# Singapore: Support for Households and Businesses during the Pandemic

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## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a significant toll on countries across the world, both in terms of lives lost to the diseases, as well as the impact on jobs, incomes and livelihoods arising from the resulting economic dislocation.

In the long battle against COVID-19, the Singapore Government has prioritised the protection of both “lives and livelihoods”.[1] Singapore’s approach at the outset of the pandemic was to control the spread of the virus so as to minimise deaths and prevent the healthcare system from being overwhelmed. Concurrently, substantial financial support was provided to keep businesses and households afloat.

The experience of SARS in 2003 and the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2008-09 informed Singapore’s approach to dealing with COVID-19 and the economic fallout. Taskforces comprising Government ministers and civil servants were quickly set up for coordination of policies, both for infection control as well as management of the economy. State assistance covered jobs, citizens, households and businesses. These provided a buffer against job and income losses, mitigating the impact of the pandemic on the economy and labour market. To finance this exceptional support, the Singapore Government enacted five budgets in 2020 and drew on the nation’s Past Reserves for the first time since the GFC.

Subsequently, with COVID-19 becoming endemic, it became necessary to open up the economy in phases, accepting a rise in infections while seeking to minimise the incidence of death and serious illness. Singapore’s opening up was aided by the efficient rollout of its vaccine and booster programme, while the more transmissible Delta and Omicron strains of the virus have made a COVID-zero policy untenable for a country heavily dependent on global connectivity.

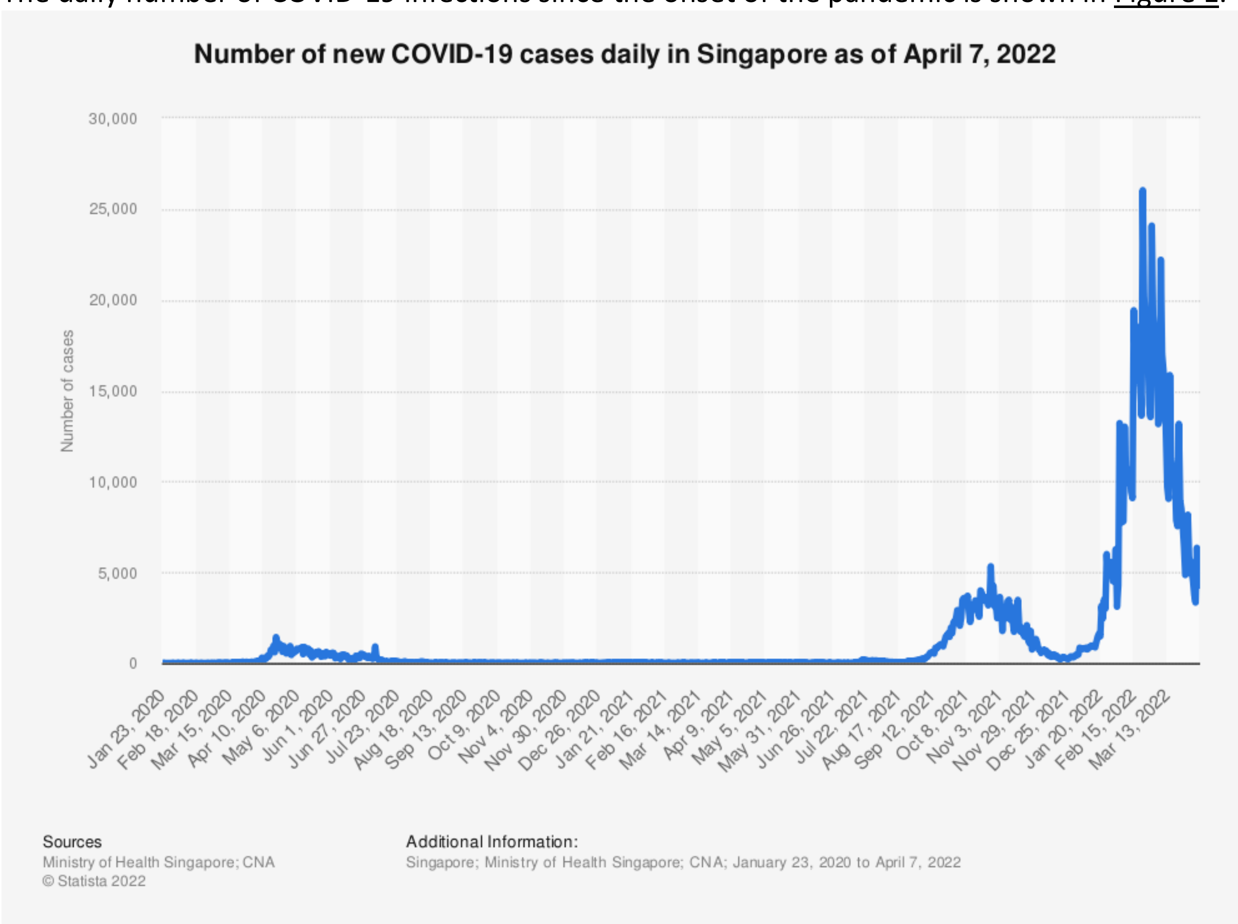
In mid-2022, Singapore is emerging from the pandemic with a relatively low mortality rate while also having significantly mitigated the fallout of the pandemic on the economy and labour market. However, the longer-term impact of the pandemic on areas such as inequality and foreign manpower policies will require sustained attention.

## COVID-19 Context and Overall Economic Impact

As at 7 April 2022, Singapore has recorded over 1.1 million COVID-19 cases since the start of the pandemic. The aggregate death toll from COVID-19 complications stands at 1,290, representing a fatality rate of 0.11%, one of the lowest in the world. Ninety-six percent of Singapore's eligible population (aged 5 years and above) have completed their full vaccination programme, with about 72% having received vaccine booster shots.

### Trajectory of the Outbreak

The daily number of COVID-19 infections since the onset of the pandemic is shown in Figure 1.




Source: Statista, compiled from data released by Ministry of Health (MOH), Singapore
Note: The data may be affected by changes in reporting protocols. For instance, in Jan 2022, MOH decided to include mild cases detected by Antigen Rapid Tests (ART), in addition to those confirmed by Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) tests. Health protocols were again revised and simplified in late April 2022.

**Figure 1: Daily Number of New COVID-19 Cases in Singapore**

Singapore's first case, a Chinese national who had travelled from Wuhan, China, was confirmed on 23 January 2020, not long after the outbreak in Wuhan had been reported. Local transmission of the virus picked up in February and March, along with imported cases. This prompted a progressive closure of international borders to travellers, beginning with the countries most affected by the virus. Singapore residents and work pass holders returning from affected countries abroad were subject to quarantine or stay-home requirements.

In response to the first wave of infections, including unlinked community cases, the Government announced a "Circuit Breaker" – a nationwide partial lockdown – on 3 April 2020. Initially intended to run from 7 April to 4 May, the Circuit Breaker was extended to 1 June 2020. During this period, workplaces and shops deemed non-essential were closed, and dining-in at food and beverage (F&B) establishments was prohibited. Social gatherings in homes and public places were banned. Schools also implemented full home-based learning from 7 April 2020.

The Circuit Breaker was followed by a phased reopening, with safe management measures imposed such as limits on group sizes in public areas, caps on unique visitors to households and capacity limits at places of worship. Mask wearing outdoors and in public places, first imposed on 14 April 2020, remained mandatory. With the COVID-19 outbreak in foreign worker dormitories under control by September 2020, overall case numbers came down by the end of the year. Singapore's vaccination programme, which began towards the end of 2020, picked up speed in 2021.

However, hope for a quick and conclusive victory over COVID-19 in 2021 did not materialise. Recurring outbreaks, driven by the spread of the more infectious Delta variant, kept economies worldwide in stop-start mode. Even countries that had previously brought the disease under control experienced resurgences in cases, forcing a reversion to more stringent safe distancing measures. Singapore was no exception, despite strict safe distancing measures, frequent testing and speedy contact tracing.

The first road-bump was experienced in May 2021, with a rash of imported COVID-19 cases sparking off a modest community spread. Once again, the Government tightened safe distancing measures, with Singapore entering "Phase 2 heightened alert" from 16 May to 13 June 2021. This limited group sizes and household visitors to two persons a day, with dining-in at F&B establishments suspended.

July 2021 saw a larger rise in locally transmitted cases, centred around KTV establishments and the Jurong Fishery Port, which in turn spread infections to wet markets throughout Singapore. It led to a re-imposition of heightened alert measures in July 2021 not long after the Government had signalled its intent to transition towards treating COVID-19 as endemic. This was intended to buy time as Singapore ramped up the national vaccination drive, with a view to protecting vulnerable seniors who had yet to be vaccinated. By August 2021, the vaccination rate had reached 85% of the population, making Singapore one of the world's most vaccinated countries (Deutsche Welle 2021).

In September 2021, COVID-19 cases began to rise exponentially as the more transmissible COVID-19 Delta variant took root in Singapore. Cases subsided by December 2021, but this was followed by an even higher infection peak in February to March 2022 arising from the Omicron variant, which was more transmissible than Delta but with milder symptoms. With the vast majority of the population fully vaccinated and most having received a third booster shot, COVID-19 safe management measures could finally be unwound as the wave of infections subsided in April 2022.

## Economic and Labour Market Impact

Singapore experienced its deepest ever recession in 2020 due to COVID-19, with real GDP contracting by 4.1%.[2] The 13.3% year-on-year decline in the 2nd quarter of 2020, during the Circuit Breaker, was Singapore's largest quarterly economic contraction on record (Figure 2).

