Fair Employment Practices

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Singapore

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FAIR EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

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Highlights

Fewer Singapore residents in the labour force experienced discrimination at the workplace (2022: 8.2%; 2021: 8.5%) and during their job search (2022: 23.8%; 2021: 25.8%). The continued improvement follows efforts by MOM, TAFEP and tripartite partners to correct stereotypes and promote fair employment practices.

Age, race, and mental health discrimination were the more common forms of discrimination during job search (age: 16.6%; race: 7.1%; mental health: 5.0%) and at work (age: 3.7%; race: 2.6%; mental health: 4.7%).

Among employees who faced discrimination at work, the proportion who sought help nearly doubled from 20.0% in 2021 to 35.3% in 2022. More employees also reported that their firms had put in place formal procedures to manage workplace discrimination in 2022 (59.8%), up from 54.0% in 2021.

Results from a logistic regression on the survey results show that formal procedures to manage workplace discrimination leads to a statistically significant reduction in the likelihood of age, race, sex, maternal, and marital status discrimination.

1 Introduction

1.1 The Manpower Research and Statistics Department conducts regular surveys to track the prevalence of workplace discrimination. This report analyses data that were obtained from the latest survey conducted in 2022, following previous runs in 2021 and 2018.

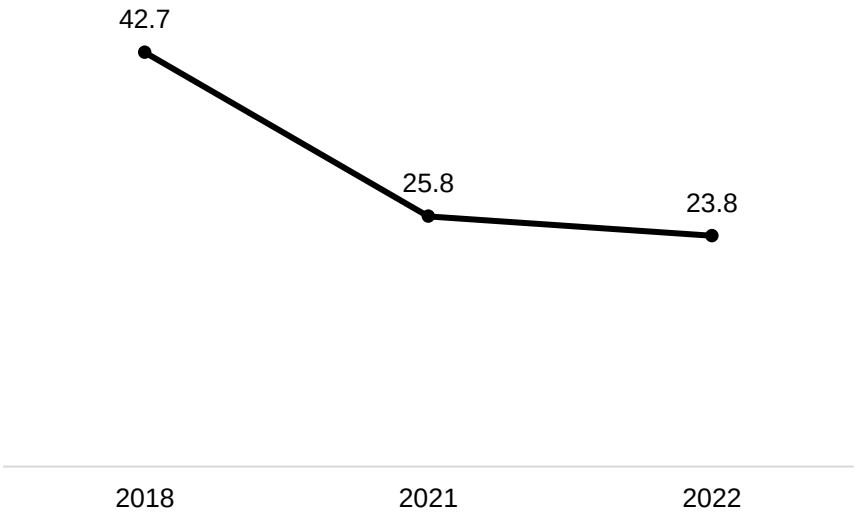
1.2 To ensure that our survey results can be generalised to the entire resident workforce, the sample is selected randomly and is representative of the profile of Singapore's resident workforce such as age, sex, and labour force status. A total of 3,600 residents in the labour force aged 15 and over (excluding full-time National Servicemen) were selected to participate in the survey, of whom 80.3% responded. Respondents were asked to recount their experiences in the year prior to the time the survey was conducted. The survey methodology is kept consistent to enable comparisons of results across the years.

2 Prevalence of workplace discrimination

2.1 Discrimination among job seekers

2.1.1 The proportion of job seekers who faced discrimination during their job search fell for the second consecutive year to 23.8% in 2022, from 25.8% in 2021 and 42.7% in 2018 [Chart 1]. The continued decline reflects efforts by MOM and TAFEP to promote fair employment practices and enforce against discriminatory practices. Employers are expected to adhere to the Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices (TGFEP) which spells out the principles and practices of fair hiring. For example, job advertisements should provide objective selection criteria instead of stating preferences for applicants with specific demographic characteristics without justifications.

Chart 1: Proportion of resident job seekers who were discriminated during job search due to their personal attributes (%)



Source: Supplementary Survey on Fair Employment Practices, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

