Migration Profile

SINGAPORE

A. Executive Summary

Singapore has become one of the most prosperous metropolises in the world, joining the ranks of the 'Asian tigers' along with Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea.[i] The port of Singapore is one of the largest in the world in terms of cargo traffic, and so is Changi International Airport in terms of passenger numbers.[ii] The capital city shares the same name of the country; it is so large and crucial that the country is sometimes referred to as a *city-state*.

Singapore is a member of ASEAN, the regional association reuniting the asiatic countries from the South-East, where it plays a key role being one of the few developing countries.[iii] In July 2018, Singapore ratified the text of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).[iv] The World Bank's *Doing business 2020 ranking* placed Singapore second.[v]

Singapore is a Parliamentary Republic with a unicameral legislative body that is renewed every five years. The People's Action Party (PAP) has dominated the political scene since 1959.[vi]

In Singapore the international migrant stock at mid-year 2020 counted just over 2.5 million people, representing 43.1% of the entire population. 55.9% of them were female , and most migrants were aged between 40 and 49 years old, with a minority of children.

According to the UN International Migrant Stock, the total number of emigrants at mid-year 2020 was 348,464. Among those, 181,633 were females. Concerning refugees, the total estimated stock did not register any person in 2020, according to the UN International Migrant Stock[vii]. In 2020, the government of Singapore identified 23 potential victims of trafficking, 16 sexually exploited and 7 for labour trafficking.[viii]

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Singapore, being a sovereign island city-state, is particularly vulnerable to rising sea levels and floods. Singapore holds the world's third highest population density and has an

extremely multicultural variety of people, with four official languages (English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil). Its current population is 5.9 million people and appears to be around 100% urban; in fact, in 2020[ix] the urban population in Singapore was approximately 5.9 million people.[x]

Multiracialism is a Singapourean constitutional principle that influences its national policy in various fields. The majority of the population is ethnic Chinese (about 77%); there are also significant Malay (14%) and Indian (8%) minorities. As a consequence, from a religious point of view, most people belong to the Buddhist faith, with the addition of Muslim (about 14%, corresponding to the Malay community), Christian and Hindu minorities.[xi] The fertility rate is one of the lowest in the world (1.2%), and the greatest contribution to its economic growth comes from foreign workers, representing 42% of the population.[xii]

The Government of Singapore does not release any poverty statistics. However, even if it is often referred to as a rich country, inequalities do exist. According to several estimates, around 400,000 Singaporeans live on $5 a day.[xiii]

II. International and Internal Migrants

In Singapore, at mid-year 2020 the international migrant stock counted 2,523,648 people, representing 43.1% of the entire population and, according to UN data, 1,411,131 of them were female (55.9%).[xiv] There were more female immigrants than males in 2020. Most migrants were between 40 and 44 years old (precisely 326,151 persons); the second largest group was between 45 and 49 (316,466 persons), while a minority were children aged 0-4 (26,836)[xv].

By mid-2020, Singapore was among the top 10 countries of destination for migrants in Asia and the Pacific.[xvi] Concerning internal migration, it is not a main concern, since the whole population is urban.

Many of those migrants are workers, even though their number decreased by 70,000 people (5%) between January and June 2020, if compared to the same period in 2019, probably due to the COVID-19 pandemic.[xvii] Highly skilled migrants enter the country more and more due to the high-tech and knowledge-intensive industries created in Singapore.[xviii]

In 2020, with over 1.13 million persons, Malaysians were the largest group of Asian immigrants in Singapore. Chinese immigrants were also present in large numbers, counting 426,434 people. Indonesians instead were 159,685, while Indians were 144,970 and Pakistani 126,848.[xix] The smallest group included immigrants from Sri Lanka (10,767). People from these areas tend to move to Singapore mainly because of higher salaries and better opportunities, in a country that has a particular geographical proximity. Moreover, Singapore has been chosen by over 50,000 foreign students from all over the world, because of its excellent undergraduate programs.[xx]

Migrant workers in Singapore can easily find accommodation or places to stay, since the country offers many workers' dormitories spread throughout the whole territory. The Ministry of Manpower provides a complete list of such dormitories, licensed in accordance

with the Foreign Employee Dormitories Act.[xxi] Housing is available in Bukit Batok, in Changi, in Woodlands; basically in the whole territory these places are available. For instance, the Homestay Lodge is a foreign workers' dormitory, located in the eastern part of Singapore, and has a capacity of up to 6,000 residents.[xxii]