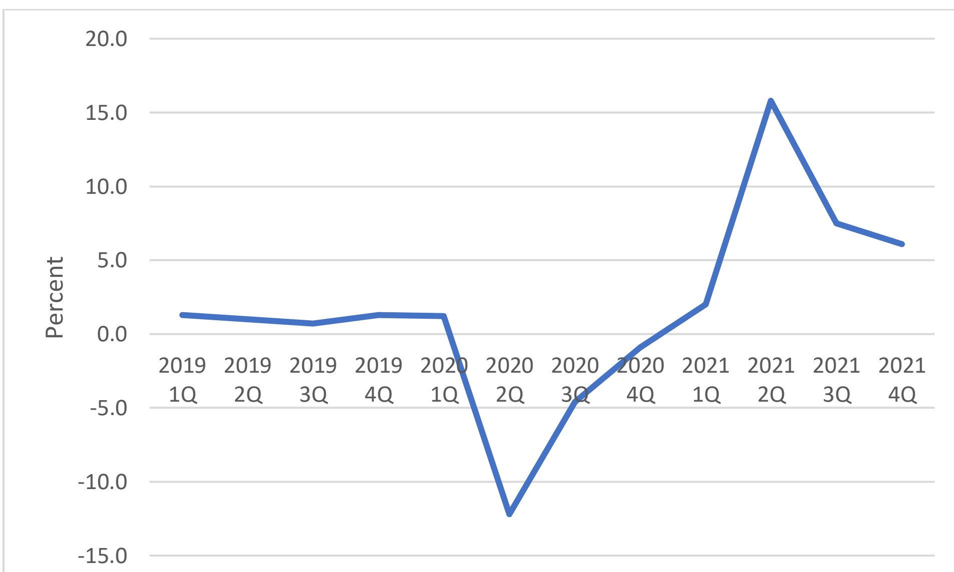



**Figure 2: Singapore's Quarterly Real GDP Growth Rate (Year-on-Year)**
Source: Singapore Department of Statistics

The Singapore economy mounted a strong recovery in 2021, growing by 7.1% in real terms, although sectors such as aviation and tourism remained weak. The Government forecasts economic growth to be between 3% to 5% in 2022.

Resident unemployment, which had spiked in 2020, recovered to pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2021 (Figure 3), while the number of quarterly retrenchments returned to baseline levels earlier, by the beginning of 2021 (Figure 4). The labour force participation rate even rose from 68.0% in 2019 to 68.1% in 2020 and 70.5% in 2021.

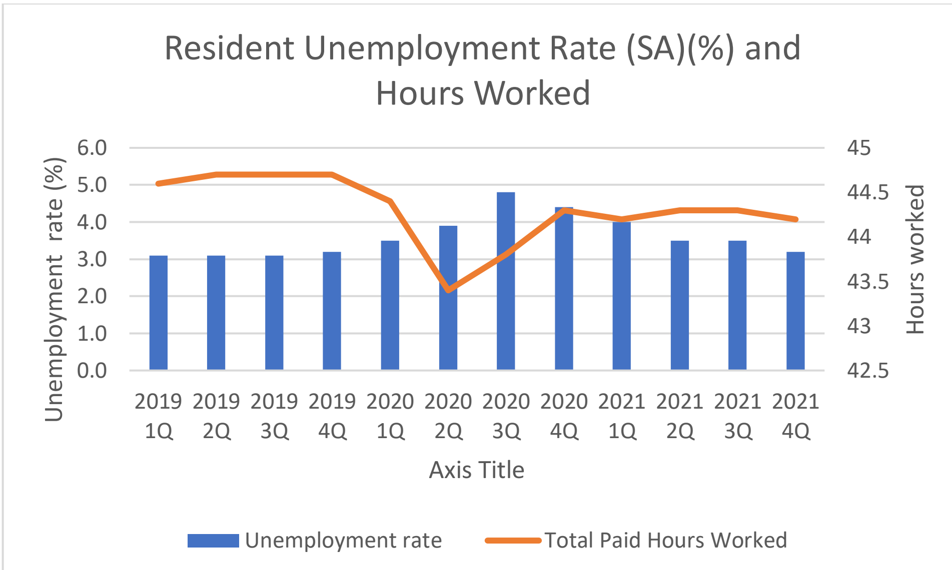



**Figure 3: Singapore's Quarterly Resident Unemployment Rate (Seasonally Adjusted) and Hours Worked**

Source: Singapore Department of Statistics

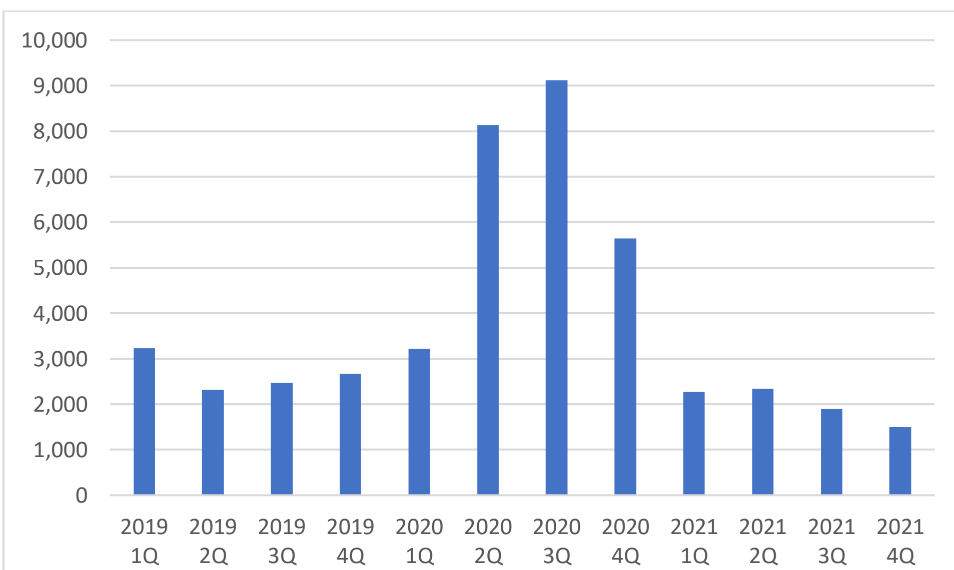



**Figure 4: Number of Retrenchments**

Source: Singapore Department of Statistics

Median gross monthly income from work of full-time employed residents grew by 3.2% in nominal terms in 2021 after declining by 0.6% in 2020. The real change in median monthly household income from work for resident households rebounded by 4.0% in 2021, after contracting by 2.8% in 2020.

## Policy Response: COVID-19 Support Measures

### Saving Jobs for Locals

The Singapore Government's economic contingency plans are frequently reviewed and ready to be activated at short notice. Following SARS in 2003 and the GFC in 2008-2009, inter-ministerial teams kept the plans continually updated in anticipation of the next economic crisis.

The centrepiece of Singapore's response to the GFC—the Jobs Credit Scheme—was credited with averting a major spike in unemployment at the height of the crisis. Some have argued that the scheme, which provided employers with a wage offset of 12% for every local worker they kept on their books, might even have been too effective. By shielding less-productive firms from the pruning scythe of market forces, it may have left the economy as a whole operating below its potential. But as the COVID-19 pandemic started to bite, this wage offset approach, re-incarnated as the Jobs Support Scheme (JSS), once again became the preferred rapid-response measure.

Introduced in Singapore's first budget in 2020 (called the Unity Budget) on 18 February, JSS support was set at 8% of gross monthly wages. Concurrently, the existing Wage Credit Scheme, which co-funded qualifying wage increases given by firms to local employees (Singapore citizens and permanent residents), was enhanced with a higher co-funding rate and support cap.

As the COVID-19 outbreak gathered pace globally, it became evident that a much larger intervention would be needed to save businesses and jobs. Many countries across the developed world rushed to implement job protection schemes. Singapore introduced a supplementary budget, called the Resilience Budget, on 26 March 2020. JSS support was stepped up to 25%, 50% or 75% depending on sector, and the qualifying income ceiling raised from $3,600 to $4,600, approximately the median wage in Singapore.

For ease and speed of implementation, JSS support for firms was based on their sector rather than revenue or profit loss. This would also avoid penalising firms that were better able to respond and adapt to changing market conditions. Firms (regardless of size) in the most badly affected sectors (aviation and tourism) received 75% support; those moderately affected (food services) were given 50% support; firms in the remaining sectors had baseline support at 25% of wages. In recognition of the general disruption to business posed by the Circuit Breaker, JSS support was set at 75% for all firms for April and May 2020. The JSS was later extended to March 2021 and subsequently to December 2021. However, support was tapered across the board, and excluded sectors that were faring well, such as information and communications technology (ICT) and biomedical science.

To help businesses affected by heightened alert measures in 2021, support through the JSS was stepped up again. Wage support was raised to 50% from 16 May to 11 July for sectors required to suspend their activities, including F&B, gyms and performing arts, and 30% for other significantly affected sectors such as retail, cinemas and personal care services. Support was 60% and 40% for the respective groups from 22 July to 18 August 2021. In total, more than $28.1 billion was disbursed through the JSS (Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore and Enterprise Singapore 2022).

The pandemic's outbreak affected firms very differently, even among those within the same sector and JSS tier. Most businesses experienced some income loss; revenue for some dropped to nearly zero, while others were unaffected or even saw their earnings grow. The pressing circumstances did not allow for a careful assessment of each firm's specific situation. The priority at the outset of the pandemic, especially in view of the Circuit Breaker restrictions, was to put firms in suspended animation, avoiding an indiscriminate cull that would have condemned even viable businesses.[3]

Wage adjustment—cutting wages to save jobs, rather than cutting jobs to save on wages—was another vital move to keep Singaporeans employed during the crisis. The Ministry of Manpower convened the National Wages Council (NWC) – a tripartite advisory body comprising government, employer and union representatives – in March 2020, to provide guidance to firms on cutting wages in a responsible way. With the COVID-19 situation rapidly evolving, the NWC was reconvened in August and released a supplementary set of recommendations in October. Observing wage restraint and demonstrating solidarity with other Singaporeans whose incomes had been affected by the pandemic, the public sector announced that there would be no annual variable bonus for most public servants, although the 13$^{th}$ month bonus would still be paid.

