

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FAMILY JUSTICE SYSTEM






1 Review of substantive laws

A) Amendment of Women's Charter in 2011 to introduce new sanctions against maintenance defaulters.

B) Amendment of Women's Charter in 2016 and 2019 to better support victims of family violence, and strengthen law enforcement against online vice.

C) Courts (Civil and Criminal Justice) Reform Act passed in 2021, enacting a permanent framework for all courts, including the Family Justice Courts, to conduct hearings remotely, where appropriate.

D) Amendment of Women's Charter in 2022 to:

-  Introduce Divorce by Mutual Agreement of the irretrievable breakdown of marriage as a sixth fact that can be cited for divorce, where parties need not attribute blame for a divorce.
-  Extend divorce support programmes to parents, children, and key related persons (e.g. grandparents).
-  Enhance the Court's powers to enforce child access orders.

2

Strengthening our institutional structures and culture

Strengthening expertise and skills in the management of family disputes

(A)

Family Justice Courts ("FJC") established in 2014 to hear all family proceedings.

(B)

Development of Family Judges' Specialist Curriculum for family judges to receive specialist training in multi-disciplinary topics.

(C)

Setting up of Advisory and Research Council by FJC in 2020 for FJC to draw on expertise of international thought-leaders in Therapeutic Justice.

(D)

Launch of the Family Therapeutic Justice Certification Programme in 2021 by FJC, Law Society of Singapore and the Singapore Academy of Law to equip family lawyers on relevant multi-disciplinary skillsets.

(E)

Launch of the MSF-SUSS Family Counselling Certification Programme in 2021 to equip counsellors at FAMS@FSC to address family relationship issues.



Cultivating a Multi-Disciplinary Approach to family proceedings

A) Establishment of FJC's Counselling and Psychological Services in 2009 to provide therapeutic interventions e.g. counselling, to divorcing parents and children.

B) Court may advise that children of divorcing parents attend support programmes for children (e.g. Children-in-Between Programme).

C) Setting up a Panel of Financial Experts in 2021 by FJC and the Institute of Singapore Chartered Accountants to assist divorcing parties to better understand their financial situation.

E) Setting up a private sector Panel of Therapeutic Specialists in 2022 by FJC, the College of Psychiatrists, Academy of Medicine, Singapore, the Singapore Association for Counselling and the Singapore Psychological Society to improve accessibility of paid therapeutic specialist services to court users.

Developing an eco-system of support for distressed families

(A)

Setting up of Divorce Support Specialist Agencies by MSF in 2015, and roll out of the Strengthening Families Programme@Family Service Centre (“**FAM@FSCs**”) by MSF across the island in 2022 to bring together marriage, divorce support and family counselling services.

(B)

Setting up Family Violence Specialist Centres, now called Protection Specialist Centres, and the Integrated Services for Individual and Family Protection Specialist Centre.

(C)

Enhancement of integration between the Legal Aid Bureau and social service agencies, e.g LAB refers applicants in need to agencies such as FAM@FSCs and Protection Specialist Centres.

(D)

Launch of a 24-hour Domestic Violence Emergency Response Team (“**DVERT**”) by MSF in 2023, which jointly responds to high-risk domestic violence cases with the Police from Ang Mo Kio Police Division. The DVERT will be reviewed later in the year for implementation island-wide.

(E)

Launch of the National Anti-Violence and Sexual Harassment Helpline by MSF in 2021, which serves as a one-stop helpline for anyone who is a victim-survivor of violence, including sexual violence and sexual harassment.

3

Reforms to Court Processes and Procedures

Strengthening “upstream” interventions to encourage out-of-court settlement

A) Introduction of the Simplified Divorce Track in 2015, providing for a quicker and less costly filing process for uncontested divorce cases.

B) Introduced as part of the 2016 Women’s Charter amendments, couples who disagree on divorce and ancillary matters, with at least one minor child, are to attend the Mandatory Co-Parenting Programme prior to filing for divorce. With the 2022 Women’s Charter amendments, this will be extended to all parents of minor children who agree on divorce and ancillary matters.

Reducing acrimony during court proceedings

(A)

Introduction of the judge-led approach in 2014, empowering judges to take a more proactive to case management of family proceedings.

(B)

From 2011, the Court may direct divorcing couples with at least one minor child to attend counselling and mediation at FJC’s Child Focused Resolution Centre.

Simplifying processes and procedure, enhancing accessibility to the family justice system

A) Launch of the Divorce eService in 2021 and the Probate eService in 2023, by FJC to allow court users, especially Self-Represented Parties, to access simpler processes in applying for divorce on the Simplified Track and for grant of probate, respectively.

B) Launch of Electronic Template Statements by FJC to guide court users to provide the necessary information and documents for maintenance applications.

C) Introduction of physical touchpoints, including in the heartlands, where Self-Represented Parties may file certain applications e.g. maintenance enforcement applications.

D) New simplified and streamlined Family Justice Rules to be introduced by FJC.

E) Publication of the Family Orders Guide by FJC to provide guidance to court users on the language of commonly used court orders.