

AWARE’s recommendations on ‘Our Population, Our Future – Public Engagement on Population Challenges’

AWARE thanks the National Population and Talent Division (NPTD) for initiating public engagement on population challenges. AWARE makes the following recommendations to the NPTD on the three areas of focus – a strong and cohesive society, a good quality living environment, a sustainable and vibrant economy. These recommendations address the questions posed on pages 22, 25 and 32 of the Issues Paper.¹

No.	Questions raised in the NPTD Issues Paper ‘Our Population, Our Future’	AWARE’s Recommendations	Justifications
Getting married and having children			
1	How can we support Singaporeans who wish to marry earlier and have more children?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would be misguided to regard early marriage as the cause of having more children. • Instead, support alternative modes of parenting, including adoption and options for parents who want to have their children later in life. • Shorten by one year (i) the legally required length of separation for divorce, with or without consent, and (ii) the three year time bar for divorces, so as to increase the opportunity for re-marriage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any imputed causal relation between early marriage and starting families earlier has yet to be shown. The causality may even be the other way around. Many early marriages may be precipitated by an unexpected pregnancy. Consequently, there is also a high correlation between early marriage and divorce. • Policies must recognize existing trends: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Singaporeans are marrying later (30.1 years of age for males and 27.8 years for females) (b) The median age of citizen mothers at first birth is 29.8 years.² • The number of marital dissolutions increased to 7,604 in 2011 from 7,338 in 2010.
2	What more can we as a country and people do to promote marriage and parenthood, and foster a supportive environment for family life?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make gender equality a core value in all policies in order to support shared parenthood. • Legislate at least 2 weeks of paid paternity leave with costs shared between employer and State. • Ensure that any paternity leave measures are 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biased norms restrict men to the role of breadwinners and women to that of caregivers. Fathers are thus deprived of a caregiving role, which negatively impacts on the father-child relationship, while mothers are pressured into dropping out of the workforce.

¹ National Population and Talent Division, ‘Our Population, Our Future Issue paper July 2012.’

² National Population and Talent Division, ‘Population in brief 2012.’

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		<p>accompanied by protections against discrimination.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convert four weeks of the 16-week maternity leave to parental leave to be taken by either spouse. • Promote active parenting by men and dispel misinformed stereotypes of manhood. • Eliminate discrimination against mothers in the workplace and provide job security after childbirth. • Eliminate discrimination against pregnant workers or parents spending time with their children. • Adopt the best practices of other countries which do not penalize employees for being parents and have stable fertility rates. • Extend equal childcare benefits to all parents single or married, male or female. • Redirect the sizeable amount used for the ineffective Baby Bonus Scheme to enable to promote gender-equitable shared parenthood (see recommendations above). 	<p>Both men and women are thus unable to develop their full human potential.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's workforce participation rates decline from the age of 30 onwards. This indicates that many who leave the workforce do not return.³ • Discrimination against single parents (male and female) should be abolished with support provided to ensure that the children of single parents do not fall into a poverty trap. • Policies need to be based on the recognition that people are making childbearing decisions in a holistic and responsible manner. They evaluate what it takes to raise children as responsible parents, what their responsibilities toward other family members are, what capacities they have to build long-term stable homes. It is not short-term materialism that makes people think that they cannot afford children, but responsible and realistic evaluations of how much they need to bear in terms of costs for care for elderly parents of husband and wife, healthcare needs for themselves and families, as well as their own retirement needs in an expensive city. • The Baby Bonus scheme does not address these root causes and is thus ineffective, as indicated by the declining TFR.
Immigration			

³ Ministry of Manpower, 'Singapore Workforce 2011'.