## Supporting the Self-Employed

Self-employed persons (SEPs), however, fell outside the ambit of the JSS. The Resilience Budget (the second budget of 2020) attempted to address this gap with the Self-Employed Training Support Scheme, providing up to $7.50 an hour (later increased to $10 an hour) in training allowance for approved SkillsFuture Series or sector-specific training programmes. The National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) stepped in with a further top-up for union members. The

Government then introduced the Self-Employed Persons Income Relief Scheme (SIRS), providing a flat $9,000 (spread over 9 months) to Singaporean SEPs with less means and family support.

Simplicity and generosity in administering these support measures were the order of the day. Those who had previously registered with the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore (IRAS) or Central Provident Fund Board (CPFB) as self-employed were automatically included in the scheme. Others had to apply, as they had not registered as SEPs or did not meet the auto-eligibility criteria. Those who had narrowly missed any one of the eligibility criteria and were facing financial difficulty could also be considered on appeal. When SEP needs became clearer, SIRS was extended in the April 2020 Solidarity Budget (the third budget of 2020) to automatically include SEPs who also drew a salary (not more than $2,300 a month) from employment. In response to ground appeal for more flexibility in the eligibility criteria, the annual property value threshold was also raised from $13,000 to $21,000, allowing some SEPs living in condominiums and other private properties to be eligible for support.

In total, about $1.8 billion was disbursed to about 200,000 beneficiaries through SIRS (Ministry of Social and Family Development 2021).

## Helping Employers with Foreign Worker Upkeep

The Government's priority was to help locals, but foreigners were not neglected. Many employers were unable to repatriate their foreign workers due to border closures or lack of flights, and had to provide for the workers' upkeep. With the rapid spread of COVID-19 infection in foreign worker dormitories, many workers were confined to their residences and unable to work, and were understandably anxious about their livelihoods and circumstances at a difficult time. Even if workers could be repatriated, firms would need to keep a core of workers to resume their operations when conditions allowed: otherwise viable firms could go under, leading to job losses for locals and foreigners alike.

To help employers meet their obligations to their foreign workers, the Government announced that foreign worker levies due in April 2020 would be waived for employers of work permit and S-Pass holders[4], with employers receiving a further $750 rebate for levies previously paid.

The levy rebate was extended for another month, on condition that employers made an online acknowledgment that they would use the amount received to support their foreign employees. This caveat recognised that while companies that reduced their local employees' salaries or put them on no-pay leave would receive correspondingly lower pay-outs in subsequent tranches under JSS, there was no similar mechanism for the foreign worker levy rebate. Employers were reminded to treat all workers fairly and responsibly, regardless of nationality.

A third round of levy waiver and rebate was announced in the May 2020 Fortitude Budget (the fourth budget of 2020), for firms that were still unable to restart operations after the Circuit Breaker, as well as all firms in the construction, marine shipyard and process (CMP) sectors—which had been badly affected by the dormitory outbreaks and consequent disruption to operations. These sector-specific levies were stepped down from October 2020 onwards. Firms in these sectors continued to receive a $90 rebate until December 2021, to ease the adjustment to more stringent safe management measures.

The implementation of these support measures reflected a balance between fairness and fiscal prudence (by targeting support at affected firms) with expediency in support and administration. While such measures to ease the upkeep of foreign workers were meant to tide firms over the difficult pandemic period, the prevailing policy stance remained: firms relying heavily on foreign workers should review their workforce strategy and grow their pipeline of local workers for sustainability and resilience in the medium to long term.

## Keeping Businesses Going

Besides employment support, the Government also stepped up financing support for businesses, as it had done during the GFC. This was to avert insolvencies arising from short-term cash flow difficulties caused by COVID-19 and its economic impact. The maximum loan quantum under the Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Working Capital Loan scheme (part of the Enterprise Financing Scheme) was increased to $1 million, while the Government's risk share was raised to 90%.

A one-year Temporary Bridging Loan Programme allowed businesses to borrow up to $5 million from financial institutions with interest rate capped at 5% and the Government bearing 90% of the risk. The application period, which was to have closed in March 2021, was extended by six months but at lower support levels. Banks and financial institutions making new loans under the Working Capital Loan scheme and Temporary Bridging Loan Programme could also apply to the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) for low-cost funding through the MAS Singapore Dollar (SGD) Facility, thus further lowering interest rates charged.

The Enterprise Financing Scheme Trade Loan Programme and Loan Insurance Scheme were likewise enhanced to provide more support for SMEs facing financing difficulties. SMEs could also opt to defer principal payments on their secured term loans till the end of 2020. Laws were passed to provide temporary relief from legal action for inability to perform certain contracts, as well as increased thresholds for bankruptcy and insolvency for financially distressed individuals and businesses, for six months from 20 April to 19 October 2020. Also passed was a bill that provided temporary relief from onerous contractual terms such as excessive interest for late payments.

On the Government's part, it deferred income tax payments and committed not to raise Government fees and charges for a year from April 2020. Property tax rebates were given for non-residential properties, with a duty imposed on landlords of non-residential properties to pass the rebate on in full to tenants. The Government also gave rental waivers ranging from 2 to 5 months to hawkers and commercial tenants in public properties. SME tenants of private properties received rental relief in cash grants, with co-sharing of rental obligations among the Government, landlords and tenants. To help businesses affected by COVID-19 heightened alert measures in 2021, credit support measures were extended while the Government provided a fresh round of rental relief for commercial tenants.

Besides the wage, cash flow and rental support given to all firms, support packages were rolled out for the most affected sectors including aviation, tourism, land transport, maritime, and arts and culture, as summarised in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Sectoral Support Packages**

| **Sector** | **Key Measures** |
|---|---|
| Aviation | ■ Cost relief for airlines, ground handlers, cargo agents, and airport tenants, and to maintain minimum level of air connectivity<br>■ Temporary redeployment of aviation sector workers to other sectors |
| Tourism | ■ Support for training industry professionals and ensuring pipeline of events and products<br>■ $320 million in tourism credits to citizens to stimulate domestic tourism |
| Land transport | ■ $95 million package for transport operators including relief for taxi and private hire car drivers and waiver of operator license fees<br>■ Road tax rebate and waiver of parking fees for private bus operators |
| Maritime | ■ Port dues concession for cruise ships and ferries<br>■ Rebates on counter rentals, overnight berthing |

| | |
|---|---|
| Arts and culture | ■ $55 million to safeguard jobs, develop capabilities and step up digitalization |
| Built Environment | ■ Govt co-sharing of additional costs for safety measures when resuming construction activity |

## Supporting Households

The general uncertainty at the outset of the outbreak also called for a time-tested budgetary measure—cash handouts to citizens and households. With employment at risk and income loss rife, such handouts provided help and assurance to households in financial difficulty, while giving a much-needed lift to consumption and aggregate demand. Such measures were based on the principle that everyone would receive something, but the less well-off would receive more. This would balance the intent to foster solidarity with more targeted support for those in greater need.

The Care and Support Package, introduced in the February 2020 Unity Budget, gave every adult Singaporean $100 to $300 (depending on income and property ownership), with parents of Singaporean children aged 20 and below receiving an additional $100. Seniors received a further $100 in cash. The Package also included grocery vouchers and household rebates.[5]

By the March 2020 Resilience Budget, the worsening fallout prompted a tripling of support under the Care and Support Package to $300-$900. The Workfare Special Payment, a special transfer for low-wage workers announced in the Unity Budget, was increased to $3,000. The Solidarity Budget of April 2020 added a further cash handout of $300 to all citizens which, together with the earlier announced payment, amounted to a minimum of $600 for every adult citizen (called the Solidarity Payment). Permanent Residents and Long-Term Visit Pass-Plus holders received a minimum of $300. A Solidarity Utilities Credit of $100 was also given to all households, in recognition that utilities consumption had risen with more people staying home, especially during the Circuit Breaker.

The main individual and business support measures announced in each of the 2020 Budgets is summarised in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Singapore's COVID-19 Support Measures and Cost**

| | Major support measures - Individuals/Households | Major support measures – Employers | Cost of COVID support measures |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Unity Budget** (18 Feb 2020) | Care and Support Package (cash payouts, Workfare Special Payment, grocery vouchers, additional GST Voucher, service & conservancy charges rebate) | Stabilisation and Support Package (Job Support Scheme or JSS support at 8% of wages, enhanced Wage Credit Scheme, Corporate tax rebate) | $6.4 billion |
| **Resilience Budget** (26 Mar 2020) | - Enhanced Care and Support Package (tripled cash payouts, increased Workfare Special Payment)<br>- Temporary Relief Fund, COVID Support Grant<br>- SGUnited Jobs & Traineeships<br>- Self-Employed Person Income Relief Scheme (SIRS) | - Higher JSS support of 25-75% depending on sector<br>- Sectoral support packages for aviation, tourism, land transport, arts & culture.<br>- Enhanced property tax rebate, rental waivers, financing (cash flow) support | $48.4 billion (+$17 billion draw on Reserves) |
| **Solidarity Budget** (6 April 2020) | - Expanded eligibility criteria for SIRS<br>- Topped up cash payout to form $600 Solidarity Payment for all citizens | - 75% JSS support for all sectors in April & May<br>- Foreign worker levy waiver and rebate<br>- Enhanced financing support | $5.1 billion (+$4 billion draw on Reserves) |
| **Fortitude Budget** (26 May 2020) | - Solidarity Utilities Credit<br>- SGUnited Jobs & Skills Package to include mid-career traineeships, skills programmes, hiring incentive | - Extended JSS<br>- Extended foreign worker levy waiver and rebate for firms unable to resume work<br>- Deferred increase in older worker CPF contribution<br>- Expanded rental relief for SMEs, Govt tenants<br>- Digital Resilience Bonus | $33 billion (+$31 billion draw on Reserves) |
| **Ministerial Statement - August** (17 August 2020) | - Extended Covid Support Grant<br>- Widened eligibility for Workfare Special Payment | - Extended and stepped down JSS, depending on sector<br>- Further support for aviation and tourism | No additional outlay ($8 billion from Budget savings elsewhere) |
| **Total Sum** | | | **$92.9 billion ($52 billion draw on Reserves*)** |

* $42.7b of the $52b was utilised in FY2020, with the balance to be deployed in FY20201, along with a further expected $1.7b draw on Reserves.

