

# Fair Employment Practices 2023



**MINISTRY OF  
MANPOWER**

Manpower Research and Statistics Department

Singapore

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### **FAIR EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES 2023**

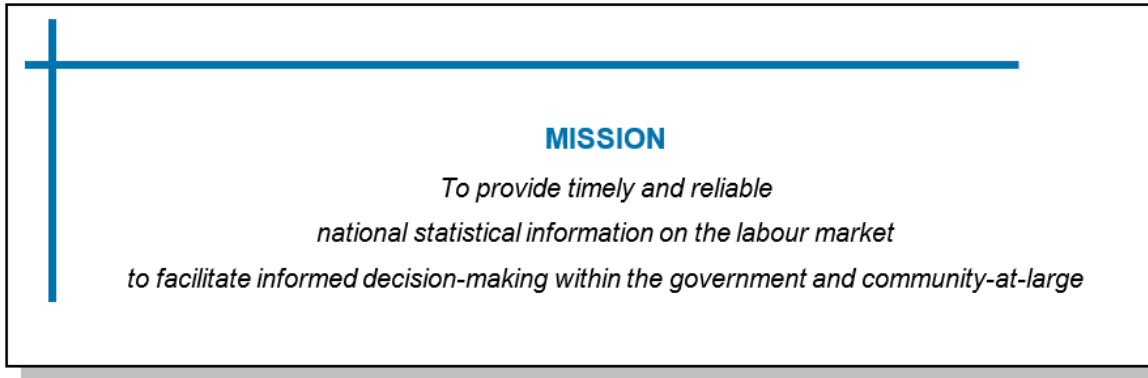
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## Highlights

The proportion of employees and job seekers who faced discrimination has trended down over the years. In 2023, 6.0% of employees experienced discrimination at work, lower than the percentage in 2022 (8.2%), 2021 (8.5%) and 2018 (24.1%).

The proportion of job seekers who faced discrimination in 2023 (23.4%) was also lower than the previous years (2022: 23.8%; 2021: 25.8%; 2018: 42.7%). These improvements reflect the efforts by the Ministry of Manpower, the Tripartite Alliance for Fair & Progressive Employment Practices and tripartite partners in promoting fair employment practices.

The proportion of employees who worked in firms with formal procedures to manage workplace discrimination has increased steadily over the years from 49.6% in 2018 to 63.2% in 2023. Our analysis showed that having formal procedures to manage discrimination at work was effective in reducing the likelihood of experiencing age discrimination, which was the most prevalent form of workplace discrimination.

However, employees are still apprehensive about seeking help after experiencing discrimination. The proportion of employees who sought help after experiencing discrimination declined in 2023 (29.5%) compared to 2022 (35.3%). Most employees did not seek help because they feared their relationships at work or their career would be jeopardized. Under the upcoming Workplace Fairness Legislation (WFL), workers are protected against retaliation and employers are required to put in place proper grievance handling processes for a fair and prompt response to workplace discrimination. This would strengthen employees' confidence in reporting workplace discrimination without fear of reprisal.

## **1 Introduction**

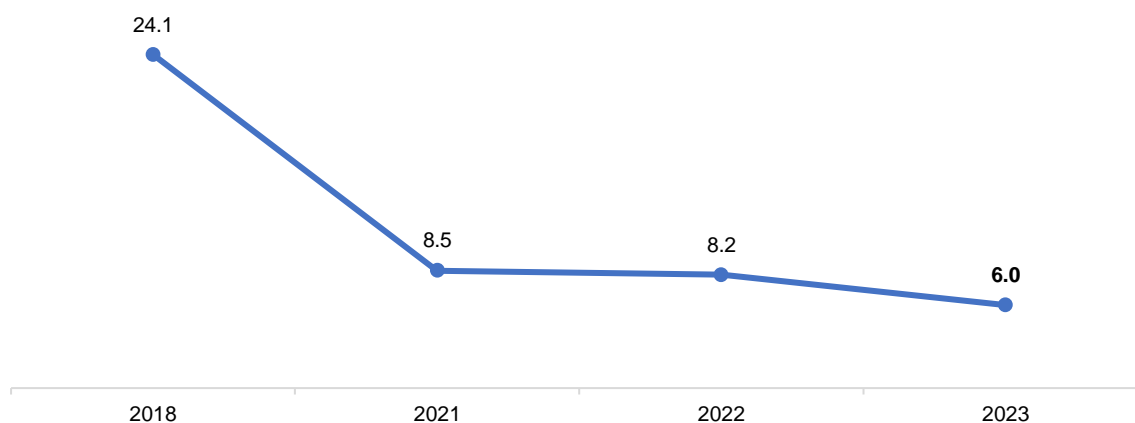
1.1 The Manpower Research and Statistics Department conducts regular surveys to track the prevalence of workplace discrimination. Each survey aims to capture the incidence of workplace discrimination among Singapore residents. Respondents are asked if they had experienced discrimination, based on actual incidents they encountered while they were working as employees and/or during their job search (e.g., when filling up job application forms or during interviews). The survey also asked employees if their organisations have in place formalised procedures to manage workplace discrimination, and the actions they took after experiencing discrimination. This report analyses data that were obtained from the latest survey conducted in 2023.

