

**(EMBARGOED TILL 21 OCTOBER 2021, THURSDAY, 12.00PM)**

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## **JOINT MEDIA RELEASE**

### **NTUC and SNEF Call on Government to Strengthen Employment and Employability Support for PMEs**

*~ Joint union and employer taskforce engaged more than 10,000 PMEs, union leaders and business leaders to propose ways to help PMEs ~*

1 Since the formation of the joint National Trades Union Congress (NTUC)-Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) PME Taskforce (PME TF) in October 2020, it had widely consulted more than 10,000 professionals, managers and executives (PMEs), union leaders and business leaders, to understand the key concerns and needs of PMEs at the workplace and seek out both pro-worker and pro-business proposals that would help PMEs and companies.

#### **PMEs' Top Concerns – Lack of Job Security and Require More Support for Employment and Training**

2 Through a series of online surveys, focus group discussions and engagement sessions, the PME TF found that PMEs are most concerned with the lack of job security and require greater support in employment and training opportunities. These concerns and challenges are felt more acutely by mature PMEs in their 40s to 60s. Even as businesses transform to ensure business sustainability, the skillsets possessed by PMEs, including younger PMEs, may be at risk of becoming obsolete. These are especially so as the Singapore economy has been impacted by COVID-19.

#### **Joint NTUC-SNEF PME Taskforce's Nine Recommendations to Help PMEs**

3 Having deliberated the top concerns and challenges faced by PMEs, the PME TF arrived at nine recommendations<sup>1</sup> under four key thrusts. These are to strengthen PMEs' employment and employability, while ensuring that they can compete fairly and effectively to meet the manpower and skill demand of employers in a dynamic labour landscape. In summary, these recommendations are:

##### **Key Thrust 1: Enhance workplace fairness**

*to ensure local PMEs receive fair opportunities and treatment when seeking employment or at their workplace, regardless of their age*

<sup>1</sup> For the Joint NTUC-SNEF PME Taskforce recommendations, please refer to Annex A or the full report.

<b>1</b>	<p><b>Enhance fair employment practices</b> through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Improving HR standards</li> <li>b) Strengthening enforcement on errant companies which adopt unfair practices</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<p><b>Strengthen Singaporean core</b> through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Differentiating foreign worker access by occupations</li> <li>b) Enhancing EP application review process</li> <li>c) Facilitating skills transfer to local PME's</li> </ul>
<b>3</b>	<p><b>Widen support for PME's</b> through review of legislation on PME's representation by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Setting up tripartite work group to review the scope of union representation of PME's</li> </ul>
<p><b>Key Thrust 2: Provide Unemployment Support and Benefits</b>  <i>to support PME's who are involuntarily unemployed, especially the mature PME's as they take a longer time to return to the workforce</i></p>	
<b>4</b>	<p><b>Strengthen unemployment income support</b> for PME's by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Introducing a national transitional support framework to provide supplementary income relief and assistance to those who are involuntary unemployed, supplemented by active Labour Market Policy</li> <li>b) Providing additional tier of support for all union members and/or vulnerable mature PME's</li> </ul>
<p><b>Key Thrust 3: Ensure more hiring opportunities for mature PME's</b>  <i>so that there are enough meaningful and quality jobs which they can transition to</i></p>	
<b>5</b>	<p><b>Assist mature PME's to transit into meaningful employment</b> through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Short term salary support for companies</li> <li>b) Supporting training courses and mentorship programmes for relevant roles</li> <li>c) Fast track training programmes with certification</li> </ul>
<p><b>Key Thrust 4: Support PME's in career progression and skills upgrading</b>  <i>to help them progress in their careers</i></p>	
<b>6</b>	<p><b>Build Singaporean leadership bench strength</b> by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Supporting leadership development programmes for Singaporean PME's</li> <li>b) Facilitating global development of Singaporean talent</li> </ul>
<b>7</b>	<p><b>Provide customised career coaching support to PME's</b> by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Supporting and expanding funding of career coaches to NTUC / SNEF to guide and support PME's in companies</li> </ul>
<b>8</b>	<p><b>Develop structured jobs and skills plans for PME's</b> through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Leveraging NTUC's Company Training Committees (CTCs) to upskill workers in line with business and industry requirements.</li> </ul>

<b>9</b>	<p><b>Strengthen the nexus between tripartite partners to prepare workforce for economic transitions and investment pipelines</b> by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Repositioning existing NTUC's Job Security Council (JSC) as NTUC-SNEF JSC to strengthen the jobs ecosystem</li> <li>b) NTUC-SNEF JSC working with MOM and the relevant government agencies to improve the employment prospects and create good jobs for Singaporeans</li> <li>c) Ensuring that training needs are incorporated into Institutes of Higher Learning (IHL) curriculum, in tandem with the fast-changing economic landscape</li> </ul>
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4 On helping PMEs, NTUC Secretary-General Ng Chee Meng who is the Co-Advisor to the PME TF commented, "The most important task at hand is how we can help protect jobs for our Singaporean PMEs, especially in some sectors, and groom them for better jobs to help them achieve upward progression. PMEs feel the pressure from foreign competition and for mature PMEs, they find it challenging to bounce back when they lose their jobs. Thus, we must do more to level the playing field for our local PMEs, while enabling other forms of employment and employability-related support like unemployment transition support, job search or training support for them."