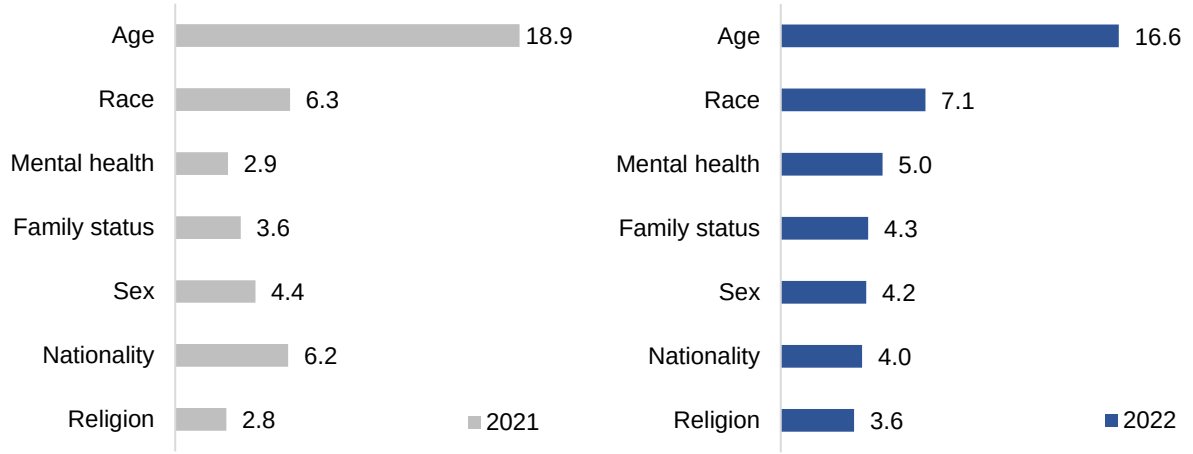
Notes:
(1) Data are based on those with job search activity in the year prior to the conduct of the survey.
(2) The incidence of job search discrimination is based on those who were discriminated due to personal attributes shown in Chart 2. Data for 2018 excludes discrimination due to mental health condition as this was not collected in the 2018 survey.

2.1.2 Age (16.6%), race (7.1%) and mental health (5.0%) discrimination were the more common forms of discrimination during job search in 2022. While age discrimination remained the main form of discrimination towards job seekers, the proportion of job seekers who experienced age discrimination declined, from 18.9% in 2021 to 16.6% in 2022 [Chart 2].

2.1.3 Other forms of discrimination during job search included sex (4.2% of all job seekers experienced this form of discrimination),[1] and nationality (4.0%). Similar to age discrimination, the levels for these two forms of discrimination have declined from 2021 and were sharply lower than in 2018 (sex: 9.5%; nationality: 14.2%).

2.1.4 However, there was an uptick in job seekers who faced discrimination due to mental health condition (from 2.9% in 2021 to 5.0% in 2022).[2] This could be partly due to greater expectations for employers to care for their staff's mental needs, as well as an increase in the proportion of residents in the labour force with mental health conditions.[3]

Chart 2: Proportion of resident job seekers who were discriminated during job search due to their personal attributes (%)



Source: Supplementary Survey on Fair Employment Practices, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

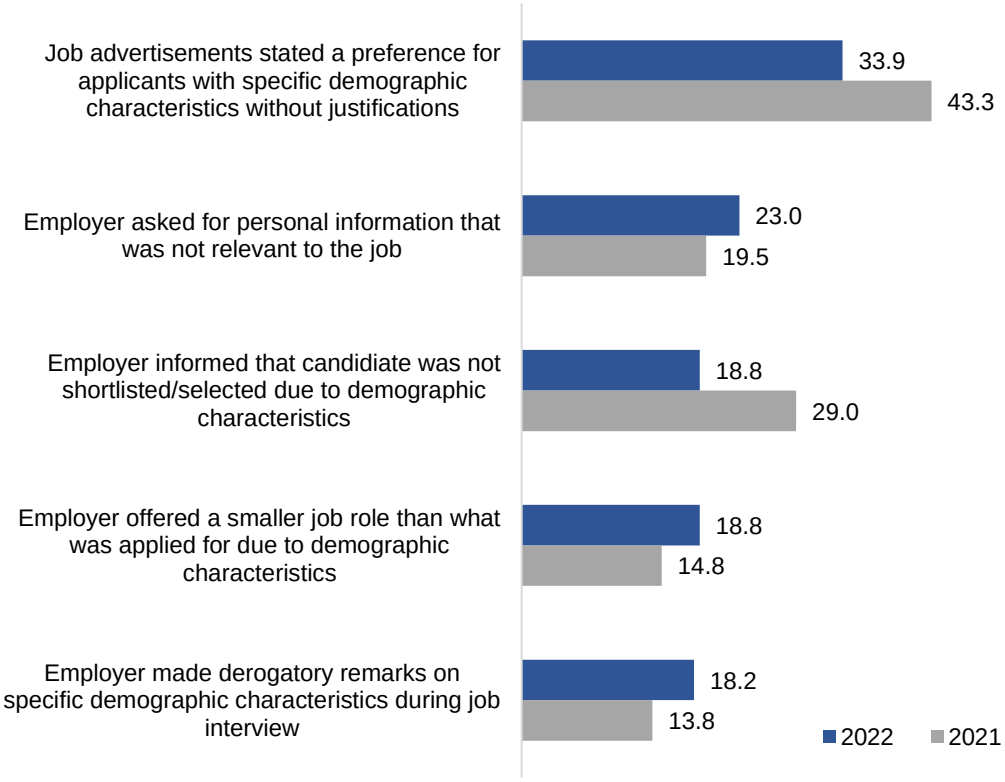
Notes:
(1) Data are based on those with job search activity in the year prior the conduct of the survey.
(2) The incidence of discrimination for each specific attribute do not sum up to the overall incidence of 25.8% in 2021 and 23.8% in 2022 respectively. This is because a job applicant who faced discrimination may face multiple forms of discrimination. These discrimination encounters are reflected as individual counts for each distinct attribute (e.g., one count under 'age', one count under 'sex').
(3) Discrimination due to family status includes marital status, pregnancy status and maternal discrimination. The breakdown into each component is shown in Annex A.
(4) There were insufficient responses among disabled job applicants to provide an estimate in both 2021 and 2022.