## 2 Prevalence of workplace discrimination

### 2.1 Discrimination among employees

2.1.1 The proportion of employees who experienced discrimination at work fell to 6.0% in 2023, down from 8.2% the year before and 8.5% in 2021 [Chart 1]. The percentage in 2023 was also about four times lower than pre-pandemic levels in 2018 (24.1%). These improvements reflect the efforts by the Ministry of Manpower, the Tripartite Alliance for Fair & Progressive Employment Practices and tripartite partners in promoting fair employment practices.

**Chart 1: Proportion of resident employees who were discriminated against at work due to their personal attributes (%)**



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

Notes:

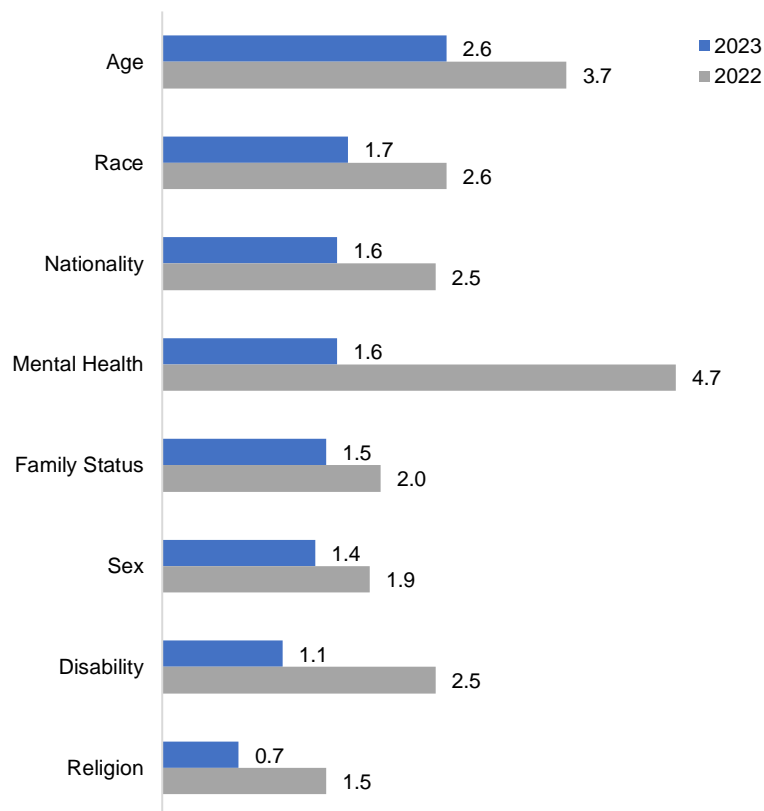
(1) The incidence of discrimination at work is based on those who were discriminated due to the following personal attributes: age, sex, race, religion, nationality, family status (marital status, pregnancy, number of children), disability and mental health conditions. The list of personal attributes was expanded in 2023 to include gender identity and criminal history.

(2) Excluding discrimination based on gender identity and criminal history, the proportion of resident employees who experienced discrimination at work was 5.8% in 2023.

2.1.2 Age discrimination was the most common form of discrimination at work (2.6%) in 2023 [Chart 2]. This was followed by race (1.7%), nationality (1.6%) and mental health (1.6%).

2.1.3 All forms of discrimination, including age discrimination, have declined from 2022 to below 3% in 2023.

**Chart 2: Proportion of resident employees who were discriminated against at work due to their personal attributes (%)**



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

Notes:

