



The Director-General



Secretary General

SINGAPORE - EU Gender Action Plan III: Country Level Implementation Plan (CLIP) 2021-2025

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1. Context for EU action gender equality and women's empowerment in the country

Analytical basis for developing the CLIP

The following were consulted in developing the CLIP:

- The documentation of the 3rd cycle of Singapore's Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which took place on 12 and 14 May 2021: Singapore's National Report, the compilation of UN information and the submissions by civil society;
- The documentation of the 2017 review by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: the State party report, the "List of Issues" by the Committee, the "Reply to List of Issues" by the Committee and the Committee's concluding observations;
- The chapter on Singapore in the "2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices" by the U.S. Department of State;
- Presentations by the civil society organisation AWARE at the EU Political Counsellors meeting on 2 March 2021, the "UPR Pre-Session" organised by the NGO UPR-Info on 25 March 2021, and the presentation at the webinar about the UPR and CSO submissions co-organised by EUDEL Singapore and the Embassy of Switzerland in Singapore on 18 November 2020;
- The reports by the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative project *Safe and Fair*;
- The political reports by the EUDEL Singapore Political, Press and Information section.

Overview of the gender equality situation in the country

There is no specific definition of discrimination against women in Singapore law. Article 12(2) of the *Constitution* prohibits “discrimination against citizens of Singapore on the ground only of religion, race, descent or place of birth”. This has been confirmed by the Singapore Court of Appeal (the apex court): “only specific grounds of discrimination are prohibited under Art 12(2)”. The Court further elaborated: “the necessary flexibility to include additional prohibited grounds of discrimination exists in as much as Article 12(2) can be amended by the Singapore Parliament”.¹ Thus, the current constitutional and legislative framework excludes any prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sex or gender.

In its National Report submitted on 28 January 2021 to the UN Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism, the Singapore government stated that specific legislation protected the rights of women in particular areas, such as the *Employment Act*, the *Women’s Charter*, the *Children and Young Persons Act* and the *Penal Code*. Singapore added it had enacted several laws since 2009, to give effect to its obligations under the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW). These include the *Protection from Harassment Act*, the *Prevention of Human Trafficking Act* and the *Family Justice Act*. Whilst noting this with appreciation, the CEDAW Committee reiterated its recommendation that Singapore incorporate into its Constitution or other appropriate legislation a definition of discrimination against women and provisions to prohibit all forms of discrimination against them, encompassing direct and indirect discrimination in the private and public spheres as well as intersecting forms of discrimination against women.

Singapore acceded to the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) on 15 October 1995. Its last State party report was submitted on 29 October 2015 and reviewed in 2017. Its next report is due on 30 November 2021.²

At its latest review in 2017, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women welcomed the partial withdrawal of **Singapore’s reservations to CEDAW**, made on accession. However, it noted Singapore’s remaining reservations to Article 2(a)–(f), Article 16 (1)(a), (c) and (h) and (2), which it deemed were contrary to the object and purpose of the convention. It also noted concern about Singapore’s lack of measures to withdraw its reservations to article 11(2).

Furthermore, the CEDAW committee noted in their review in 2017 a lack of information on measures taken by the Singapore Inter-Ministry Committee on CEDAW to implement the convention and the previous CEDAW committee recommendations. It also expressed concern about the **lack of information on the monitoring mechanisms** in place to track progress and ensure gender mainstreaming in the development and implementation of laws, policies and programmes in ministries and legislative structures. Additionally, the Committee noted the lack of progress in establishing an independent national human rights institution, noting a governmental body such as the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Rights was not an appropriate substitute.

Singapore ranked as number 12 in the 2020 UNDP Gender Inequality Index.³ While it recognised that gender equality remained a work in progress, it announced that it would undertake “**a comprehensive review of issues affecting women**”,⁴ resulting in a White Paper by the second half of 2021.⁵ In addition,

¹ Para 102(d), *Lim Meng Suang and another v Attorney-General and another appeal and another matter* [2014] SGCA 53. Retrieved from: <https://www.supremecourt.gov.sg/docs/default-source/module-document/judgement/2014-sgca-53.pdf> (Accessed 28 April 2021).