[1] In 2022, 4.8% of female job seekers faced job search discrimination due to their sex as compared to 3.6% among males.
[2] Job search discrimination due to mental health condition was not collected in 2018. This trend bears further monitoring.
[3] The Health Promotion Board launched an inaugural mental health campaign in October 2021 aimed at normalising discussion and improving understanding of mental health issues. There was also a rise in the prevalence of poor mental health among residents aged 18 to 74 (13.4% in 2020, an increase from 12.5% in 2017). Source: National Population Health Survey, Ministry of Health and Health Promotion Board, Singapore.

2.1.5 Job advertisements which stated a preference for specific demographic characteristics without justifications remained the most common source of discrimination experienced by job seekers. However, the proportion of job seekers who indicated this form of discrimination has declined from 43.3% in 2021 to 33.9% in 2022 [Chart 3], as more employers adhere to the TGFEP which encourages employers to ensure that job advertisements state job-related criteria that are related to the qualifications, skills, knowledge, and experience of the candidates.

2.1.6 Requests by employers for personal information that was not relevant to the job (23.0%) was another form of discrimination commonly experienced by job seekers. Age, marital status, and nationality were the most common types of personal information asked in job application forms or during interviews. The TGFEP would help reduce discrimination on this front, as it encourages employers to review job application forms to ensure that each field is relevant to the job, and to communicate why the information is needed.

Chart 3: How job search discrimination occurred, as a percentage of job seekers who were discriminated during job search in the year (%)



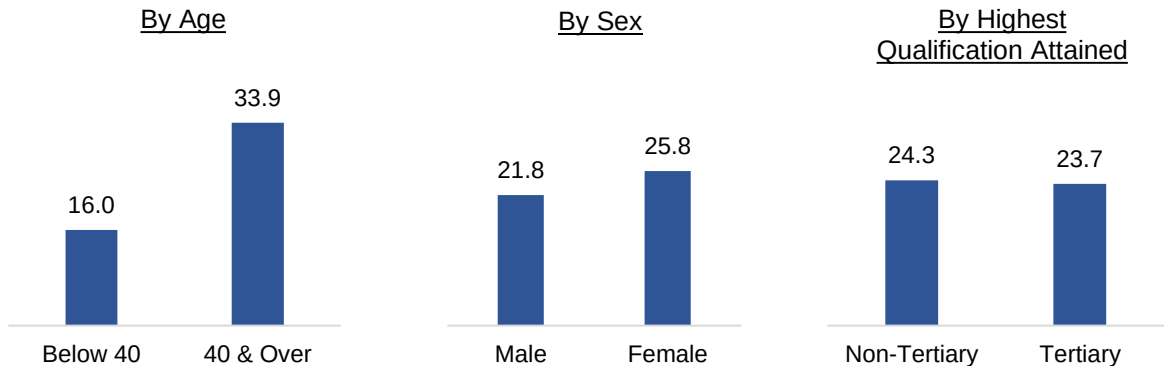
Source: Supplementary Survey on Fair Employment Practices, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

Note: Respondents are allowed to indicate more than one option.

2.1.7 Across age groups, job seekers aged 40 and over had a much higher incidence of being discriminated (33.9%) compared to younger job seekers (16.0%) [Chart 4].[4] However, the likelihood of mature job seekers experiencing discrimination has declined from the previous year (41.7%), as employers increasingly value the experience and skills of mature job seekers.

2.1.8 Unlike age, there were no notable differences between the level of discrimination among the less and more educated (discrimination by highest qualification attained) and between males and females (discrimination by sex) [Chart 4].

Chart 4: Proportion of resident job seekers who were discriminated during job search by their demographic profile, 2022 (%)



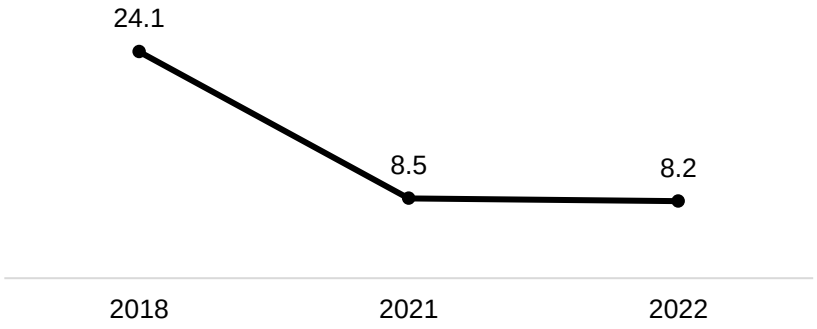
Source: Supplementary Survey on Fair Employment Practices, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

[4] This is not limited to age discrimination. For example, the discrimination faced by job seekers aged 40 and over does not solely reflect age discrimination, although it is the main form of discrimination they encountered.