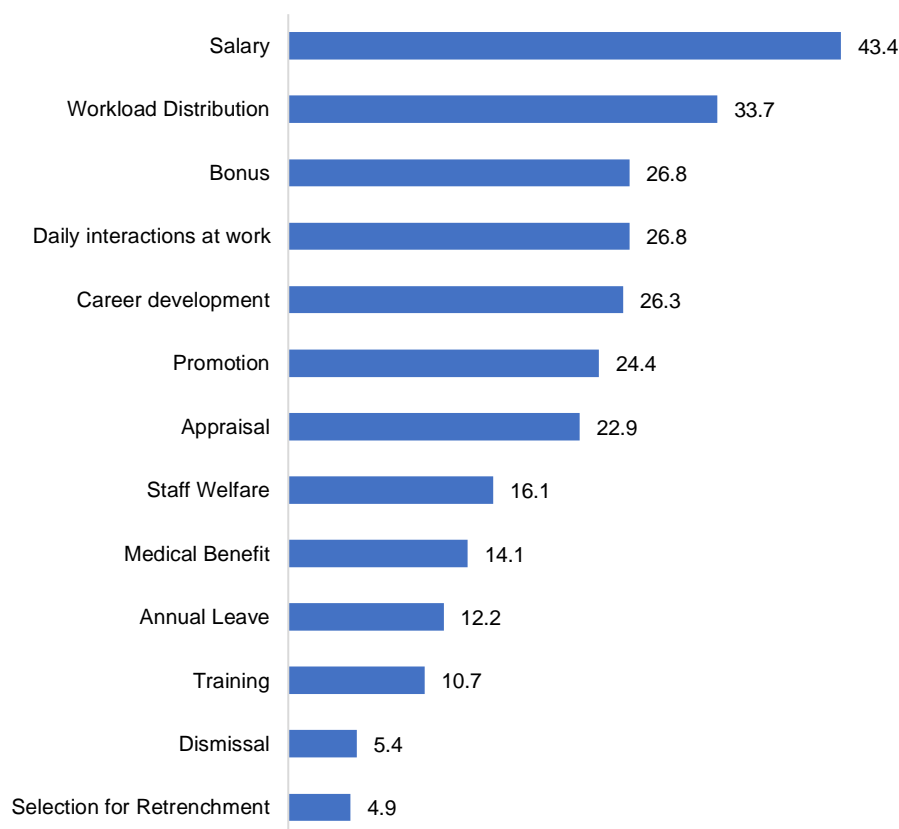
- (1) Data are based on those who have worked as an employee in the year prior to the conduct of the survey.
- (2) The incidence of discrimination for each specific attribute do not sum up to the overall incidence as an employee who faced discrimination may face multiple forms of discrimination. These 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 is shown in Annex A – Table A1.



2.1.4 Unfair treatment at work could be in areas related to remuneration (salary, bonus); benefits (annual leave, staff welfare, medical benefits); career progression (career development; work appraisal; training; promotion); work environment (workload distribution, daily interactions at work); and termination of employment (dismissal, retrenchment).

2.1.5 Employees who experienced discrimination at work more commonly reported unfair treatment related to remuneration (salary: 43.4%; bonus: 26.8%) and work environment (workload distribution: 33.7%; daily interactions at work: 26.8%) [Chart 3]. Areas related to career opportunities were also common points of unfair treatment (career development: 26.3%; promotion: 24.4%; appraisal: 22.9%). Unfair treatment related to benefits (staff welfare: 16.1%; medical benefits: 14.1%; annual leave: 12.2%) and termination of employment (dismissal: 5.4%; retrenchment: 4.9%) were less common.<sup>1</sup>

**Chart 3: Instances of unfair treatment at work as percentage of employees who were discriminated at work (%), 2023**



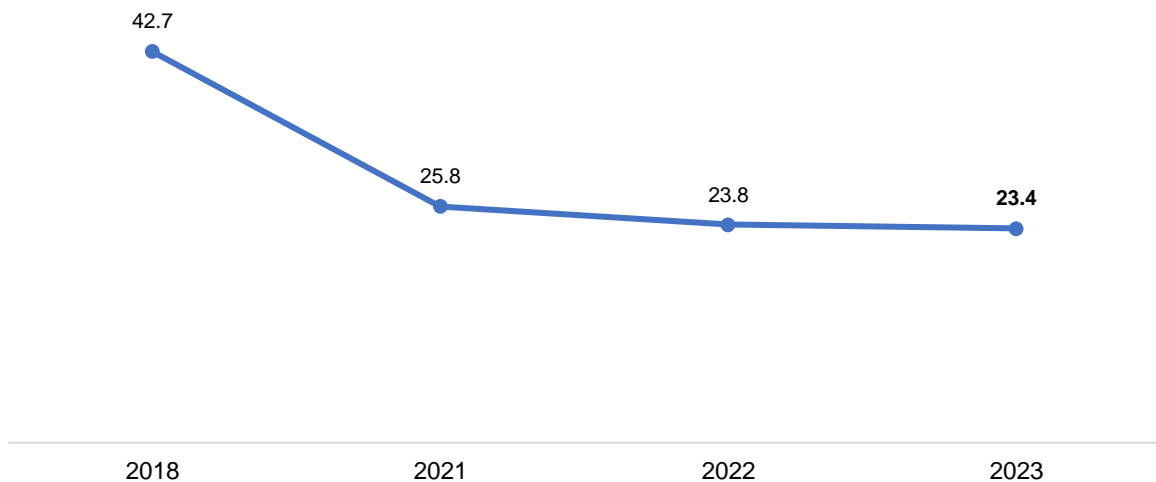
Source: Supplementary Survey on Fair Employment Practices, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM  
 Note: Respondents are allowed to indicate more than one option.