² “Reporting status for Singapore”, UN Treaty Body Database. Retrieved from: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Countries.aspx?CountryCode=SGP&Lang=EN (Accessed 28 April 2021).

³ Table 5: Gender Inequality Index, 2020 Human Development Index, United Nations Development Programme, 10 December 2020. Retrieved from: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2020_statistical_annex_table_5.xlsx (Accessed 7 May 2021).

⁴ “Singapore to conduct review of women’s issues to bring about mindset change for gender equality”, *The Straits Times*, 20 September 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/singapore-to-conduct-review-of-womens-issues-to-inculcate-mindset-change-for-gender> (Accessed: 18 February 2021).

⁵ “Review on women’s issues in Singapore to be extended so more can participate”, *The Straits Times*, 16 January 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/politics/review-on-womens-issues-to-be-extended-so-more-can-participate> (Accessed: 7 May 2021).

2021 was declared “the Year of Celebrating SG Women”.⁶

Civil society groups welcomed the women’s issues review, in particular remarks by government officials acknowledging that **gender inequality in Singapore was partly a structural issue**, with working women often forced to make a choice between work and family care, a decision seldom faced by men. Minister of Home Affairs and Law K. Shanmugam stated: “*We want women to be presented with real choices, unencumbered by unequal expectations on the roles of men and women in society*”.⁷ Yet, civil society activists have noted that the public dialogue sessions that have mainly taken place in a virtual format so far, have not included issues concerning certain groups of women, such as ethnic minority women, migrant women or LGBTI women.

Relatedly, in their 2017 review, the CEDAW committee noted concern about the **persistence of discriminatory stereotypes** about the role of women as primary caregivers, including as caregivers of older persons, and the continued use of the concept of “head of household”, which reflects a hierarchical view of the family.

Furthermore, the CEDAW Committee noted female candidates face gender stereotypes in the media and among politicians, and **continue to be underrepresented** in ministerial posts, the judiciary, the police and the diplomatic service, in particular at decision-making levels. Women still remain underrepresented in traditionally male-dominated fields of study, such as engineering, electronics and information technology, at the tertiary level. In addition, women are underrepresented on corporate boards, notwithstanding their high educational and professional achievements and qualifications.

The Committee remarked there was continued vertical and horizontal occupational segregation in both the public and private sectors and a **persistent gender wage gap** in all occupational categories, except clerical support. In January 2020, the Ministry of Manpower announced that taking into account factors such as industry, occupation, age, and education, Singapore’s adjusted gender pay gap had narrowed to 6.0%. However, men continued to be over-represented in higher paying occupations and that women tended to be in lower paying ones, and that women still earned less than men after adjustment.⁸

The *Protection from Harassment Act* provides a legal framework for **harassment** within and outside the workplace, including cyber bullying, stalking and sexual harassment. In 2017, the CEDAW Committee raised concern about reports of low number of applications for protection orders under the Act owing to costly and burdensome procedures.

Multiple NGOs have documented reports of **workplace discrimination**. The AWARE Workplace Harassment and Discrimination Advisory received over 57 calls of workplace discrimination against women from September 2019 to August 2020.⁹ A 2018 study by the Disabled People’s Association found that disabled people were told directly that they would not be employed due to their disability.¹⁰ The Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (Tafep) “*encourages employers to adopt fair employment practices*” and may subject employers to administrative sanctions. In addition, the Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management has been established to resolve wrongful dismissal claims through mediation. Yet, civil society activists note that neither process holds employers legally

⁶ “2021 declared the Year of Celebrating SG Women”, The Straits Times, 31 January 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/2021-declared-the-year-of-celebrating-sg-women> (Accessed: 18 February 2021).

