

Research Study on Underemployment in Singapore



Underemployment In Singapore

Career decisions, aspirations, and workers' underlying motivations have been evolving in Singapore. Our understanding of underemployment must evolve too. **The research study on Underemployment in Singapore** examines how workers are redefining the balance between careers, aspirations, and personal lives, and the implications for underemployment. It aims to uncover the different types of underemployment and identify profiles of workers most at risk of being involuntarily underemployed.

Concept and Types of Underemployment

Underemployment is defined as the underutilisation of the productive capacity of the labour force in terms of availability to work and the underutilisation of skills, qualification, or experience.



Underemployment Arising from Skills-Job Mismatch

22.5% of respondents experienced underemployment arising from skills-job mismatch, lower than the 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)



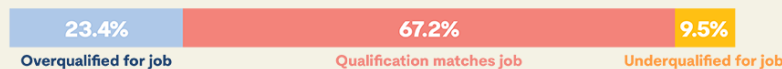
Underemployment Arising from Qualification-Job Mismatch

23% of respondents experienced underemployment arising from qualification-job mismatch, comparable to the OECD average.

SINGAPORE



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



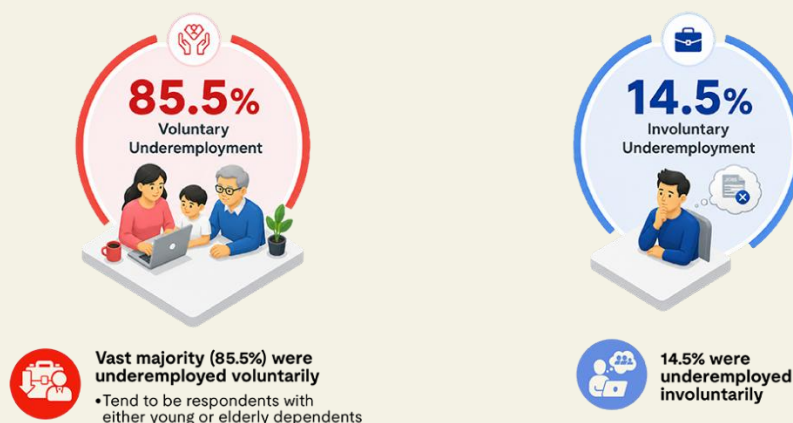
Proportions of respondents reporting being **overqualified** for their jobs were higher among four profiles:

- 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)



Voluntary Underemployment

The vast majority of underemployed individuals were underemployed voluntarily. However, efforts should still support both involuntarily and voluntarily underemployed individuals to keep their skills current and avoid future involuntary underemployment.

