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Speech By Senior Minister of State for Manpower Dr Koh Poh Koon at Ministry of Manpower Committee of Supply 2026

Dr Koh Poh Koon, Senior Minister of State for Manpower, Parliament House

3 March 2026

A. PREAMBLE

A1. Mr Chairman, our workforce has always been the backbone of Singapore's progress. As Singaporeans live longer and healthier lives, we now have the chance to extend that progress into longer, more rewarding careers.

A2. In the past, a career often progresses in a linear fashion, with people starting in one job after graduation and working their way up through the same company. But today, faster business and technology cycles, and changing business models mean that most people will go through multiple jobs and roles over their working lives.

A3. Workers now have different work-life balance expectations and different hierarchy of needs at different life stages. This shift has implications for everyone.

A4. For workers, this means that careers are no longer about climbing a corporate ladder, but rather about navigating a dynamic, multi-stage journey – moving up, across domains or even intentionally downshifting to balance life's priorities such as caregiving. This also means taking greater ownership of their careers and skills and desiring more flexibility in work arrangements.

A5. For employers, this shift means more than just adapting job roles – it means rethinking how jobs are designed to tap on both the vitality of youth and the wisdom that comes with seniority and experience, how talent is managed and developed at every stage, and how transitions are supported across a workforce that is increasingly diverse in age. Employers need to be proactive in creating workspaces that are inclusive, flexible and capable of supporting workers at all life stages.

A6. And for the Government, this shift requires a fundamental change in how we support the workforce. We must move beyond supporting training and job-seeking, to supporting career longevity, giving workers insights about their human capital and empowering them to take action – across career transitions, across life stages, and across different forms of work.

A7. This is why the Ministry of Manpower is focusing our efforts in three key areas:

- a. Empowering seniors to thrive in longer careers, by supporting meaningful participation, career transitions, and flexibility in later stages of work.
- b. Building thriving workplaces that support longer working lives, through stronger HR systems and better management of age-diverse workforces.
- c. Adapting employment protections for a changing workforce, so that our laws and safeguards remain relevant as work arrangement and career pathways evolve.

A8. Let me first outline how the Ministry of Manpower is responding to this shift through our senior employment strategy, before turning to how we are strengthening HR capabilities and employment protections more broadly.

B. SUPPORTING SENIORS IN A LONGER WORKING LIFE

B1. Now, Singaporeans live longer and healthier lives. Our workforce is also maturing. Today's seniors are better educated and more skilled than the generations before them. Future seniors will be even more so, reflecting the high cohort participation rate in our population. Seniors therefore offer a growing wealth of human capital and many of them want to contribute meaningfully to our economy.

B2. Supporting seniors today is no longer just about extending working years. It requires planning ahead to enable sustainable careers across later stages of life. We are strengthening support across mid-career and later-career transitions through the Tripartite Workgroup on Senior Employment.

Extending Productive Longevity

B3. More than ten years ago, tripartite partners started removing barriers for seniors who wanted to keep working. A major step was to progressively raise the retirement and re-employment ages. These moves have helped more seniors stay employed.

B4. These changes matter because they do more than just set legal limits. They shape social norms around ageing and work, giving seniors confidence to stay on, and giving employers the clarity to plan for and retain experienced workers. Indeed, more than 9 in 10 employees who are eligible and wish to continue working are successfully offered re-employment.

B5. This year, we take the next step. We will raise the retirement and re-employment ages to 64 to 69 respectively, keeping us on track towards 65 and 70 by 2030.

B6. I want to assure Mr Sanjeev Kumar Tiwari that these changes have made a difference. Over the past five years, labour force participation among residents in their 60s has edged up from around 58% to nearly 60%. Among those in their 50s, it rose from 79% to 82%.

B7. Internationally, this puts Singapore among the leaders – for workers in their 60s, we rank 5th compared to OECD countries for labour force participation. But for workers in their 50s, we rank only 23rd.

B8. We agree with Ms Jessica Tan's call on the need to strengthen career support for mature and senior PMEs. We need to do more work upstream, to support workers who may be leaving the workforce earlier than they need to, or earlier than they would like to.

