

Boosting the Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLPR) in Singapore

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Retention policies targeting caregiving load reduce long-term barriers to workforce re-entry

Problem Statement

Persistent declines in FLPR post-childbirth **deepen gender inequality** and **lower economic productivity**.

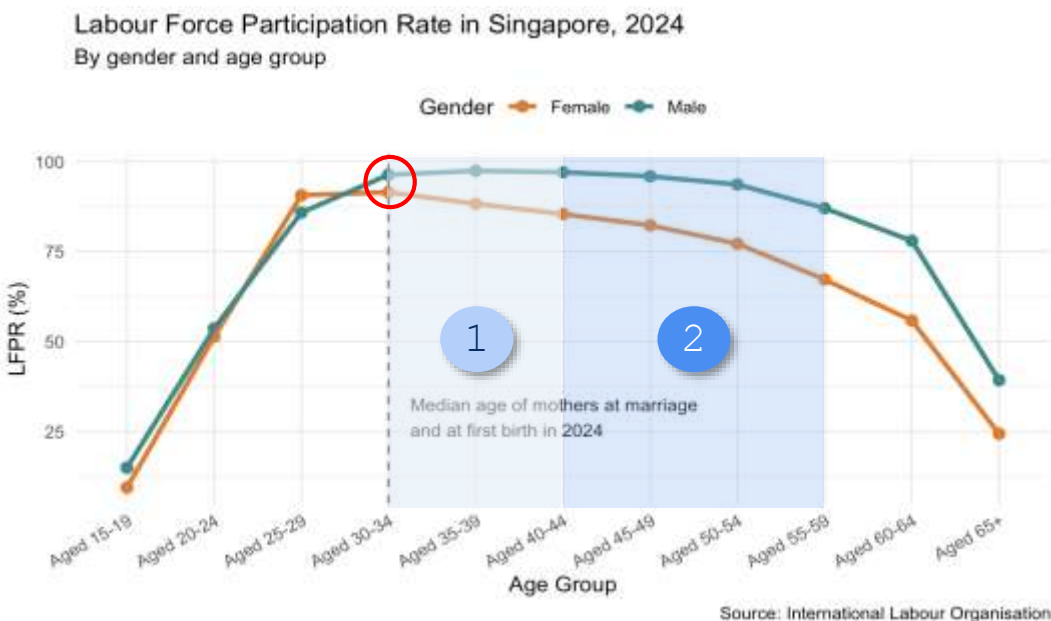
Without targeted interventions, this gap becomes entrenched and increasingly difficult to reverse.

Our Hypothesis

Sustained gap in participation is driven by:

- 1 Disproportionate caregiving load
- 2 Barriers to re-entry after career breaks

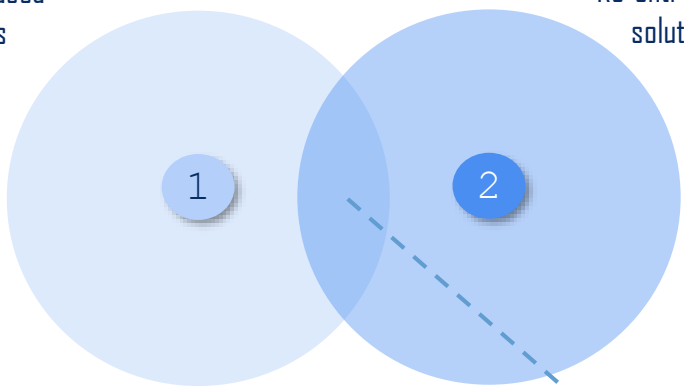
Divergence emerges at childbirth, widens over time



Focusing on retention reduces need for reintegration

Retention based solutions

Re-entry based solutions

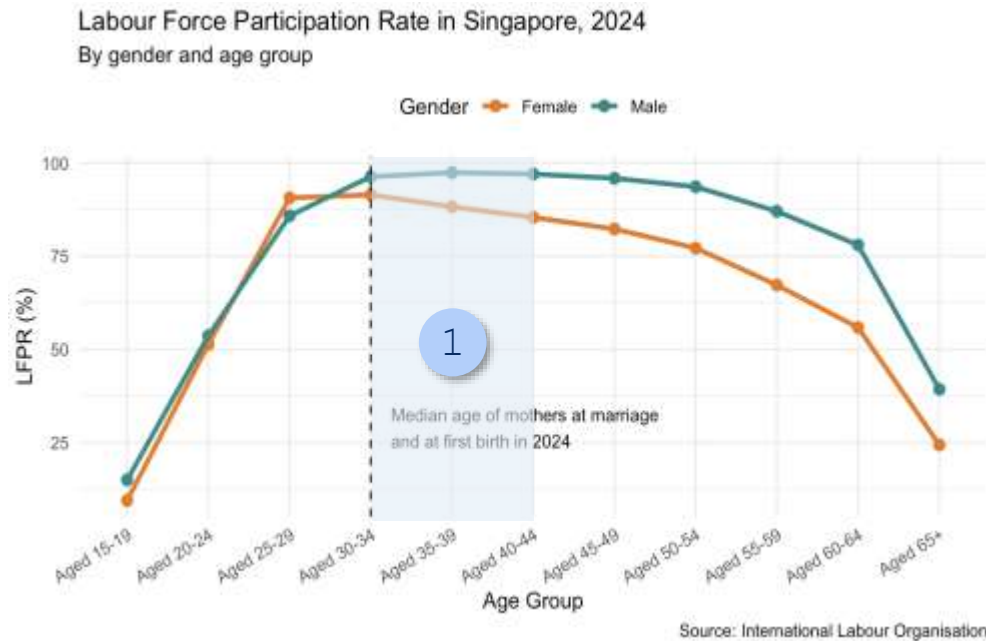


- Parental Leave Campaigns
- Tiered Leave
- Community Childcare

- Job Sharing

Unequal parental leave and inflexible childcare norms drive women's early workforce exits

FLPR falls by 6% between ages 30–34 and 40–44



- Caregiving, **#1** reason women permanently leave workforce
- 95.1% of those who exit for childcare are women

... what's driving these exits?

Parental leave is unequal and underused

- 16w for mothers vs. 4w for fathers (+6w shared)
- 53% take-up for paternity leave

"We agree caregiving should be shared — but it isn't in practice"

- 99% agree both parents should share caregiving

"Mum steps back" is still the default

- Employer expectation placed on women taking predominant childcare role
- FWAs concentrated in lower-skilled jobs

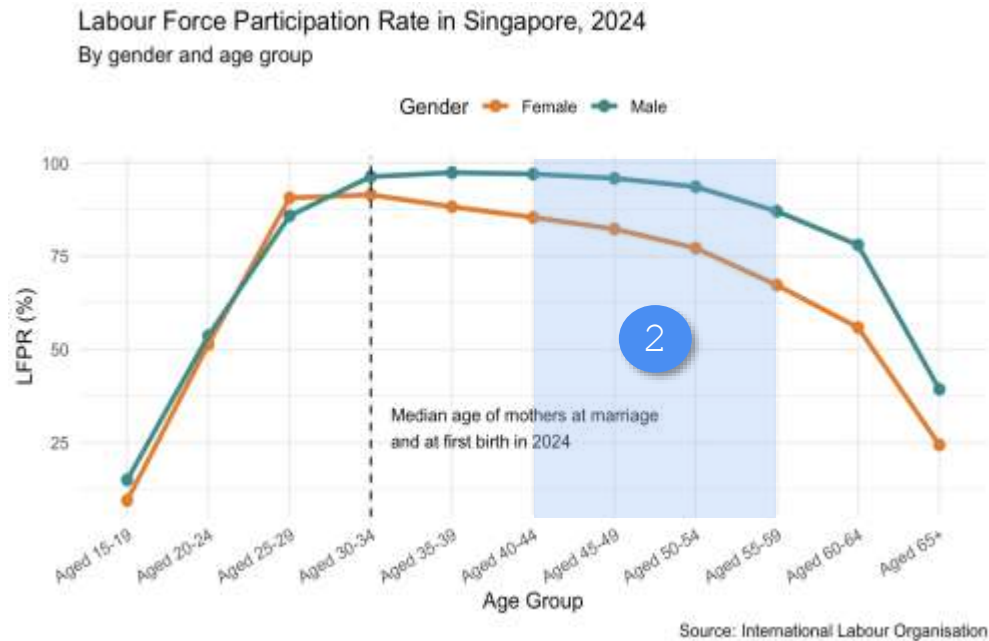
Childcare Exists, but may be out of reach