Another suite of measures was needed to help individuals and households that had run into financial difficulty due to the pandemic. The existing Community Care (ComCare) schemes, which were subject to rigorous means testing, would not be able to handle the anticipated surge in need for a time such as this. The Temporary Relief Fund (TRF) was introduced in April 2020 as an interim assistance scheme for lower to middle-income locals who had lost their jobs or suffered substantial income loss.

In May 2020, the TRF was superseded by the COVID-19 Support Grant (CSG), which provided income support of up to three months for those who had lost their jobs, were on involuntary no-pay leave for at least three months, or suffered income loss of at least 30%. From January 2021, the COVID-19 Recovery Grant (CRG) replaced the CSG and SIRS, providing support for both employees and self-employed persons who been placed on involuntary no-pay leave or suffered significant income loss. Compared with CSG and SIRS, support under CRG is lower, while eligibility criteria have been tightened to target support at those who need it most. Applicants must also show they have been actively seeking job or training opportunities or, in the case of the self-employed, have reached out to potential clients.

With the tightening of COVID-19 safe distancing measures in May and July 2021 affecting the economy and jobs, CRG – Temporary was given to affected workers who had suffered job or significant income losses for at least a month due to tightened safe distancing measures. Monthly payouts were similar to that of CRG, but without the job search and training requirement. Support for specific groups of workers including hawkers and drivers was also disbursed through the Market and Hawker Centre Relief Fund and the Covid-19 Driver Relief Fund.

The CRG has been extended to the end of 2022 to continue providing support to those who are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

A summary of the criteria and support for TRF, CSG, CRG and TRG – Temporary is given in Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Temporary COVID-19 Relief Schemes**

| | TRF | CSG | CRG | CRG - Temporary |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Period** | April 2020 | May – Dec 2020 | Jan 2021 onwards | May – Aug 2021 |
| **Beneficiaries** | Employees (SC/PR) aged 16 and above | Employees (SC/PR) aged 16 and above [SEPs receive SIRS instead] | Employees, SEPs (SC/PR) aged 21 and above | Employees, SEPs (SC/PR) aged 21 and above |
| **Income/Property thresholds?** | Household income <= $10k (or $3.1k per capita) | Household income <= $10k (or $3.1k per capita). Property AV <=$21k | Household income <= $7.8k (or $2.8k per capita). Property AV <=$21k | Household income <= $7.8k (or $2.8k per capita). Property AV <=$21k |
| **Support quantum and conditions for job loss and involuntary NPL** | One-off $500 in April 2020 for those who lost jobs or on involuntary NPL for at least 3 consecutive months | Up to $800 a month for 3 months for those who lost jobs or on involuntary NPL for at least 3 months | Up to $700 a month for 3 months for workers retrenched or on involuntary NPL for at least 3 months | Up to $700 for workers on involuntary NPL for at least a month due to tightened safe mgt measures |
| **Support quantum and conditions for significant income loss** | One-off $500 in April 2020 for income loss of >=30% | Up to $500 a month for 3 months for income loss of >=30% for at least 3 consecutive months | Up to $500 a month for 3 months for income loss (overall >=50%) for at least 3 consecutive months | Up to $500 for income loss of >= 50% for at least a month due to tightened safe mgt measures |
| **Job/training requirement** | No | Yes, only need to agree to participate | Yes, prior to application | No |
| **Limits** | | | Max 2 tranches | |

## Securing Jobs and Other Opportunities for Locals

Even with the JSS in place, unemployment and retrenchments were expected to rise in 2020. The economic contraction was forecast to be more severe than during the GFC or SARS.

Still, opportunities remained. COVID-19 swab testing, temperature taking, the surge in hospital admissions as well as safe distancing or safe management measures created short-term job opportunities. Meanwhile, hiring in the ICT sector continued to be strong, with the pandemic accelerating digitalisation. Recruitment for longer-term needs, such as in the publicly funded healthcare and early childhood education sectors, could also be brought forward.

Matching workers who had suffered job or income losses with these opportunities was a priority. Initially, short-term job opportunities were given the “SGUnited Jobs” branding, under the broader SGUnited movement.[6] Public sector agencies Workforce Singapore and SkillsFuture Singapore organised virtual careers to match workers with immediate vacancies. The Public Service Division worked directly with companies to redeploy affected staff. For instance, airline crew were redeployed as patient care ambassadors in hospitals and nursing homes, or as safe distancing ambassadors in transport hubs.

However, there were still fears that there would not be enough jobs to go around. Fresh graduates from the universities, polytechnics and the Institute of Technical Education (ITE), were entering a challenging job market. A body of international research suggested that entering the workforce in a recession could have a long-lasting impact on earnings (Kahn 2010; Oreopoulos et al. 2012). Besides current jobs, there was a need to create other opportunities for fresh graduates as well as displaced mid-career workers.

This motivated the development of the SGUnited Jobs and Skills Package, unveiled in the May 2020 Fortitude Budget. The package aimed to create close to 100,000 opportunities for local workers within a year, comprising 40,000 jobs, 25,000 traineeships and 30,000 skills training opportunities. A National Jobs Council, comprising government, union and business leaders, was set up to oversee the design and implementation of the SGUnited Jobs and Skills Package.

Under this programme, the Government co-funded traineeship allowances for fresh graduates and mid-career workers. The SGUnited Traineeship Programme, for fresh graduates of the publicly-funded universities, polytechnics and ITE, aimed to equip them with industry experience so they would gain a foothold in the job market during the economic recovery. The Government co-funded their training allowance by 80% for up to six months.

The SGUnited Mid-Career Pathways Programme was an equivalent programme of between four and six months for mid-career individuals which aimed to widen their professional networks and help them gain industry-relevant skills and experience. Training allowances were higher than those for fresh graduates to reflect the trainees' work experience. A subsidy of 80% was provided for workers under age 40, and 90% for those aged 40 and above.

To further increase opportunities for mid-career workers, the SGUnited Mid-Career Pathways Programme also offered a "Company training track" whereby participants could acquire industry-relevant skills by taking up training with well-known companies.

Finally, the SGUnited Skills Programme offered to workers of all ages a suite of training courses to help workers acquire in-demand skills, especially in sectors with good hiring opportunities. These courses were designed in partnership with industry and delivered by Continuing Education and Training (CET) Centres, including Institutes of Higher Learning. Their modular format allowed for flexibility and early exit without penalty upon finding a job. Participants received a monthly training allowance of $1,200 and assistance with job search.

By the end of 2020, nearly 76,000 locals had been placed in jobs or training opportunities through the SGUnited Jobs and Skills Package.[7] As at end-October 2021, more than 166,300 jobs and skills opportunities had been taken up, including 122,300 job placements, with more than seven in 10 being long-term job roles (Ministry of Finance 2022).

### Pivoting to Job Creation and the Future Economy

With the economy improving towards end-2020, the challenge was to pivot support for jobs and households to something more fiscally sustainable, and in line with Singapore's medium-term economic and social policy directions.

The aviation and hospitality sectors were expected remain weak for some time, notwithstanding progress on vaccine development and rollout. The acceleration of remote working and digital commerce meant that some lost jobs would never return. Hence, "suspended animation" had to give way to helping businesses and citizens take up new opportunities in areas with strong growth potential.

To spur hiring by companies that are able to do so, the Jobs Growth Incentive (JGI) was introduced on 1 September 2020, for firms expanding their local workforce over the next six months. Under this scheme, companies received 25% wage support for up to 12 months for new local hires aged below 40, and 50% wage support for up to 18 months for new local hires aged 40 and above. Some 130,000 new local hires, nearly half of whom were mature workers aged 40 or above, had benefited from this scheme within three months of its implementation (Ministry of Manpower 2021).

Budget 2021 reflected the Government's intent to equip businesses and workers for the future while engineering a soft landing for the Singapore economy, while. Of the $11 billion COVID-19 Resilience Package announced, $700 million was set aside to extend the JSS for targeted sectors until September 2021, while $5.2 billion went towards extending the JGI.[8] At the same time, the Government stepped up financing support for high-growth enterprises, as well as co-funding for technology adoption and digitisation for SMEs. Also unveiled was an Enterprise Sustainability Programme to help Singapore businesses build sustainability capabilities and capture opportunities for growth in the burgeoning green economy.