2.2 Discrimination among employees

2.2.1 The proportion of employees who were discriminated at work continued to decline to 8.2% in 2022, compared to 8.5% in 2021, and was significantly lower than in 2018 (24.1%) [Chart 5]. Discrimination at work occurs when employees face unfair treatment at work in areas such as salary, career development and workload distribution.

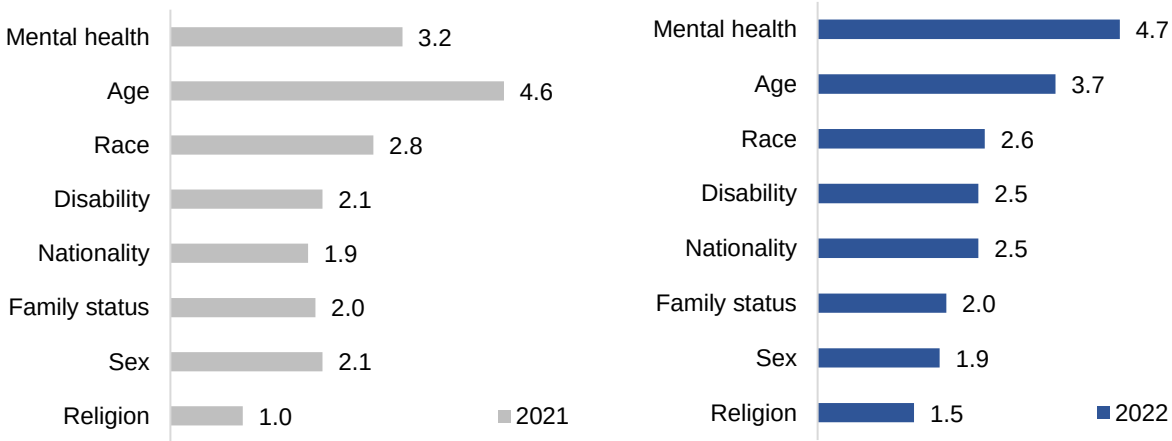
Chart 5: Proportion of resident employees who were discriminated at work due to their personal attributes (%)



Source: Supplementary Survey on Fair Employment Practices, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

2.2.2 In 2022, mental health (4.7%), age (3.7%) and race (2.6%) remained the top forms of discrimination at work [Chart 6]. Age (from 4.6% in 2021 to 3.7% in 2022) and race discrimination (from 2.8% to 2.6%) has declined.

Chart 6: Proportion of resident employees who were discriminated at work due to their personal attributes (%)

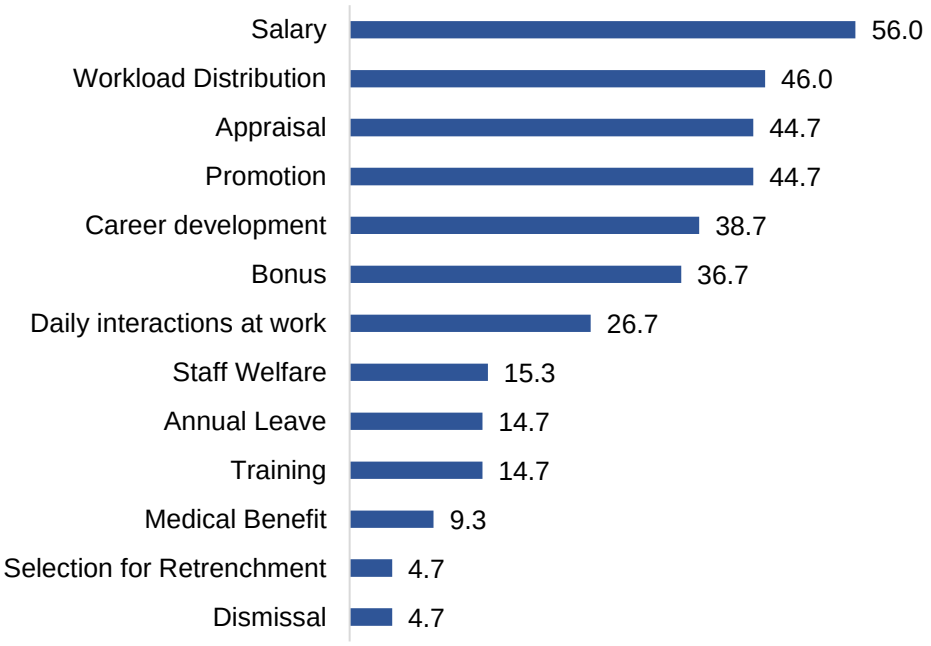


Source: Supplementary Survey on Fair Employment Practices, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

Notes:
(1) Data are based on those who have worked as an employee in the year prior to the conduct of the survey.
(2) The incidence of discrimination for each specific attribute do not sum up to the overall incidence of 8.5% in 2021 and 8.2% in 2022. This is because an employee who faced discrimination may face multiple forms of discrimination. These discrimination encounters are reflected as individual counts for each distinct attribute (e.g., one count under 'age', one count under 'sex').
(3) Discrimination due to family status includes marital status, pregnancy status and maternal discrimination. The breakdown into each component is shown in Annex A.