<sup>1</sup> The common areas of unfair treatment at work in 2023 were similar to the preceding years. See Annex A – Table A2.

## 2.2 Discrimination among job seekers

2.2.1 The proportion of job seekers who faced discrimination during their job search continued to decline to 23.4%, from 23.8% in 2022. The proportion was also significantly lower than 42.7% in 2018 [Chart 4]. The decline is reflective of the collective tripartite efforts to promote fair employment practices.

**Chart 4: Proportion of resident job seekers who were discriminated against during job search due to their personal attributes (%)**



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

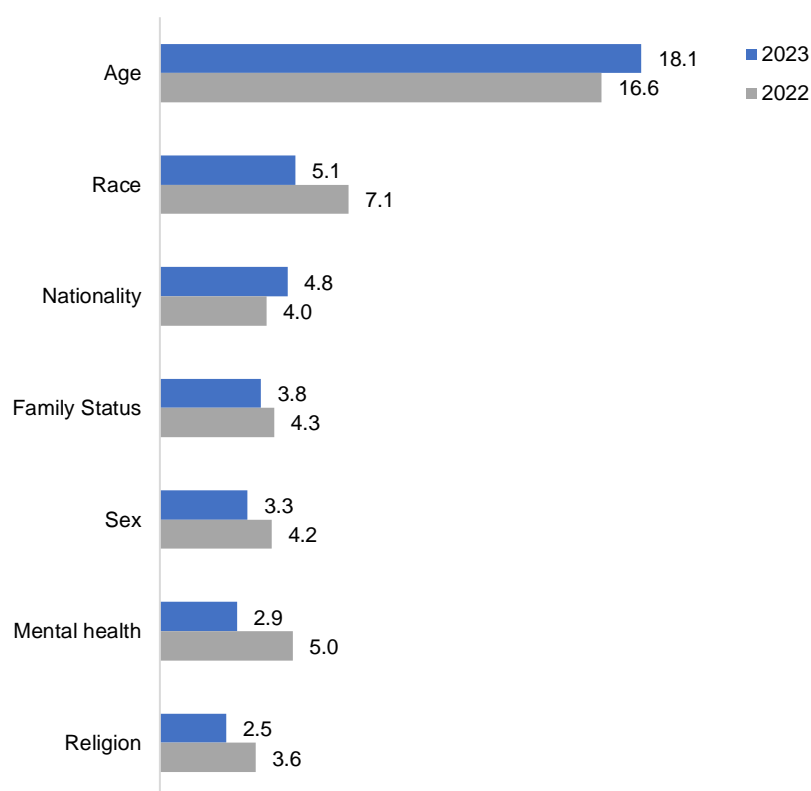
Notes:

- (1) Data are based on those with job search activity in the year prior the conduct of the survey.
- (2) The incidence of job search discrimination is based on those who were discriminated due to the following personal attributes: age, sex, race, religion, nationality, family status (marital status, pregnancy, number of children) and mental health conditions. The list of personal attributes was expanded in 2023 to include gender identity and criminal history.
- (3) Excluding discrimination based on gender identity and criminal history, the proportion of resident job seekers who experienced discrimination during job search was still 23.4% in 2023.

2.2.2 Age discrimination remained the most prevalent form of discrimination (18.1%) during job search in 2023 [Chart 5].<sup>2</sup> This was followed by race (5.1%) and nationality (4.8%).

2.2.3 All forms of discrimination declined in 2023 compared to 2022, except for age and nationality discrimination which saw a rise for the first time in 2023 after a steady decline over the years.<sup>3</sup>

**Chart 5: Proportion of resident job seekers who were discriminated against 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 as 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 is shown in Annex A – Table A3.
- (4) There were insufficient responses among job applicants with disability to provide an estimate in both 2022 and 2023.