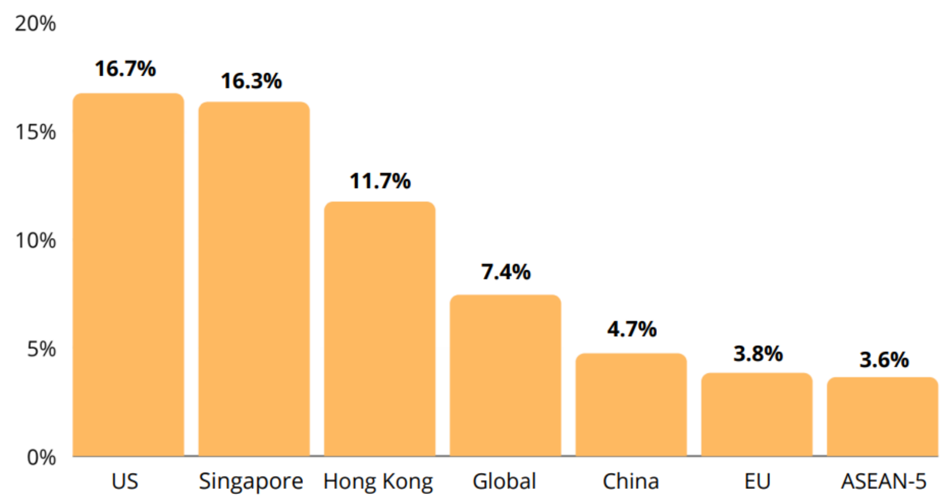
## Outcomes and Implications

## Size and Impact of Support Measures

All in, close to $100 billion was set aside in financial year (FY) 2020 to deal with the pandemic: $73.5 billion for workers and businesses, and $10 billion for social and household support.[9] The overall budget deficit for FY2020 amounted to S$64.9 billion, or 13.9% of GDP - the largest in Singapore's history.

In FY2020, the President granted approval for the Government to draw $52 billion from the Past Reserves, significantly more than what was approved for the GFC in 2009. Of this amount, $36 billion was used in FY 2020 and FY 2021, with a further $6 billion set aside for FY2022.

Compared with other countries, Singapore's COVID-19 fiscal spending as a proportion of GDP was relatively high, similar to that of the US (Figure 5).




Source: IMF Fiscal Monitor, January 2021

Note: ASEAN-5 aggregate comprises Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam, and is weighted by countries' shares in Singapore's non-oil domestic exports. Figures are on CY basis except for Hong Kong and Singapore. The fiscal responses exclude liquidity support such as loans & guarantees.

**Figure 5: Fiscal Spending on COVID-19 Support (Excluding Liquidity Support) as Percentage of GDP**

Source: Chart reproduced from Ministry of Finance, "An Interim Assessment of the Impact of Key COVID-19 Budget Measures," occasional paper, February 2021.

These measures helped to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the labour market and economy. Government estimates based on macroeconomic modelling suggest that the Budget support measures in 2020 and 2021, along with accommodative monetary policy, had a significant impact on GDP and unemployment. The fiscal and monetary policy measures prevented the economy from contracting by a further 6.6 percentage points in 2020 and by 0.8 percentage points in 2021 (see Figure 6). They also reduced the resident unemployment rate by an estimated 2.0 percentage points in 2020 and 4.0 percentage points in 2021 (Ministry of Finance 2022).

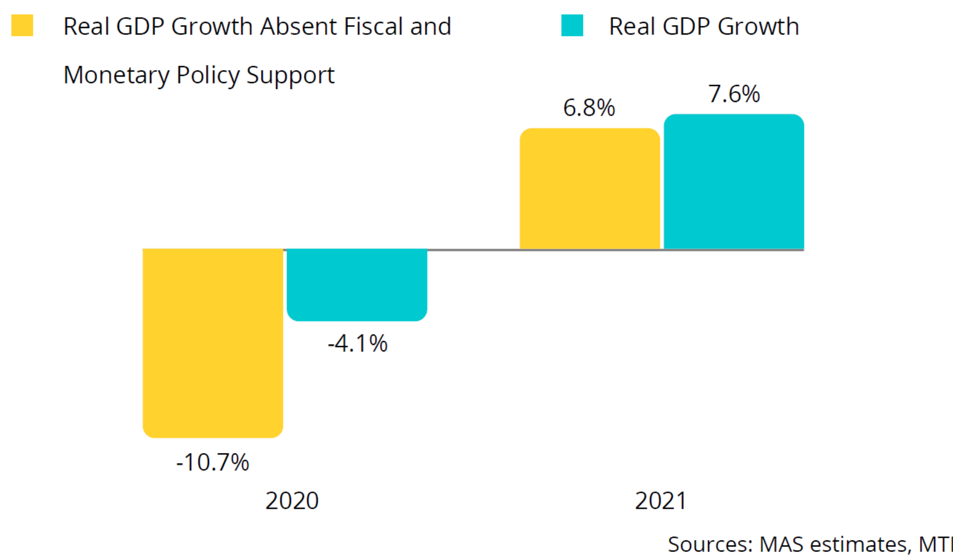



**Figure 6: Real GDP Growth and Projected Growth Without Fiscal and Monetary Support**
Source: Chart reproduced from Ministry of Finance, "Assessment of the Impact of Key COVID-19 Budget Measures," occasional paper, 17 February 2022.

While Singapore was able to tap on accumulated reserves to finance COVID-19 support measures, there was still impetus to rebuild public finances given the considerable sums spent. Prior to COVID-19, the Government had already announced in 2018 that the Goods and Services Tax would be raised from 7 to 9 percent sometime between 2021-2025, so as to fund growing public expenditure, particularly on healthcare. This is estimated to bring in additional revenues of about $3 billion a year when fully implemented.

## Business Formation and Cessation

The impact of COVID-19 on businesses varied significantly by sector, but was in aggregate milder than initially feared. Overall business formation did not experience a significant decline, while business cessation did see a pronounced uptick despite COVID-19 (Figures 7 and 8).

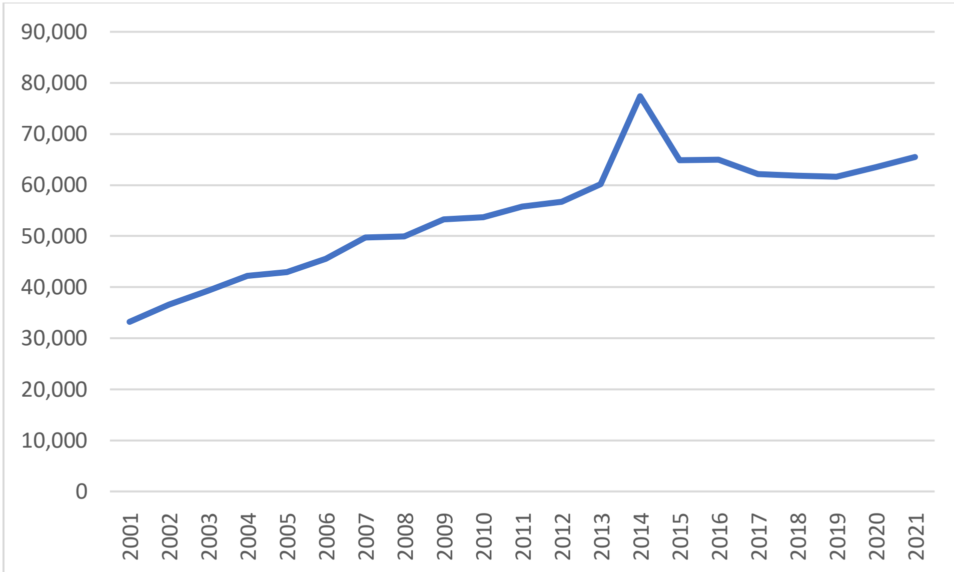



**Figure 7: Number of Businesses Formed**

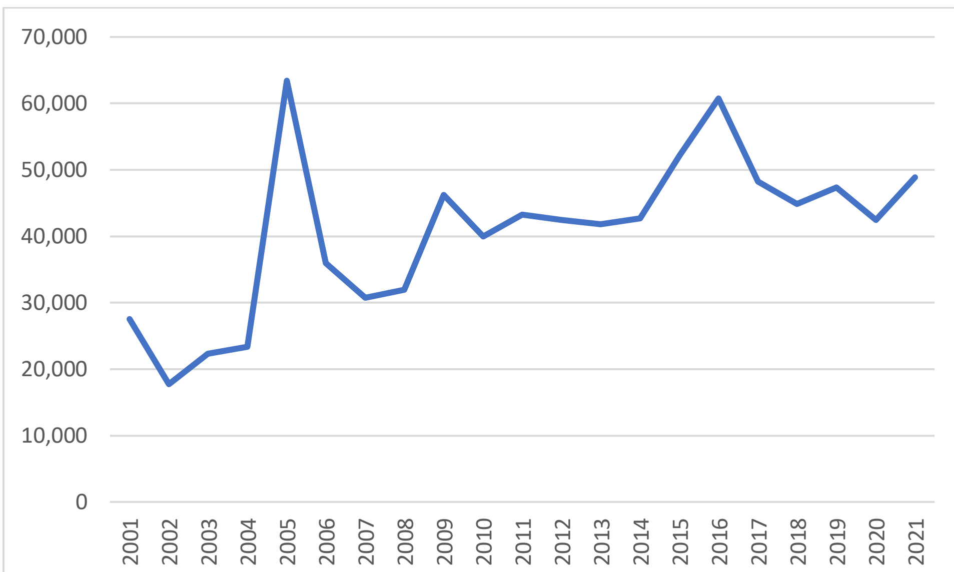



**Figure 8: Number of Businesses that Ceased to Operate**

Financing support also cushioned the blow for firms and financial institutions. The non-performing loans of commercial banks rose slightly to peak at 2.71% in the third quarter of 2020, before gradually declining (Figure 9).

