

## COUNTRY MIGRATION PROFILE (DESTINATION COUNTRY)

### SINGAPORE



### Summary Table

<b>Profile of the country</b>	
A. Total Number of Migrants	<u>Total: 2,323,252<sup>1</sup></u> (2013)  Male: <b>1,026,171</b> Female: <b>1,297,081</b>
B. Key Countries of Origin	1. Malaysia (1,044,994) 2. China (380,766) 3. Indonesia (152,681) 4. India (138,177) 5. Pakistan (118,765) 6. Bangladesh (74,074) 7. Hong Kong (55,948) 8. Macau (20,157) 9. Thailand (17,644) 10. USA (15,793)  (Includes skilled and semi-skilled migrants; 2013). <sup>2</sup>
C. Key Employment Sectors	<u>Skilled/professional:</u> professional industries  <u>Semi-skilled:</u> construction, domestic labour, services, manufacturing, marine industries
D. Types of Visa	<b><u>Skilled Workers/Professionals:</u></b> <sup>3</sup>  <b>1. Employment Pass (EP)</b> EntrePass Personalised Employment Pass  <b>2. Special Pass (S Pass)</b>  <b><u>Unskilled / Semi-Skilled Workers</u></b> <sup>4</sup>  <b>3. Work Permit</b>

<sup>1</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2013), "Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Destination and Origin", available at:

<http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimatesorigin.shtml>  
(Accessed 23 July 2015)

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2013). (Accessed 23 July 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Manpower, "Work passes and permits", available at: <http://www.mom.gov.sg/passes-and-permits> (Accessed 23 July 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Manpower.

## COUNTRY MIGRATION PROFILE (DESTINATION COUNTRY)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Work Permit (Foreign Domestic Worker)</i></li> <li>- <i>Work Permit (Foreign Worker)</i></li> <li>- <i>Work Permit (Confinement Nanny)</i></li> <li>- <i>Work Permit (Performing Artiste)</i></li> </ul>
E. Minimum Wage	<b>N/A</b> (for both local and migrant workers) <sup>5</sup>
F. Maternity Protection for Migrant Women	<b>N/A</b> (no pregnancy permitted unless married to Singapore citizen / permanent resident, as permitted by Controller of Immigration) <sup>6</sup>
G. National Labour Laws	<p><b>Generally:</b> <i>Employment Act (Cap 91)</i><sup>7</sup> and <i>Workmen's Compensation Act (Cap 354)</i> applies to all workers (local and migrants)<sup>8</sup></p> <p><b>MDWs:</b> Excluded from <i>Employment Act (Cap 91)</i><sup>9</sup> and <i>Workmen's Compensation Act (Cap 354)</i><sup>10</sup>; covered by <i>Employment of Foreign Workers Act</i><sup>11</sup> and <i>Employment Agency Act</i>.</p>
H. Social Security	<b>N/A:</b> Social security scheme (CPF) applies to Singapore citizens and permanent residents only. <sup>12</sup>
I. Trade Union Membership	Yes
J. Trade Union Formation	Yes
K. Permanent Residency	<u>Work Permit Holders:</u> N/A <u>P, Q, and S Employment Pass Holders:</u> May apply
L. Citizenship	<u>Work Permit Holders:</u> N/A <u>P, Q, and S Employment Pass Holders:</u> May apply
M. Access to Public Schools	

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Manpower, "Is there a prescribed minimum wage for foreign workers in Singapore", *FAQ*, available at: <http://www.mom.gov.sg/faq/work-permit-for-foreign-worker/is-there-a-prescribed-minimum-wage-for-foreign-workers-in-singapore> (Accessed 23 July 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Singapore, *Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (Cap 91A) (S569/2012)*. Schedule IV, section 7, p44. Available at: <http://www.mom.gov.sg/~media/mom/documents/services-forms/passes/wpsspassconditions.pdf> (Accessed 23 July 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Manpower, "Employment Act: who it covers", *Employment practices*, available at: Ministry of Manpower, "Is there a prescribed minimum wage for foreign workers in Singapore", *FAQ*, available at: <http://www.mom.gov.sg/faq/work-permit-for-foreign-worker/is-there-a-prescribed-minimum-wage-for-foreign-workers-in-singapore> (Accessed 23 July 2015).