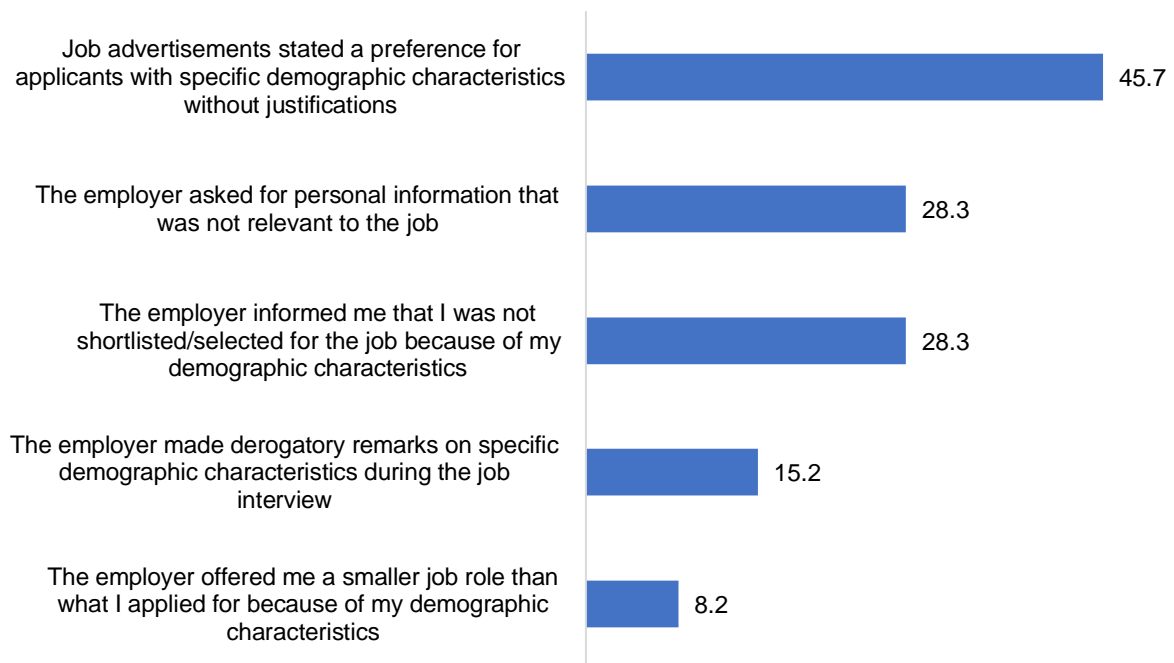
<sup>2</sup> Age discrimination could be related to age-based assumptions of job seekers' abilities and experience. For example, among job seekers aged 50 & over who experienced age discrimination, close to three in ten said they were deemed by employers to be too qualified for the job (29.0%). There were also older job seekers – many of whom have applied for non-PMET jobs – who were viewed as lacking the physical ability to do the job (23.2%), even though they were medically fit.

<sup>3</sup> See Annex A – Table A3 on incidence of each form of discrimination among job seekers for 2018, 2021, 2022, and 2023.

2.2.4 The most common source of discrimination experienced by job seekers was job advertisements which had stated a preference for applicants with specific demographic characteristics (45.7%) [Chart 6]. This was followed by discriminatory experiences arising from employers' ask for personal information that was irrelevant to the job (28.3%) and being passed over due to demographic characteristics (28.3%).

2.2.5 Besides fair job advertising, other good practices to adopt for fair hiring include reviewing job application forms to ensure that each field is relevant to the job, and to communicate why the information is needed.

**Chart 6: How job search discrimination occurred, as a percentage of resident job seekers who were discriminated during job search in the year (%), 2023**



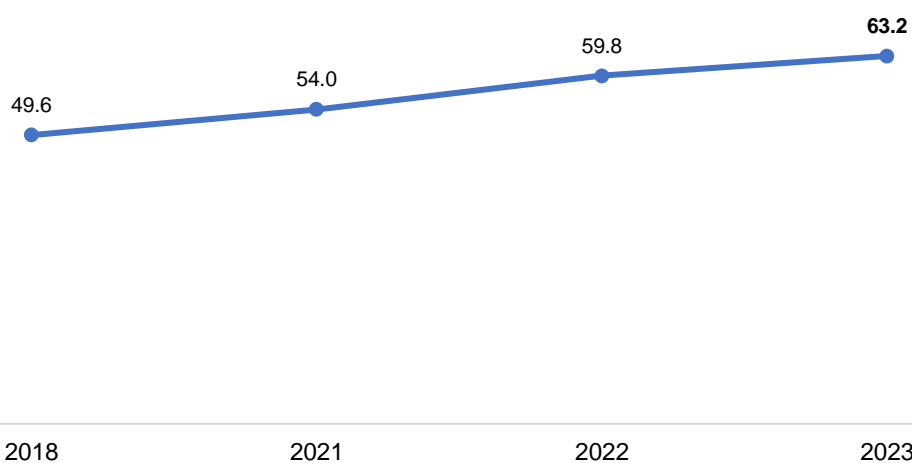
Source: Supplementary Survey on Fair Employment Practices, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

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

### 3 Formal procedures to handle workplace discrimination

3.1 Having formal procedures to manage workplace discrimination provides an avenue for employers and employees to resolve discriminatory complaints and stamp out errant behaviours at the workplace. In 2023, 63.2% of resident employees worked in firms with formal procedures to manage workplace discrimination. There has been a steady rise in the proportion since 2018 (49.6%), a positive sign toward further improvements in workplace fairness [Chart 7].