2.2.3 Employees who experienced discrimination more commonly reported unfair treatment related to remuneration (salary: 56.0%; bonus: 36.7%), workload distribution (46.0%), and career progression (appraisal: 44.7%; promotion: 44.7%; and career development: 38.7%) [Chart 7].

Chart 7: Instances of unfair treatment at work as a percentage of employees who were discriminated at work, 2022 (%)

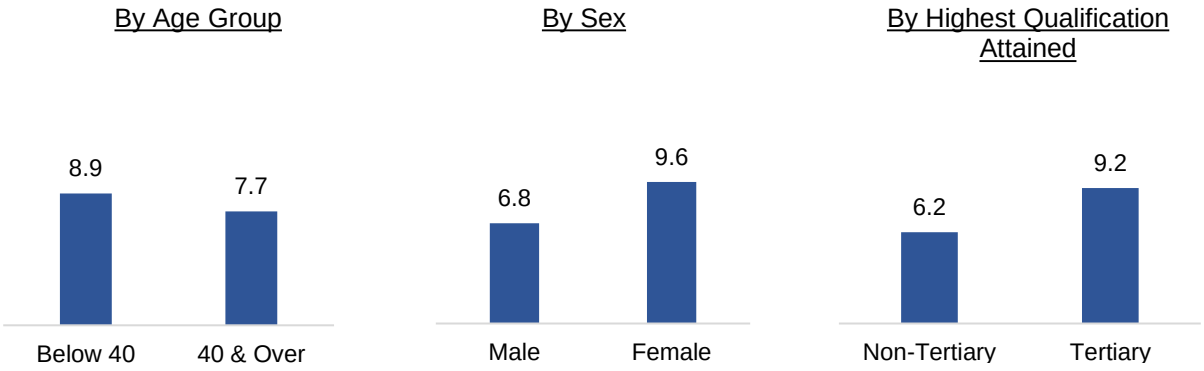


Source: Supplementary Survey on Fair Employment Practices, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

Notes:
(1) Data are based on those who have worked as an employee in the year prior to the conduct of the survey.
(2) Respondents are allowed to indicate more than one option.

2.2.4 Females (9.6%) were more likely than males (6.8%) to experience discrimination at work [Chart 8],[5] which commonly occurred through unequal distribution of workload (52.4% among females compared to 38.2% among males). Non-tertiary educated females (92.3%) were also more likely to experience pay-related discrimination than their male counterparts (84.2%). This suggests that in general, females need more support for fairer pay and work conditions.

Chart 8: Proportion of resident employees who were discriminated at work by their demographic profile, 2022 (%)



Source: Supplementary Survey on Fair Employment Practices, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

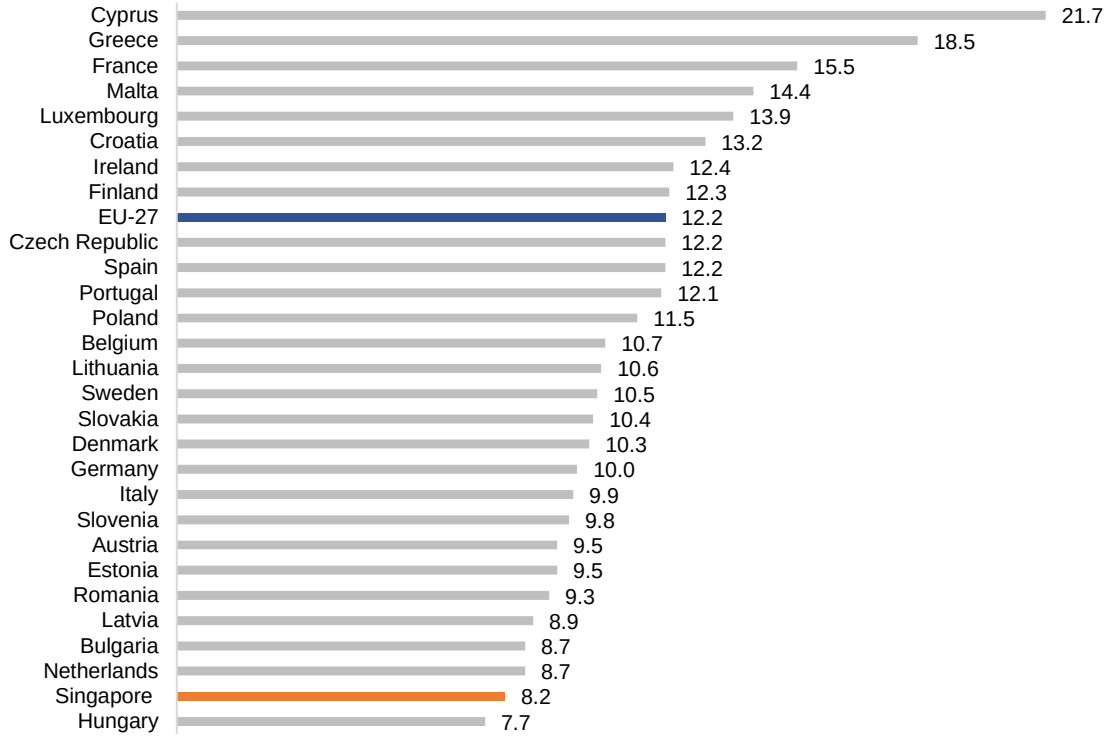
[5] This is not limited to discrimination due to sex. In 2022, 2.6% of female employees faced discrimination at work due to their sex as compared to 1.3% among males.