⁷ “Review on women’s issues in Singapore to be extended so more can participate”, The Straits Times, 16 January 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/politics/review-on-womens-issues-to-be-extended-so-more-can-participate> (Accessed: 7 May 2021).

⁸ “Singapore’s Adjusted Gender Pay Gap Narrows to 6%”, Ministry of Manpower, 10 January 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.mom.gov.sg/newsroom/press-releases/2020/0109-singapores-adjusted-gender-pay-gap-narrows-to-6-percent> (Accessed: 10 May 2021).

⁹ “Universal Periodic Review – Singapore: Joint submission by a coalition of 11 Civil Society Organisations in Singapore”, Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), Freedom of Information Singapore (FOISG), Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics (HOME), Sayoni, SG Climate Rally, We Believe in Second Chances, We Who Witness, Women and Law in Islam (WALI), Function 8, New Naratif, 350 Singapore. Retrieved from: <https://d2t1lspzrjtif2.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/Singapore-UPR-Civil-Society-Coalition-Joint-Report.pdf> (Accessed: 19 May 2021).

¹⁰ “Discrimination Faced by People with Disabilities at the Workplace”, Disabled People’s Association and Institute of Policy Studies, July 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.dpa.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Discrimination-Faced-by-People-with-Disabilities-at-the-Workplace-Study-1.pdf> (Accessed: 20 May 2021).

liable for discriminatory acts, nor guarantees legal remedy for workers.

Women continue to bear many **household and caregiving responsibilities**. Since 2017 fathers get two weeks of paid paternity leave and can share up to four weeks of their spouses' maternity leave. Mothers get four months maternity leave. In addition, since 2017, single mothers enjoy the same infant care, childcare subsidies and maternity leave as married mothers. From 2018 to 2020, the Singapore government committed more than S\$200 million (EUR 124 million) in financial grants and developed practical guides to support employers in implementing and sustaining flexible working arrangements, to promote sharing of domestic and family responsibilities. Furthermore, civil society activists maintain a more equally shared parental leave would facilitate women's workforce participation and impact Singapore's low fertility rate (1.1 in 2020). Relatedly, in view of its aging population and the expectation of caregiving often falling on women, civil society activists have reminded there is no mandatory paid eldercare leave, that elderly day care and home care services are costly, and that there is a shortage of nursing homes and respite care spaces.¹¹

In its 2017 review, the CEDAW Committee noted concern that sex education in public schools was based on abstinence until marriage, with limited information provided about **sexual and reproductive health and rights**, including the use of contraception and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. Moreover, any form of Assisted Reproductive Technology is only available to married heterosexual couples in Singapore. It is illegal for single women to freeze their eggs, unless they have to undergo medical procedures such as chemotherapy. Surrogacy is illegal in Singapore.¹²

The CEDAW committee further highlighted the lack of reforms in **outlawing non-consensual sexual offences**. In 2019, amendments were made to the *Penal Code* to fully repeal marital immunity for rape and expand the definition of rape to cover non-consensual oral and anal penetration by the penis. Penalties were enhanced for a range of offences committed against "*persons vulnerable to harm*", including children, domestic helpers, persons in intimate relationships with offenders, and persons with disabilities whose mental or physical disabilities render them substantially unable to protect themselves from abuse. Furthermore, the *OneSafe Centre* was established by the Singapore police force for victims of sexual assault to undergo forensic and medical examination in one place with greater privacy.¹³ However, civil society organisations have reported from their community engagement that insufficient training of public and judicial officials on sexual violence trauma, victim-blaming attitudes, and lengthy court processes still deter victims of sexual violence from seeking help from law enforcement.¹⁴ In late 2020 and continuing in 2021, a national conversation was ignited about student safety and Singaporean universities' handling of reports of sexual offences, as multiple cases of sexual violence, harassment and misconduct by both students and staff of Singaporean universities were brought to light.¹⁵

¹¹ "Disparity in maternity, paternity leave reinforces gender roles in child-rearing, says activist Corinna Lim", The Straits Times, 14 May 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/disparity-in-leave-for-new-mums-and-dads-reinforces-idea-that-raising-children-is-womens> (Accessed: 18 May 2021).

