



# Migrant Workers: Policy Responses and Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic

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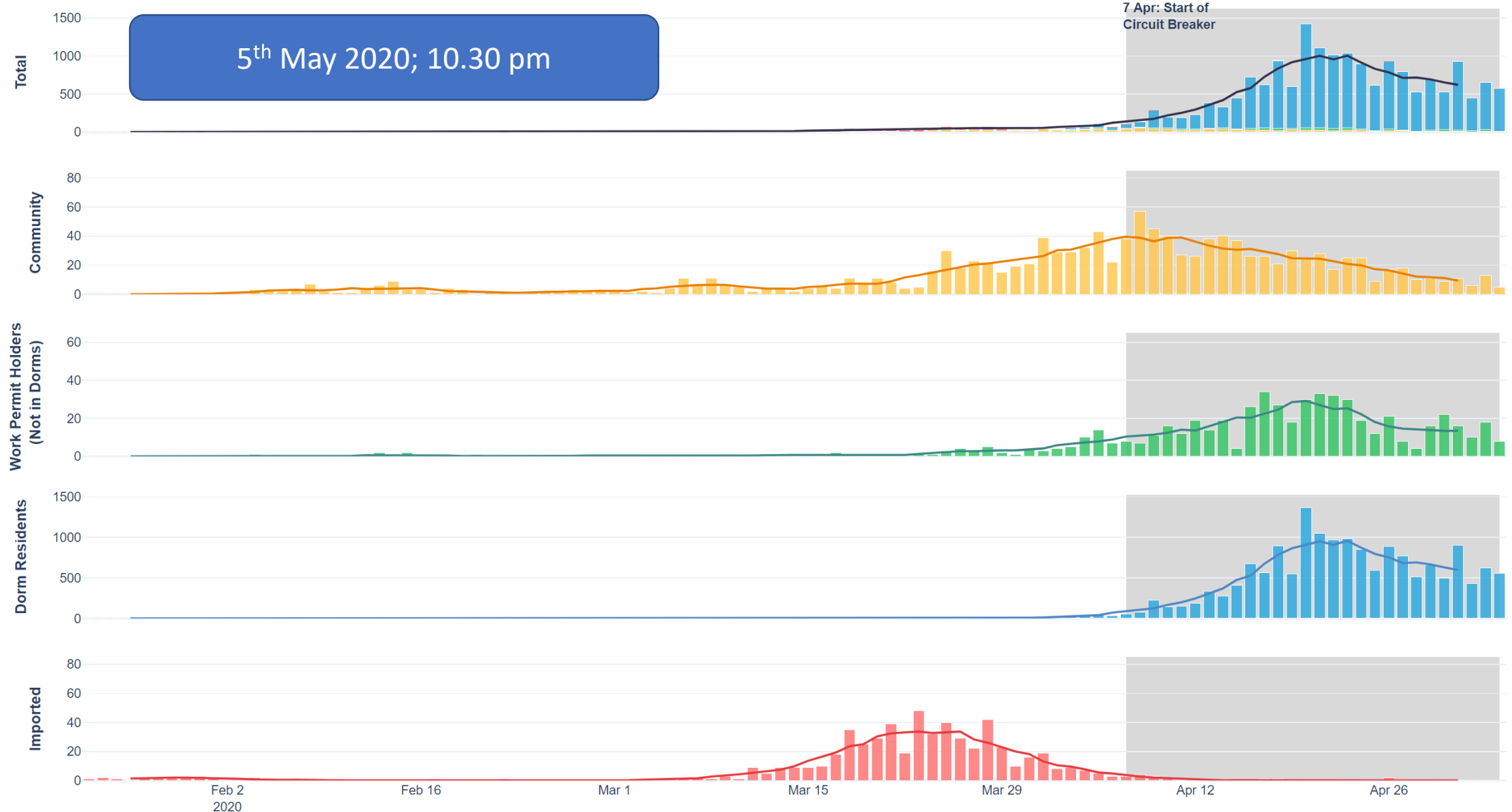
Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, National University of Singapore

