

Key Insights

RESEARCH STUDY ON
UNDEREMPLOYMENT
IN SINGAPORE



Research Partnership between **National Trades Union Congress (NTUC)** and
Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities at the
Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD)

Career decisions, aspirations, and workers' underlying motivations have been evolving in Singapore. Our understanding of underemployment in Singapore needs to evolve too.

This research study* aims to uncover the different types of underemployment and identify the profiles of workers who are most at risk of being involuntarily underemployed and prone to be voluntarily underemployed.

CONCEPT AND TYPES OF UNDEREMPLOYMENT

Underemployment

Defined as the underutilisation of the productive capacity of the labour force in terms of availability to work and the underutilisation of qualifications, skills, or experience.

Time-related Underemployment

Time-Related Underemployment

refers to the situation where a person normally works less than 35 hours a week (i.e. working part-time) and is willing and available to engage in additional work.

Non Time-related Underemployment

(Covered by our study, measurements adopted from International Labour Organization)

Skills-related Underemployment

refers to the situation whereby a worker's skills are not adequately utilised in their current job. These could be skills acquired through formal education, on-the-job training, and/or other non-formal and informal learning activities.

Qualification-related Underemployment

arises when a worker has a higher qualification than is required by their job.



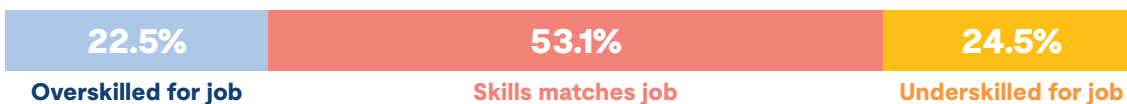
Education field-related Underemployment

refers to the situation whereby the worker is employed in a job outside of their field of study.

UNDEREMPLOYMENT ARISING FROM SKILLS-JOB MISMATCH

22.5% OF RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCED UNDEREMPLOYMENT ARISING FROM SKILLS-JOB MISMATCH, LOWER THAN OECD AVERAGE OF 26.1%

SINGAPORE



AVERAGE FROM ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT (OECD), SURVEY OF ADULT SKILLS



Proportions of respondents reporting being over-skilled for their jobs were higher among three profiles:

1. Males
2. Middle to older adult respondents (30-65 years old)
3. Late-middle career stage (16-25 years of work experience)

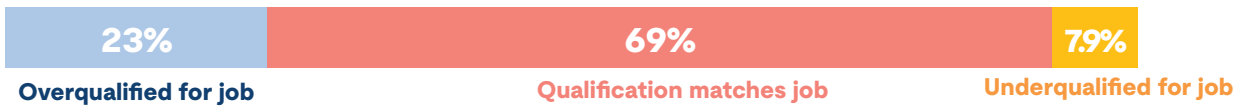
*Survey was conducted with 1,100 Singapore Citizens and Permanent Resident workers in October 2025

UNDEREMPLOYMENT ARISING FROM QUALIFICATION-JOB MISMATCH

23%

OF RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCED UNDEREMPLOYMENT ARISING FROM QUALIFICATION-JOB MISMATCH, COMPARABLE TO OECD AVERAGE

SINGAPORE



AVERAGE FROM ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT (OECD), SURVEY OF ADULT SKILLS



Proportions of respondents reporting being overqualified for their jobs were higher among four profiles:

1. Younger adults (below 35 years old)
2. Degree or diploma and professional qualifications holders
3. Part-timers
4. Early-middle career stage (15 years of work experience or less)



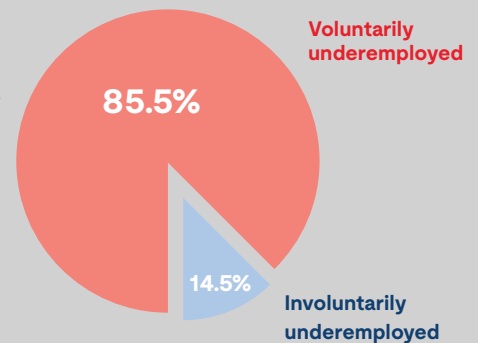
Vast majority (85.5%) were underemployed voluntarily

- Tend to be respondents with either young or elderly dependents



14.5% were underemployed involuntarily

Efforts should support both involuntarily and voluntarily underemployed individuals to keep their skills current and avoid future involuntary underemployment



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS[^]

How unions can help, together with tripartite partners:

- 1 Target support** for early-career individuals and fresh graduates as jobs and aspirations evolve
- 2 Enhance** employability through multi-skilling
- 3 Create** a hub to facilitate the pursuit of social entrepreneurship and passions
- 4 Establish** a community-based employment co-ops to create collective employment opportunities
- 5 Craft** Career Re-Visioning Programme to facilitate future transition to next phase of career
- 6 Expand** the official measure of underemployment to better reflect the Underemployment situation in Singapore

[^]Refer to Research Report for full list of recommendations

Copyright © 2026 NTUC. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publishers.

In partnership with



Lee Kuan Yew
Centre for
Innovative Cities

**Every
Worker
Matters**