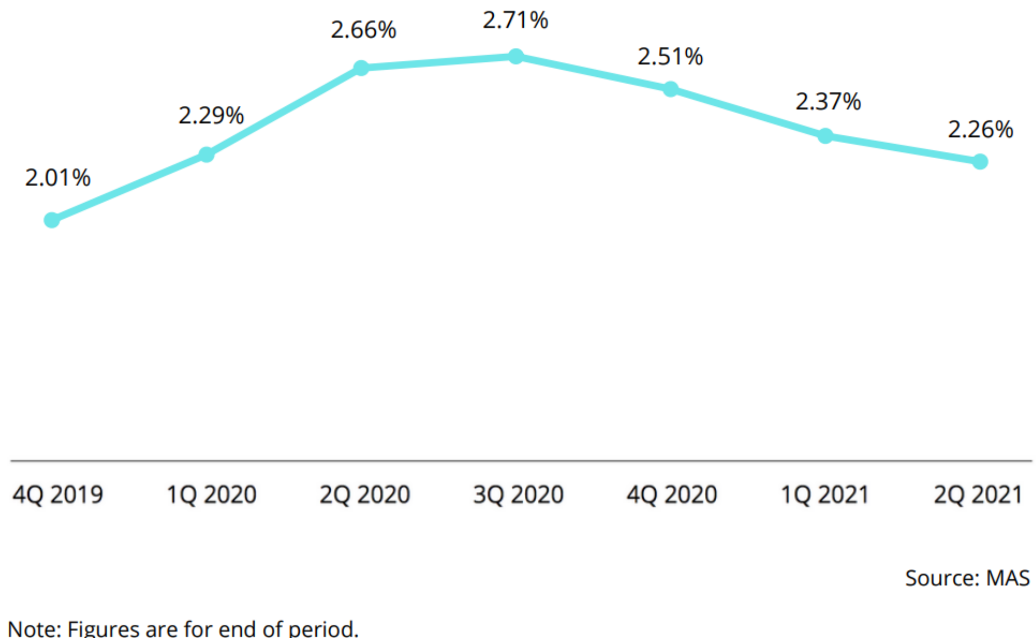



**Figure 9: Non-Performing Loan Rate of Commercial Banks**

Source: Source: Chart reproduced from Ministry of Finance, "Assessment of the Impact of Key COVID-19 Budget Measures," occasional paper, 17 February 2022.

Over the period from March 2020 to December 2021, the Government's financing schemes supported over 27,000 enterprises in accessing loans of over $24.7 billion, substantially higher than in 2019 (Figure 10). Around 90% of the firms supported were micro and small enterprises.

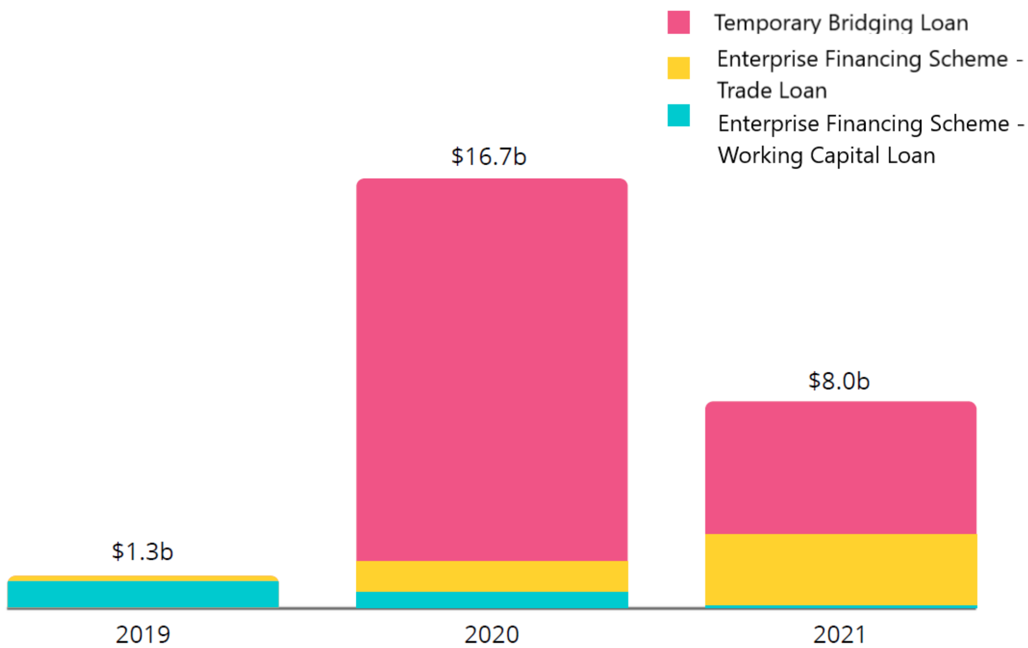



**Figure 10: Value of Approved Loans ($ billion)**

Source: Source: Chart reproduced from Ministry of Finance, "Assessment of the Impact of Key COVID-19 Budget Measures," occasional paper, 17 February 2022.

Results from an MTI study on Temporary Bridging Loan (TBL) indicated that scheme helped to alleviate financial distress across firms of all sizes and supported employment in smaller firms with 50 or fewer employees. In particular, an additional loan of the average quantum under the TBL reduced the probability of firm financial distress (i.e. probability of a firm missing its payment obligations) by 0.05 percentage points and had a positive impact on firms' total employment of 0.26% on average.

## Income and unemployment Support

The exceptional income and unemployment support during the COVID-19 pandemic was timely and impactful: $225 million was disbursed to some 450,000 beneficiaries through TRF while a further $215 million was distributed to about 98,000 beneficiaries through the CSG.

Some challenges were encountered in the administration of these schemes, which were intended to provide quick support without onerous application procedures. Verifying employment status and income was difficult during the Circuit Breaker period, where it was hard to contact employers or firms' human resource departments. As with all such schemes, the Government had to be alert for possible fraud, and managed to uncover several such cases.

Beyond 2022, it may also be necessary to shore up precautionary and retirement savings, especially for self-employed workers who are susceptible to income and job disruptions and may not have built up adequate Central Provident Fund (CPF)[10] savings. To this end, an Advisory Committee on Platform Workers has been set up. The committee is considering whether online platform companies should be required to make CPF contributions to support workers' housing and retirement needs.

Besides Government support, other options to smoothen incomes or otherwise help individuals and households to tide over periods of unemployment are being considered. While a quick return to employment is preferred, this may not always be possible in a period of heightened economic and job market volatility.

One option is unemployment insurance (UI), where workers or employers contribute regular premiums to fund pay-outs for members who fall into involuntary unemployment. Singapore had previously avoided UI so as not to risk blunting incentives to return to employment. However, a joint NTUC and Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) taskforce on professionals, managers and executives (PMEs) has recommended supplementary income relief for the involuntarily unemployed, which the Government is looking into.

Another option is for workers to set aside savings for use during periods of unemployment, such through the CPF system. This could be mandated or kept voluntary, with incentives such as tax deductions and top-ups to encourage saving. The merits of such precautionary saving have to be weighed against the reduction in take-home pay or retirement savings.

There is also wage loss insurance, which tops up workers' pay if they move to lower-paying jobs involuntarily. While this has the advantage of encouraging displaced workers to return to employment, such a scheme would also require workers or employers to contribute premiums, reducing take-home pay or profits.

## Jobs and Employability

While the resident unemployment rate climbed to 4.7% in the third quarter of 2020, it fell short of the peak during the GFC (Figure 11). By the fourth quarter of 2020, resident unemployment had fallen to 4.4%.

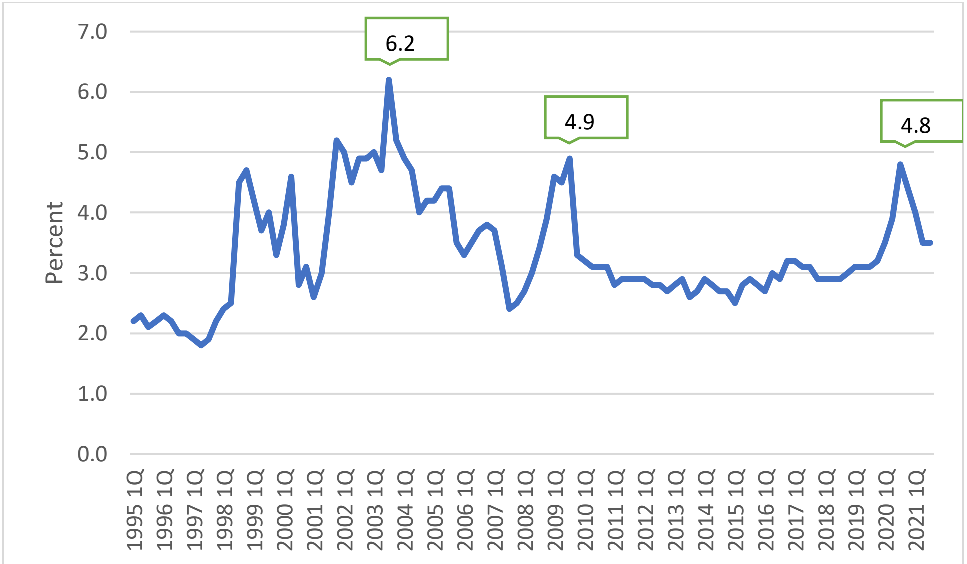



**Figure 11: Quarterly Resident Unemployment Rate (Seasonally Adjusted)**

The number of retrenchments came to over 26,000 in 2020, but the incidence of retrenchment (12.8 per thousand employees) was below that of previous recessionary highs in 2003 and 2009 (Table 4).

**Table 4: Incidence of Retrenchment**

| Year | Incidence of Retrenchment (per thousand employees) |
|---|---|
| 1998 – Asian Financial Crisis | 32.7 |
| 2001 – Dot-com Bust | 26.3 |
| 2003 – SARS | 16.7 |
| 2009 – Global Financial Crisis | 14.2 |
| 2020 – COVID-19 | 12.8 |

Source: Ministry of Manpower

Resident employment, which had contracted in the first half of the year, turned around in the third and fourth quarters, and recovered to pre-pandemic levels by the end of the year.