These international migrants face different challenges. During crisis times and not, access to social security is one of the main issues they encounter. According to ILO, the majority of ASEAN migrant workers do not have access to social assistance.[xxiii] Moreover, according to the Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics (HOME) report, for some migrants during the COVID-19 crisis (April 2020), it was difficult to obtain social security benefits and information on potential help packages.[xxiv] Only 37.4% of respondents, who took part in the poll, said they were somehow aware of the COVID-19 migrant worker support payments supplied by the government. Since many migrant workers live in crowded employer-provided accommodations, with little or no possibility of social distancing, from Spring 2020 the COVID-19 infection spread dramatically fast in these places.[xxv]

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

According to the UN International Migrant Stock, the total number of emigrants at mid-year 2020 was 348,464; 52% of them were female (181,633), just slightly less than female immigrants who were instead 56%.[xxvi]

The majority of Singaporean people emigrate to Malaysia; but other important destinations are Australia and the UK, as in both countries English is their main language. Also, some emigrants move to the USA, even though in smaller numbers compared to the first three countries, and others to Indonesia, according to UN migrant stock. Both unskilled and highly skilled Singaporeans who leave the country are young and talented people.[xxvii] Abroad, they also have access to higher salaries, better opportunities, different lifestyles, and more recreational activities.

Holding dual citizenship is forbidden in Singapore; therefore a person must give up one's citizenship. This situation favours emigration; in fact, holding a dual citizenship offers different lifestyle preferences in other countries or better work opportunities.[xxviii]

IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees, climate displaced people)

Even though historically Singapore has hosted large numbers of refugees, like during the Vietnam War, it seems today not a place chosen by refugees, also due to its lack of a national asylum and refugee legislation.

Concerning refugees, according to the UN International Migrants Stock, in 2020 no one registered or applied for refugee status in Singapore,[xxix] while in 2019 there were only 2 refugees.[xxx] However, according to UNHCR, there were 5 refugees by mid 2020, but no IDPs. Also, no asylum applications were filed in the same year. Instead, the most relevant

phenomenon in 2020 was the presence of 1,109 people under the UNHCR's statelessness mandate.[xxxi]

According to UNHCR, these 5 refugees registered in 2020 were all females, between 18 and 59 years old.[xxxii] Their country of origin is not retrievable. These 5 people did not go into collective centres, rather moved into private individual accommodations in the city.[xxxiii]

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

In 2020, the government of Singapore identified 23 potential victims of trafficking, 16 were sexually exploited and 7 for labour trafficking.[xxxiv]

Women and men are both exploited within and outside Singapore. Women who come to Singapore in order to work in the entertainment industry, such as nightclubs and bars, sometimes become victims of labour trafficking.[xxxv] Men are often victims of forced labour on fishing vessels.

Human traffickers exploit non-native victims in Singapore, coming from other surrounding countries, such as Burma or Cambodia. Some Singaporeans are also promoting child sex tourism overseas, especially in Batam and Indonesia.[xxxvi]

According to one of the main international organisations helping victims of human trafficking in Singapore, the Hagar organisation, victims of human trafficking in Singapore work for 16 hours a day, with no food provided. Other types of abuse they are often subjected to is to sign a contract without fully understanding it; they are mistreated or abused for minor mistakes, paid only a fraction of what they were promised; they are sold, kidnapped and their passports are confiscated.[xxxvii]

The government provides 24-hour hotlines for migrant workers experiencing difficulties. It has built some dormitories for them to improve their living conditions, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the New Quick Build Dormitories (QBDs), temporary structures which are quickly built and can last for about three years.[xxxviii]

VI. National Legal Framework

Singapore recently achieved Tier 1 ranking, thanks to its on-going efforts to tackle human trafficking. The Immigration Act became effective in 1959; in 2015 the Foreign Employee Dormitories Act (FEDA), a Parliament statute, provided for the regulation of dormitories-staff, assigning inspectors, for foreign employees.[xxxix] In 2015 the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act (PHTA) took effect. This act provides penalities for up to 10 years of imprisonment for human trafficking.

Regarding international Conventions, Singapore is not part of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, nor to its 1967 Protocol. It has neither ratified nor signed the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, and not even the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.[xl]

Even though some laws have been passed, Singapore lacks a proper national asylum and refugee legislation. Therefore, UNHCR still plays a major role in handling asylum applications and refugee registrations. Nevertheless, refugees and asylum seekers certified by UNHCR do not have legal status in Singapore.[xli]

VII. Main Actors

The State

The Singapore Inter-Agency Taskforce on Trafficking in Persons was created in 2010, by recognising the threat of human trafficking in Singapore. It is co-chaired by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), collaborating to establish the National Plan of Action.[xlii] The latter sets up also a comprehensive framework to combat human trafficking. Several international organisations (such as Hagar, mentioned above) cooperate with the government to increase public awareness and to provide care to men, women, young girls and boys trafficked in Singapore.