- 586 centres built, but many middle-income families fall into the "missing middle"
- Few flexible, part-day, or localised care options

"I didn't want to quit — but I couldn't afford to stay"

Employer biases, skill erosion, limited support programmes create strong barriers to workforce re-entry

Re-entry after long absence is the hardest part



- Prolonged caregiving breaks → permanent departure
- Longer the gap, lower the chance of return

... what's blocking their return?

Ageism and Skill Obsolescence

- Bias against older returning women, especially in PMET roles
- Career breaks erode skills and confidence
- "Career break returnees" slowly **gaining recognition** in Asia

Hiring Bias & Ageism

- Low probability of HR hiring returning women
 - CV gaps viewed negatively

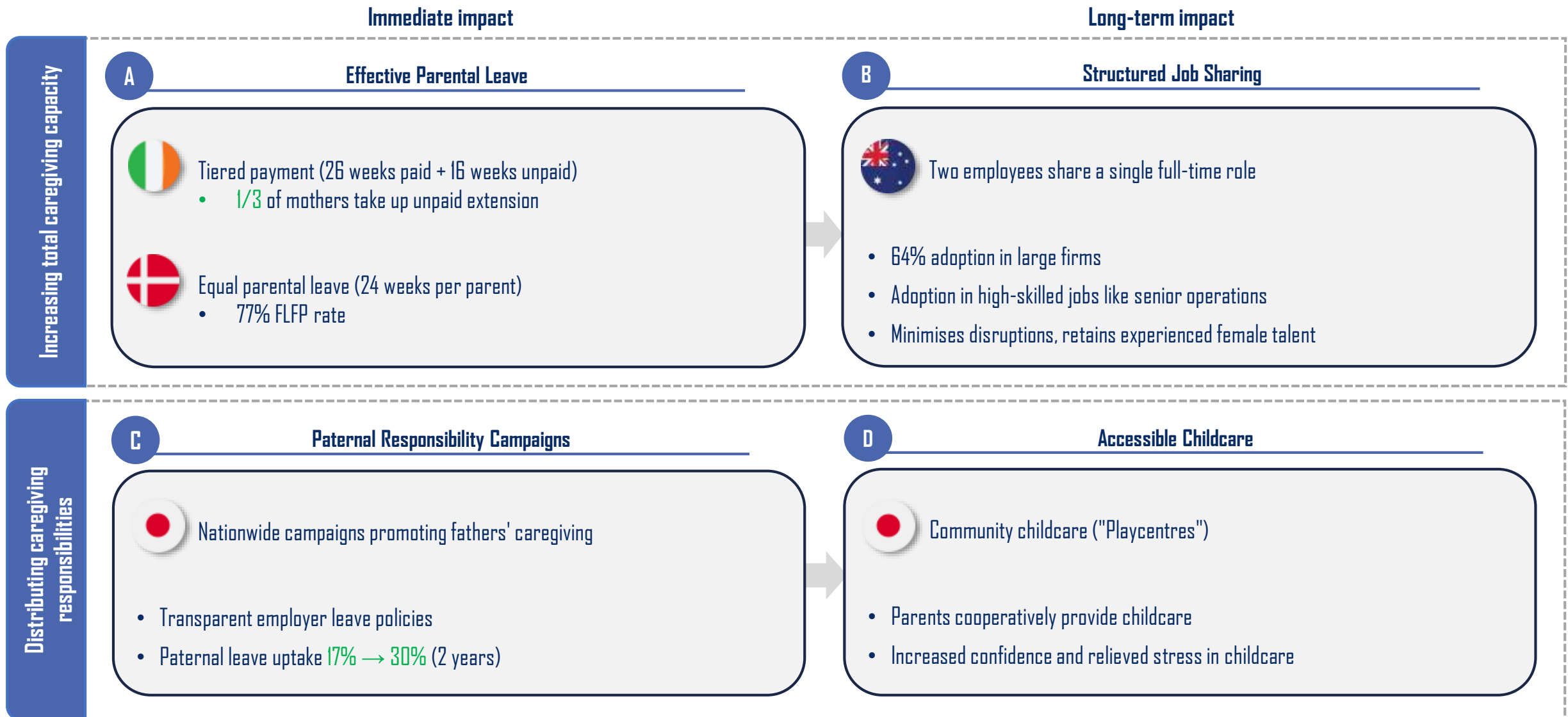
49% of HR won't hire returning women (2017)

Limited Structured Return Support

- Return pathways often unstable
- Limited mid-career job-sharing or phased return models

Re-entry is hindered by bias, structural program gaps, and personal drag, creating a **"one-way door"** effect in the workforce

Countries with high FLPR leverage equitable leave, campaigns, accessible childcare and structured job-sharing

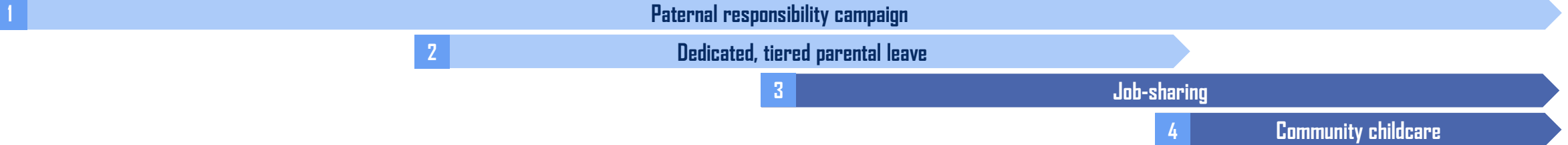


Solutions include shifting caregiving norms, to structured leave, flexible job options, and accessible childcare

Solutions should address **cultural norms, structural gaps, and employer reluctance.**

Immediate impact

Long term impact



1

2

3

4

Description

- Normalise paternity leave and FWAs

- Front-loaded subsidies, phased out gradually

- Pilot in targeted industries
- Leverage existing returner programmes

- Support Playcentres at local Community Clubs

Impact

- Awareness and expectations
- Long-term mindset change

- Normalise shared caregiving
- Reduce career gaps for mothers
- Gender parity in leave provision

- Ease re-entry
- Minimises disruptions for employers

- Cuts childcare-driven exits
- *Addresses ECE shortage*

Considerations

- Employer buy-in

- Fiscal sustainability
- Resistance from SMEs

- Industry selection

- Community trust
- Regulatory framework

Thank you!

