

# Migrant workers a boon for Singapore

Rejecting calls to cut their numbers, business groups and trade associations stress the workers' importance to the economy

LIMMINZHANG

Reducing the number of migrant workers in Singapore, in light of the Covid-19 outbreak, will hurt the country's economic recovery and harm the job prospects of Singaporeans, several business groups and trade associations said yesterday.

In a flurry of statements, these groups came out strongly against recent calls to restrict the number of foreign workers in Singapore, cautioning that such steps were unwise and could backfire on Singaporeans.

Migrant workers account for more than 90 per cent of the 32,876 confirmed Covid-19 infections in Singapore as of yesterday and some political commentators have argued that the Republic should consider reducing its dependence on them in light of the outbreak in the dormitories.

Countering this, the industry groups, between them, asked Singaporeans to consider three central implications of cutting back on migrant worker numbers: Singaporeans might have to put up with higher costs; Singapore's economy might become less competitive; and



Cutting back on migrant worker numbers could mean that Singaporeans may not be able to focus on white collar jobs. TNP FILE PHOTO

Singaporeans might not be able to focus primarily on white-collar jobs, as they can now, when foreign workers take on the low-paid jobs.

In a joint statement, the Singapore Indian, Malay and Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry said: "Given Singapore's limited workforce, we would not be able to stay competi-

itive in certain sectors otherwise if not for migrant workers."

They said migrant workers take on many lower-end jobs in Singapore. "This allows the vast majority of Singaporeans to take on PMET jobs, and help in creating an innovation-based economy as well," they said, referring to jobs for professionals,

managers, executives and technicians. "Thus, we urge the Government and Singaporeans to carefully consider the next steps on migrant workers."

As of March, there were 720,800 work permit holders in Singapore, excluding foreign domestic workers. Of that number, 287,800 were in the construction industry.

There were 194,900 S-pass holders, and 193,800 on employment passes.

The Singapore Contractors Association said the 300,000 foreign workers in the construction industry formed the backbone of the sector, taking on labour-intensive jobs that locals preferred not to do. "Reducing the number of foreign workers would hamper the current speed at which Singapore continues to grow and redevelop."

## HIGHER COSTS

The Specialists Trade Alliance of Singapore put it starkly: Would Singaporeans accept higher costs if jobs such as maintaining lifts cannot easily be filled by locals?

Meanwhile, the Singapore Manufacturing Federation, the Association of Singapore Process Industries, and the Association of Singapore Marine Industries rebuffed suggestions that foreign worker numbers should be cut.

The manufacturing sector accounts for about 20 per cent of Singapore's GDP.

SINGAPORE

# Reducing migrant worker numbers will hurt Singapore: Trade bodies

Rejecting calls to cut their numbers, business groups and trade associations stress the workers' importance to the economy

**Lim Min Zhang**  
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Cutting back on migrant worker numbers could mean that Singaporeans may not be able to focus on white-collar jobs. TNP FILE PHOTO

<https://www.tnp.sg/news/singapore/reducing-migrant-worker-numbers-will-hurt-singapore-trade-bodies>

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