<sup>8</sup> ILO, "Singapore (550) >", *NATLEX*, available at: [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p\\_lang=en&p\\_isn=79060&p\\_country=SGP&p\\_count=550](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=79060&p_country=SGP&p_count=550) (Accessed 23 July 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Manpower.

<sup>10</sup> ILO.

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Manpower, "Employment of Foreign Manpower Act", *Legislation*, available at: <http://www.mom.gov.sg/legislation/employment-of-foreign-manpower-act> (Accessed 23 July 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Mahidol Migration Centre (2012), "Case Study Three: Singapore", *Migrant Workers' Rights to Social Protection in ASEAN: Case Studies of Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand*, available at: [http://www.fes-asia.org/media/publication/2012\\_MigrantWorkersRightsToSocialProtectionInASEAN\\_Hall.pdf](http://www.fes-asia.org/media/publication/2012_MigrantWorkersRightsToSocialProtectionInASEAN_Hall.pdf) (Accessed 23 July 2015). P79.

## COUNTRY MIGRATION PROFILE (DESTINATION COUNTRY)

<b>Ratification Status of Relevant Conventions<sup>13</sup></b>	
<b>Convention</b>	<b>Year of Ratification</b>
ICCPR	<b>N/A</b>
ICESCR	<b>N/A</b>
ICERD	<b>N/A</b>
CEDAW	<b>1995</b>
CRC	<b>1990</b>
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families	<b>N/A</b>
ILO29 (Forced Labour)	<b>1965</b>
ILO105 (Forced Labour)	<b>N/A (Denounced 1979)</b>
ILO87 (Freedom of Association)	<b>N/A</b>
ILO98 (Collective Bargaining)	<b>1965</b>
ILO100 (Equal Remuneration)	<b>2002</b>
ILO111 (Discrimination in Employment and Occupation)	<b>N/A</b>
ILO97 (Migration)	<b>N/A</b>
ILO143 (Migrant Worker)	<b>N/A</b>
ILO189 (Domestic Worker)	<b>N/A</b>

<sup>13</sup> Information obtained from (1) ILO, "Ratifications for Singapore", *NORMLEX*, available at: [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11210:0::NO:11210:P11210\\_COUNTRY\\_ID:103163](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11210:0::NO:11210:P11210_COUNTRY_ID:103163) (Accessed 21 July 2015); (2) ILO, "Up-to-date Conventions not ratified by Singapore", *NORMLEX*, available at: [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11210:0::NO:11210:P11210\\_COUNTRY\\_ID:103163](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11210:0::NO:11210:P11210_COUNTRY_ID:103163) (Accessed 21 July 2015); and (3) Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Ratification of 18 International Human Rights Treaties", *STATUS OF RATIFICATION INTERACTIVE DASHBAORD*, available at: <http://indicators.ohchr.org/> (Accessed 21 July 2015).

## COUNTRY MIGRATION PROFILE (DESTINATION COUNTRY)

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### Overview of Migration

Migrant labour has played a significant role in Singapore's economic development since the city-state's industrialisation in the 1980s. Although initially conceived as a temporary solution to labour shortages, migrant workers have become a distinctive feature of the city-state's workforce.<sup>14</sup> In 2013, approximately 2,323,000 migrants comprised 42.9% of Singapore's total population.

Within public discourse, a distinction is frequently made between "foreign workers" and "foreign talent" – referring respectively to semi-skilled and skilled professionals.<sup>15</sup> Different immigration programs apply to the two classes of workers; while skilled workers and professionals are encouraged to seek permanent residency and citizenship through liberal policies, low-skilled migrant workers are often considered a "transient" population and are correspondingly subjected to stricter controls.<sup>16</sup>

### Relevant Policies

#### Skilled Workers/ Professionals

A competitive hub of international financial activity, a number of policies and schemes aim to incentivise the migration of professional and skilled workers to Singapore. Some of these include:

1. *Contact Singapore*: An alliance of the Singapore Economic Development Board and the Ministry of Manpower, Contact Singapore is an organisation engaging global professionals and overseas Singaporeans to "work, invest and live" in Singapore.<sup>17</sup>
2. *Singapore Talent Recruitment ("STAR") Committee*: Established in 1998, the "STAR" Committee similarly aims to attract foreign talent and investment to Singapore, through the implementation of programs such as the "Global Investment Program".<sup>18</sup>
3. *International Manpower Program*: The Economic Development Board's International Manpower Program provides information concerning employers, industry profiles and immigration to prospective professionals.