6<sup>th</sup> May 2020



# Daily New Cases

Broken down into Community, Dorm Residents, Work Permit holders not residing in Dorms, Imported Cases



# Pre-COVID-19 Arrangements: Employers

Academia | SG

PROMOTING SCHOLARSHIP OF/FOR/BY SINGAPORE

ACADEMIC VIEWS FALSEHOODS LAW BEYOND RANKINGS SINGAPORE STUDIES ABOUT US

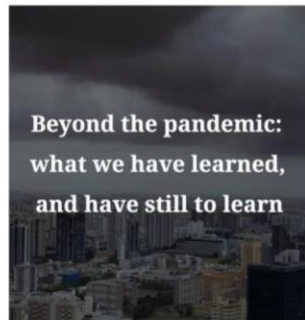


## Who is responsible for Singapore's migrant workers, and why does it matter?

ACADEMIC VIEWS, CORONAVIRUS / TUESDAY, MAY 5TH, 2020

*Shona Loong, DPhil candidate at the University of Oxford, describes how the state has made employers responsible for migrant workers, to dire effect, and examines the implications for state-society relations and the role of NGOs.*

Webinar on 1 May



A roundtable of Singaporean social scientists

Perspectives on the

- In theory, migrant workers have fully funded healthcare through direct employer provision and mandated insurance
- In practice, power dynamics, financial constraints, worker priorities all act against timely access to quality healthcare



## Parliament: About half of dorm operators flout licensing conditions each year, says Josephine Teo



1 of 2 Manpower Minister Josephine Teo said accommodation standards for migrant workers have become better over the years, but acknowledged that further improvements can be made. PHOTO: MOM

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Danson Cheong

“The day after the first confirmed case in Singapore (in January), MOM reached out to **dormitory operators to be more vigilant and to step up hygiene**... We produced materials in the workers’ native languages to **encourage them to take steps to protect themselves**.

Subsequently, non-essential facilities in the dormitories like gyms and TV rooms were closed. Meal-times and recreational hours were staggered. Intermixing between blocks was stopped.

“MOM officers also fanned out on weekends, to **advise migrant workers** to observe safe distancing measures and disperse big groups that were gathering at popular hangouts.”