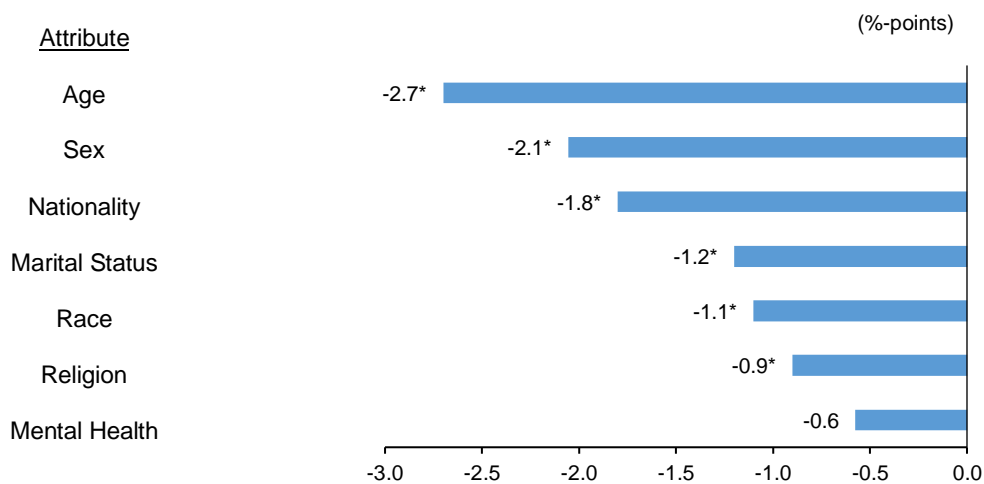
**Chart 7: Proportion of resident employees in firms with formal procedures to manage workplace discrimination (%)**



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

3.2 Results from a regression<sup>4</sup> analysis found that formal procedures<sup>5</sup> to manage discrimination reduces the likelihood of experiencing discrimination. The presence of formal procedures was statistically significant in reducing the likelihood of discrimination across most forms of discrimination, except mental health discrimination [Chart 8]. In particular, formal procedures were effective in managing workplace discrimination due to age and sex. The implementation of formal procedures to handle workplace discrimination reduces age discrimination by 2.6 percentage points, and for sex discrimination, it reduces by 2.1 percentage points. This gives evidence to the importance of implementing formal procedures to manage workplace discrimination.

**Chart 8: The effect of formal procedures to manage workplace discrimination on discrimination at work, 2023**



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

Note: Results which are statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval. Results for attributes not marked with an asterisk (\*) are not statistically significant.

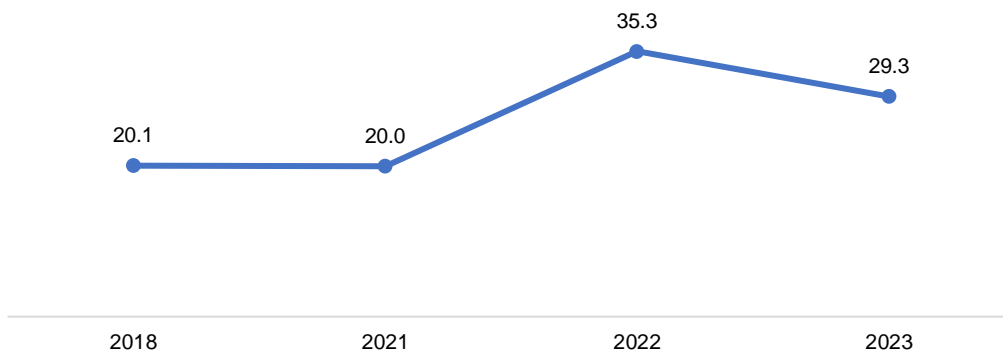
<sup>4</sup> The model is specified as follows:  $Y_1 = \alpha + \beta_1(\text{formal procedures}) + \gamma_1(\text{female}) + \gamma_2(\text{age}) + \varepsilon$ , in which all variables are categorical with the exception of age, which is continuous. The outcome variable is a binary variable, in which 1 represents having experienced unfair treatment at work and 0 otherwise.

<sup>5</sup> Examples include the existence of internal channels, (e.g., designated officers, survey links to send anonymous feedback) for reporting of feedback and dispute resolution related to practices that negatively affect mental well-being.

## 4 Seeking help for workplace discrimination

4.1 Notwithstanding the increased availability of formal procedures to handle workplace discrimination, a large share of employees who experienced discrimination did not seek help. In 2023, 29.3% of employees who faced discrimination at work sought help, a decrease from the year before (35.3%) [Chart 9].