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1	Is it important to prevent our citizen population from declining?	<p>No. The citizen population came into being only from 1965 onwards. Almost all citizens are the descendants of migrants. What is important would be the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance of an optimal population size that would support a desirable quality of life for all citizens and all those who make Singapore their home. • Support active and health ageing with the elderly remaining as productive members of society. • Ensure a fair and transparent system of immigration so that a diversified pool of immigrants can become permanent residents and, eventually, citizens, contributing to all sectors of society, so that Singapore is not just a stepping stone to other shores.⁴ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The TFR issue should not lead to an over-emphasis on increasing population at all costs in order to meet workforce needs. • If the issue we are concerned about is that of an ageing population and a shrinking workforce, attempts to reverse the declining TFR may not be an effective solution. An IPS study shows that increasing the TFR from 1.2 to 1.85 (a highly ambitious target) would only marginally ameliorate the situation.⁵ • Singaporean citizens are not anti-migrant if they are assured that they themselves are not discriminated against and that no biased preference is given to immigrants from certain countries or in certain sectors. • Some of the resentment against foreigners results from the dominance of certain types of foreigners. Greater diversity would reduce this and would optimise the potential contributions of foreigners to Singapore.
2	The government has reduced the inflow of immigrants significantly since 2009. Should we reduce the inflow further even if it means that our citizen population will age and shrink, and foreign spouses and dependants of Singaporeans may find it more difficult to become PR or SCs?	<p>No. The issue is not about the quantitative inflow of immigrants as if all immigrants are now treated equally. Instead, focus on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure a clear and reasonable path, within a specified timeframe, for the foreign wives of Singaporean men to obtain permanent residency and then citizenship. Currently, foreign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marriages between citizens and non-citizens made up 39.4% of all marriages involving citizens in 2011. 77% of these marriages were between citizen grooms and non-citizen brides⁶. However, these brides are not granted automatic right of entry and residence. There is currently no transparency about the condi-

⁴ See, for example, Ong 2010.

⁵ Yap *et al* 2011.

⁶ National Population and Talent Division, 'Population in brief 2012'.

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		<p>wives, including those who are mothers of Singaporean children, only have a long-term social visit pass+, with no clear path to obtaining PR and citizenship.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address the root causes of resentment among citizens, especially increased competition for jobs, housing, education, basic needs, etc. 	<p>tions under which foreign wives can qualify for permanent residence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2008 alone, around 30% of all Singaporean citizen births had one non-citizen parent. About 70% of these births involved a foreign wife married to a Singaporean husband.⁷ • Inflation, currently 4.7%, indicates a relative scarcity of supply in relation to demand, resulting in increased competition for scarce goods. Policies should address the factors that impact on the demand and supply of scarce resources, including stresses in the global economy, policy changes, etc.
Integration is a collective journey			
1	How can we improve interactions and strengthen cohesion between Singaporeans and new immigrants?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that Singaporeans are not discriminated against in favour of foreigners. • Consider the possibility of anti-discrimination legislation to ensure equal treatment for all, citizens and non-citizens alike. • Eradicate all forms of discrimination on grounds of race, language, religion, nationality, age, disability, gender, or any other marker of difference. • Ensure a diversified pool of immigrants, contributing to all sectors of the economy, instead of immigration being skewed towards certain countries and sectors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blogs have been posted by Singaporeans expressing unhappiness about being discriminated against in their own country.⁸ But such unhappiness cannot be addressed by xenophobia. We would end up in vicious cycle of discrimination, counter-discrimination, counter-counter-discrimination, and so on, <i>ad infinitum</i>. This will tear apart the fabric of our society as an integrated whole. • The lack of anti-discrimination legislation allows discriminatory practices to occur, based on any marker of difference, not just nationality. The job ad that specified only PRC Chi-

⁷ National Population and Talent Division, 'An occasional paper on marriages between Singapore citizens and non-Singapore citizens 1998 – 2008'.

⁸ See, for example: 'Discrimination in Singapore', <http://soojenn.blogspot.sg/2012/03/discrimination-in-singapore.html>, 'Discrimination against Singaporeans', <http://singaporemind.blogspot.sg/2011/11/discrimination-against-singaporeans.html>.