Update on Tripartite Workgroup on Senior Employment (TWG-SE)

B9. This is why MOM, together with the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) and the Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF), convened the Tripartite Workgroup on Senior Employment, or TWG-SE, in July last year. The TWG-SE reflects a shared responsibility – by workers, employers and the Government – to respond to longer, more varied careers for our seniors, including PMEs.

B10. With longer careers ahead, support cannot wait until workers are near retirement. If the drop-off in labour force participation starts from 50, then the interventions must begin at 40. From our engagements, both employers and seniors told us that earlier training and career guidance are essential – to keep skills fresh, open new pathways, and ensure every stage of a longer working life remains meaningful and productive.

B11. The TWG-SE is therefore studying recommendations across the senior's career journey, including during mid-career transitions and later-career stages, where timely interventions can make the greatest difference.

Mid-Career Transitions: Strengthening Career Health

B12. Just as good physical health supports better physical lives, good career health supports longer working lives. And like physical health, career health benefits from early, regular check-ins and career planning – not only when problems arise.

B13. This is especially important for many who are mid-career in their 40s and 50s, adapting to new roles, technologies, or sectors, while balancing work and family commitments and responsibilities. These pivotal years determine how long, and how well, they can continue working.

B14. Yet, working adults often face this journey alone. Unlike the structured education and career guidance that one might find in schools, working adults receive less structured support to help them make sense of options at this stage.

B15. This is why, as Minister highlighted earlier, we are strengthening and broadening Career Health SG by working with and developing the Career and Employment Services sector. We will grow the sector so that there is a variety of good quality services to cater to different segments of seniors, to help them plan ahead, navigate transitions, and build sustainable careers over a longer working life.

B16. At the individual level, WSG and its partners have piloted targeted career guidance programmes for individuals in their 50s and 60s planning their later-stage careers. They include workshops such as the Republic Polytechnic's Designing Your Life – The Next Chapter and SUTD's What's Next: Reimagining Your Career Using Design-AI, which were introduced in April and October 2025 respectively. These programmes have since supported about 1,000 participants, with about 4 in 5 already embarking on their career plans within 6 months of completing the workshop.

- a. With the right guidance, later stage career transitions can open new doors. Participants like 61-year-old Mr Eddie Sng and 55-year-old Ms Mabel Lee show how this works in practice.
- b. After attending WSG-supported career guidance workshops, both began to see career transitions as growth opportunities rather than professional endings.
- c. Eddie, a former logistics managing director, is now pursuing logistics advisory work while creating digital content.
- d. Mabel, a former photographer and marketing professional, has secured a part-time marketing manager role while building her photography teaching practice.
- e. Their journeys show how strategic career guidance enables older workers to rethink their options, make confident transitions, and continue contributing meaningfully.

B17. Building on these early successes, WSG will work with partners to scale up the provision of career guidance for later-stage careers and integrate these programmes into its regular career guidance offerings.

B18. But career guidance by a third party is not enough. Employers too have to play a role. Many seniors who are already in employment need clarity on how long they can stay in a role, whether their job will evolve, and how they might work differently. These are insights that only their employers can provide.

B19. Employers must therefore have deliberate conversations with their workers to plan for job redesign, identify skills needed to seize future job opportunities, and adjust work arrangements over time as part of regular workforce planning.

B20. This Structured Career Planning, or SCP, should not just be a structured conversation, but should also be structured as part of the routine HR processes in companies.

B21. Under the Part-Time Re-employment Grant, employers are required to send management and HR representatives to SCP workshops, to gain knowledge and skillsets to conduct SCP. Based on a survey by SNEF, about 80% of these employers subsequently conducted SCP conversations with their employees, who found the sessions useful in helping them to understand options and navigate the next bound of their careers.

B22. What we have learnt is that SCP works best when it starts earlier, not only when one has reached the age for re-employment. Strengthening career planning earlier helps seniors stay confident and employable, while giving employers clearer sight of how to develop and deploy their workforce over longer careers.

B23. Yet today, fewer than 30% of workers aged 50 and above actively plan for their careers, and only 38% of employers conduct structured career conversations.