2.3 International comparison

2.3.1 Eurofound[6] conducts a European Working Conditions Survey[7] (EWCS) which has similar survey methods with Singapore. The EWCS measures the prevalence of discrimination at work in the 12 months prior to the survey. Comparing with EWCS 2021 findings, Singapore's incidence of discrimination among employees in 2022 (8.2%) was lower than that of the EU-average (12.2%), and most of the EU-27 countries except Hungary [Chart 9].

2.3.2 Based on breakdown available by sex, trends in EU-27 countries mirrored that of Singapore. Females had a higher likelihood of being discriminated at work (13.0%) as compared to males (9.9%).

Chart 9: Proportion of workers who were discriminated in the last 12 months due to their personal attributes, in EU 27 countries, 2021 (%)[8]



Sources:

Other countries: European Working Conditions Telephone Survey, 2021, Eurofound

Singapore: Supplementary Survey on Fair Employment Practices, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

[6] Eurofound is the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

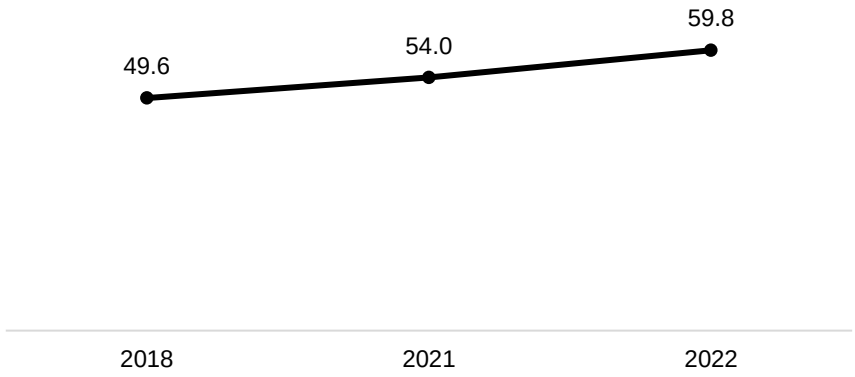
[7] The European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) collects data on working conditions in Europe, including adverse social behaviours and discrimination, work organisation, health, and well-being. In 2021, a modified-EWCS using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) was conducted based on an adaptation of the EWCS 2020 questionnaire. This survey is the European Working Conditions Telephone Survey (EWCTS) 2021. It focused on working conditions in the time of COVID-19. The EWCS has been conducted once every five to six years, with 2021 being the most recent survey.

[8] Singapore's data is based on 2022.

3 Formal procedures to handle workplace discrimination

3.1 More employees also reported that their firms had put in place formal procedures to manage workplace discrimination in 2022 (59.8%), up from 54.0% in 2021. The proportion was also higher than in 2018 (49.6%) [Chart 10]. The encouraging trend could lead to further improvements in workplace fairness in the future.

Chart 10: Proportion of resident employees in firms with formal procedures to manage workplace discrimination (%)

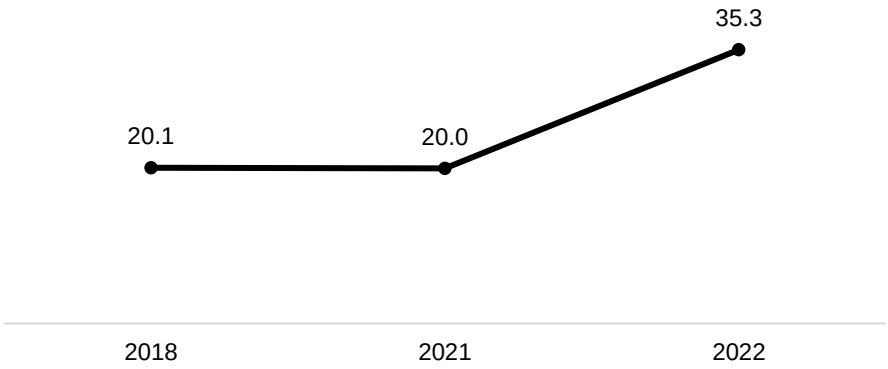


Source: Supplementary Survey on Fair Employment Practices, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

4 Seeking help for workplace discrimination

4.1 The proportion of employees who sought help upon facing discrimination at work nearly doubled to 35.3% in 2022 from 20.0% in 2021 [Chart 11].