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			<p>nese was made possible by the existing plethora of discriminatory job ads that ask for Chinese speaking applicants only, that discriminate against Malay and Indian Singaporeans in favour of Chinese Singaporeans, as well as recruitment practices that favour men over women or the able-bodied over the disabled. In short, discriminations against Singaporeans exist only because discrimination as such is condoned as a social norm, which can be practised with impunity by those in positions of relative superiority.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is needed is anti-discrimination legislation that protects all workers and prevents a broad range of discrimination, not only at the workplace but throughout society.
2	How can we enhance mutual understanding of, and respect for, one another's cultures and customs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable the development of Singapore as a multi-cultural society where people are not pigeon-holed into just one of four ethnic categories but rather, a genuinely cosmopolitan society where people can appreciate a wide range of cultural diversity. • Ensure rights of equal citizenship, opportunities and access to national resources to all citizens, 'regardless of race, language or religion', as promised in our Constitution. • Ensure equal opportunities for upward social mobility to all ethnic groups so that there is no over-representation of one particular ethnic group among the poor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The division of Singapore society into four ethnic categories (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Other) carries the risk of having racial stereotypes applied to large sectors of the population, as we have seen in recent months. • Laws and policies must support the necessary evolution of Singapore beyond racialised compartments to an integrated society that appreciates its culturally diverse past, present and future.⁹ • Uneven social outcomes show that aggregate gains have been made without reducing inequalities over time. Statistics indicate that Singaporeans of Chinese and Indian descent are

⁹ See, for example: Imran 2012.

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			still ahead by 25-27 percentage points in the attainment of post-secondary education, compared to Singaporeans of Malay descent. ¹⁰
A home for Singaporeans, a global city			
1	What makes Singapore special as a home and how can we make Singapore a place where both we and our children want to live in the future?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reform the education system to reduce stress on children and parents while promoting creative learning. • Lower the cost of public housing and expand access beyond outdated family units that do not match reality, including singles and single parents. • Expand support for caregivers, the disabled and the poor. • Provide fairer distribution of benefits and support without discriminating against lower-income families or single parents. • Caregiving spouses/stay at home mothers must have financial and medical protection, including regular deposits into their CPF accounts. • Reduce out-of-pocket payments for healthcare, especially for older women with less Medisave and Medishield. • Ensure that Singaporeans can afford to retire in their own country without having to migrate in their old age to a cheaper country. • Support the vulnerable members of society, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies relating to housing, health, employment and retirement shape how people think about their future, especially their future in Singapore. • Without adequate social support for the vulnerable, including the elderly, younger Singaporeans have to think of how they will cope with high out-of-pocket costs for healthcare when they themselves become older. Singaporeans currently pay 55% of healthcare costs out of their own pockets, compared to only 30% in Hong Kong and Taiwan. • Stress is induced by an educational system that still emphasises rote-learning, with the constant danger of being filtered out of a highly competitive 'talent pool.' This becomes a push factor for families with young children to migrate to other countries that are more supportive of child development in a more balanced way. • The impoverishment of many elderly people has led an abnormally high rate of elderly suicides in Singapore.¹¹ • When spending is pooled as investment in

¹⁰ Department of Statistics, Census of Population 2010.

¹¹ Wee *et al*, 2012.