Q&A

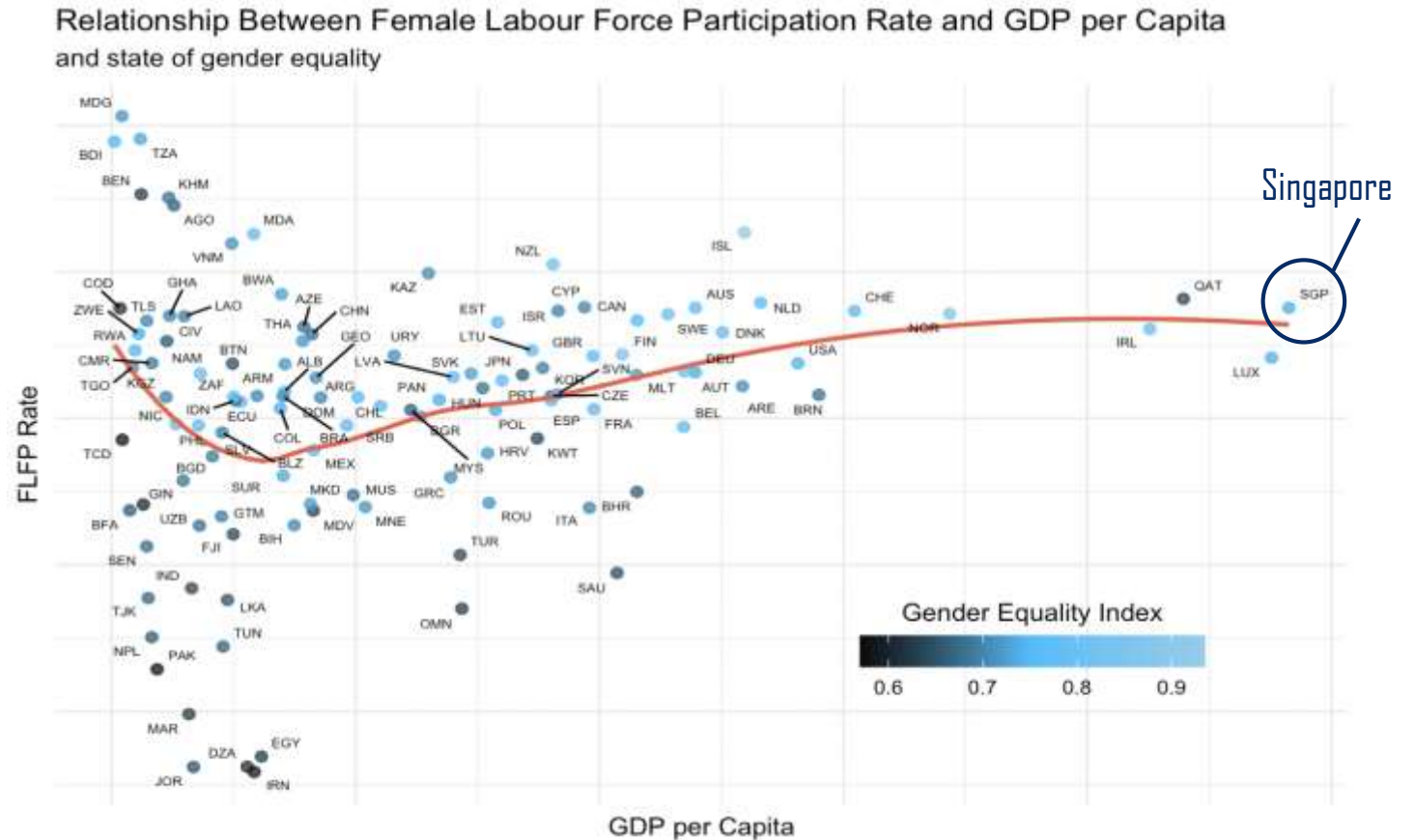
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Annex

Annex A: Relationship Between GDP per Capita and FLFP Rate

- The red line is the LOESS fit for the plot of FLFP rate in 2024 against GDP per capita.
- This supports the U-shaped hypothesis especially when disregarding outliers like Singapore, Luxembourg, Qatar and Ireland.
- We can also see that Gender Equality is directly proportional to FLFP rate.
- Among countries with moderate to high gender equality, the U-shape is even more pronounced.

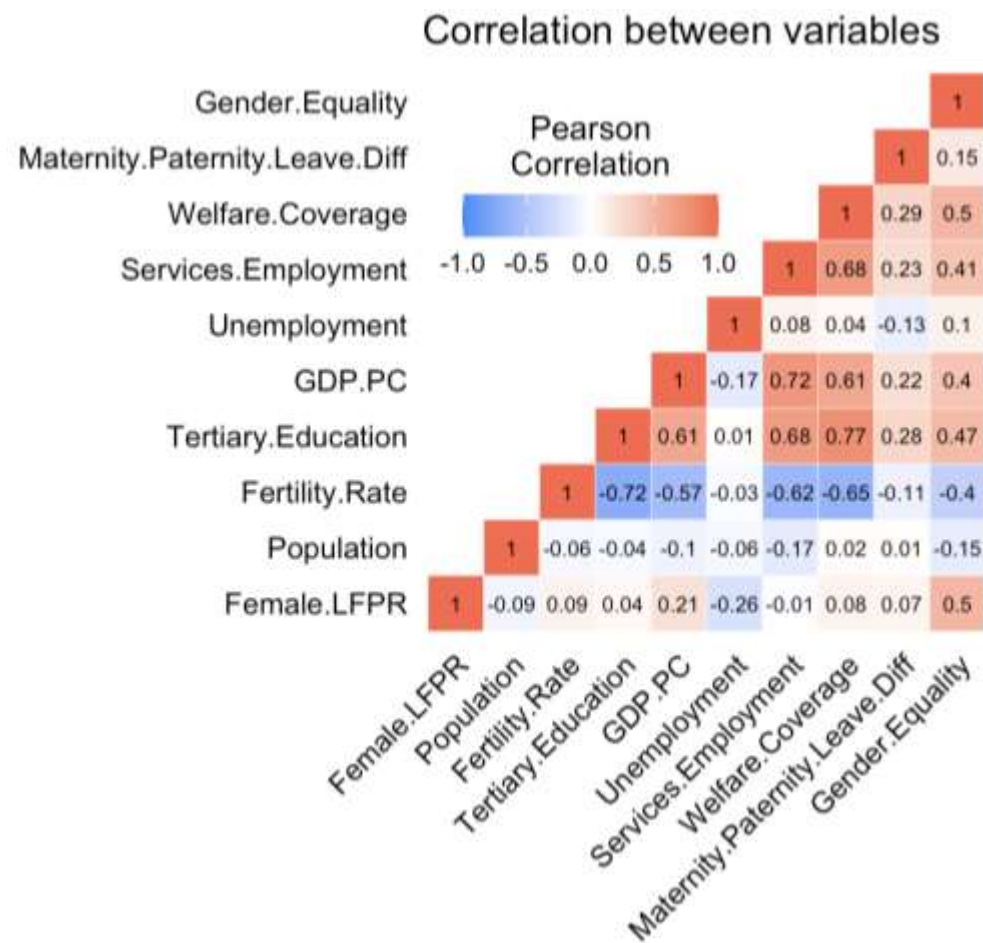


Annex B: Similarity Analysis

Category	Variable	Source	Reason for Inclusion
Demographic	FLFP rate	World Bank	Provides a starting point for progress of FLFP.
	Population	World Bank	Countries with different populations require different types of interventions and face different bureaucratic challenges.
	Female tertiary education	World Bank	Study by OECD (2013) found the number of years of education to be a significant driver of FLFP.
	Fertility rate	World Bank	Study by OECD (2013).
Economic	GDP per capita	World Bank	Goldin's U-shaped curve. In general, one of the most important economic factors that cannot be excluded.
	Unemployment rate	World Bank	Study by OECD (2013).
	Employment in Services Sector	World Bank	Study by OECD (2013).
Cultural	Global Gender Gap Index	World Population Review (World Economic Forum)	Theoretically, this corresponds with the treatment of women in the workplace both socially and financially.
	Welfare Coverage	OECD	Countries with higher welfare coverage are used to greater government intervention and would likely be more receptive.
	Difference between maternity and paternity leave	World Population Review	This should proxy for the skew in the perception of the mother as the primary caregiver compared to the father.