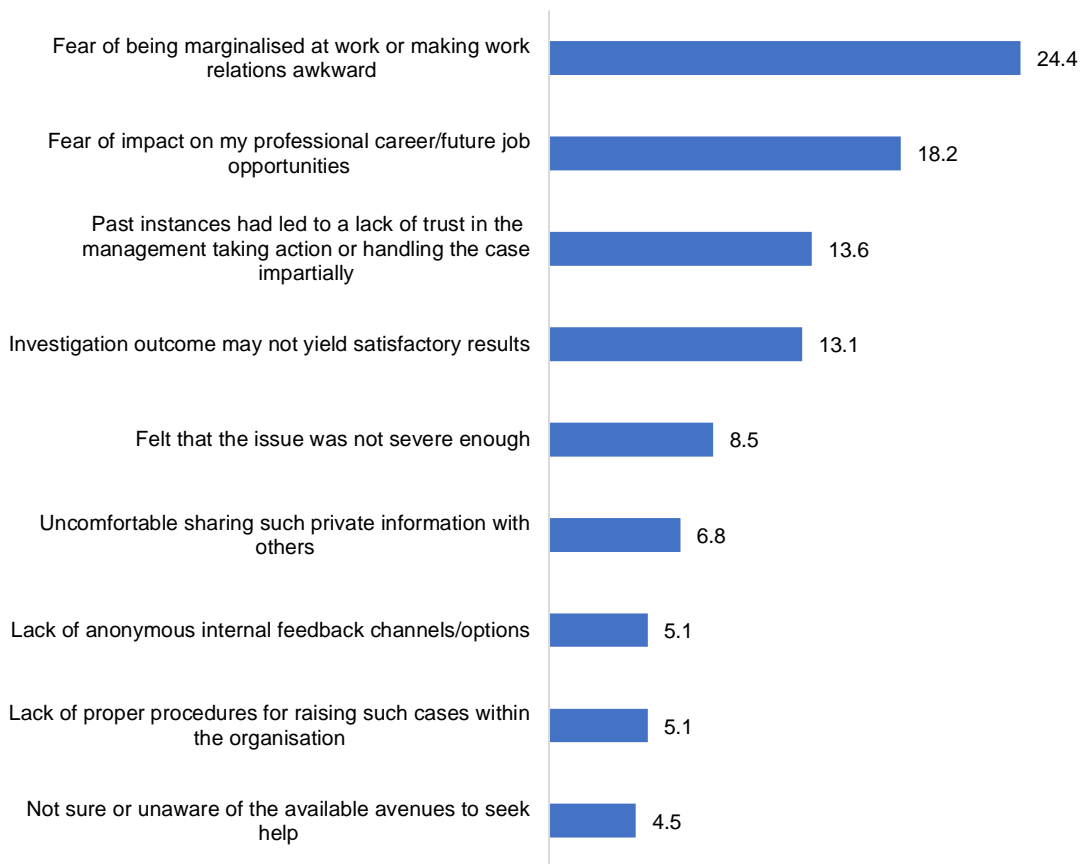
**Chart 9: Proportion of resident employees who were discriminated against at work and sought help (%)**



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

4.2 Like the years before, the ‘fear of being marginalised at work or making work relations awkward’ (24.4%) was the main reason employees did not seek help when faced with discrimination at work [Chart 10].<sup>6</sup> They were also concerned about a detrimental impact on their career (18.2%). These findings suggests the need for more efforts to instill confidence of employees to seek help from available channels. Under the Workplace Fairness Legislation, victims are protected against retaliation on those reporting. Greater transparency in data pertaining to the prevalence of workplace discrimination, firmer stances on discriminatory practices and action against errant employers are some ways which confidence and trust can be built towards formal channels.

**Chart 10: Reasons for not seeking help among those who were discriminated at work, 2023 (%)**



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

<sup>6</sup> See Annex A – Table A6 on the reasons for not seeking help when discriminated against at work, for 2021, 2022 and 2023.



Discrimination among employees**Table A1: Proportion of resident employees who were discriminated against at work in the year due to their personal attributes (%)**

Form of Discrimination	2021	2022	2023
Age	4.6	3.7	2.6
Race	2.8	2.6	1.7
Nationality	1.9	2.5	1.6
Mental Health	3.2	4.7	1.6
Family Status	2.0	2.0	1.5
Pregnancy Status	3.7	3.3	1.9
Maternal	1.5	3.4	1.1
Marital Status	1.2	1.3	1.0
Sex	2.1	1.9	1.4
Disability	2.1	2.5	1.1
Religion	1.0	1.5	0.7

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) Maternal discrimination refers to the discrimination towards mothers based on the number of children they have.