International organisations

Singapore has only a UNHCR branch office, while the UNHCR Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific is located in Thailand.[xliii] It means that Singapore does not have a specific bureau in the country, but still produces research and collects data for the country. UNHCR may also register asylum seekers and determine their refugee status remotely, as well as explore for long-term solutions.[xliv]

NGOs and Other organisations

Singapore Red Cross holds blood drives and provides first aid training to those who are interested.[xlv]

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

The humanitarian NGO, Mercy Relief, was established in Singapore in 2003. Its goal is to respond to disasters in the Asia Pacific region. Today, it is one of the leading disaster relief NGOs, with experts in capacity building and a considerable affiliate network. Mercy Relief provides emergency aid very rapidly after a disaster occurs. Its programs empower local communities in several areas such as education, healthcare, water and sanitation, shelter and sustainable livelihoods.[xlvi]

Habitat for Humanity Singapore is an NGO, aiming at eradicating poverty housing throughout the world. It seeks to enhance living conditions for low-income people in their communities.[xlvii] The organisation mostly works with families to improve their life and has built over a thousand houses in the Asia-Pacific region.

Also, HOME (Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics) cooperates with government and community partners to foster inclusion, justice, and ensure equality and dignity for all. Since 2004 the Singapore-based charity has been supporting migrant workers

in the country victims of exploitation, through immediate as well as long-term assistance (education and training programmes).

The Catholic Church

In the region, there is the Episcopal Conference of the Catholic Bishops of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei (CBCMSB).[xlviii] The Archdiocesan Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants & Itinerant People (ACMI), located at Agape Village, in the heartland of Singapore, is responsible for the pastoral needs of migrants in Singapore.[xlix] It provides counselling, financial and legal aid when needed, shelters and educational training, among other activities. Over all, ACMI helps migrants to meet their spiritual, relational and emotional needs.[l]

Caritas Singapore was established in 2006. It represents the charitable branch of the Catholic Archdiocese of Singapore,[li] organising fundraising and visits to families and prisoners. Caritas Humanitarian Aid & Relief Initiatives Singapore (CHARIS) is the umbrella organisation for overseas humanitarian aid by the Archdiocese of Singapore. CHARIS is a member of Caritas Singapore and was established in 2010. CHARIS was also recognised as a member of Caritas Internationalis during the Caritas Internationalis General Assembly in May 2019.[lii]

The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Singapore[liii] raises awareness on human trafficking victims and organises activities for them. JRS started the Education for Economic Empowerment programme in 2021, aiming at equipping asylum seekers refugees with certified IT skills.[liv] JRS Singapore works together with JRS Asia Pacific (located in Thailand) to help local people in need, giving financial or material aid where needed and sending volunteers on mission trips.

In Singapore, the association of the Order of Malta is also present.[lv] They do not seem to have special programs for migrants, but they hold summer camps for disabled youth, in addition to several religious and charitable activities.

The Saint Vincent de Paul in Singapore[lvi] helps the poorest by providing food, cash grants, paying educational fees for children, who cannot afford it and transportation for the sick. They also do home visits to families.[lvii]

Franciscans have a presence in Singapore. The Franciscan Young Adults Fraternity was created by the Franciscans Friars in Singapore at the beginning of 2020.[lviii] They have recently organised a seminar to discuss the involvement of Catholic organisations for migrants, people in need and victims of human trafficking. The organisations involved in this joint effort are the Canossaville Children and Community Services (CCCS)[lix], the Catholic Welfare Services which provide nightwalks accompanied by service to the poor,[lx] and ACMI.

The Canossaville Children and Community Services (CCCS) is a Catholic charity licensed by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) of Singapore and by the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA).[lxi] It provides several types of services including a care service for students in need, coming from all nationalities and all backgrounds. The Canossaville Student Care also offers well-balanced nutritious meals for students who often do not have access to healthy food.

The Good Shepherd Sisters is an international apostolic religious institute of pontifical right.[lxii] They provide residential facilities and services for survivors of domestic violence and abuse, victims of human trafficking, migrants and young people or families with low income, or affected by HIV/AIDS. They also collaborate with governmental institutes and with non-government organisations.[lxiii] The Good Shepherd has a social service arm, the Sisters Marymount Centre (SMC,) that helps marginalised women and children, provides residential homes and shelters, in addition to after-school services for students.[lxiv]

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