¹² "Stakeholder submission to the Universal Period Review (UPR) regarding the protection of the rights of LGBTQ persons in Singapore", Sayoni, IndigNation, Prout, The Healing Circle.sg, TransgenderSG, Young Out Here, October 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewjHlsnAo9fwAhVvgf0HHRgpDiIQFjAAegQIAxAD&url=https%3A%2F%2Fuprdoc.ohchr.org%2Fuprweb%2Fdownloadfile.aspx%3Ffilename%3D8473%26file%3DCoverPage&usq=AOvVaw0JOMZFDIQMHgX470EXHsT3> (Accessed: 19 May 2021).

United Nations Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review on Singapore: Joint Stakeholder Report, Oogachaga and Pink Dot SG, 15 October 2020. Retrieved from: https://oogachaga.com/s/Singapore_OCPD_submission_14102020-PDF.pdf (Accessed: 19 May 2021).

¹³ "Singapore to conduct review of women's issues to bring about mindset change for gender equality", The Straits Times, 20 September 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/singapore-to-conduct-review-of-womens-issues-to-inculcate-mindset-change-for-gender> (Accessed: 18 February 2021).

¹⁴ "Universal Periodic Review – Singapore: Joint submission by a coalition of 11 Civil Society Organisations in Singapore", Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), Freedom of Information Singapore (FOISG), Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics (HOME), Sayoni, SG Climate Rally, We Believe in Second Chances, We Who Witness, Women and Law in Islam (WALI), Function 8, New Naratif, 350 Singapore. Retrieved from: <https://d2t1lspzrjtif2.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/Singapore-UPR-Civil-Society-Coalition-Joint-Report.pdf> (Accessed: 19 May 2021).

¹⁵ "Parliament: 172 cases of sexual misconduct handled by unis, polys and ITE over past five years", The Straits Times, 3 November 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/politics/parliament-172-cases-of-sexual-misconduct-handled-by-universities-polytechnics> (Accessed: 21 May 2021).

In 2017, the CEDAW Committee noted concern about the lack of statistical data on all forms of **gender-based violence** against women and underreporting of cases of gender-based violence. They noted a lack of legislative reforms since its previous review to effectively criminalise domestic violence, regardless of marital status. The Committee mentioned the disproportionately high burden of proof required when married or divorced women apply for personal protection orders because of marital abuse and domestic violence, and the fact that women who are not married cannot apply for personal protection orders as a consequence of intimate partner violence. Civil society reports that public understanding of what constitutes domestic violence, apart from physical violence, is low.

During COVID-19, domestic violence increased significantly. Migrant spouses of citizens are particularly vulnerable to domestic violence, as they are dependent on the citizen spouse to sponsor their right to reside in Singapore. From 2016 to 2018, twice as many migrant women as Singaporean women called the civil society organisation AWARE's helpline for support with domestic violence.¹⁶

In its 2021 National Report to the UPR, in addition to the above mentioned legal reforms taking effect in January 2020, Singapore acknowledged that laws alone cannot resolve the issue of domestic violence. It highlighted that a *Taskforce on Family Violence* was set up in February 2020, to bring together members from the government, the courts, and other stakeholders such as hospitals, family violence specialist centres, crisis shelters and family service centres, to put forth recommendations on tackling family violence. The taskforce is expected to report on its findings and recommendations in the second half of 2021.

