

**MOM'S 70<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY BOOK**  
**CHARTING OUR PATH: 70 YEARS OF WORKING TOGETHER AND LESSONS FOR**  
**TOMORROW**

**Charting Our Path** is MOM's first official book about the transformation of Singapore's workforce and workplaces over the past 70 years – steered by the Ministry of Manpower as it sought to strike a balance between its economic and social objectives.

It details the major milestones in the Ministry's history, from creating the conditions for industrial peace in the turbulent pre-independence years, to preparing the workforce with the skills needed to support economic growth and cushioning the impact of economic crises on workers and businesses. Through these historical accounts, it explains the Ministry's efforts to translate economic growth into socio-economic progress for Singaporeans. Appendix A provides a summary of the key highlights of the book.

Mr Lee Hsien Loong, Senior Minister, noted MOM's role and contributions to Singapore in the foreword of the book: "For its part, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) manages and develops the nation's human resources and ensures that the labour market works well. In so doing, it maximises the potential of our workforce and enables businesses to grow and produce good social outcomes for Singaporeans. MOM's efforts have dramatically improved workers' lives and the quality of our workplaces. All this while keeping our economy lean and competitive, minimising the regulatory and administrative burden on companies, and striving for service excellence in supporting businesses and workers. MOM has done well."

Reflecting on MOM's journey over the last 70 years, Dr Tan See Leng, Minister for Manpower, noted in his opening message for the book: "The milestones detailed in this book are a testament to the dedication of all MOMers who, often without fanfare, went above and beyond to help businesses and workers thrive together. MOM's journey thus far has given us a wealth of stories from which future workers and leaders can learn and draw confidence. In particular, this book distils three key lessons for MOM as we chart our path ahead. First, tripartism must remain the anchor of MOM's work. Second, we must innovate to progress. Third, it is crucial that we plan for the long term."

On commissioning the book to commemorate MOM 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Mr Ng Chee Khern, Permanent Secretary (Manpower), indicated in his opening message for the book: "The book is an ambitious project to capture MOM's significant contributions to the transformation of our workforce, businesses, and economy, drawing on document research as well as the knowledge of past and present MOM and tripartite leaders and staff through in-depth interviews with them. It was written for all MOMers, helping us to remember and learn from our past steps and the values that have guided us for the past 70 years. It should also serve as a source of inspiration as we chart our own path in a new operating landscape. Producing it was an endeavour that continues a long legacy of investing in growing our people so that each new generation of MOMers can make a greater impact towards our mission to serve Singapore."

**About the Author**

*Charting Our Path: 70 Years of Working Together and Lessons for Tomorrow* was written by The Nutgraf, a content and communications agency based in Singapore, and edited by Aaron Low, its Editor.

**Availability**

The book is not for sale. Its digital copy is available for download at [go.gov.sg/mom70](http://go.gov.sg/mom70).

The book unfolds over 16 chapters spanning seven key eras in MOM’s history, along with six Spotlight topics that focus on MOM’s unique approaches to address critical challenges that span over several eras.