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<sup>14</sup> Yap M., "Chapter 10: Singapore's System for Managing Foreign Manpower", available at: [http://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/ips/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2013/04/pa\\_MT\\_Managing-International-Migration-for-Development-in-East-Asia-Research-Papers\\_240215.pdf](http://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/ips/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2013/04/pa_MT_Managing-International-Migration-for-Development-in-East-Asia-Research-Papers_240215.pdf) (Accessed 25 Aug 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Yeoh, B & Lin, W. (3 April 2012), "Rapid Growth in Singapore's Immigrant Population Brings Policy Challenges." *Migration Policy Institute*. Available at: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/rapid-growth-singapores-immigrant-population-brings-policy-challenges> (Accessed 23 Aug 2015)

<sup>16</sup> Yeoh, B & Lin, W. (3 April 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Contact Singapore, "About Contact Singapore", *Contact Singapore*. Available at: <https://www.contactsingapore.sg/en/about> (Accessed 23 Aug 2015).

<sup>18</sup> MOI News, (5 February 2013), "Taiwan launches immigration to discuss foreign talent hunt", *Ministry of Immigration Taiwan*, available at: [http://www.moi.gov.tw/english/print.aspx?print=eng\\_news&sn=6342&type=](http://www.moi.gov.tw/english/print.aspx?print=eng_news&sn=6342&type=) (Accessed 25 Aug 2015).

## COUNTRY MIGRATION PROFILE (DESTINATION COUNTRY)

Professionals and skilled workers, unlike unskilled workers, do not require a work permit to work in Singapore, but hold an Employment Pass (EP) or a Special Pass (S Pass) depending on basic salary and level of education received.<sup>19</sup> In 2007, the Personalised Employment Pass (PEP) was introduced for all EP holders and overseas professionals who fulfilled the relevant criteria with regards to salary.<sup>20</sup> Compared to holders of work permits (below), holders of the EP or the S Pass enjoy greater benefits within Singaporean society. Entitlement to apply for permanent residency and citizenship opens the doors of varying eligibility to categories of housing rental and purchase, maternity and childcare benefits, tax relief benefits, and a social security plan.<sup>21</sup>

Recent years have seen local complaints that foreign professionals are preferred for employment over local Singaporeans.<sup>22</sup> To assuage such concerns, the Singaporean government instituted the Fair Consideration Framework in 2014, requiring employers to hire expatriate workers only where no suitable Singaporean candidate has applied within two weeks of the job listing.<sup>23</sup>

### **Unskilled / Semi-Skilled Workers**

A different set of policies is operated with regards to unskilled and semi-skilled migrant workers, who are not entitled to the Employment Pass or the Special Pass.

#### Work Permit System

Migrant workers from “source countries” (with which Singapore has agreements) working within the construction, manufacturing, marine, process or services sector require a work permit (WP) to work in Singapore.<sup>24</sup> The permit is not directly obtained by the migrant worker, but also applied for by his employer or other employment agent.<sup>25</sup> The permit is valid for up to two years with the possibility of renewal, depending on the employment period, worker’s passport and security bonds.<sup>26</sup>

Migrant workers holding a work permit are excluded under the jurisdiction of the Employment Act and Work Compensation Act; instead, their employment is governed by the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (Cap 91A)<sup>27</sup> and Employment of Foreign Manpower (Work Passes) Regulations 2012 (“Regulations”). Depending on the occupation specified on the work permit – for example, that of “domestic worker”, “construction worker” or other – different being and

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Manpower (12 Aug 2015), “Eligibility for Employment Pass”, *Work passes and permits*. Available at: <http://www.mom.gov.sg/passes-and-permits/employment-pass/eligibility> (Accessed 24 Aug 2015).