5 Representing the employers, Co-Advisor to the PME TF, SNEF President Dr Robert Yap said, "Providing support to strengthen the employability of local PMEs is essential for employers to meet their manpower and skill demand. Through developing a strong Singaporean core complemented by foreign manpower, this will help employers to grow their business in and from Singapore. The recommendations do not just seek to help local PMEs to compete effectively and fairly in the local labour market. The recommendations also seek to help them develop deeper skills and gain overseas exposure so that they can be developed to take on regional and global roles. I encourage local PMEs to take charge of their own career, and be resilient and adaptable to progress and thrive in the future economy."

6 On the formulation of the recommendations, NTUC Assistant Secretary-General Patrick Tay who is Co-Chair to the PME TF added, "These recommendations came about as a reflection of all the ground feedback that we have garnered from PMEs, union leaders and employers. With their insights, we distilled their key concerns into actionable recommendations, which we will continue to work with the relevant partners to bring them to fruition to help our PMEs. I encourage PMEs to join our unions as members so that we can effectively speak up for them and provide them the much-needed support as a collective voice. With PMEs onboard, NTUC will be able to work with our tripartite partners to formalise effective policies and programmes that would address our PMEs' concerns and aspirations."

7 PME TF Co-Chair SNEF Executive Director Sim Gim Guan echoed these sentiments. He said, "We have garnered insights from ground feedback and aimed to be more responsive and proactive in addressing both the concerns of PMEs and employers through the recommendations. SNEF will work together with our tripartite partners and employers to implement the recommendations so that PMEs can have

good career opportunities and employers can have a globally-competitive workforce.”

### **The Next Steps in Helping PMEs**

8 In the next decade, Singapore will experience significant demographic shifts – more PMEs in the workforce; people living longer; and a rapidly ageing workforce. COVID-19 has impacted the global economy. Mass adoption of digital technologies has hastened and the geopolitical environment is seeing a much more fragmented world. Singapore will need to transform urgently to stay competitive, while ensuring that Singaporeans’ aspirations are met now and for the new economy.

9 When the PME TF set off with its work in October 2020, its three key focus areas are to help PMEs:

- a. Protect – Enhancing employability of PMEs and reducing risk of retrenchment, through greater support and representation of PMEs, especially those aged 40 to 60.
- b. Preserve – Encouraging employers to retain and build capabilities for economic recovery.
- c. Provide – Supporting PMEs to upskill and reskill to enhance their employability.

10 Looking ahead, the PME TF sees an even greater need to also focus on the following as well:

- a. Prepare – Preparing the workforce for challenges ahead.
- b. Pivot – Helping the workforce pivot into new growth areas as necessary.
- c. Participate – Ensuring that PMEs and employers work hand in hand to navigate the road ahead.

11 The PME TF recognises that while the set of recommendations is targeted at PMEs (with particular focus on mature PMEs), they can and should also be applied to the rest of the workforce.

12 The PME TF has submitted its full report on the nine recommendations to the Ministry of Manpower for the Government’s consideration and support in turning these into real solutions that would help our PMEs, companies and economy.

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## **Annex A: The NTUC-SNEF PME Taskforce's Nine Recommendations**

### **Recommendation #1:**

**Enhance fair employment practices through improving HR standards and strengthening enforcement against errant companies adopting fair practices**

#### **1. Improve HR standards**

- a) Increase take-up of Institute for Human Resource Professionals (IHRP) certification for HR professionals or introduce top up modules on Singapore's employment legislation & regulations for HR Professionals with internationally recognised certification
- b) Companies with more than 200 employees are to ensure that their HR staff in recruitment, employee relations, training and development functions are equipped with IHRP or internationally recognised certification (with certification of top up modules). Companies will have to submit proof of at least 1 of such in-company HR staff during application of Employment Passes.
- c) Introduce shared HR services for SMEs
- d) Fully accredit HR professionals in the longer term