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		<p>including the disabled and the elderly, without insisting that their families must be their first and primary source of support for individuals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the idea that all Singaporeans are mutually responsible for each other, 'regardless of race, language or religion.' • Redesign social spending so that it is not always channeled to individuals, individual families or ethnic categories, so as to send the clear signal that public spending is for supporting everyone. • Focus on existing commonalities that Singaporeans already have and recognise the spontaneous emergence of shared values, without seeking to impose artificial constructions of identity through government interventions. 	<p>public services, this can benefit society as a whole. Handouts given to crudely targetted individuals or individual families (based, for example, on housing type or household income) are not the most effective way of providing social support to those in need.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies that divide Singaporeans into ethnic categories, that favour high net worth individuals and that promote public indifference to the needs of the vulnerable block the development of a collective Singaporean identity, shared by all Singaporeans.
2	How can we optimise our land use while ensuring a good living environment?	<p>The question is: optimise our land use for whom? For the benefit of all citizens or only for property developers? If land is to be used for the benefit of all citizens, there is no contradiction between optimising land use and ensuring a good living environment. Therefore, the recommendation is:</p> <p>Optimise land use for the benefit of all citizens, thereby ensuring a good living environment for them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land use policies must protect public spaces that citizens can call their own, to which they can form long-lasting attachments.¹² • Land use policies must ensure that Singapore does not become only a morass of roads that lead only to the airport at one end and to the second causeway at the other end, with some shopping malls in the middle.
3	What else can we do to improve the current infrastructure shortfall?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stabilise the population at its current size – slightly more than 5 million, while developing the infrastructure to meet public needs. • Ensure that population growth does not ex- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current urban development paradigm of 'destroy-and-rebuild' is unsustainable. • There needs to be a halt to building increasingly more shopping malls that use a dispro-

¹² Lim and Wong 2011.

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		<p>ceed the pace of infrastructure development. If the population needs to grow, the rate of growth should not exceed 0.5%.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the public transportation system to ensure greater reliability and access. • Develop environmentally sustainable urban development by minimising our carbon footprint. 	<p>portionate amount of energy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental sustainability has to be discussed as a necessity, not an unaffordable luxury.¹³
Creating opportunities for Singaporeans			
1	What kind of opportunities and career options do you wish for yourself and your children in Singapore? How do we create such opportunities for them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the growing gap between rich and poor. • Improve social mobility across generations. • Reduce the feminisation of poverty (i.e. a situation where most of the poor are female). • Increase social spending as a percentage of GDP. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Gini coefficient in 2010 was 0.452, an increase from 0.43 in 2000. • Singapore has an intergenerational income elasticity of 0.58 (i.e. 58% of the economic advantage gained by higher-income families is inherited by the children). This means less social mobility than Hong Kong (0.4) and the Scandinavian countries (lower than 0.3)¹⁴ • Social spending in Singapore has decreased significantly from 25% of GDP in the 1980s to only 16% or less in 2011. Compared to Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan, Singapore spends the smallest amount on social programmes, with uneven consequences for rich and poor.¹⁵ • An inclusive society is necessarily a caring society where everyone cares for everyone else. It is not a dog-eat-dog over-competitive

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Tan 2011.

¹⁵ AWARE, 'Feedback for the Singapore Budget 2012, Calling for an inclusive budget to support a caring society'.

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			<p>society where winners take all and losers lie down and die. Policies, practices and values that breed elitism and that valorise might as right do not promote inclusivity. They lead to people treating Singapore simply as an arena of competition, to be used only when they themselves have the chance of winning over others, not a home to live in for all phases of life or across generations.</p>
2	<p>How do we encourage employers to provide more good jobs for Singaporeans and build up a sustainable Singaporean core?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide appropriate opportunities for Singaporeans to upgrade their skills and increase productivity • Provide subsidies to stay-at-home caregivers to enable them to attend skills training. • Professionalise blue-collar jobs as integral to the workforce and move such jobs up the value chain.¹⁶ • Encourage young people to take up part-time jobs at an earlier age.¹⁷ • Increase incentives to SMEs to hire Singaporean workers, rather than lower-waged foreign workers. • Eradicate policies that encourage the exploitation of foreign workers (e.g. no regulation of minimum wage, no limit on FDWs' working hours). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More job opportunities will be created for Singaporeans when blue-collar jobs become professionalised as higher value, higher waged jobs that are respected, instead of being low-waged jobs that only transient foreign workers would want. • Stay-at-home caregivers should receive the same financial support provided by the Parents Tax Rebate and Working Mothers Child Relief policies that are currently biased in favour of working mothers who are on higher salaries. Stay-at-home caregivers, including those who care for elderly family members, need support to enable them to upgrade their skills to ensure employability. • Policies that encourage the exploitation of foreign workers downgrade the industries that rely on their labour. Singaporeans will not want to work in these exploitative industries. • Policies and practices that place a lower value