Note: values used for all variables were values of the latest reading since 2020, i.e. if the latest reading is before 2020, or the variable was never measured for the country, then the country is removed.

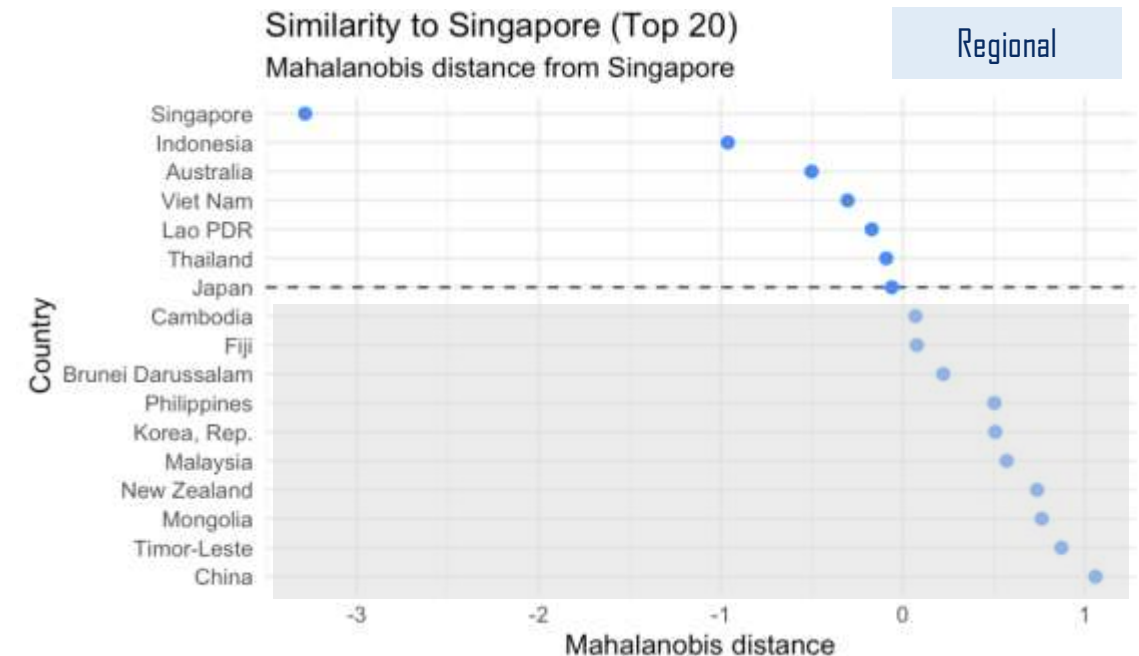
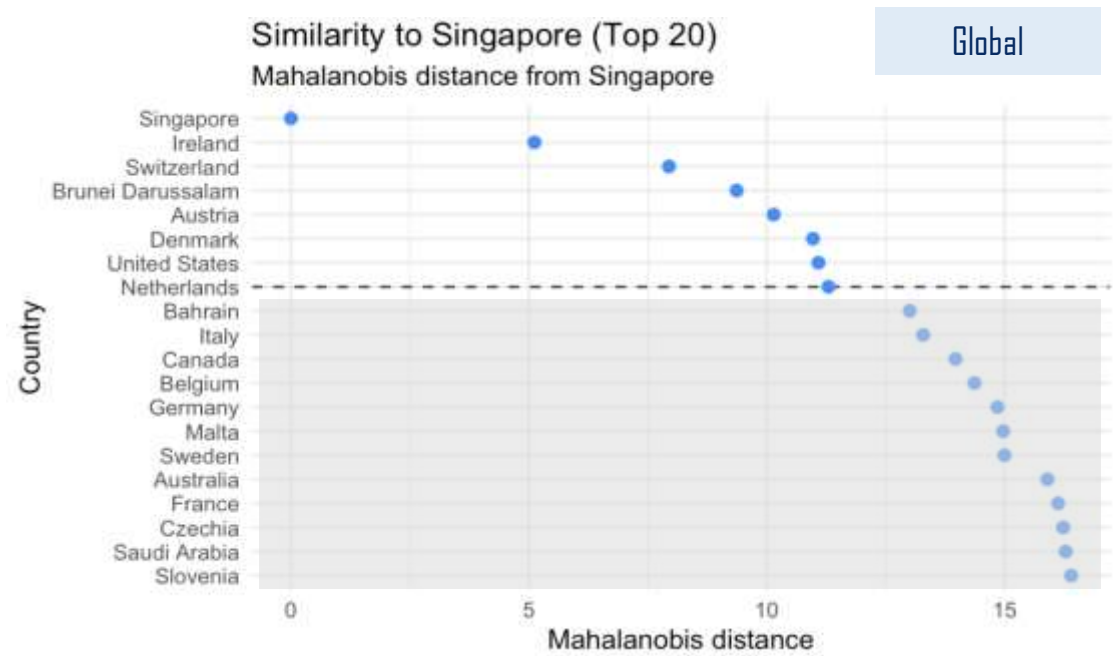
Annex B: Similarity Analysis



Highly correlated variables:

- Demographic:
 - Fertility rate
 - Tertiary education
- Economic:
 - GDP per capita
 - Services employment
- Cultural:
 - Welfare coverage
 - Gender equality

Annex B: Similarity Analysis



Countries Identified

Global

Ireland, Switzerland, Brunei, Austria, Denmark, United States, Netherlands

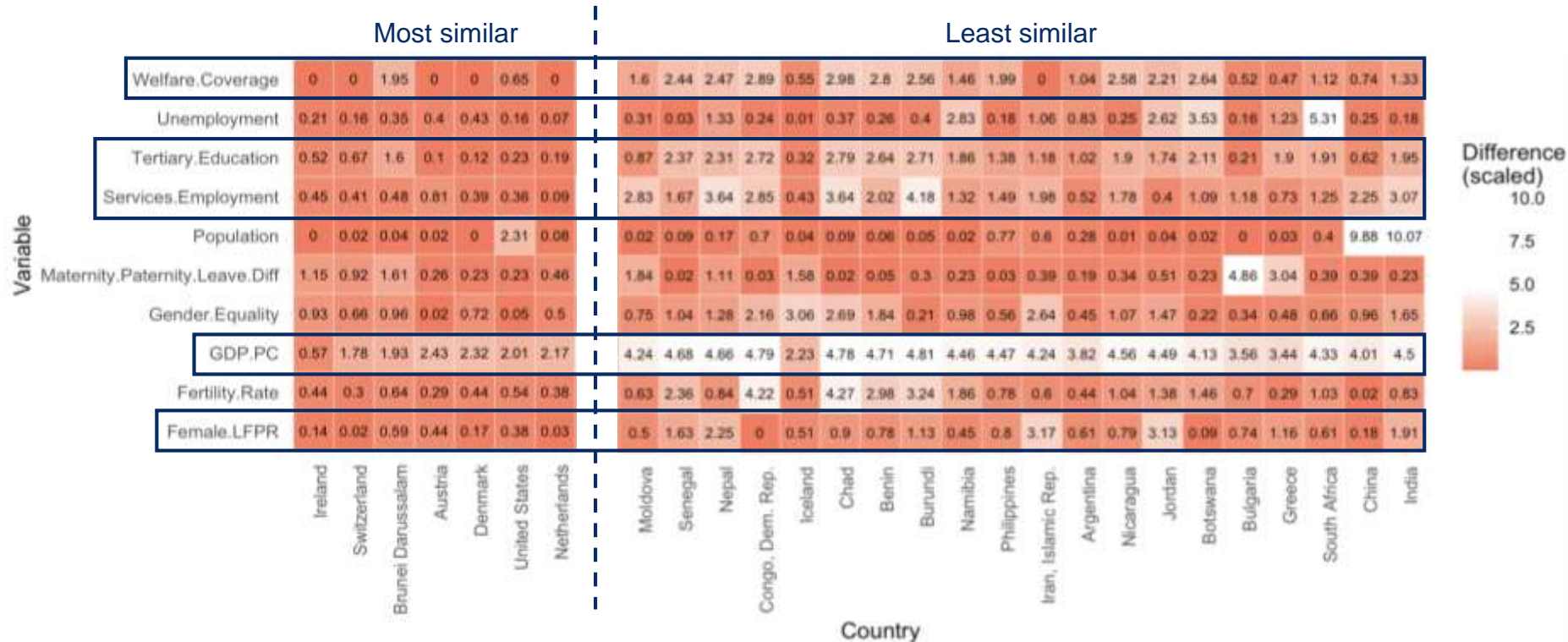
Regional (East Asia and Pacific)