B24. Mr Sanjeev Kumar Tiwari rightly asked how we can intervene at the mid-career stage to boost continued employability before workers reach their late 50s. Building on the positive experience with SCP, we will therefore give a stronger push for employers to adopt regular SCP conversations earlier in their employees' careers, and explore how SCP can be more systematically embedded into HR training and certification requirements. This will enable employers and workers to proactively redesign jobs, adjust work arrangements, and build resilience over longer careers.

Later-Career Transitions: Designing Age-Friendly Workplaces

B25. As workers move into later stages of their careers, some may wish to continue full-time work, others prefer reduced hours or more focused roles, while some require adjustments over time as their priorities, health status or physical abilities change.

B26. Whether seniors can continue contributing depends largely on how workplaces adapt. Employers play a critical role here.

B27. To support employers who hire and retain senior workers, we will extend the Senior Employment Credit to December 2027, as announced by the Prime Minister at Budget. Mr Sanjeev Kumar Tiwari and Mr Shawn Loh have asked for longer extensions to the SEC, and whether the scheme will be

studied beyond 2027. Under the TWG-SE, we are reviewing support measures for employers more holistically, including reviewing the SEC and whether longer-term measures may be appropriate.

B28. We have also extended the Part-Time Re-employment Grant to December 2027, to support employers in offering suitable part-time and flexible work options that attract and retain senior workers.

B29. Beyond these measures, we also need to rethink traditional job designs.

B30. What does age-friendly work look like in practice? There is no 'one-size-fits-all' model that will work for every company and it will likely be different across industries and job-roles. Through the Alliance for Action on Empowering Multi-Stage Careers for Mature Workers, or AfA-EMW, we are working with organisations including intermediaries to test practical models, which can give employers greater confidence to act.

a. For example, under the AfA-EMW, the pilot by QED Changemakers gives us a glimpse of how we can unlock senior expertise in new ways. By connecting experienced senior professionals with companies that need their expertise on a project basis, senior professionals can continue contributing meaningfully – sharing decades of experience, staying active, and earning an income – while companies, especially SMEs, get access to seasoned leadership when they need it.

b. Another example explores how simple job redesign can keep experienced bus captains on the road, safely and sustainably. Tower Transit is piloting new work arrangements that allow senior bus captains to continue working safely and confidently. With more balanced shifts, job rotation, and lighter duties, seniors can keep contributing – while the company retains experience, maintains service reliability, and supports the next generation of captains.

c. These prototypes are being developed and will feed into TWG-SE's recommendations, translating good ideas into scalable practices.

B31. As seniors remain economically active for longer, work must also remain safe and sustainable. To support the development of industry-led solutions to address common workplace safety and health risks, including those faced by seniors, MOM will be launching an Alliance for Action on Safety and Health for Employment Longevity (AfA-SHEL).

B32. MOS Dinesh will share more detail about this.

B33. These efforts reflect a holistic approach to senior employment, to help seniors continue contributing meaningfully, in ways that work for them, for their employers, and for our economy.

Supporting Transitions Across the Senior Career Journey

B34. Across both mid- and later-career stages, navigating transitions remains a key challenge. Workers need clearer pathways to plan their next steps, while employers need guidance on age-friendly workplace design.

B35. Today, even though seniors can tap on many schemes for training, job search or hiring support, navigating these different sources of support can still be challenging.

B36. To address this, the TWG-SE is studying a more integrated approach to support career longevity, and whether to deliver this through a dedicated centre for career longevity, which brings service providers together to raise awareness, collaborate, as well as develop and scale solutions for longer, multi-stage careers.

a. For individuals, this would help them better navigate and access the relevant career, skills and employment support in accordance with their needs, including allowing them to plan earlier for their later-stage career transitions.

b. For employers, they would be able to access practical resources and the network of partners to support them in designing age-friendly workplaces and strengthen multi-generational teams.

c. For partners, this would be a platform for them to test and scale new initiatives and innovative practices, including those emerging from AfA-EMW.

B37. This centre could be co-located with existing career centres, so individuals who need job search assistance can receive more holistic support across the various aspects of career planning, skills and employment, rather than navigating these services separately.