<sup>20</sup> Yeoh, B & Lin, W. (3 April 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Hawksford, “Singapore Citizenship – Benefits and Drawbacks”, *Immigration*, available at: <http://www.guidemesingapore.com/relocation/citizenship/singapore-citizenship-benefits-and-drawbacks> (Accessed 25 Aug 2015).

<sup>22</sup> Tan, A. (10 April 2015), “Foreigners not taking the jobs of Singaporean professionals: Manpower Minister”, *The Straits Times*. Available at: <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/foreigners-not-taking-the-jobs-of-singaporean-professionals-manpower-minister> (Accessed 23 Aug 2015).

<sup>23</sup> Curtis, L. (4 November 2014). “‘Foreigners are taking our jobs’, complain Singaporeans”, *The Telegraph*, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/expat/expatnews/11205536/Foreigners-are-taking-our-jobs-complain-Singaporeans.html> (Accessed 23 Aug 2015).

<sup>24</sup> Ministry of Manpower (27 May 2015), “Key facts on Work Permit for foreign worker”, *Work passes and permits*. Available at: <http://www.mom.gov.sg/passes-and-permits/work-permit-for-foreign-worker/key-facts> (Accessed 23 Aug 2015)

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Manpower (27 May 2015).

<sup>26</sup> Ministry of Manpower (27 May 2015).

<sup>27</sup> Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (Chapter 91A).

## COUNTRY MIGRATION PROFILE (DESTINATION COUNTRY)

regulatory conditions apply as specified in the Regulations.<sup>28</sup> Such conditions typically include insurance coverage by the employer (as work permit holders are not protected by workman's compensation), medical examination requirements; in the case of domestic workers, there are conditions relating to accommodation and maintenance.<sup>29</sup>

Migrant workers holding a work permit are subject to stringent stay conditions; they are permitted only to work within the industry and for their employer stipulated on their permit.<sup>30</sup> Termination of employment of a migrant worker results in the cancellation of their work permit, without which they must leave Singapore within 7 days.<sup>31</sup> Repatriation may occur on any breach of condition or stay or of contract; for example, due to pregnancy for female migrants or failure to seek approval from the controller of work permits in marrying Singaporean citizens or permanent residents.<sup>32</sup> Further, effective from 1 September 2012, migrant workers must earn at least S\$4,000 (USD\$3,150) a month in order to sponsor their dependents' stay in Singapore.<sup>33</sup> Effectively, this means that most low-skilled workers are not able to bring their family to the city-state.

### Dependency Ceiling / Foreign-worker Levy

Employers of semi-skilled or unskilled migrants are subject to "dependency ceilings", a form of quota in which the ratio of migrant workers to the employer's total workforce may not exceed a certain "ceiling".<sup>34</sup> The dependency ceiling varies according to sector; for example, it is currently 87.5% for the construction industry, compared to 40% in the service industry.<sup>35</sup>

Employers are also required to pay a "foreign worker levy" in respect of semi-skilled and unskilled migrant workers hired, depending on the worker qualifications and dependency ratio within the company.<sup>36</sup> Failure to pay the levy may incur penalties or cancellation of work permits.<sup>37</sup> In recent years, the dependency ceiling has been lowered, and levies increased in response to concerns of job displacement by migrant workers affecting local Singaporeans.<sup>38</sup>

## Issues

### Recruitment Malpractices

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<sup>28</sup> Employment of Foreign Manpower (Work Passes) Regulations 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Employment of Foreign Manpower (Work Passes) Regulations 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Yeoh, B & Lin, W. (3 April 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Yeoh, B & Lin, W. (3 April 2012).

<sup>32</sup> Yeoh, B & Lin, W. (3 April 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Tan, A. (7 September 2012). "Singapore Tightens Rules for Foreign Workers' Families", *Bloomberg Business*, available at: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2012-07-09/singapore-tightens-rules-for-foreign-workers-families> (Accessed 30 Aug 2015).