Indonesia, Australia, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Japan

Annex D: Driving Factors for Similarity

Global Comparators

Difference Between Countries and Singapore (Global)
on each variable from expanded list

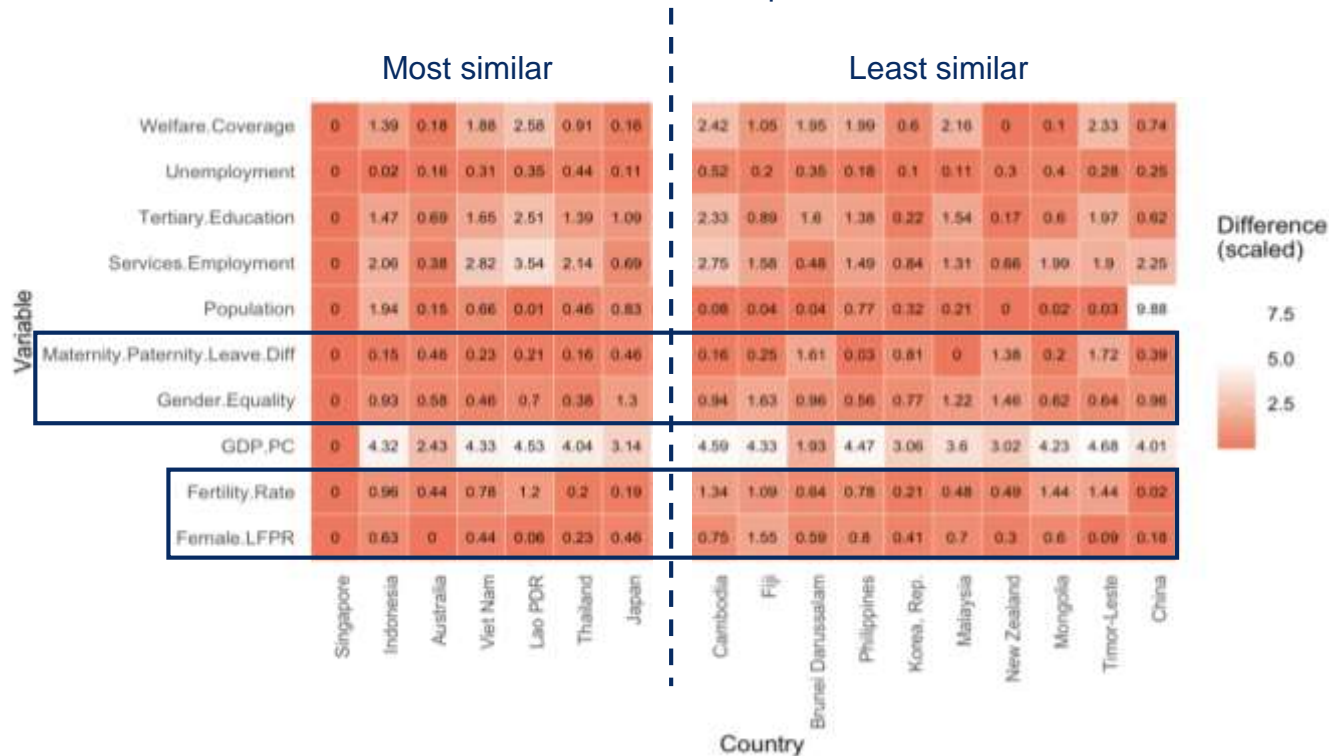


- Selected countries are highly-educated developed countries dominated by the service sector.
- This leaves ample opportunities for female workers to enter the workforce and start their careers. Hence, we can explore more policies which address child caregiving needs of female workers.

Annex D: Driving Factors for Similarity

Regional Comparators (East Asia and Pacific)

Difference Between Countries and Singapore (Regional)
on each variable from expanded list

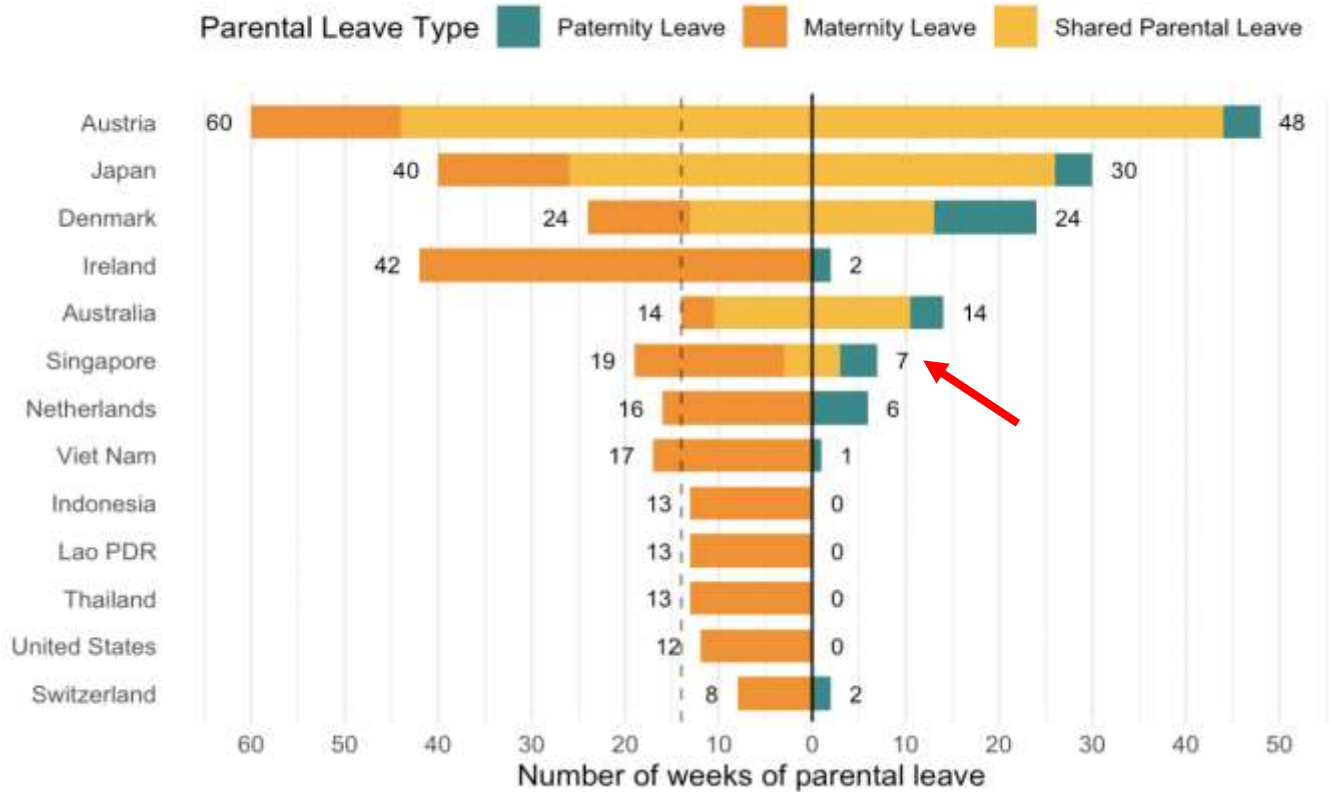


- Demographic and cultural factors are emphasised more than economic factors here.
- This helps us to assess whether policies will be well-received in our specific socio-cultural context.