A joint MOF-MOM regression analysis estimated that a 10 percentage point increase in the effective JSS wage subsidy led to a net increase of 0.44 and 0.13 local jobs saved per firm per month for firms in Tier 1 and 2 sectors respectively, which suggests that the JSS preserved around 165,000 local jobs in 2020. Local wages were found to have increased by between 1.7% and 5.3% for every 10 percentage point increase in the effective JSS wage subsidy. These results suggest that the impact of the pandemic on local workers would have been significantly worse without the JSS support to firms.

A study by Government economists on Phase 1 of the JGI scheme (i.e. September 2020 to February 2021) found that the JGI incentivised the hiring of an additional 47,000 local workers, including 27,300 mature workers aged 40 and above. This increased the proportion of mature workers hired. Average wages of new hires also improved. JGI supported the hiring of vulnerable jobseekers, in particular. Nearly half of the JGI supported hires were previously not in employment (i.e. unemployed or outside the labour force) with close to 30% having been out of employment for more than six months.

Traineeships under the SGUnited Jobs and Skills Package played a role alongside the JGI in securing opportunities for fresh graduates and mature workers, in particular. The six-month post-programme employment outcomes for each of the SGUnited programmes is shown in Figure 12 below. Over 80% of SGUnited Traineeship (SGUT) and SGUnited Mid-Career Pathways Programme - Company Attachment (SGUP-CA) trainees found employment, while 52% and 69% of SGUP – Company Training (SGUP-CT) and SGUnited Skills Programme (SGUS) trainees found employment respectively.

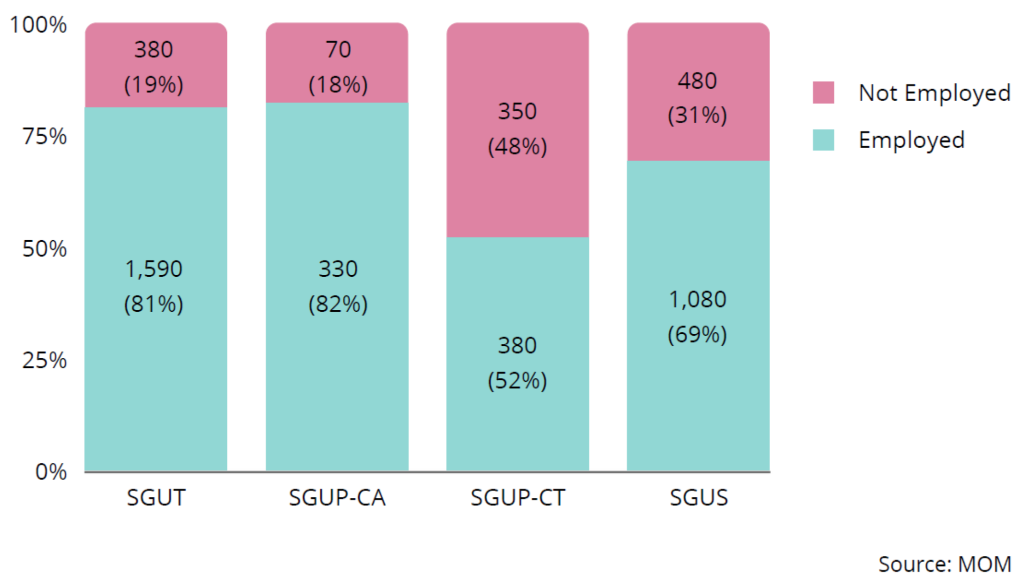



**Figure 12: Six-Month Post-Programme Employment Status**

Source: Chart reproduced from Ministry of Finance, "Assessment of the Impact of Key COVID-19 Budget Measures," occasional paper, 17 February 2022.

Overall employment, inclusive of the traineeships, held up well for university and polytechnic graduates, although there was a slight decline for ITE graduates in 2020. However, the proportion of those in full time permanent employment declined for each group.

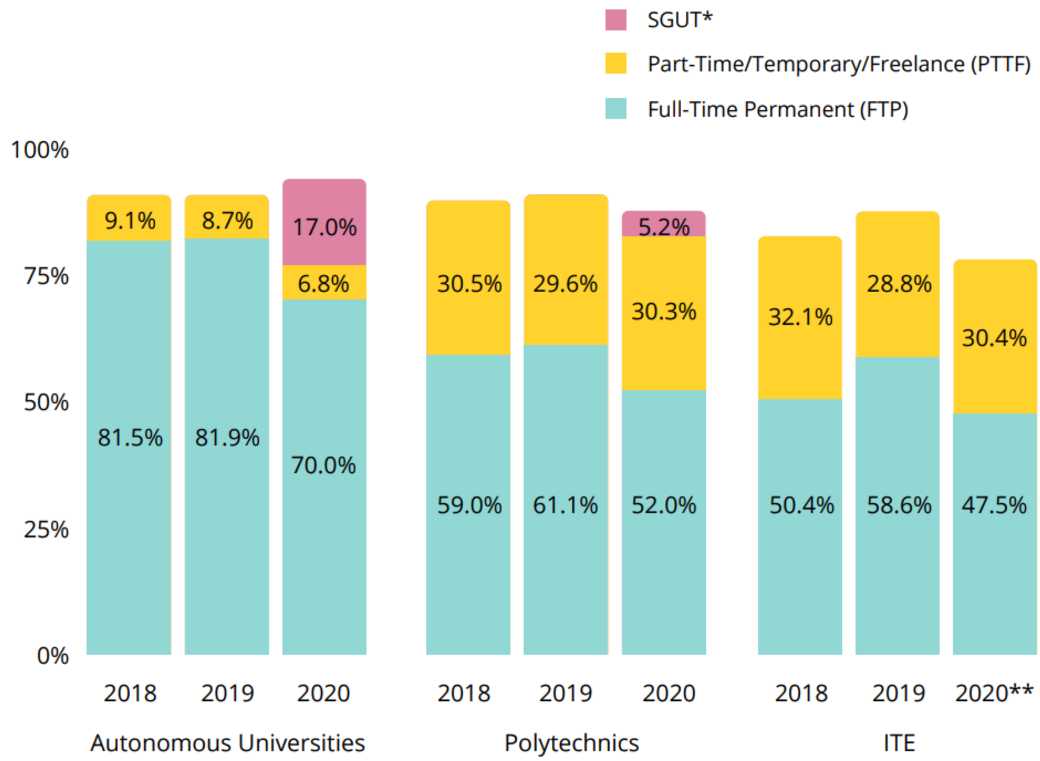



**Figure 13: Graduate Employment Outcomes**

Source: Chart reproduced from Ministry of Finance, "Assessment of the Impact of Key COVID-19 Budget Measures," occasional paper, 17 February 2022.

Median salaries of university polytechnic and ITE graduates in 2020 remained comparable to those in 2019 (Table 5).

**Table 5: Median Salaries of Fresh Graduates**

| | **Universities** | **Polytechnics** | **ITE (fresh)** | **ITE (post-NS)** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2018** | $3,500 | $2,350 | $1,700 | $2,200 |
| **2019** | $3,600 | $2,400 | $1,700 | $2,050 |
| **2020** | $3,700 | $2,400 | $1,720 | $2,200 |

Source: Institutes of Higher Learning Graduate Employment Surveys, 2018-2020

Older workers aged over 50, as well as mature workers aged over 40, are among those particularly vulnerable to retrenchment. They also find it more difficult to re-enter employment after being retrenched. This is the reason they received higher wage support under the Jobs Growth Incentive as well as the SGUP.

The training provided under SGUP-CT and the SGUS Programme will become a permanent feature of Singapore's training and placement ecosystem with the launch of a new SkillsFuture

Transition Programme. This is intended to strengthen support for mid-career workers, particularly those in their 40s and 50s, through training along with skills advisory, industry involvement and employment facilitation with government support.

As a “train and place” programme, this will complement the Career Conversion Programmes offered by WSG which are mostly “place and train” (i.e. current programme requires a company to first hire the worker before training commences). It will allow for scaling up of training efforts by training workers in anticipation of jobs in promising sectors.

## Addressing Inequality

Addressing inequality has been a priority, given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on income and wealth distribution, and its implications for social mobility.

The fallout of the disease on jobs and incomes has been highly uneven, with the impact on workers mirroring the impact on companies. Those heavily dependent on cross-border tourism and travel have been most badly affected, along with those providing in-person services or whose work requires them to be on site.

Data from the Ministry of Manpower’s Comprehensive Labour Force Survey in June 2020 showed that lower-wage, non-Professional, Managerial, Executive and Technician (non-PMET, or “rank and file”) workers bore the brunt of income and job losses at the onset of the pandemic.

Real median gross monthly income from work declined by 0.3% between June 2019 and June 2020, compared with a 4.5% decline for income at the 20th percentile. The PMET unemployment rate rose by 0.6 percentage points to 3.5% in Jun 2020, compared with a 1.7 percentage point increase in the non-PMET unemployment rate to 6.4% over the same period. This corroborates the results of a study by DBS bank, which found that lower-income earners (those earning S$2,999 and below), and those with less savings, formed the bulk of bank customers whose incomes had declined substantially (Seah et al. 2020).

While income inequality as measured by the household income Gini coefficient after taxes and transfers fell to a historic low in 2020 due to sizeable government transfers,[11] inequality, particularly wealth inequality, remains a pressing concern.

The pandemic was accompanied by a surge in asset prices globally, spurred by unprecedented fiscal and monetary stimulus, particularly in the US. This depressed interest rates and sent property and equity prices soaring. In Singapore, the private residential property price index breached its previous all-time high in the fourth quarter of 2020, while the HDB Resale Price Index reached a new high in the third quarter of 2021.

Recognising the need to uplift lower-income workers and households, the Government commissioned a tripartite workgroup to develop proposals to improve their long-term prospects. This would build on Workfare and the Progressive Wage Model (PWM) to boost incomes and provide for career progression through skills.