<sup>34</sup> Chu, K. (9 January 2015), "Foreign manpower policy in Singapore", *Legislative Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China*, available at: <http://www.legco.gov.hk/research-publications/english/essentials-1415ise02-foreign-manpower-policy-in-singapore.htm> (Accessed 26 Aug 2015).

<sup>35</sup> Chu, K. (9 January 2015).

<sup>36</sup> Chu, K. (9 January 2015).

<sup>37</sup> Ministry of Manpower, "Paying the foreign worker levy", available at: <http://www.mom.gov.sg/passes-and-permits/work-permit-for-foreign-worker/foreign-worker-levy/paying-the-levy> (accessed 29 Aug 2015).

<sup>38</sup> Chu, K. (9 January 2015).

## COUNTRY MIGRATION PROFILE (DESTINATION COUNTRY)

Under the Employment Agencies Rules 2011, employment agencies may charge migrant workers no more than the sum of one month's salary per year of their contract.<sup>39</sup> In the case of employers unilaterally terminating a worker's contract within the first six months of his or her contract, the agency is liable to refund 50% of the collected fees within seven working days of the termination.<sup>40</sup> However, many Singaporean agencies charge in excess of the statutory limit due to ineffective enforcement of the rules by the Ministry of Manpower, such that unskilled and semi-skilled workers are placed into situations of debt bondage. The Employment Agencies Rules 2011 regulate only the charging of fees from workers by employment agencies, failing to oversee or control commonplace indirect means of charging fees such as through third-party loans or by employers.<sup>41</sup> The absence of written statements or evidence relating to fees charged by employment agencies exacerbates overcharging issues, due to a lack of tangible evidence.<sup>42</sup> Other common agency malpractices include passport confiscation; while the Rules stipulate that the documents of a "foreign employee" must be returned "as soon as practicable" upon employment, a "reasonable excuse" allows agencies to limit the movement of their workers.<sup>43</sup>

Further, the fee cap notably applies only to employment agencies within Singapore; it does not cover other fees charged by overseas partner agencies, or expenses for training and medical examinations incurred before deployment.<sup>44</sup> This leaves unskilled and semi-skilled workers – notably, domestic workers – vulnerable to exorbitant sums incurred even before arrival in Singapore. In 2010, a spokesman of the Ministry of Manpower stated that overpayment by migrant workers within their countries of origin is "beyond the jurisdiction" of the Singapore government.<sup>45</sup>

In 2014, a new pre-departure video detailing information relating to workers' rights and entitlements, common recruitment malpractices, and behavioural advice was produced jointly by the Ministry of Manpower and the Migrant Workers' Centre.<sup>46</sup> The Migrant Workers' Centre stated that the video would be broadcast to migrants before departure from their country of origin, in their native language.<sup>47</sup>

### Low Wages and Poor Living Conditions

Although Singapore has not instituted minimum wage standards, significant wage discrimination is apparent when comparing local and migrant workers. In their submission to the 24<sup>th</sup> Session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a joint submission by the

<sup>39</sup> Employment Agencies Rules 2011, s12.

<sup>40</sup> Employment Agencies Rules 2011, s13.

<sup>41</sup> Transient Workers Count Too (2010), "Singapore's Employment Agencies Act and Rules – Proposals for Amendment", available at: <http://twc2.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Employment-Agencies-Act-Review1.pdf> (Accessed 30 Aug 2015).

<sup>42</sup> Transient Workers Count Too (2010).

<sup>43</sup> Transient Workers Count Too (2010).

<sup>44</sup> Legislative Council Secretariat (2014), "Regulation of domestic helper employment agencies in selected places", available at: <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr13-14/english/sec/library/1314in07-e.pdf> (Accessed 30 August 2015).

<sup>45</sup> The New Paper (22 March 2010), "China woman pays \$7,000 to work in Singapore", available at: <http://news.asiaone.com/News/The+New+Paper/Story/A1Story20100320-205794.html> (Accessed 30 August 2015).

<sup>46</sup> Tan, A. (26 October 2014), "New pre-departure video that informs workers of their rights here launched", *The Straits Times*, available at: <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/new-pre-departure-video-that-informs-migrant-workers-of-their-rights-here-launched> (Accessed 30 Aug 2015).