**Table A2: Instances of unfair treatment at work among resident employees who were discriminated against due to their personal attributes (%)**

	2021	2022	2023
Salary	46.4	56.0	43.4
Workload distribution	n.a.	46.0	33.7
Bonus	25.6	36.7	26.8
Daily interactions at work	n.a.	26.7	26.8
Career development	49.2	38.7	26.3
Promotion	44.0	44.7	24.4
Appraisal	40.0	44.7	22.9
Staff welfare	16.8	15.3	16.1
Medical benefit	9.6	9.3	14.1
Annual leave	11.2	14.7	12.2
Training	14.0	14.7	10.7
Dismissal	6.4	4.7	5.4
Retrenchment	6.8	4.7	4.9

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

- (1) Respondents are allowed to indicate more than one option.
- (2) n.a.: not available.

## Discrimination among job seekers

**Table A3: Proportion of resident job seekers who were discriminated against during job search in the year due to their personal attributes (%)**

Form of Discrimination	2018	2021	2022	2023
Age	30.4	18.9	16.6	18.1
Race	11.0	6.3	7.1	5.1
Nationality	14.2	6.2	4.0	4.8
Sex	9.5	4.4	4.2	3.3
Family Status	13.5	3.6	4.3	3.8
Pregnancy Status	23.1	4.2	6.9	5.3
Maternal	13.9	6.9	14.9	3.9
Marital Status	7.9	3.2	2.6	2.4
Mental Health	n.a.	2.9	5.0	2.9
Religion	6.9	2.8	3.6	2.5

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) n.a.: not available.
- (3) Maternal discrimination refers to the discrimination of mothers based on the number of children they have.

**Table A4: How job search discrimination occurred among job seekers who were discriminated against due to their personal attributes (%)**

	2021	2022	2023
Job advertisements stated a preference for applicants with specific personal characteristics without justifications	43.3	33.9	45.7
Was asked information on personal characteristics irrelevant to the job	19.5	23.0	28.3
Not shortlisted/selected due to personal characteristics	29.0	18.8	28.3
Derogatory remarks made on their personal characteristics during interview	13.8	18.2	15.2
Was offered a smaller job role than what was applied for due to personal characteristics	14.8	18.8	8.2

Source: Supplementary Survey on Fair Employment Practices, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM  
Note: Respondents are allowed to indicate more than one option.

Seeking help for workplace discrimination

**Table A5: Proportion of resident employees who were discriminated against at work by type of help they sought (%)**

	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Formal Help Within Firm/ With Union	79.2	75.3	63.6
Informal help from co-workers/friends/family	16.0	16.1	22.2
Formal help from Government (MOM, TAFEP, TADM, ECT)	4.7	5.4	13.1

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

**Table A6: Reasons for not seeking help among those who were discriminated against at work (%)**

	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Fear of being marginalised at work or making work relations awkward	18.9	23.1	24.4
Fear of impact on professional career/ future job opportunities	15.0	21.5	18.2
Past instances had led to a lack of trust in the management taking action or handling the case impartially	14.1	16.2	13.6
Investigation outcome may not yield satisfactory results	13.7	12.3	13.1
Felt that the issue was not severe enough	15.4	6.9	8.5
Uncomfortable sharing such private information with others	8.4	6.9	6.8
Lack of proper procedures for raising such cases within the organisation	2.6	4.6	5.1
Lack of anonymous internal feedback channels/options	3.5	3.8	5.1
Not sure or unaware of the available avenues to seek help	5.7	3.1	4.5

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

## **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 1973 (2020 Revised Edition). The survey was conducted from 3 July 2023 to 18 Sept 2023.

### **Objective**

The survey was conducted to collect information on the prevalence of workplace discrimination during the 12-month period ending June 2023 (i.e. 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023), and procedures related to fair treatment at work.

### **Coverage**

To ensure that our survey results can be generalised to the entire resident workforce, the sample for each survey is 1) representative of Singapore's resident workforce in terms of key characteristics such as age, sex, and labour force status, and 2) selected randomly.

The survey covered residents in the labour force aged 15 years and over (excluding full-time National Servicemen). A total of 4,090 residents in the labour force were surveyed, of whom 3,480 or 85.0% responded to the survey.

### **Reference Period**

The reference period is limited to the year prior to the time of the survey. This enables comparability across the years when the survey is being conducted. The reference period was 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023.

All respondents were asked on incidents of discrimination encountered during the 12-month period ending June 2023, 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. About 98.3% of the respondents were in employment at any time during the 12-month period ending June 2023, and the remaining were either unemployed or had recently exited the labour force.

## **Mode of Submission**

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 mental well-being;
- 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	23.4	1.51	6.4	20.4	26.4
Proportion of resident employees who were discriminated at work due to their personal attributes	6.0	0.41	6.8	5.2	6.8
Proportion of resident employees who were discriminated in their firm and sought help	29.3	3.22	10.9	23.2	35.8