At the National Day Rally in August 2021, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced that the Government would accept the tripartite workgroup's recommendation to extend the PWM to more sectors and occupations. It would be a requirement for all firms hiring foreign workers to pay all their local workers at least the Local Qualifying Salary of $1,400, a figure that can be revised upward periodically. With these measures, the PWM would cover over 8 in 10 lower-wage workers (i.e. those in the bottom 20% of the wage distribution). A new Progressive Wage Mark would encourage the remaining firms to adopt PWM in order to be eligible to bid for government contracts.

In concept, wages under PWM would rise in tandem with skills and productivity. In practice, however, there are limits to productivity gains in domestic services sectors such as cleaning and waste management. While higher productivity may partly offset business costs and better service may increase consumer willingness to pay, the higher wage cost would have to be shared between businesses and consumers, with the government providing transitional support. Hence, it will take broad societal consensus to grow wages sustainably through the PWM.

To this end, it is hoped that greater public awareness of the important role played by cleaners and other frontline service workers during the COVID-19 crisis may bolster support for initiatives that benefit lower-income workers.

As announced in 2021 and elaborated on in Budget 2022, the Workfare Income Supplement, a wage supplement, was enhanced to provide greater support for lower-income workers. The relaxation of eligibility criteria will enable more workers, including younger workers aged 30 to 34, to benefit from this scheme.

In the lead up to Budget 2022, there was speculation as to whether Singapore would introduce new wealth taxes or reinstate estate duty, which had been abolished in 2008. The Government opted instead to work within the existing framework of taxes on residential properties and luxury cars, given the practical difficulty of fairly assessing a person's net wealth, as well as the mobility of other forms of wealth across borders.

Residential property taxes were made more progressive, with the top 7 per cent of owner-occupied properties and all non-owner occupied properties affected. These are estimated to net additional tax revenues of more $380 million more a year. Concurrently, marginal personal income taxes were raised for top earners earning more than $500,000 a year. This increase in personal income taxes for the top 1.2 per cent of wage earners is expected to raise about S$170 million in additional revenues each year.

## Impact on Singapore's Openness and Global City Status

While Singapore had done well in insulating the population from COVID-19, some questioned how long Singapore could afford to maintain strict immigration and social distancing measures as the pandemic wore on in 2021. On reaching high vaccination rates, countries such as the US and UK proceeded to roll back COVID-19 measures and allowed their economies to re-open. Meanwhile, reports surfaced that expatriates were getting frustrated with the difficulty of getting entry permits to Singapore, as well as strict Stay Home requirements for those returning to Singapore. The periodic tightening of COVID-19 measures in 2021 also added uncertainty to businesses and constrained the recovery of domestic economic activity.

In August 2021, the authorities announced a 4-stage re-opening plan to reach the end goal of becoming a "COVID-resilient nation". This would entail learning to live with COVID-19 as an endemic disease, allowing economy and society to settle into a new normal. In his National Day message, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong referred to the "difficult balance" between protecting lives and livelihoods. Health Minister Ong Ye Kung warned that Singaporeans would have to be "psychological prepared" for infections, serious illnesses and deaths to rise as Singapore opened up, even while striving to minimise the incidence of serious illness. Notwithstanding, the tradeoff between lives and livelihoods would be mitigated by "public health measures, social discipline and financial support for families, workers and businesses", as the Prime Minister alluded to.

The delta and omicron infection waves in November 2021 and March 2022 set back the timeframe for opening up, but the Government finally announced that COVID-19 safe management measures would be rolled back when the omicron wave subsided. From 31 March 2022, all fully-vaccinated people are allowed to enter Singapore without quarantine or having to book designated flights, and without prior entry approvals or quotas on the number of daily arrivals. Since 26 April 2022, there is no longer a need for travellers coming to Singapore to take a COVID-19 test before departure or on arrival.

## Foreign Manpower Inflow and Policy

The number of foreign workers fell by some 230,000 between December 2019 and December 2021, with declines across all pass types. This was due to border closures as well as limits on the entry or return of foreign workers, given capacity constraints in quarantine facilities.

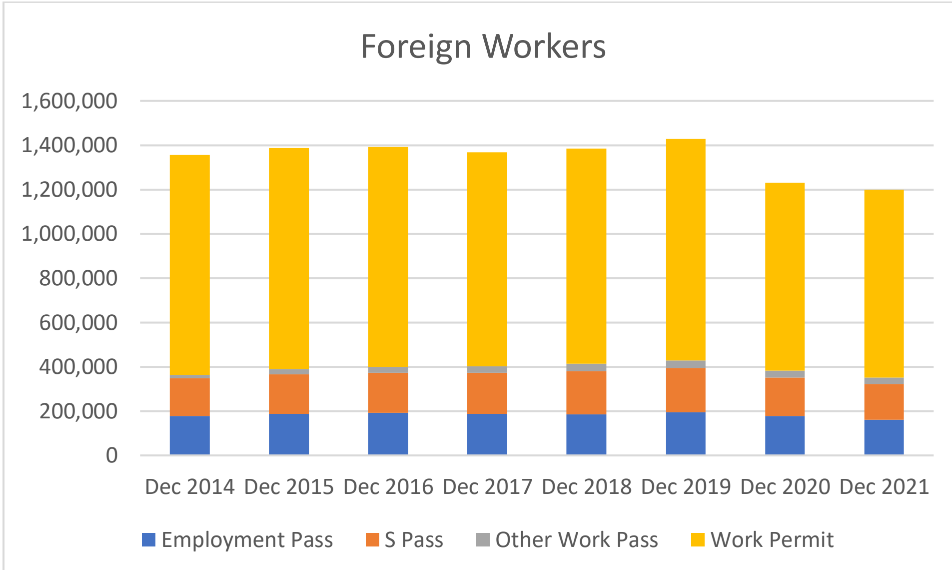



**Figure 14: Number of Foreign Workers by Work Pass Type**

The disease outbreak in foreign worker dormitories in 2020 also shone the spotlight on foreign worker housing and safety, with updated designs and more stringent standards for the construction of new foreign worker dormitories.

With the gradual reopening of borders, the number of Work Permit holders increased modestly from 848,200 at end-2020 to 849,700 at end-2021. However, the number of S Pass (mid-skilled) and Employment Pass holders (higher-skilled workers) continued to decline. The tight labour market in 2022 has seen strong demand for foreign workers to fill vacancies and alleviate manpower shortages across various sectors. However, in order to manage reliance on foreign workers and to give firms sufficient impetus to build a local workforce core, the Government has taken steps to tighten the inflow of foreign workers and to improve complementarity between the local and foreign workforce.

Policy measures adopted in Budget 2022 included raising the qualifying salaries for higher and mid-skilled workers on Employment Pass and S Pass respectively. A points-based system is being introduced for Employment Pass applications which takes into account not just the worker's salary and qualifications, but also the employer's workforce diversity and efforts to support local employment. Foreign worker levies have also been raised for S Pass holders while quotas have been lowered for Work Permit holders in the Construction and Process sectors.

### Impact on Digitalisation and Work Arrangements

It is clear that the pandemic has accelerated the trend of digitalisation, with more businesses adopting e-commerce and more heartland stores and food stalls accepting e-payment. This has positioned the economy well for the future, although the downside risks such as cybersecurity threats and scams will have to be addressed.

Working from home has gained currency, with many firms in Singapore indicating that they would support such work arrangements even beyond the pandemic. Likewise, home-based learning will take on a more prominent role, complementing learning in schools. In these areas, there ought to be a balance between convenience and safety on the one hand, and the importance of face-to-face interaction at the workplace and in schools.

## Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the crisis of a generation. Beyond fiscal support, it has required adroit policy navigation to protect both lives and livelihoods amid a public health challenge that has taken numerous twists and turns since its onset in early 2020. It has also demanded a whole-of-society effort to minimise infections and limit the economic fallout from the disease.

Looking ahead, the pandemic will have far-reaching ramifications for the economy and society in various dimensions ranging from the future of work to the challenge of inequality. Besides economic efficiency, public policy will have to increasingly take cognisance of equity and resilience in anticipation of future pandemics and other social and economic dislocations.

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## NOTES

[1] Co-Chair of the Multi-Ministry COVID-19 Task Force, Minister Lawrence Wong, said that the Government prioritised "both lives and livelihoods" in an interview with Money FM 89.3 host Elliott Danker on 2 Jun 2020.

[2] The previous largest economic contraction was during the Asian Financial Crisis in 1998, when real GDP declined by 2.2%.

[3] Notably, the business community was part of a groundswell of civic consciousness prompted by the pandemic. The Ministry of Finance reported in June that more than 130 companies had returned a total of $97 million in JSS payments for April and May, while over 250 companies had pledged to decline future payments. Other companies donated their JSS payments to charitable causes. Firms also joined with Singaporeans from all walks of life in making donations in cash or kind to support the needy and vulnerable, or in showing appreciation for frontline workers in the COVID-19 fight.

[4] Work permit and S-Pass are foreign work passes for basic skilled and mid-skilled workers respectively.

[5] Grocery vouchers were disbursed to citizens living in 1- or 2-room HDB flats, along with additional utilities rebates for HDB households, and Service and Conservancy Charges rebates of between 1.5 to 3.5 months for all HDB households, depending on flat type.

[6] SGUnited is an initiative to foster resilience and solidarity among Singaporeans through volunteerism and community action, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

[7] Cited in the  2021 Budget Statement by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat.

[8] The JGI was extended by 7 months to September 2021 in Budget 2021, and was subsequently further extended to cover hiring up to Septmber 2022.

[9] Heng Swee Keat, Written Reply to Parliamentary Question by Ms Foo Mee Har, 1 February 2021.

[10] The Central Provident Fund (CPF) is a mandatory savings scheme for working Singapore citizens and permanent residents, to fund retirement, healthcare and housing needs.

[11] This was the lowest since the Government began tracking the Gini coefficient in 2000.