Concerning **marriage and family relations**, the CEDAW Committee noted concern that, with regard to civil marriages, a girl under 18 years of age may marry with parental consent, a special marriage licence and permission from the Ministry of Social and Family Development. Furthermore, under the *Administration of Muslim Law Act*, a woman may not marry without a wali (male next of kin) and a kadi (official of religious standing) may “*in special circumstances*” solemnize the marriage of a girl under the age of 18 years who has attained puberty.¹⁷

In its 2017 response to the CEDAW Committee review of the same year, the Singapore government noted that within Singapore's domestic context, Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS), the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, is in charge of monitoring developments in Muslim law. The Fatwa Committee of MUIS meets regularly to discuss points of Muslim law, review current practices and recommend new measures to ensure that Singapore's religious practices remain progressive. In their own words, this approach enabled Singapore to make partial withdrawal of their reservations to Articles 2 and 16 of CEDAW in 2011.

The CEDAW Committee expressed its concern that the criteria for obtaining Long Term Visit Pass Plus scheme passes remained unclear, which may lead to discriminatory treatment, in particular as regards the possibilities for **foreign spouses of Singapore citizens** to work and obtain access to health care subsidies. The Committee also reiterated its concern about the unclear criteria according to which foreign spouses, predominantly women, may obtain permanent residency status, which continues to be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Migrant domestic workers, predominantly women, are not covered by the *Employment Act* but rather by the *Employment of Foreign Manpower Act*; the latter not providing certain key labour law protections, such as legal limits on daily work hours or mandatory days off work. Several high-profile cases have highlighted domestic workers are particularly vulnerable to abuse; a risk heightened by the live-in nature of their work. In 2017, the CEDAW Committee noted on-going allegations of non-payment of salaries, deprivation of food and adequate rest, confiscation of personal items, such as mobile phones and passports, restrictions on freedom of movement and refusal to pay medical expenses, as well as sexual, physical, verbal and psychological abuse. The work permits of migrant workers are tied to

¹⁶ “*Universal Periodic Review – Singapore: Joint submission by a coalition of 11 Civil Society Organisations in Singapore*”, Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), Freedom of Information Singapore (FOISG), Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics (HOME), Sayoni, SG Climate Rally, We Believe in Second Chances, We Who Witness, Women and Law in Islam (WALI), Function 8, New Naratif, 350 Singapore. Retrieved from: <https://d2t11spzritif2.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/Singapore-UPR-Civil-Society-Coalition-Joint-Report.pdf> (Accessed: 19 May 2021).

¹⁷ Section 96(5), *Administration of Muslim Law Act* (Chapter 3, 2009 Rev Ed).

one specific employer, which makes workers vulnerable to retaliation in case of complaints. Furthermore, migrant workers are required by law to undergo mandatory and regular testing for pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, and are by the same law deported on the grounds of pregnancy or diagnosis of HIV.

In 2017, Singapore established the Employment Claims Tribunal (ECT) to resolve a wide range of employment disputes and the Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management to provide mediation as an intermediate step before the ECT. In 2019, the *Penal Code* was amended to double the maximum punishment for persons convicted of causing hurt, assault, sexual offences, and wrongful restraint or confinement against foreign domestic workers. In addition, the Ministry of Manpower have begun conducting home visits to randomly selected first-time foreign domestic workers' employers' homes.¹⁸ Local civil society has insisted mandating better work conditions by law would be even more efficient in preventing abuse.

In its 2107 review, the CEDAW Committee noted concern that **lesbians, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons** face discrimination in various areas of life and that their situation is often exacerbated by the policies of the State party, including through its media policies that prohibit and restrict material with LGBTI characters and themes. Same-sex relationships are not recognised under the law in Singapore, nor are marriages between same-sex partners contracted in other jurisdictions.¹⁹

In 2019, a research study by Singaporean civil society organisation Sayoni showed LGBTI women who came out or had their sexuality revealed experienced physical, psychological and sexual violence from family members and intimate partners. Younger people experienced bullying in school. LGBTI women had difficulty securing stable employment, particularly those who did not conform to gender stereotypes. Purchasing and renting housing was challenging, with housing challenges pronounced for transgender individuals.²⁰