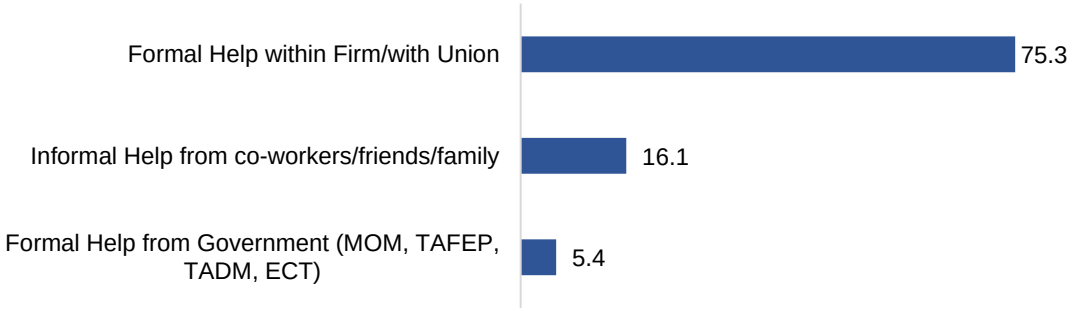
Chart 11: Proportion of resident employees who were discriminated at work by whether they sought help (%)



Source: Supplementary Survey on Fair Employment Practices, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

4.2 The majority of employees (75.3%) who sought help with discrimination were able to do so via the formal help provided by their firm or their union [Chart 12].

Chart 12: Proportion of resident employees who were discriminated at work by type of help sought, 2022 (%)



Source: Supplementary Survey on Fair Employment Practices, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

4.3 Among those who chose not to seek help, the most common reasons were 'fear of being marginalised at work or affecting work relations negatively' (23.1%) as well as having 'repercussions on career' (21.5%) [Chart 13]. These findings signal the importance of having a formal, confidential and impartial process to handle workplace grievances, so as to create a safe environment for employees to report discrimination.

Chart 13: Reasons for not seeking help among those who were discriminated at work, 2022 (%)



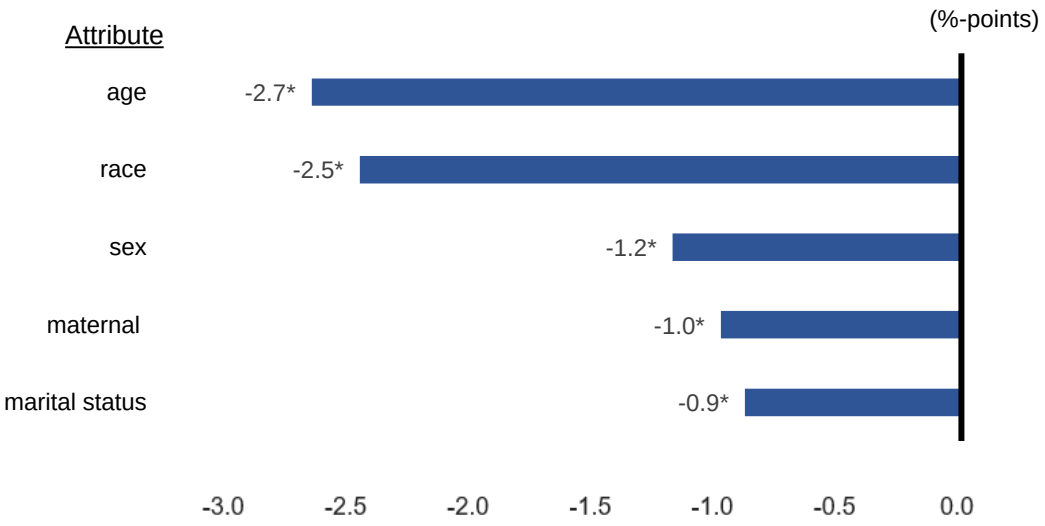
Source: Supplementary Survey on Fair Employment Practices, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

5 Effect of formal procedures in firms on workplace discrimination

5.1 Results from a logistic regression on the survey results suggest that having formal procedures to manage workplace discrimination could deter acts of discrimination in the workforce.

5.2 Being in a firm with formal procedures to manage workplace discrimination (compared to one without) reduces the predicted probability of being discriminated based on age by 2.7 percentage points [Chart 14]. Similarly, the presence of formal procedures in a firm also reduces the predicted probability of race discrimination by 2.5 percentage points, and to a smaller extent, sex discrimination (-1.2%-points), maternal discrimination (-1.0%-points), and marital status discrimination (-0.9%-points). This gives evidence to the importance of implementing formal procedures to manage workplace discrimination.