Annex E: International Policy Review

Parental Leave

Parental leave in selected comparator countries
Total paid and unpaid parental leave by default



Source: World Population Review (and others)

- The ILO Maternity Protection Recommendation encourages **maternity leave** to be **no less than 14 weeks** and suggests that it should be at least 18 weeks.
- Unlike Singapore, where parental leave pay is 100%, many countries have partially paid or unpaid parental leave (e.g. Ireland).
- Denmark, Japan and Ireland have the most generous parental leave policies among the selected comparator countries.
 - Hence, we compare their approaches to understand whether extending parental leave in Singapore can be feasible both fiscally and culturally.

Annex F: Paternal Responsibility Campaign

Paternal responsibility campaign to **increase awareness** and **encourage usage of paternity leave**.

	Employer transparency (short-term)			Public mindset
Description	Encourage employers to inform working fathers of paternity leave entitlements and present a positive attitude towards them taking it up.			Promote a positive image of paternal childcare involvement.
Trade-offs and Limitations	Uneven abilities and efforts to develop and implement initiatives. For some companies, the opportunity cost may be too high.	Little incentive to follow the recommendations.		Even after inform them, employees may continue to have sticky stereotypes experience social pressure to not take up the paternity leave.
Solutions to Address Limitations	Frameworks	Certification	Financial incentives	Celebrity endorsement
	Standard processes that companies can choose to implement and modify.	Public certification of companies which have certain initiatives in place ¹ .	If needed, provide tax breaks and preference in some contract negotiations.	Report on politicians and successful businessmen taking paternity leave.
Impact of Solutions	Lower the cost and complexity of compliance.	Leverage on job seekers' growing concern about welfare and not just wages.	Helping companies become willing and able to implement the measures.	Counteract the notion that taking paternity leave is lazy or it will harm one's career.

¹ Based on effort and not results as it is supposed to signal the benefits available to fathers who are considering to join.

Annex G: Dedicated Tiered Parental Leave

The number of weeks and the payment tiers should be calibrated based on needs of the child at various points in its development and the availability of external assistance for childcare (e.g. childcare centres, grandparents).

A possible structure can be found below:

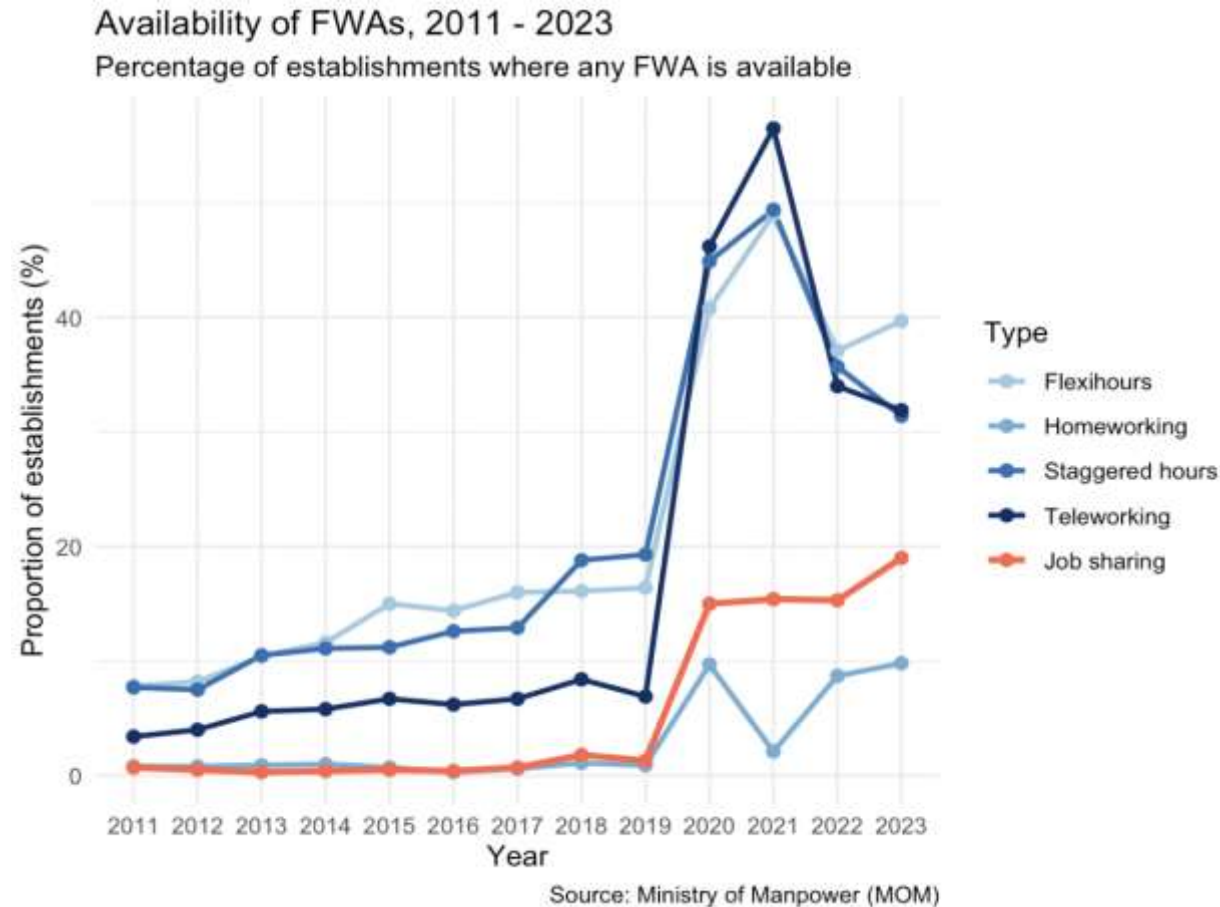
- The payment structure for the mother and father are the same.
- The last 12 weeks of unpaid leave can be transferred between parents.

Tier	Weeks	Pay (%)	Reason
Tier 1	8	100	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mothers usually need 6-8 weeks to physically recover from childbirth.• Children can only enter infant care once they are 2 months old.
Tier 2	4	75	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Infants usually require 24-hour care until they are 6-12 months old. If parents take both of their first 12 weeks separately, then they can be on leave for 6 months in total.
Tier 3	4	50	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In total, the maximum payout expected is equal (26 full weeks of pay).
Tier 4	10	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In total, parental leave adds up to 12 months.

- Employers may be not happy about the increased leave in total, but the full extent of the impact will only be a temporary. Eventually, with job-sharing and community childcare, we hope parents will have less need to take parental leave.