In addition, transgender persons face significant hurdles in transitioning. Since 2017, new requirements to change legal sex include a "*Medical Examination Report*" showing proof of "*sex reassignment surgery with the result that the patient's genitalia has completely changed*" and its inspection of this by a local specialist. Because of the restrictive and costly requirements for a person to legally change their gender by undergoing all relevant gender assignment procedures, transgender women are often unable to change their legal gender in time to avoid National Service obligations. Moreover, in January 2021, 300 teachers, counsellors and social workers signed a petition calling on the Ministry of Education to implement a clear policy to support transgender students, after a transgender student claimed that the Ministry had interfered with her hormonal therapy.

In 2017, the CEDAW Committee noted concern that Singapore continued to be a destination and transit country for **trafficking in women and girls** for purposes of sexual and labour exploitation. In its 2021 National Report to the UPR, Singapore stated it had "*taken decisive action, including implementing obligations under the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons*" and developed a National Approach Against Trafficking in Persons for the years 2016-2026. In 2019, the government increased penalties for the trafficking of women and girls. It now carries a penalty of up to seven years in prison and a fine of up to S\$100,000 (€62,000) – a tenfold increase to previous penalties. Notwithstanding the increase in criminal penalties, in its 2021 UPR submission Amnesty International commented that little progress had been made in ensuring the protection of the victims of trafficking.²¹

In their "*2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*", the U.S. Department of State indicated that some **ethnic Singaporean Malays and Indians reported that discrimination** limited their

¹⁸ "*Some employers in Singapore holding on to maids' passports illegally*", The Straits Times, 31 May 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/some-bosses-holding-on-to-maids-passports-illegally-0> (Accessed: 3 June 2021).

¹⁹ Section 12(1), *Women's Charter* (Chapter 353, 2009 Rev Ed).

²⁰ "*Sayoni releases first, groundbreaking report into violence and discrimination facing lesbian, bisexual, trans and queer (LBTQ) persons in Singapore*", Sayoni, 28 May 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.sayoni.com/community/blog/202-latest-news/advocacy/2306-sayoni-releases-first-groundbreaking-report-into-violence-and-discrimination-facing-lbtq-persons-in-singapore> (Accessed: 19 May 2021).

²¹ "*Amnesty International Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review: 38th Session of the UPR Working Group, 3-14 May 2021*", Amnesty International, 30 October 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA3633312020ENGLISH.pdf> (Accessed: 21 May 2021).

employment and promotion opportunities. Malays were prohibited from holding certain sensitive national security positions in the military.²² Although Muslim women can freely wear the hijab in most settings in Singapore, some professions bar the headscarf, which ignited national debate in August 2020 when a woman was asked to remove her hijab to work as a promoter at a local department store. President Halimah Yacob, Singapore's first female president who herself wears the hijab, stated there is "no place" for discrimination when asked her view of the case. The store reversed its policy, but many took to social media pointing out restrictions remain on wearing the hijab for some civil servants, including policewomen and nurses. Some urged consistency, noting that the turban - headgear worn by Sikh men - is allowed at work in Singapore.²³ In April 2021, Prime Minister Lee indicated the government was to decide on wearing of the tudung (headscarf worn over the head to cover the hair, neck and chest areas while leaving the face exposed) for nurses by August of the same year.²⁴

In 2017, the CEDAW Committee expressed concern about the lack of national **asylum and refugee** legislation and procedures. There is a lack of official information on the number of stateless persons in Singapore and of legal protection to ensure that children born in Singapore who cannot acquire another nationality automatically acquire Singaporean citizenship. Singapore is not a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

In 2021, Singapore co-chairs with the EU and the US the **ASEAN Regional Forum** Open-Ended Study Group and Symposium on Inclusive Processes for Preventive Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution.