<b>Era (Chapters)</b>	<b>Key Highlights</b>
<p><b>The Early Years (1950s – 1960s)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chapter 1 – From Confrontation...</li> <li>• Chapter 2 – ...To Collaboration</li> </ul>	<p>The Ministry of Labour and Welfare was established in 1955 during a period of severe industrial strife. To attract foreign investments into Singapore and create jobs for its people, the Ministry introduced employment laws that helped to resolve labour disputes, as well as the Trade Unions Act to regulate union activities and achieve industrial harmony. This sowed the seeds for tripartism as the Ministry built a lasting partnership between unions, employers and government.</p>
<p><b>Industrialisation and Beyond (1970s – 1980s)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chapter 3 – Building a Productive Workforce</li> <li>• Chapter 4 – Wage Woes: Embarking on Reform</li> </ul>	<p>With industrial peace established, Singapore turned to rapid industrialisation to tackle widespread unemployment. The Ministry supported this by upgrading the skills of our local workforce and calibrating access to foreign manpower. The National Wages Council guided wage reforms and encouraged women to participate in work. By the end of the decade, the focus shifted to raising productivity.</p> <p>As regional competition intensified, Singapore’s strategy centred on raising wages to push industries up the value chain and boost productivity. The 1985 recession prompted a review of economic and labour policies, marking Singapore's crucial shift towards higher-value industries such as electronics, pharmaceuticals and financial services.</p>
<p><b>Developing a Skilled Capital (1990s)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chapter 5 – Blueprint for a Future-Ready Singapore</li> <li>• Chapter 6 – Developing a Globally Competitive Workforce</li> </ul>	<p>The Ministry of Labour was renamed to Ministry of Manpower (MOM) in 1998, reflecting its expanded role in developing Singapore's only resource – its people. Through the Manpower 21 plan, it set out to build a globally competitive workforce through skills training, talent attraction, and strong tripartite partnerships.</p>
<p><b>Through the Crises (2000s)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chapter 7 – Down But Not Out)</li> <li>• Chapter 8 – Championing Lifelong Learning in the Workforce</li> </ul>	<p>A series of crises from 1997 to 2003 tested Singapore's economic resilience. MOM supported workers and businesses by strengthening job matching and wage flexibility measures. The government also advocated for training and reskilling programmes, including the establishment of the Workforce Development Agency in 2003 to oversee continuing education and training.</p>
<p><b>Productive and Inclusive Growth (2010s)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chapter 9 – Towards a Manpower-Lean Economy</li> </ul>	<p>As workforce growth slowed due to demographic changes, Singapore needed to move beyond labour-intensive growth. MOM thus shifted its focus towards building a manpower-lean economy. Through initiatives like</p>

Era (Chapters)	Key Highlights
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chapter 10 – No One Left Behind: Helping Lower-Wage Workers</li> </ul>	<p>Workfare and the Progressive Wage Model, it also pursued inclusive growth by boosting productivity and uplifting lower-wage workers.</p>
<p><b>Managing Our Migrant Workforce (2020s)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chapter 11 – Migrant Worker Management</li> <li>Chapter 12 – Migrant Domestic Workforce</li> </ul>	<p>Migrant workers have been crucial to Singapore's development since the 1970s. While this strategy enabled growth and met workforce needs, it required a delicate calibration of economic and social considerations. MOM will continue to transform the migrant worker ecosystem by fortifying housing standards, improving healthcare support and enhancing social well-being.</p>
<p><b>Pro-Growth, Pro-Worker, Pro-Singapore (2025 onward)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chapter 13 – Developing a Complementary Foreign Workforce</li> <li>Chapter 14 – Empowering Workers Through Career Health</li> <li>Chapter 15 – Fair and Progressive Workplaces</li> <li>Chapter 16 – Charting the Path Ahead</li> </ul>	<p>As we chart the path ahead, MOM is committed to empowering Singaporeans to access good job opportunities and have a secure retirement. MOM strives to foster safe, fair and progressive workplaces. MOM will enable businesses to thrive and create quality jobs.</p>

SN	Spotlight Topics	Details
1	Tripartism: Singapore's Secret Weapon for Industrial Peace	This spotlight sheds light on the journey to more peaceful industrial relations, and how tripartism played a critical role in resolving disputes and enhancing policymaking.
2	Managing an Ageing Workforce	This spotlight traces how the Ministry tackled demographic challenges over the past decades and took steps to increase workforce longevity and improve retirement adequacy.
3	Service From the 'HEART'	This spotlight looks at key milestones in the Ministry's journey to better serve its customers and digitalise its services.
4	Workplace Safety and Health	This spotlight traces how the Ministry continually reformed its workplace safety and health regime to achieve significant improvements in workplace safety and health.
5	A Wage and Skills Ladder	This spotlight looks at how Singapore took a novel approach to uplift lower-wage workers.
6	The COVID-19 Pandemic	This spotlight focuses on the COVID-19 pandemic that struck Singapore in 2020 and examines the extraordinary measures taken in response to protect lives and livelihoods, including those of migrant workers.