<sup>47</sup> Tan, A. (26 October 2014).

## COUNTRY MIGRATION PROFILE (DESTINATION COUNTRY)

Humanitarian Organization for Migrant Economics (HOME) and Think Centre stated that low-wage migrant workers in all sectors of the economy are paid less than local workers.<sup>48</sup> Such concerns over wage discrimination, by which Singaporean and Malaysian bus drivers were paid more, motivated a strike by Chinese bus drivers in 2011.<sup>49</sup>

Whilst employers are required to provide accommodation to their migrant workers, it was reported by HOME that many, particularly construction workers, are accommodated in overcrowded, unhygienic and poorly ventilated dormitories.<sup>50</sup> Such provisions mean that workers are denied privacy and decent living conditions. Although Singapore's Parliament passed the Foreign Employee Dormitories Bill in early 2015 requiring that all dormitories with capacities of over 1,000 be licenced and adhere to designated standards (such as the inclusion of quarantine plans and recreational areas), it has been criticised for applying only to large migrant worker dormitories.<sup>51</sup>

### Access to Justice

While migrant workers have access to legal channels for any grievances against employers, in practice, their ability to make effective use of the system is hindered by patchy enforcement of court orders.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, many workers who bring claims against their employers are subjected to forced repatriation.<sup>53</sup> Although the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act stipulates that employers are responsible for providing accommodation and food to workers during the filing of a complaint – which is reported by HOME to take as long as two years – workers may be pressured or even evicted.<sup>54</sup> Even where migrant workers have sufficient evidence to file a claim against their employer or company, long investigation times mean that workers may not return to their country of origin in several years, nor are they necessarily compensated.<sup>55</sup> This, coupled with the fact that migrant workers are frequently the weaker party in terms of finances, creates a significant disincentive for migrant workers to make complaints. Indeed, 29 migrant worker participants of the 2011 bus driver strikes were deported following the event.<sup>56</sup>

### Discrimination

Although the Singaporean government has made concerted efforts to encourage acceptance of migrant workers and to honour their contribution to the city-state's economy, migrant

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<sup>48</sup> HOME & Think Centre (2015), *Submission for the 24<sup>th</sup> Session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)*, available at: <http://www.home.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/HOME-UPR-Report-13-June-2015.pdf> (Accessed 30 Aug 2015).

<sup>49</sup> Siddique, H. (28 November 2012), "Singapore's first strike in 25 years shines spotlight on racial tensions", *The Guardian*, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/28/chinese-bus-drivers-strike-singapore> (Accessed 30 Aug 2015).

<sup>50</sup> HOME & Think Centre (2015).

<sup>51</sup> The Online Citizen (26 February 2015), "HOME's responses to new Foreign Employee Dormitory Act", available at: <http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2015/02/homes-responses-to-new-foreign-employee-dormitory-act/> (Accessed 1 Sept 2015).

<sup>52</sup> HOME & Think Centre (2015).

<sup>53</sup> HOME & Think Centre (2015).

<sup>54</sup> HOME & Think Centre (2015).

<sup>55</sup> HOME (22 April 2015), "The Long Wait For Justice", available at: <http://www.home.org.sg/the-long-wait-for-justice/> (Accessed 30 Aug 2015).

<sup>56</sup> Angerer, T. (3 December 2012), "Singapore Deportations Show Strains in Work Force", *Bloomberg Business*, available at: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2012-12-02/singapore-deportations-show-strains-over-foreign-work-force> (Accessed 30 Aug 2015).