B38. In this way, we shift the focus from managing exits to enabling longer, meaningful participation at work. Ms Mariam Jaafar asked when the TWG-SE will share its recommendations. The TWG-SE will release its report in the second half of 2026, with further details on its proposed measures.

B39. Mr Chairman, allow me to say a few words in Mandarin.

B40. 去年成立的《年长员工就业劳资政工作小组》(TWG-SE)与各方沟通交流后所作出的总结是:随着国人职业生涯的延长,我们必须更早协助员工进行职业规划,支持雇主重新设计工作岗位,并确保相关制度与奖励措施是切合实际和务实可行的。

- a. 对员工们而言,这意味着更早获得职业指导与技能培训的支持,在仍有选择空间的时候顺利转型。
- b. 对雇主而言,这意味着获得更明确的支持,以留住资深员工、重设计工作性质,并提供具灵活性、更适合年长者的工作安排。
- c. 对政府而言,则是要强化整体职业与就业生态系统,通过职业指导、技能培训与就业奖励,确保更长职业生涯的可行性和可持续性。

B41. 《年长员工就业劳资政工作小组》目前正在研究年长者职业历程各阶段所需的建议,这包括从中年转业到后期职业调整的需求,并将在2026年下半年公布相关成果。

C. SUPPORTING CAREER TRANSITIONS ACROSS LONGER WORKING LIVES

C1. Our senior employment efforts reflect a broader shift in how we support working lives: longer careers, less linear progressions, and more frequent transitions.

C2. But this is not a challenge unique to seniors. Across the workforce, workers are navigating more frequent changes as our economy restructures and technology reshapes jobs. This calls for stronger systems that help all workers and employers manage transitions more deliberately and responsibly.

Building stronger HR capabilities to support longer careers

C3. Employers and especially their HR teams are critical enablers. HR sits at the intersection of skills and career development, job redesign, and employment practices. How well firms manage careers directly affects whether workers can stay relevant, productive and engaged over longer careers.

C4. This is why MOM convened the Tripartite Workgroup on Human Capital Capability Development (TWG-HC) in February 2025 to strengthen workforce development capabilities across organisations.

C5. We are establishing clearer benchmarks of what “good” looks like. MOM launched the Singapore Opportunity Index (SOI) last October and unveiled the top 300 organisations earlier this year. The SOI gives employers and workers a data-driven yardstick to see how the best workplaces shape outcomes like pay, progression and retention, enabling employers to make sharper talent decisions. Beyond recognising top performers, we are progressively releasing detailed reports and advisory support to help all 1,500 organisations covered by the SOI improve.

C6. To turn these insights into real gains for workers and businesses, the workgroup will also make recommendations to uplift the HR profession in key areas.

C7. First, we are strengthening HR leadership capability.

- a. SNEF is leading a multi-agency effort to pilot a National HR Leadership Programme, together with NTUC and our local HR institutes.
- b. The programme aims to strengthen Singapore’s local HR leaders through international exposure, experiential learning, mentoring and networking.

C8. Second, we are preparing HR for AI-driven change. As AI accelerates transformation across sectors, stronger and more systematic HR capability becomes even more critical.

- a. AI can automate repetitive tasks like scheduling interviews and handling routine queries. It can also surface workforce trends more quickly, helping HR to spot skills gaps earlier and design better development and deployment strategies.
- b. But let us be clear: AI is not here to replace the human in HR. AI can take care of the processes, but only humans can take care of people. This shift towards human-AI collaboration presents opportunities for HR to be more strategic, more developmental, and more human-centered.

C9. Ms Jessica Tan asked how we are equipping HR to be more AI-driven.

- a. MOM is working with MDDI and IMDA under the National AI Impact Programme to develop AI fluency amongst HR professionals.
- b. In parallel, NTUC is developing a framework to help companies with limited AI experience, especially smaller SMEs navigate the complexity of AI adoption for HR by consolidating existing resources for AI readiness assessment, training, applicable grants and widely adopted AI tools for HR.
- c. Looking ahead, MOM, WSG and IHRP will refresh the HR Jobs Transformation Map this year to provide clear guidance on two fronts: (1) how AI will transform HR jobs, and (2) how its impact on the wider workforce will change the demands on HR. The TWG-HC will also consider Ms Tan's suggestions as part of its broader review.