Annex H: Job-sharing

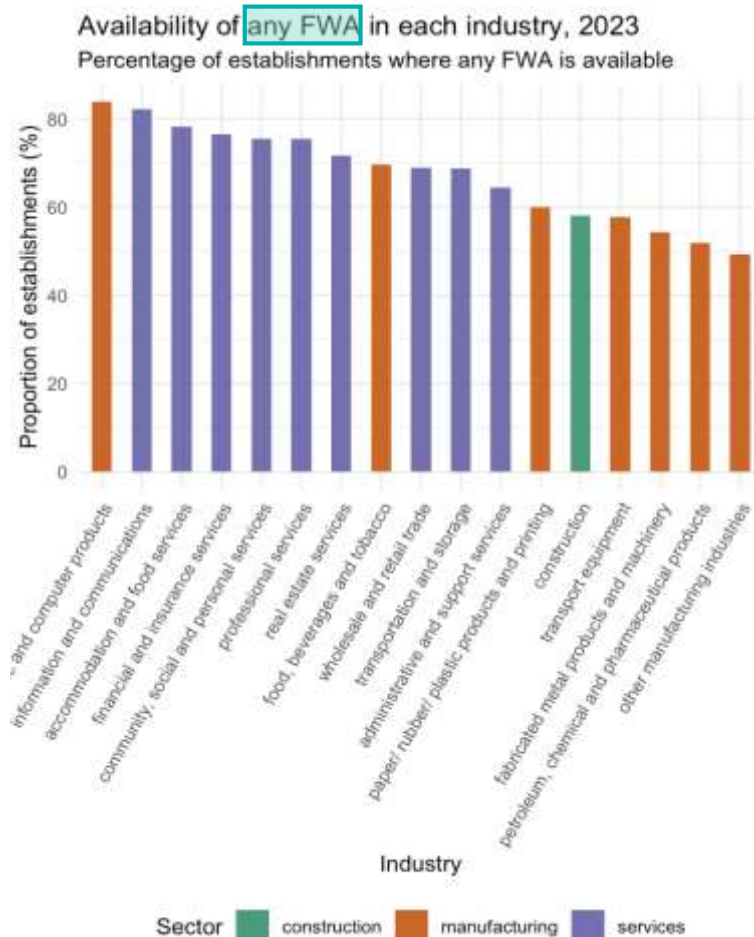
FWAs in Singapore



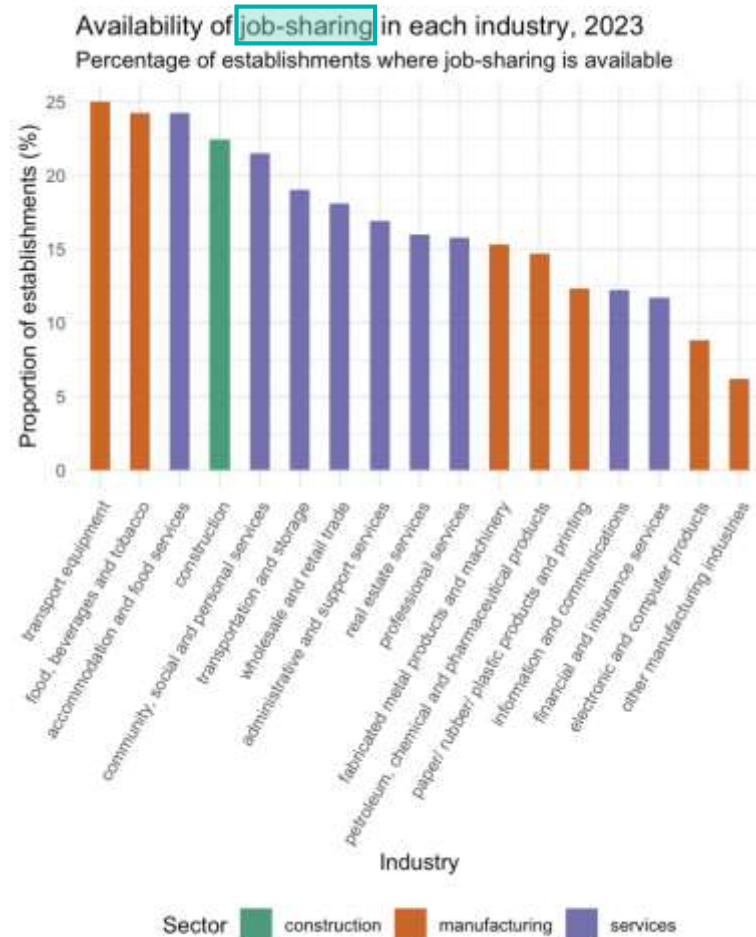
- There has been a clear growth in FWA adoption over the past decade or so.
- FWA availability spiked significantly during COVID (2020-2021) as it legitimised FWAs.
- Especially for job-sharing, which increased significantly and did not decrease towards its original trend.
 - This suggests that, while employers or employees were originally hesitant, after attempting job-sharing during COVID, the arrangement was kept or expanded, suggesting that the results of its adoption were positive.
 - Hence, government involvement is useful to give companies a push to adopt this initiative which they can then maintain on their own.

Annex H: Job-sharing

FWAs in Singapore



Source: Ministry of Manpower (MOM)



Source: Ministry of Manpower (MOM)

- The services sector is highly open to FWAs.
- Industries where FWAs in general are more available have some of the least job-sharing opportunities.
- We would like to expand job-sharing into industries leading in FWAs in general but underutilising job-sharing.
 - Info and comms
 - Financial and insurance
 - Comm, social, personal
 - Professional services
- Also, we would like to pilot the programme on managerial roles too.

