Continuing Professional Education courses for *asatizah* (Muslim religious teachers), a series of talks and forums at mosques across Singapore, social media campaigns and via the national radio. These public education efforts were aimed at educating the community on the range of financial planning instruments available for Muslim families.

140. The amendments in 2017 to Sections 116 and 117 of AMLA now allow for the court, if it thinks fit, to permit women beneficiaries to become sole administrators of a deceased man's estate. This was previously not possible, although husbands were allowed to become sole administrators to their wives' estate. These amendments eliminate differential treatment of a wife's administration of a husband's estate.

### **XXXVII. Reply to paragraph 23(e) of the list of issues and questions**

141. Female officers play a significant role in various Muslim institutions. There is increased representation of women to important positions in administering Muslim Family Law in Singapore, in both Syariah Court and ROMM, as mentioned in [122g] of the Periodic Report. Additionally, women also comprise 30per cent of the Council of MUIS and 24per cent of the Appeal Board. However, for ROMM, the roles of *Kadi* and *Naib Kadi* involve religious rituals that must only be carried out by males.