C10. Third, we must expand professional HR practice to more organisations. As our workforce becomes more diverse and employment issues more complex, organisations need HR that meet high standards, possess future-ready competencies and are committed to continuous professional development.

C11. This need was recognised back in 2020 when the NTUC-SNEF PME Taskforce recommended mandating HR certification for larger firms. However, such a significant change could not happen overnight. That is why we spent the past five years laying the groundwork to strengthen the value of HR certification.

C12. I am happy to share that these efforts have yielded good progress.

- a. Today, the certified community exceeds 10,000 professionals.
- b. Around 45% of larger firms with more than 200 employees have certified HR, covering nearly half of Singapore's workforce.
- c. The impact has been promising. A recent study by MOM economists showed that IHRP certification delivered measurable improvements in both wage outcomes and employment prospects of certified professionals.
- d. This ultimately translates into benefits for both firms and workers, as evidenced by the greater range of career development initiatives – such as workforce planning and career guidance – implemented in organisations with certified HR professionals compared to those without.

C13. With this critical mass established, we are now ready to take the next step. We need a broader coverage of certified HR professionals who can embed best practices like structured career planning, which I mentioned earlier, to strengthen employee engagement and in turn business productivity. We cannot afford to leave this to chance.

C14. Mr Patrick Tay asked if the Government will consider mandating IHRP certification. Building on the PME Taskforce's recommendation, the TWG-HC is studying a proposal to require larger organisations with more than 200 employees to have a suitable HR personnel certified. The workgroup is now studying how this can be done in a way that is practical for businesses and will put out its detailed recommendations later this year.

C15. For firms who may not have dedicated HR, MOM is working with partners to uplift the wider career and employment services ecosystem. As mentioned by Minister, through the Alliance for Action on Advancing Career & Employment Services (Afa ACES), we are working with private career and employment service providers to pilot new initiatives and services to support workers of diverse profiles in their career journey.

C16. These efforts – from uplifting HR capabilities to partnering ecosystem players – are part of a longer-term vision under the Economic Strategy Review's (ESR) Committee on Human Capital, which I co-chair, to build a future-ready jobs and skills ecosystem where employers invest in people, HR is a strategic partner, and workers can more confidently move across roles and sectors over a longer working life.

Supporting Workers through Structural Transitions

C17. As the economy evolves, more workers may face job displacement, not because they lack ability, but because of business restructuring or failure or economic cycles.

C18. Even with stronger HR capabilities and better career support systems, job transitions may still be difficult, especially when the change happens abruptly.

C19. To help workers through such transitions, we introduced the SkillsFuture Jobseeker Support scheme in April last year. This scheme provides temporary financial relief to involuntarily unemployed individuals, helping them transition into suitable new roles rather than rushing into poor job matches.

C20. As of end-October 2025, more than 3,500 individuals have received support from the scheme. Among these individuals, we estimate that more than 1,600 have since found new job roles. Mr Ng Chee Meng and Mr Patrick Tay asked whether we would consider increasing the current qualifying income cap. As the scheme has only been rolled out last year, we will conduct a review when we have more experience, including on key parameters such as the qualifying income, to ensure the scheme remains well-targeted and sustainable.

C21. Building on this, the ESR's Committee on Managing the Impact of Restructuring is studying how we can support workers more proactively, and how we can extend meaningful support to more groups, including PMEs. For instance, as Minister said, this could include requiring earlier notice of retrenchment from employers, leveraging networks of Trade Associations and Chambers to provide more targeted job matching in sectors with more PME job openings, and expanding the scope of support under Career Conversion Programmes to help more workers with the transition into growth roles.

C22. These efforts reflect a shift from reacting to job loss, to actively supporting career transitions, guided by strong tripartite partnerships and closer alignment between skills, jobs and industry needs.