¹⁶ "Treat blue-collar jobs with respect: Tharman", 5 April 2012, <http://www.asiaone.com/News/Latest%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20120405-337929.html>

¹⁷ Ibid.

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			<p>on the lives and well-being of certain human beings, because they happen to be non-Singaporeans, also lead to Singaporean devaluing the lives and well-being of other Singaporeans. This has far-reaching implications on the Singaporean identity that is to be developed. Is this an inclusive identity or an elitist one where the lives and well-being of high net worth individuals matter more than those of other people?</p>
3	<p>Raising productivity and improving our labour force participation are long-term challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aim for high productivity growth, instead of trying to increase TFR, which IPS research has shown to be of minimal significance.¹⁸ • Focus on increasing productivity in the workforce and moving the Singapore economy up the value chain. • Combat the commodification of labour by protecting the erosion of wages from outsourcing (such as the Government's accreditation scheme for contract cleaning companies) and precarious work. • Strengthen the ability of freelance and contract workers to negotiate for fair contracts and timely payment. 	<p>As noted in a blog: "A few small changes to restrict the hiring of foreigners implemented by the govt early this year saw much resistance and complaints from employers. Many of them have over time become very dependent on foreign workers. The govt took the short cut to GDP growth by pandering to business demand for cheap foreign labor instead of investing to improve productivity and innovating to move up the value chain. We have walked too far down this road and it is now very difficult to turn back quickly. The high social costs make this model of growth unsustainable and the price has been paid for mostly by ordinary Singaporeans who have to struggle harder to support their families."¹⁹</p>
4	<p>How can we encourage more Singaporeans to join the workforce? Which industry sectors or job areas do you think more Singaporeans can be encouraged to work in?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address impediments that prevent women from remaining in or returning to the workforce, e.g. lack of flexible work, long work hours, gaps in caregiving, lopsided gender di- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are saddled with the double burden of being workers and main family caregivers. More effort must be made to ensure that women stay in and/or re-enter the workforce

¹⁸ Yap *et al* 2011.

¹⁹ 'Discrimination against Singaporeans', 4 Nov 2011, *Diary of a Singaporean Mind*, <http://singaporemind.blogspot.sg/2011/11/discrimination-against-singaporeans.html>

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		<p>vision of responsibility in domestic matters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentivise employers to adopt flexible working arrangements and ensure more effective use of working hours in their organisation in a normal work-day. • Locate more affordable childcare and childcare centres near or at workplaces or homes. • Encourage employers to support male employees' as parents. • Promote supportive practices in the employment of pregnant workers so that they are not penalised for being mothers. • Adopt the best practices of other countries in fair treatment of pregnant women and mothers, eradicate discrimination towards them and provide comprehensive job protection. • Address the issue of brain drain: what are its root causes? 	<p>through more flexible working arrangements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The take-up rate for companies offering paternity leave is still low. Only 48% of companies with at least 25 employees offered paternity leave in 2010²⁰. • Current protection against pregnancy discrimination has many loopholes. Discrimination against female employees on the basis of pregnancy and maternity leads to vulnerability among those affected, as well as negative examples of the undesirability for female employees to become pregnant. • 1,200 Singaporeans give up their citizenship yearly.²¹ We are losing up to 5% of the top 30% of the population every year.²² Push factors leading to the brain drain must be addressed, as it is pointless to try and promote the TFR or increase the population when the persistence of such push factors will continue to motivate the brain drain of Singaporeans, who should be valued as part of our society.
5	How do we better prepare Singaporeans for life-long employability?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide incentives and support for women, especially stay-at-home care-givers, to engage/participate in capacity building opportunities to ensure that they remain relevant to the workforce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The trend of women's workforce participation rates declines from the age of 30 onwards. This indicates that those who leave the workforce do not return to the workforce.²³ • The lack of sufficient retirement funds forces