## COUNTRY MIGRATION PROFILE (DESTINATION COUNTRY)

workers reportedly still face private discrimination from other sectors of society. Although migrant workers are legally permitted to unionise, they are frequently unrepresented or excluded from agreements entered into between companies and workers' unions.<sup>57</sup> In general, the significant presence of migrant workers within the Singaporean workforce has led to some concern in recent years, as evidenced by anti-immigration protests against the government's white paper on population policy in 2013.<sup>58</sup> Although there are few reported incidences of conflicts between migrant workers and local residents, negative reactions to the Little India riots in 2013 highlighted underlying attitudes towards certain nationalities of workers.<sup>59</sup>

### Migrant Domestic Workers

Migrant domestic workers are only permitted to work and live at the location designated on their work permit, and employers have a corresponding duty to provide sufficient accommodation for their worker.<sup>60</sup> Due to the live-in requirement and lack of legal provisions on maximum working hours, domestic workers – who are specifically excluded from the Employment Act – may work in excess of 16 hours per day, seven days a week.<sup>61</sup> Only in 2012 did the Ministry of Manpower grant a weekly rest day in favour of migrant domestic workers; however, this was limited only to new contracts commencing in January 2013.<sup>62</sup>

Due to the live-in requirement, migrant domestic workers are vulnerable not only to labour exploitation, but also verbal, physical and sexual abuse.<sup>63</sup> Communications and movement may be limited by employers, who may require their domestic worker to stay at home. Claims against employers may take several months or years, during which migrant domestic workers are not allowed to seek employment.<sup>64</sup> Further, general difficulties with enforcing the law within private homes mean that domestic workers are required to work or sleep in unsatisfactory conditions. Migrant domestic workers have been noted to be particularly susceptible to agency malpractices, as a significant portion are engaged through recruiters or employment agencies which may not be well regulated in their country of origin.

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<sup>57</sup> Yong, C. (22 April 2013), "Migrant Workers 'still Facing Discrimination'", available at: <http://www.stjobs.sg/career-resources/training-and-development/migrant-workers-still-facing-discrimination/a/115560> (Accessed 1 Sept 2015).

<sup>58</sup> Goh, C. and Mokhtar, M (16 February 2013), "Large turnout at Speakers' Corner for protest against Population White Paper", *The Straits Times*, available at: <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/large-turnout-at-speakers-corner-for-protest-against-population-white-paper> (Accessed 1 Sept 2015).

<sup>59</sup> Woo, S. B. (10 December 2013), "Little India riot: Netizens combat racism on social media", *Today Online*, available at: <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/little-india-riot-netizens-combat-racism-social-media> (Accessed 1 September 2013)

<sup>60</sup> Ministry of Manpower, "Your Guide to Employing a Foreign Domestic Worker", available at: <https://www.mom.gov.sg/~media/mom/documents/publications/guides/your-guide-to-employing-an-fdw.pdf?la=en> (Accessed 30 Aug 2015).

<sup>61</sup> Taranto, C. (15 June 2015), "Migrant workers stuck in Singapore's legal limbo when work permits are cancelled", available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/earshot/migrant-workers-trapped-in-limbo-when-work-permits-are-cancelled/6542834> (Accessed 30 Aug 2015).

<sup>62</sup> Human Rights Watch (5 March 2012), "Singapore: Domestic Workers to Get Weekly Day of Rest", available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/03/05/singapore-domestic-workers-get-weekly-day-rest> (Accessed 30 Aug 2015).

<sup>63</sup> O'Brien, R. (28 July 2015), "Singapore's domestic workers routinely exploited and often abused in the service of rich nationals", *The Independent*, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/singapores-domestic-workers-routinely-exploited-and-often-abused-in-the-service-of-rich-nationals-10422589.html> (Accessed 30 Aug 2015).

<sup>64</sup> O'Brien, R. (28 July 2015).

## COUNTRY MIGRATION PROFILE (DESTINATION COUNTRY)

### Responses

The Singaporean government has pledged to take action to ameliorate some of the issues mentioned above.

With regards to protecting migrant workers in employment, the Ministry of Manpower committed to make mandatory the provision of itemised payslips to workers, detailing figures for salary, total allowance, deductions and terms of employment by 2016.<sup>65</sup>

In relation to migrant domestic workers, mandatory orientation programs and stringent regulation of employment agencies and employers have been introduced.<sup>66</sup> However, there has been no action to include domestic workers within the Employment Act, or to extend protections in line with the ILO's Convention No. 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers.

### Useful Links

Ministry of Manpower: <http://www.mom.gov.sg/>

Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics: <http://www.home.org.sg/>

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