D. ADAPTING EMPLOYMENT PROTECTIONS FOR A CHANGING WORKFORCE

D1. Beyond transition support, our employment laws are important to ensure our workers are adequately protected. Many Singaporeans may not realise that the Employment Act, or EA, profoundly shapes our everyday working lives. It sets out the basic terms and conditions of employment, such as timely salary payments, overtime pay, and sick leave.

D2. As the EA covers almost all employees in Singapore, we must always strike a careful balance between protecting employees and giving space for employers to thrive.

D3. But the nature of work has changed. Our workforce profile is different, work arrangements are more varied, and businesses are operating in a more competitive environment. That is why the tripartite partners convened the Tripartite Workgroup on the Employment Act Review (TWG-EAR) in August last year, to review key parts of the Act in a balanced way, protecting workers who need it most while supporting business flexibility

D4. Mr Pritam Singh and Mr Patrick Tay have asked for an update on the main areas of review for the upcoming Employment Act. Mr Pritam Singh also asked if the Review can include a public consultation in parallel with tripartite negotiations. In conducting this review, the Tripartite Workgroup has collectively engaged more than 2,000 stakeholders, including PMEs, lower-income employees, employers and HR practitioners, and other experts to understand diverse needs across the workforce.

D5. What we heard from workers and employers was clear: different groups need different forms of protection and flexibility.

a. For lower-wage employees, time-based protections still matter and overtime pay remains an important part of their income. As wages rise and the workforce profile evolves, we will review Part 4 of the EA to ensure these protections remain well-targeted at workers who need them most.

b. For employers, greater flexibility is needed to manage costs, redesign jobs and stay competitive. Done right, this can also benefit workers, by allowing employers and employees to negotiate mutually beneficial arrangements that meet individual needs.

c. Mr Patrick Tay has asked about the Ministry's plans to issue guidelines on the inclusion of restraint of trade clauses in employment contracts. We are discussing with tripartite partners on how and when restrictive clauses in employment contracts can and should be used, and the guidelines will be based on established principles that the Courts have articulated. Employees who believe they are affected by unreasonable or unjustified clauses can seek assistance from their unions, TAFEP or MOM. We will update further, in due course.

d. Finally, many stakeholders pointed out that the Act has become harder to navigate over time. We will study how to streamline and clarify key provisions, so they are easier to understand and comply with.

D6. The TWG-EAR will publish its report in the second half of this year. Through this Tripartite Workgroup, we are strengthening protections where they matter most, while keeping our labour framework practical and responsive as careers lengthen and workplaces evolve.

D7. Taken together, these efforts reflect a simple principle: as work changes, our protections must evolve alongside it. Whether it is supporting workers through restructuring, updating the Employment Act, our aim is the same – to ensure that workers and employers can adapt with confidence to the

future of work.

E. CONCLUSION

E1. Longer lives are reshaping how we work, how we build careers, and how our economy grows. What matters now is whether our workers, employers and systems are ready to adapt to these changes with confidence.

E2. That is why much of our work this year has focused on building practical partnerships – through tripartite workgroups, alliances for action, and the Economic Strategy Review – to listen carefully, test what works on the ground, and turn ideas into outcomes that matter for both workers and employers, and ultimately, Singapore.

E3. Career longevity is not simply about staying employed for longer. It is about enabling Singaporeans to remain productive, adaptable and engaged across different stages of their lives, and enabling employers to continue drawing on the full range of experience, skills and capabilities in a tight labour force.

E4. This effort cannot be carried by any single party alone.

a. Workers must stay adaptable, taking ownership of their skills and plan ahead for transitions over longer careers.

b. Employers must continue to invest in their people, redesigning jobs, developing skills, and creating workplaces where workers of all ages can contribute meaningfully.

c. Government will continue to walk alongside both, strengthening career and employment systems, uplifting HR capabilities, supporting transitions, and keeping our employment protections fit for a changing workforce.

E5. This is how we turn longer working lives into a strength for Singapore, strengthening productivity, resilience and inclusion at the same time.

E6. And our commitment to Singaporeans is this: as work changes, we will keep listening, keep assisting, and keep adapting, so that workers have the confidence to move forward, and businesses have the support to grow through change.

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Last Updated: 04 March 2026