

## Government to get policymaking ideas from citizens' panel to improve employment resilience

**Joyce Teo**

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SINGAPORE - As the pace of change in workplaces accelerates, the Government is gathering feedback on how to better help Singaporeans adapt and protect their careers.

Speaking on Saturday at a citizens' panel discussion on employment resilience, Manpower Minister Tan See Leng said: "In an increasingly uncertain and volatile world, the risk of displacement and involuntary unemployment is very real.

"What we hope to achieve is to get people to start to take ownership and give them understanding and insights into how global and industry trends are evolving, and how they can continue to stay relevant."

The panel on employment resilience was organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and funded by Ngee Ann Kongsi.

It will see about 66 participants, comprising employees, employers, employment intermediaries and the unemployed, meeting over four sessions to offer recommendations on how to strengthen employment resilience.

The key topics on the agenda include how to encourage workers to take a more active role in managing their careers throughout their working lives; and how to design an unemployment support scheme that strikes a balance between ensuring adequate income support and encouraging active job search.

The proposals will be presented to the Government during the final session on March 25.

Dr Tan said that he hopes that with the insights from the citizens' panel, they could co-create policies together.

Drawing an analogy between health and employment resilience, he said people should not wait until they are at risk of unemployment before they start thinking about career planning.

He pointed out how things could go south quickly, which was what happened when Covid-19 hit Singapore in 2020, as the resident unemployment rate jumped from below 3 per cent to 4.9 per cent in October that year. It represented an increase of nearly 42,000 unemployed residents from the onset of Covid-19.

On the panel's importance, Dr Tan added: "Therefore, it is important for us to come together, to glean ideas from all of you, to sharpen our measures too. So that we can be a lot more precise, incisive, more surgical in some of the options that you have, for us to upskill, upgrade, consolidate and refresh our social compact."

Dr Carol Soon, senior research fellow and head of the society and culture department at IPS, said the panel comes amid new disruptions.

She added: "Unexpected crises such as the pandemic and the Ukraine war create unemployment shocks. Take technology – while it has a positive impact, it can lead to workers being displaced.

"Also, with more people working from home, the flip side is that the same job can be performed by anyone from any part of the world."

Dr Tan said that externally, workers are at risk of displacement due to technology, supply chain changes and other disruptions.

Domestically, Singaporeans are living longer and receiving better education. They have longer career runways, with opportunities for multiple career options.

But he added that careers require hard work and consistent effort to upkeep. "Just like physical health, we do fall sick from time to time. So, when we do face setbacks in our careers, how do we recover... how do we bounce back better?"

The citizens' panel concept is one of the ways in which public agencies are engaging Singaporeans to deliberate on difficult and sensitive topics.

Early in 2022, IPS had convened a panel on youth mental well-being.

Panel participants on Saturday included full- and part-time employees, gig workers and career counsellors. Most of the employees are aged 21 to 50.

NTUC secretary-general Ng Chee Meng also spoke on the opening day of the citizens' panel.