2. Selected thematic areas of engagement and objectives

As a high-income country, Singapore does not have a Multi-annual Indicative Programme and does not benefit from thematic programmes. Furthermore, the scope of potential activities is limited due to restrictions on civil society space. Therefore, the EU and Member States can raise gender equality at political and policy dialogues, while other more active and visible forms of cooperation by diplomatic missions in domestic social and political matters remain a very sensitive matter. Access to gender specific and/or sex-disaggregated indicators is in general not available.

Against this background, the realistic and feasible thematic areas of EU engagement on gender issues in Singapore as outlined in GAPIII and its Staff Working Paper are the following:

- 1) Strategic engagement at country level:
 - a. Political, security and sectoral policy dialogues integrate a gender perspective;
- 2) Strengthening economic and social rights and empowering girls and women:
 - a. Under the implementation of the EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement Trade and Sustainable Development chapter, the EU will promote Singapore's accession to ILO Convention 111 Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, one of the outstanding core ILO Convention's Singapore has yet to ratify;
- 3) Addressing the challenges and harnessing the opportunities offered by the green transition and the digital transformation:
 - a. The EU will promote women's and girls' involvement in the green, blue and circular economy;
 - b. The EU will promote its human-centric approach bringing benefits to all, while protecting human rights, both online and offline, and ensuring a safe and secure cyber space, where data are protected in line with EU standards (e.g. GDPR).

²² "2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Singapore", U.S. Department of State, 30 March 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/singapore/> (Accessed: 19 May 2021).

²³ "Job or hijab? Singapore debates ban on Islamic veil at work", Reuters, 21 September 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-singapore-women-rights-idUSKCN26C030> (Accessed: 19 May 2021).

²⁴ "Govt to decide on wearing of tudung for nurses by National Day Rally in August: PM Lee", The Straits Times, 11 April 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/govt-to-decide-on-wearing-of-tudung-for-nurses-by-national-day-rally-in-august-pm-lee> (Accessed: 19 May 2021).

3. Targeted actions supporting gender equality and women's empowerment

Gender mainstreaming

The EU Delegation and Member States will ensure gender mainstreaming in its work and processes, including the implementation of the *Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy 2021-2024*. The EU Delegation and Member States in Singapore will consider the gender balance of speakers invited to participate in their events.

Bilateral political and policy dialogues

The EU Delegation will use the available avenues established in the context of the implementation of the EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement Trade and Sustainable Development chapter to raise labour issues, notably those related to non-discrimination, such as equal pay in the context of ILO Convention 111, to which Singapore is yet to accede.

The entry into force of the EU-Singapore Partnership and Cooperation Agreement will present an additional opportunity for regular dialogue on human rights with the government of Singapore where gender issues can be raised.

In its regular annual human rights seminars and policy dialogues the EU Delegation will aim to discuss the gender aspects and inclusiveness of the green transition and digital transformation.

Monitor developments related to gender equality and women's empowerment in Singapore

The EU Delegation and Member States, also in coordination with like-minded countries - will continue to monitor domestic developments and national efforts related to gender equality and women's empowerment, such as the outcome of the women's issues review initiated by the government in late 2020.

They will continue to engage with civil society organisations and human rights activists working on gender equality to learn about the state-of-play in Singapore, facilitate knowledge exchange, inform about opportunities for civil society organisations to participate in stakeholder forums, capacity development and technical training, and opportunities in multilateral and regional human rights fora.

The EU Delegation and Member States will continue engage with the government and civil society on the implementation of the relevant recommendations of Singapore's Universal Periodic Review that took place in May 2021 and monitor progress. In the run-up to Singapore's next State party report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) due on 30 November 2021, the EU Delegation and Member States will reach out to civil society as they prepare their submissions.

The EU Delegation and Member States will aim to mark international days related to gender issues and participate in regional/local initiatives where appropriate.

EU and Member State support

No specific support is foreseen to national gender networks or other institutional actors by the EU or Member States.

