



(Clockwise from left)
Moderator Intan Azura
Mokhtar, member of
the NUS Alumni
Advisory Board, with
panellists Georgette
Tan, Royal Dutch Shell
chief diversity and
inclusion officer Lyn
Lee, Mrs Josephine Teo
and Singapore Women
in Science co-founder
Vandana
Ramachandran.
PHOTO: NUS

Female employment rate not hit hard by pandemic

Manpower Minister Josephine Teo says this highlights resilience of female workers

✓ SUE-ANNTAN

The employment rate among women was not hard hit by the coronavirus pandemic, which speaks to the resilience of female workers and the broader support for them to remain in the workforce, Manpower Minister Josephine Teo said yesterday.

She added that women also need to continue to keep their skills relevant to grasp future opportunities.

Mrs Teo told a virtual forum on gender diversity and inclusion in the workforce: “We had quite a lot of attention to how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted women in the workforce last year.

“I was particularly concerned because the hardest hit sectors, for example accommodation and retail, have got a higher representation of women within their workforce.

“When we scan the international environment, it was also very apparent that women were disproportionately affected by the pandemic, and... the resulting closures to

schools, as well as lockdowns in many countries.”

But she noted that Singapore’s female employment rate has remained relatively stable at around 73 per cent last year, while the incidence of retrenchment was also about the same for men and women.

She noted that women need to find time and opportunity to train and upskill to remain relevant in the workforce, especially as the retirement and re-employment ages are raised and women have a longer life-span.

CHALLENGES

“There are still... the challenges of workforce transformation... and of keeping up with the digitalisation of businesses. I think we mustn’t underestimate the impact on the entire workforce and women in particular,” Mrs Teo said.

“I think it is more difficult for women because apart from work commitments, quite often they juggle many hats. We are caregivers, as well, to parents or to children... So

the challenge for women to keep their skills relevant is something that we should not disregard, we have to work quite hard at it.”

Another thing that has to change is getting more women on company boards, Mrs Teo said during the panel dialogue organised by the National University of Singapore Office of Alumni Relations.

Fellow panellist Georgette Tan, president of United Women Singapore, said 30 per cent of women on boards should be the base and the target has shifted to 50 per cent, according to a global organisation that pushes for gender-balanced boards.

Meanwhile, responding to a question on whether there might be anti-discrimination legislation, Mrs Teo said the ministry is prepared to do it if society needs a stronger signal that certain things are sacrosanct.

But she noted that such legislation is not a “silver bullet” that necessarily translates into better outcomes.

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