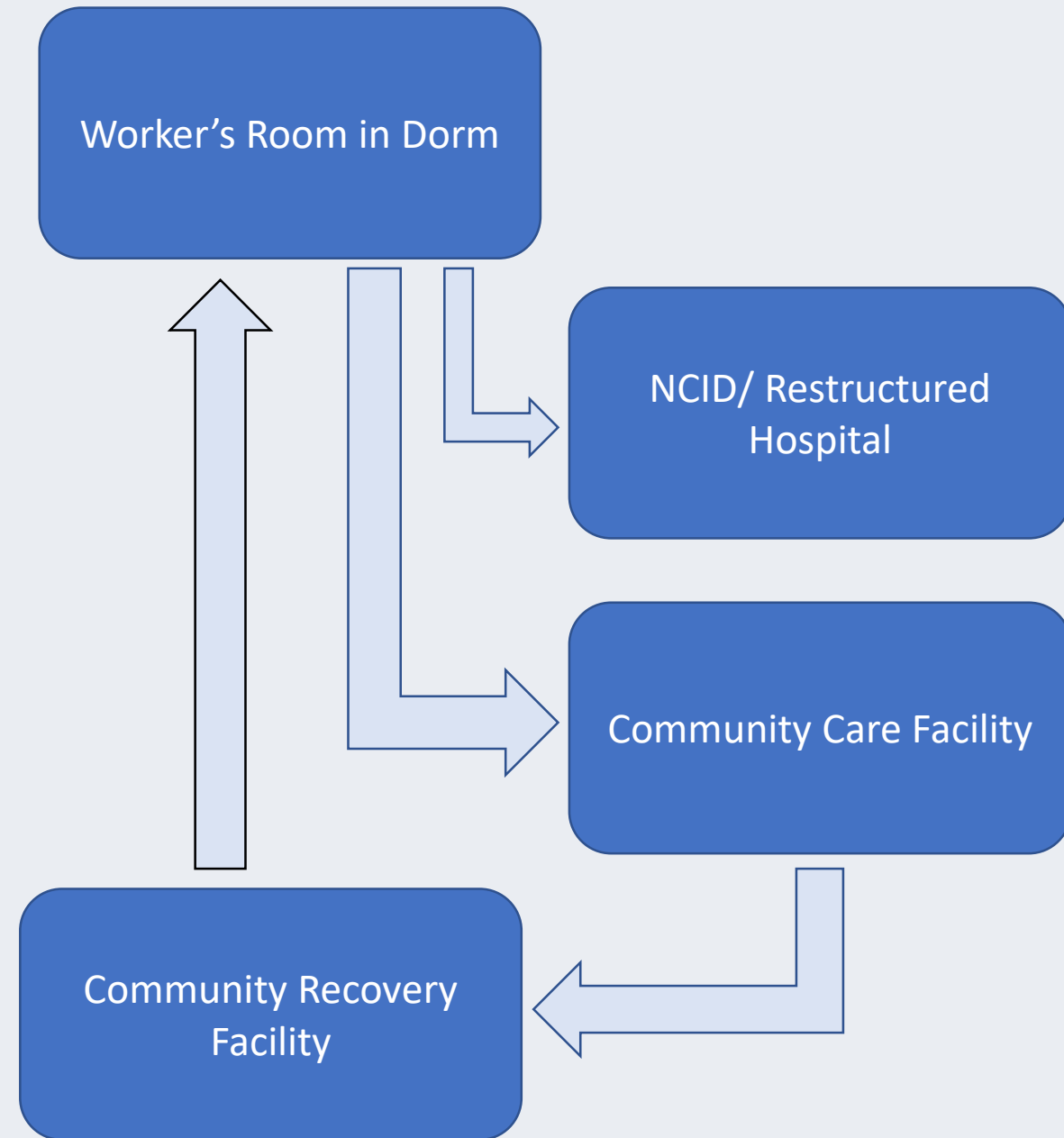
– Josephine Teo  
Minister for Manpower  
4<sup>th</sup> May 2020



# Comprehensive Approach to Take Care of the Well-Being of Foreign Workers Living in Dormitories

1 May 2020 | [Foreign manpower](#)

1. The Inter-agency Task Force (ITF) has adopted a comprehensive approach to take care of the well-being of foreign workers living in dormitories. The ITF currently comprises more than 2,200 officers from six public agencies, including the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), the Singapore Armed Forces, the Home Team, the Ministry of Health (MOH), the Building and Construction Authority and the Ministry of Communications and Information. ITF has recruited an additional 710 personnel directly or through private contractors. In total, the **Government is dedicating staff support of nearly 3,000.**
2. Over the past three weeks, the ITF has deployed Forward Assurance and Support Teams (FAST) to support the dormitory operators and residents. To date, more than 170 FAST teams have been deployed. This includes 43 teams stationed at all purpose-built dormitories (PDBs), and 127 mobile FAST teams providing coverage to factory converted dormitories (FCDs), construction temporary quarters (CTQs) and private residential premises.
3. The **FAST personnel look into all aspects of the workers' well-being**, from availability of food and maintenance of hygiene to facilitating their medical care and remittance needs. Another important aspect of their work is to optimise safe distancing measures for the workers. Teams are often deployed in shifts to provide 24/7 round-the-clock support.





## Concluding remarks

- Reliance on private sector provision and government oversight and regulations fails in a crisis of the scale of COVID-19
- Two-tier model for COVID care being established
  - Clinically defensible but creature comforts modest
- Options limited because of the sheer numbers and almost complete dependence on state funding
- Would these arrangements be acceptable to Singaporeans if they were COVID-19 cases?