On 19 May 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore reminded diplomatic missions to not interfere in domestic social and political matters. Moreover, whilst technically legally permissible for organisations registered under the *Societies Act* to receive foreign funding, authorities may at any point "gazette" a civil society organisation with the effect that it instead falls under the *Political Donations Act*. If this takes place, the civil society organisation will be regulated under the *Political Donations Act*, and, as such, prohibited from receiving foreign funding.

As a high-income country, Singapore does not benefit from any relevant EU funding instrument. However, two Singaporean civil society organisations working with service delivery to women foreign domestic workers receive EU support through the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative project *Safe and Fair*. In

addition, the EU Delegation will continue to engage with civil society organisations working on gender equality, as mentioned above.

4. Engage in dialogue for gender equality and women empowerment

As previously mentioned, engagement by diplomatic missions in domestic social and political issues remain a sensitive matter. In the wider context of the EU's bilateral relations with Singapore, the key to success is in finding synergies with other policy areas. A hard-line approach and singling out Singapore publically would be counterproductive. Instead, the EU needs to find key arguments that appeal to local sensibilities and use a smart public diplomacy approach in order to foster a gradual change in public opinion. This would however be a long-term process.

In this regard, synergies with EU Member States and other like-minded countries are equally important in forming a coordinated response on the ground.

The EU will continue to closely coordinate with civil society in order to ensure our work aligns with domestically owned objectives and priorities.

In view of the on-going women's issues review initiated by the Singaporean government, there is however a unique opportunity to discuss gender equality and women's empowerment as the White paper is being finalised and once it is presented in Parliament and to the various stakeholders. This includes encouraging the acknowledgment and efforts undertaken by the government in the work that remains to achieve gender equality in Singapore and to encourage a consideration of women in all their diversity, including particularly vulnerable groups such as migrant women, women foreign domestic workers, LGBTI women, etc.

5. Outreach and other communication/public diplomacy activities

There is a concerted effort to raise the profile and media presence of the EU in Singapore, not just as an institution but also to highlight its values and principles and explain its policies.

Key public diplomacy activities in Singapore are:

- Public or closed-door events, e.g. the Annual Human Rights Day Seminar organised by the EU Delegation, film screenings, webinars etc;
- Utilising high level visits to highlight, promote and advocate for human rights priorities whenever appropriate;
- Communication of EU values and principles on social media platforms, notably Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube;
- Identify and promote a benevolent action or cause initiated by local civil society.

Specifically on gender equality, the strategic communication/high level events foreseen during the period 2021-2025 are:

- Marking International Women's Day (8 March). Previously, the Head of Delegation has participated as a speaker at civil society events marking the day. In addition, HRVP statements have been shared on the EU Delegation's social media platforms;
- Speaking opportunities for the Head of Delegation at civil society organisation United Women Singapore's *Gender Equality Impact Awards* to take place in November 2021 (tbc) as a hybrid event.

6. Technical Facility or financial resources allocated to support GAP III implementation

Not applicable for the EU Delegation

Has any other specific allocation and/or technical assistance been earmarked under specific programmes by the EU and /or Member States in order to facilitate gender mainstreaming?

The Embassy of **Finland** in Singapore, together with the Finnish Embassies in Bangkok and Jakarta, will organize a video competition on gender equality and rights of women and girls in September 2021. The competition, titled “*Dream It, Be It*”, calls on young girls aged 15 to 18 to describe their dream jobs in a world where anything is possible. The winners in each country can participate in an all-expenses-paid summer study camp in Finland in 2022.

Finland emphasises the rights of women and girls as central human rights, and is committed to creating a world, where all girls have the possibility to pursue their dreams and education without barriers.

The Netherlands has regularly been messaging on gender equality and highlighting positive role models through (social) media.

Date: 29 July 2021

Signature by Head of Delegation: Barbara Plinkert