#### **2. Strengthen enforcement on errant companies**

- a) Improve public communications on the Fair Consideration Framework and channels for reporting unfair hiring practices
- b) Put in place safe whistle-blowing policies and procedures
- c) Strengthen TAFEP's enforcement power, empowering TAFEP to impose tough penalties on egregious companies and seek recourse for PMEs with "substantiated" hiring and workplace grievances
- d) Improve workplace fairness through both legislative and non-legislative options by the newly set up Tripartite Committee on Workplace Fairness (TCWF)

### **Recommendation #2:**

**Strengthen Singaporean core through enhancing EP application review process and facilitating skills transfer to local PMEs**

- a) Differentiate foreign worker access by occupations which have an ample supply of locals and in which locals have the required skills
- b) Enhance the EP application review process by incorporating a point(s) system which considers a range of factors beyond the individual applicant's education qualification and salary
- c) Facilitate skills transfer from foreign specialists to local PMEs through further strengthening skills transfer schemes such as extending, expanding and enhancing the Capability Transfer Programme (CTP) to facilitate mandatory capability transfer

**Recommendation #3:  
Widen support for SMEs through review of legislation on SME's representation**

- a) Setting up of tripartite work group to review the scope of union representation of SMEs

**Recommendation #4:  
Strengthen unemployment income support for SMEs who are involuntary unemployed**

- a) Basic tier – Introduction of a national transitional support framework to provide supplementary income relief and assistance to those who are involuntarily unemployed, supplemented by active Labour Market Policy
  - i. Setting up of Tripartite Work Group to assess feasibility, conditions and size of support
- b) Additional tier of support for:
  - i. All union members and/or
  - ii. Vulnerable mature SMEs

**Recommendation #5:  
Assist mature SMEs to transit into meaningful employment through short term salary support**

- a) Short term salary support for companies who hire mature SMEs with relevant skills
  - b) Support training courses and mentorship programmes for relevant roles
- Fast track training programmes with certification to aid mature SMEs to transit into relevant roles

**Recommendation #6:  
Build Singaporean leadership bench strength**

- a) Support leadership development programmes for Singaporean SMEs
- b) Facilitate global development of Singaporean talent

**Recommendation #7:  
Provide customised career coaching support for SMEs**

- a) Provide customised career coaching support to SMEs through professionally trained career coaches supported by NTUC and SNEF
  - i. Support/expand funding of career coaches to NTUC/SNEF to guide and support SMEs in companies

**Recommendation #8:  
Develop structured jobs and skills plans for SMEs through Company Training Committees (CTCs)**

- a) Develop structured jobs and skills plans for PMEs through Company Training Committees (CTCs), to upskill workers in line with business and industry requirements:
  - i. Align employers' and employees' common interest for business and workforce transformation to co-create training plans
  - ii. Expand resources for NTUC to outreach and support more sectors and companies (including SMEs)
  - iii. Support training courses and mentorship programmes for relevant roles

**Recommendation #9:**

**Strengthen the nexus between tripartite partners to prepare workforce for economic transitions and investment pipelines**

- a) Reposition existing NTUC's Job Security Council (JSC) as NTUC-SNEF JSC to strengthen the jobs ecosystem
  - b) NTUC-SNEF JSC will work with MOM and the relevant government agencies to improve the employment prospects and create good jobs for Singaporeans
- Ensure that training needs are incorporated into Institutes of Higher Learning (IHL) curriculum, in tandem with the fast-changing economic landscape

## Common Terms

National Trades Union Congress (NTUC)	全国职工总会 (职总)
Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF)	新加坡全国雇主联合会
Ng Chee Meng NTUC Secretary-General	黄志明 职总秘书长
Patrick Tay NTUC Assistant Secretary-General	郑德源 职总助理秘书长
Dr Robert Yap SNEF President	叶进国 新加坡全国雇主联合会会长
Sim Gim Guan SNEF Executive Director	沈锦源 新加坡全国雇主联合会执行理事长
PME Taskforce	PME 专责小组

### About National Trades Union Congress

The National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) is a national confederation of trade unions as well as a network of professional associations and partners across all sectors in Singapore. NTUC's objectives are to help Singapore stay competitive and working people remain employable for life; to enhance the social status and well-being of our members and working people; and to build a strong, responsible and caring labour movement. NTUC's vision is to be an inclusive labour movement for all collars, ages and nationalities. NTUC is at the heart of the Labour Movement, which comprises 58 affiliated unions, six affiliated associations, 12 social enterprises, six related organisations as well as a growing ecosystem of U Associates and enterprise partners. For more details, visit [www.ntuc.org.sg](http://www.ntuc.org.sg).

### About Singapore National Employers Federation

The Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) is a trade union of employers. Our mission is to advance tripartism and enhance labour market flexibility to enable employers to implement responsible employment practices for sustainable growth. SNEF has a membership of over 3,300 companies with a combined workforce of over 800,000. For more information, please visit [www.snef.org.sg](http://www.snef.org.sg).

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