²⁰ 'Parliamentary reply by DPM Teo Chee Hean on 13 Aug 2012 (on prevalence of companies offering paternity leave),' https://www.nptd.gov.sg/content/NPTD/home/jcr_content/par_content/download_5/file.res/Parliamentary%20reply%20on%20paternity%20leave.pdf

²¹ CNA, 2012.

²² Ng, 2008.

²³ Ministry of Manpower, 'Singapore Workforce 2011'.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have more programmes such as NTUC WDS's 'Jobs on Wheels for U' to increase outreach to women in heartland areas, especially caregivers, stay at home mothers. • Ensure that the life-long employability of older Singaporeans is not exploitative with depressed wages for the same work done by younger workers. 	<p>many elderly people to return to the workforce but at severely depressed wages that treat their work as casual labour. Such exploitation of the elderly must be halted. Retirement funds must be adequate for Singaporeans to retire on. If elderly Singaporeans decide to continue working, their work should be fairly remunerated.</p>
Meeting our social and economic needs			
1	In which sectors(s) could there be a need for foreign workers to maintain service levels at reasonable cost?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professionalise the sectors that currently depend on lower-waged foreign workers and move such jobs up the value chain.²⁴ • Remove the artificial depression of wages and hence costs of living through the labour subsidy of lower-wage foreign workers by providing fair wages for all. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sectors that rely on foreign workers are those that depend on their lower-waged labour. • Singaporeans will not step into these lower-waged jobs, at the wage levels of foreign workers, if these sectors remain in their current relatively un-professionalised state.
2	If there is a need to tighten our foreigner inflow further, which groups or sectors should we tighten (e.g.: construction workers, FDWs, low-to mid-skilled foreign workers, professionals, international students, dependants, foreign spouses of Singaporeans)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign spouses of Singaporeans, as the parents of Singaporean citizens, should have a clear path to permanent residency and thereafter citizenship. • Protect the rights and ensure good working conditions for foreign domestic workers by ensuring that they are protected by the Employment Act and other relevant labour laws. • Ensure a fair and transparent system of immigration for a diversified pool of immigrants, who can eventually be integrated into Singapore society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marriages between Singapore citizens and non-Singapore citizens make up 39.4% of all marriages in 2011. Currently, foreign spouses require their Singaporean spouses to sponsor their social visit passes, making the foreign spouses vulnerable to their Singaporean spouses' agreement to be sponsors. • Given the current state of the care-giving sector as a privatised burden of individual families, without adequate public support, foreign domestic workers continue to be needed to supply care-giving services to families, result-

²⁴ "Treat blue-collar jobs with respect: Tharman", 5 April 2012, <http://www.asiaone.com/News/Latest%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20120405-337929.html>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refrain from dividing jobs into good and bad jobs. Any job whereby a person earns an honest wage is good and should not be looked down upon. 	<p>ing in 200,000 foreign domestic workers here. But the fact that such workers are currently needed because of the lack of adequate institutionalised services does not mean that they should therefore be exploited. Apart from the recent decision to grant mandatory day off, all other labour rights of FDWs must be promoted for Singapore to 'enhance our attractiveness as a destination for quality and experienced FDWs'.²⁵</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Singaporeans do not want to take up certain jobs because they are seen as lower status and jobs that are only done by foreigners. This creates a dependency on foreigners and also gives rise to greater class divisions in society.

²⁵ Hoe 2012.

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