

Steps will be taken against workplace discrimination and to support seniors: DPM Wong

Jean Iau

The Straits Times, 16 January 2023

SINGAPORE - Apart from codifying provisions against workplace discrimination into law, the Government will encourage more employers to promote inclusive workplaces and fairer employment practices, including in the public service, said Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong on Monday.

He was speaking during a dialogue at the Singapore Perspectives 2023 conference organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), and held at the Sands Expo and Convention Centre.

When asked if sexual orientation and gender identity will be included in one of the categories protected by anti-discrimination law, Mr Wong said that “sex is different from gender”.

“It will cover sex, it will cover race, religion, age. We’ve stated very clearly what the areas of coverage are for the anti-discrimination act,” he said, adding that this would be debated in Parliament when the Bill is tabled.

Mr Wong was responding to a question from Association of Women for Action and Research executive director Corinna Lim, who was a participant at the conference.

The issue of discriminatory policies was raised earlier during the dialogue by a participant from the National Institute of Education.

He referred to comments made by Singapore Human Resources Institute president Low Peck Kem last Thursday about workforce policies that discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) individuals.

Ms Low, who is also chief human resources officer for the Public Service Division, had questioned business leaders who implement such “stupid” policies, during a symposium on workplace diversity and inclusion.

The participant asked Mr Wong what the Government is doing to implement more inclusive policies. Mr Wong responded: “We are taking actions with regard to legislation.

“And we will continue to see how we can encourage more employers to uphold not just the letter of the law but the spirit of it, to really promote more inclusive workplace practices and fairer employment practices across the board – and the public service will do its part too.”

On the issue of retirement adequacy, National University Hospital senior infectious diseases consultant Paul Tambyah asked if the Silver Support Scheme, which provides a quarterly cash supplement to seniors who had lower incomes during their working years, could be made more universal to avoid a substantial drop in incomes and quality of life when people stop working.

Mr Wong said surveys have shown that the majority of people want to work so long as they are healthy, as work is more than just a source of income and provides dignity and purpose.

But schemes such as Central Provident Fund top-ups and Silver Support can help seniors, and the Government will work out how much and what more it could do to care for the Pioneer and Merdeka generations, as well as those who are in their 50s and 60s.

“So that’s how we are thinking about strengthening our retirement system and giving everyone peace of mind,” he said.