Chart 14: The effect of formal procedures to manage workplace discrimination on discrimination at work



Change in likelihood of being discriminated in a firm with formal procedures to manage discrimination

Notes:

1. Results are statistically significant at *95% confidence interval.
2. Results for impact on the likelihood of being discriminated at work due to nationality, religion, mental health condition, pregnancy status and disability are not statistically significant.

Annex A

Table 1: Proportion of resident job applicants who were discriminated against during job search in the year due to their personal attributes (%)

Attribute	2018	2021	2022
Age	30.4	18.9	16.6
Maternal	13.9	6.9	14.9
Race	11.0	6.3	7.1
Pregnancy Status	23.1	4.2	6.9
Mental Health	n.a.	2.9	5.0
Sex	9.5	4.4	4.2
Nationality	14.2	6.2	4.0
Religion	6.9	2.8	3.6
Marital Status	7.9	3.2	2.6

Source: Supplementary Survey on Fair Employment Practices, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

Notes:

(1) Data are based on those with job search activity in the year prior to the conduct of the survey.
(2) The incidence of discrimination for each specific attribute do not sum up to the overall incidence of 42.7% in 2018, 25.8% in 2021, 23.8% in 2022 respectively. A job applicant who faced discrimination may face multiple forms of discrimination.
(3) n.a: not applicable.

Table 2: Proportion of resident employees who were discriminated against at work in the year due to their personal attributes (%)

Attribute	2021	2022
Mental Health	3.2	4.7
Age	4.6	3.7
Maternal	1.5	3.4
Pregnancy Status	3.7	3.3
Race	2.8	2.6
Disability	2.1	2.5
Nationality	1.9	2.5
Sex	2.1	1.9
Religion	1.0	1.5
Marital Status	1.2	1.3

Source: Supplementary Survey on Fair Employment Practices, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

Notes:
(1) Data are based on those who have worked as an employee in the year prior to the conduct of the survey.
(2) The incidence of discrimination for each specific attribute do not sum to the overall incidence of 8.5% in 2021 and 8.2% in 2022. An employee who faced discrimination may face multiple forms of discrimination.

Annex B

SURVEY COVERAGE AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The *Supplementary Survey on Fair Employment Practices* was conducted by the Manpower Research and Statistics Department of the Ministry of Manpower under the Statistics Act (Chapter 317). The survey was conducted from 10 October 2022 to 10 February 2023.

Objective

The survey was conducted to collect information on the prevalence of workplace discrimination during the 12-month period ending June 2022 (i.e. 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022), and procedures related to fair treatment at work.

Coverage

The survey covered residents in the labour force aged 15 years and over (excluding full-time National Servicemen). A total of 3,600 residents in the labour force were surveyed, of whom 2,890 or 80.3% responded to the survey.

About 97.9% of the respondents were in employment at any time during the 12-month period ending June 2022, and the remaining were either unemployed or had recently exited the labour force.

All respondents were asked on incidents of discrimination encountered during the 12-month period ending June 2022, either during their job search or in employment. This is because the employed person might have had previous stints of job search prior to securing employment. Similarly, some who are not employed at the point of survey might have been an employee in the year.

Methodology

The survey was conducted using mail questionnaires. Respondents could submit their returns online, by post, email or fax, with clarifications made over the phone.

Data Collected

Individuals were asked:

- Whether they were discriminated during job search in the past year because of their personal attributes;
- How they encountered discrimination during job search;
- Whether they were discriminated at work in the past year because of their personal attributes, and in various aspects of employment (e.g. salary, career development, promotion, appraisal);
- Whether the firm they worked in had formal procedures to manage workplace discrimination and
- The actions employees took after experiencing workplace discrimination.

Reliability of data

In a sample survey, inferences about the target population are drawn from the data collected from the sample. Errors due to extension of the conclusions based on one sample to the entire population are known as sampling errors. The sampling error of an estimate is the extent of variation between the estimated value obtained from a sample and the true value from the population. Factors influencing the sampling error include the sample size, the sample design, method of estimation, the variability of the population and the characteristics studied.

A common measure of the sampling error of an estimate is its standard error, which is a measure of the variation among the estimates derived from all possible samples. An alternative measure is the relative standard error of an estimate which indicates the standard error relative to the magnitude of the estimate. A sample estimate and an estimate of its standard error can be used to construct an interval that will, at specified levels of confidence, include the true estimate. By statistical convention, the confidence level has been set at 95 per cent.

Estimates of the sampling variability of selected indicators are as follows:

	Estimate (%)	Standard Error (%-points)	Relative Error (%)	95% Confidence Level	
				Lower	Upper
Proportion of resident job applicants who were discriminated during job search due to their personal attributes	23.8	1.6	6.8	20.6	27.0
Proportion of resident employees who were discriminated at work due to their personal attributes	8.2	0.5	6.3	7.2	9.2
Proportion of resident employees who were discriminated in their firm and sought help	35.3	3.9	11.1	27.7	42.9

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