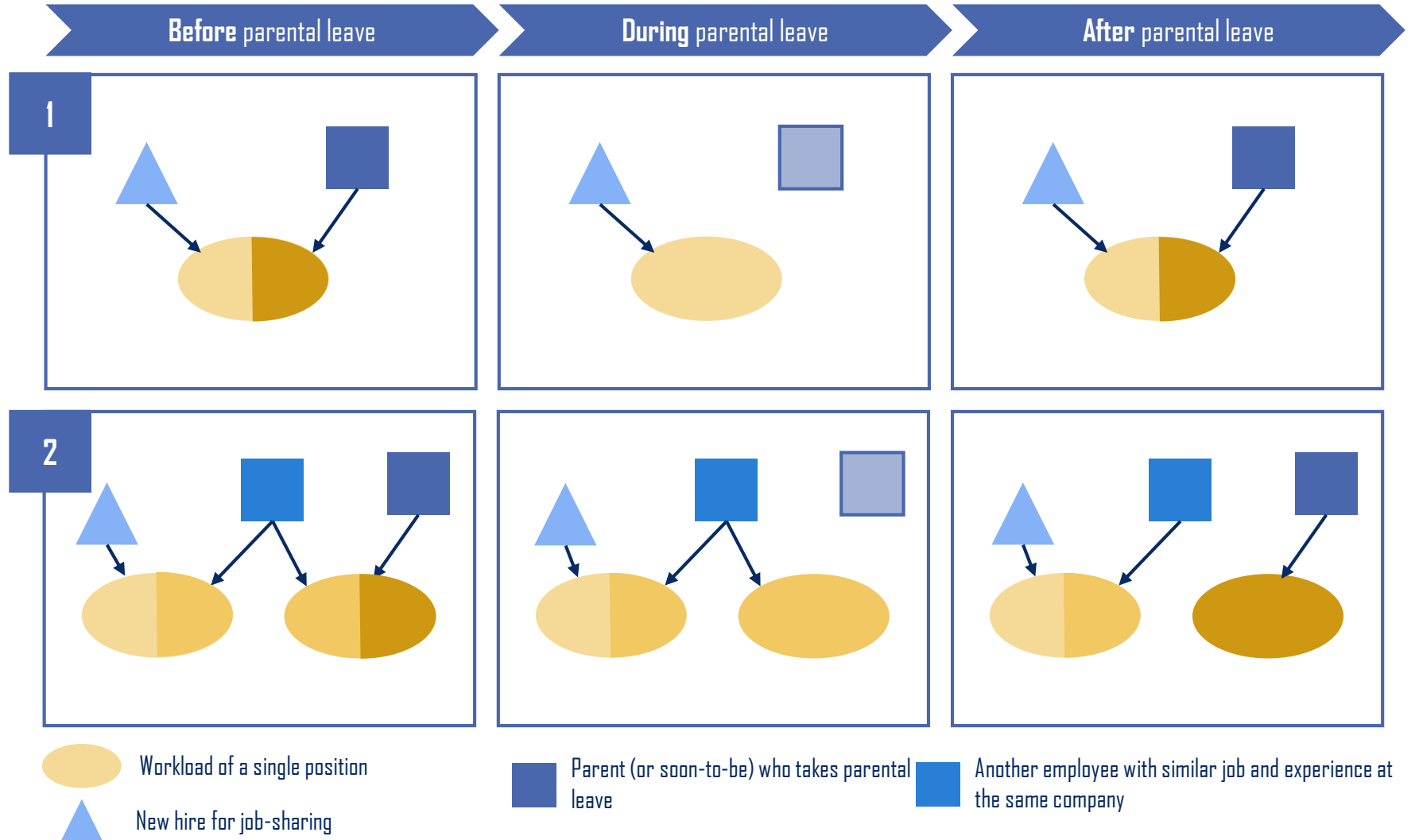
Annex H: Job-sharing

Roles which ***do not*** require as much experience in a specific company

- Short period before the start to show them the ropes while being acquainted with expectations.

Role which ***do*** require experience in the specific company

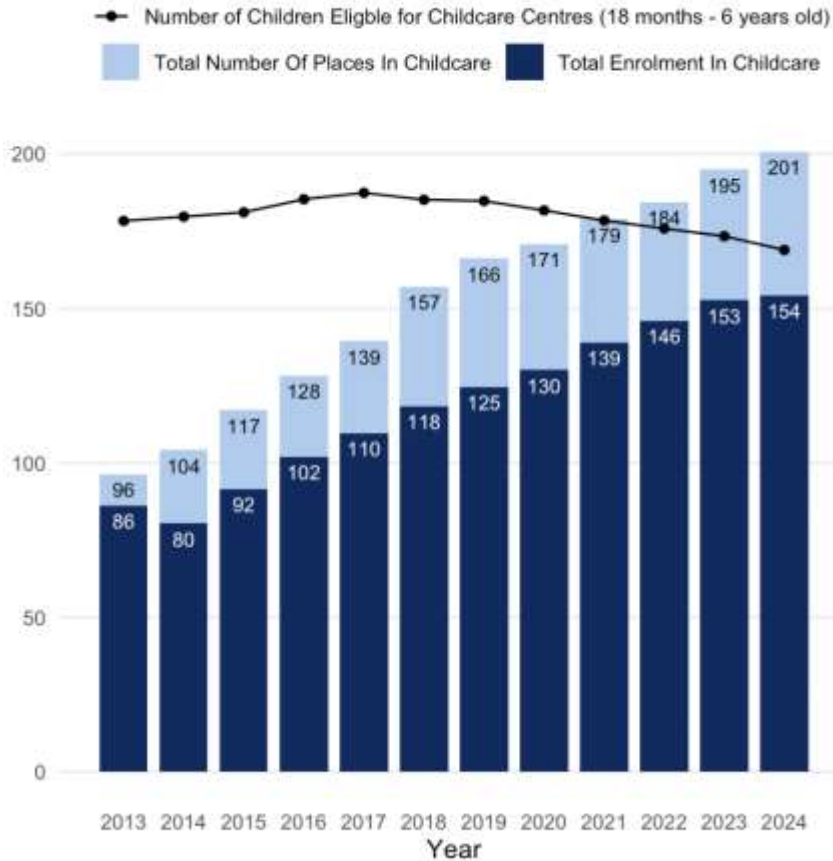
- Type 2 includes another member of the company to help with tasks that require more company-specific knowledge.



Annex I: Playcentres

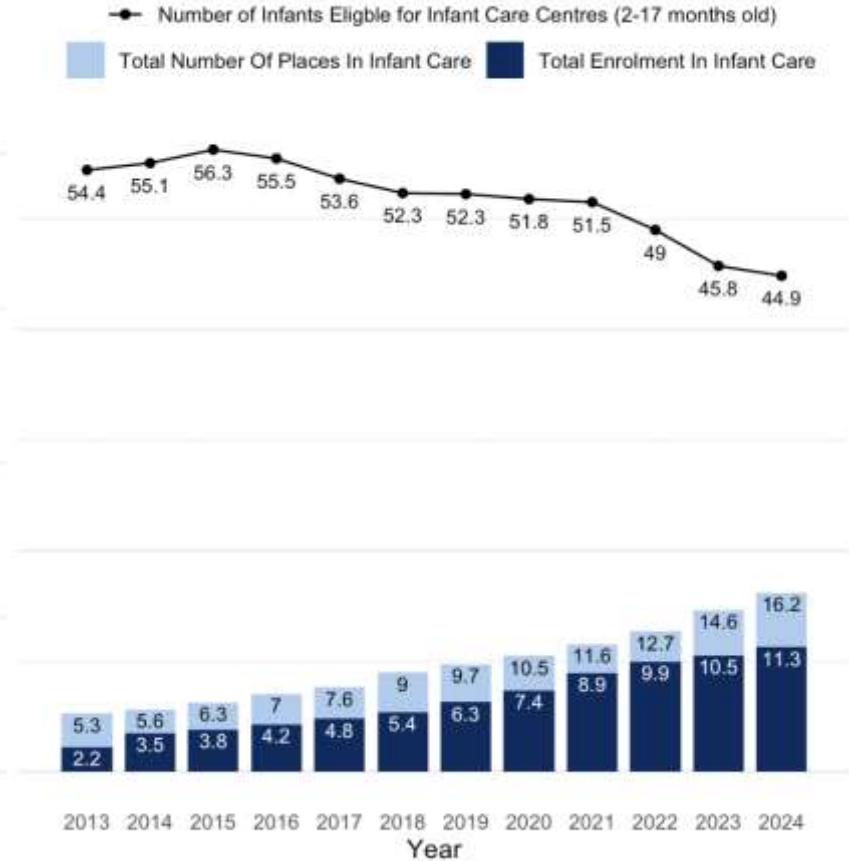
Gaps in Childcare Facilities

Number of Places and Enrollment in
Childcare Centres (thousands), 2013-2024



Source: MOM (Ministry of Manpower)

Number of Places and Enrollment in
Infant Care Centres (thousands), 2013-2024



Source: MOM (Ministry of Manpower)

- 40,000 new places in early childhood development centres, including 6,000 in infant care will be created by 2029.
- The gap between eligibility (eligible age) and availability in infant care is very large.
- We propose to establish Playcentres so that resources, especially human capital like Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) and Assistants (ECAs), can be directed from childcare into infant care.
 - Playcentres are more feasible for children than infants.

Annex I: Playcentres

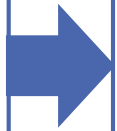
Current

Childcare (during working hours) is exclusively done by either the parents, or ECE/ECAs

- Shortage of ECE/ECAs
- Parents have insufficient leave days to take care of their children the whole time

E.g. for off-hour playgroups (18 months – 3 years old)

48 ECE / ECA Days	24 children 12 days
24 Parental Leave Days	24 children 1 day



Playcentres

Parents take turns to look after children, under the supervision of a trained personnel.

- Reducing the demand for ECE/ECAs
- Spreading out use of parental leave

E.g. for off-hour playgroups (18 months – 3 years old)

24 ECE / ECA Days + 24 Parental Leave Days	24 children 12 days
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Community-led cooperative care initiative to reduce the need for ECE/ECAs as well as parental leave.

- We assume that parents take parental leave or send their children to infant care below 18 months.
- Mainly acting as an alternative to playgroups (With side effects on other age groups).

Role of government

- Screen parents
- Provide funding
- Find qualified personnel to oversee