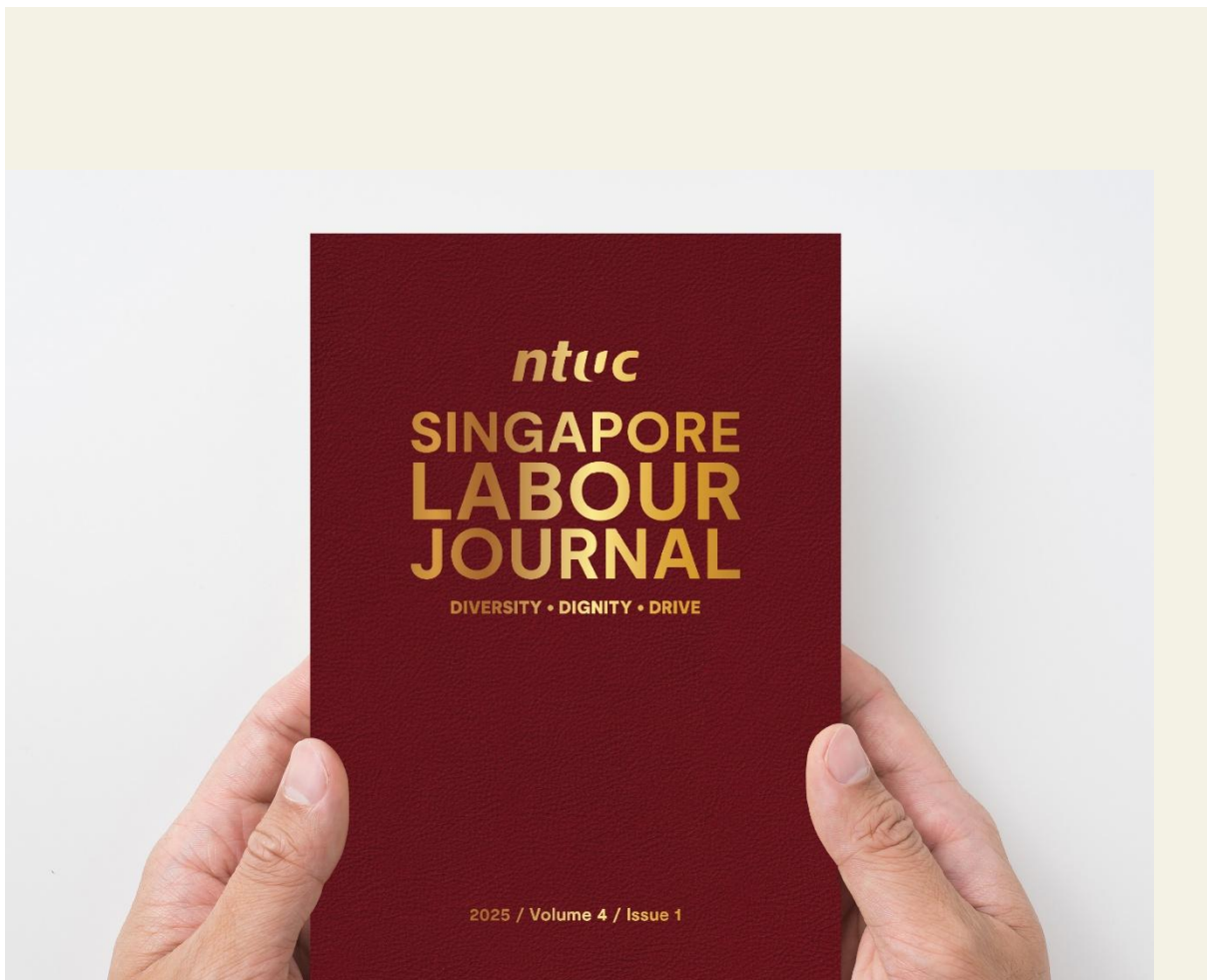


Key Recommendations

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** 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



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NTUC Strategy recently successfully launched the fourth volume of NTUC's *Singapore Labour Journal* in November 2025! The theme of this edition is "Diversity · Dignity · Drive", which reflects the Labour Movement's commitment to building a workforce where every individual is valued. This reflects the Ordinary Delegates Conference 2025 theme of a more representative Labour Movement, championing workers' interests, towards better jobs and better lives for all. Check out individual articles from the latest Volume 4 [here](#).

Explore other insights and resources on Labour Research here.

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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)

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THE PULSE OF SMES:
**SKILLS DEVELOPMENT,
MEANINGFUL WORK, AND
EMPOWERMENT**



Research Partnership between National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), Ministry of Manpower (MOM), and
Centre for Research and Development in Learning (CRDL) @ Nanyang Technological University (NTU)

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**Labour Research
Conference 2026**

Thursday, 1 October 2026

9am – 1pm

**Stephen Riady Auditorium
@ NTUC Centre, One Marina Boulevard**

The sixth **Labour Research Conference**, themed *Today's Hopes, Tomorrow's Possibilities*, will bring together union leaders, policymakers, researchers, and industry practitioners to examine how the Labour Movement can shape a fairer and more human-centred future of work. Across two sessions, speakers will discuss what a just transition should look like for transport workers amid autonomous vehicle adoption, how the parenthood penalty continues to affect hiring decisions, and how organisations can redesign work in the age of AI while strengthening human capital. The conference will also mark the launch of the fifth volume of the *Singapore Labour Journal* and the Associate Researchers Circle (ARC) @ LAB, reinforcing the role of research in amplifying worker voice, informing union advocacy and translating evidence into collective action for better jobs and livelihoods.

Thank you for reading this issue of the ***Singapore Labour Research Digest!*** Through this space, we aim to initiate discussions, promote debate, and advance our understanding of labour issues. Feel free to share this newsletter with colleagues who may find the resource relevant to their work.

Have feedback you would like to share or are interested in a research collaboration? Get in touch with us at strategy@ntuc.org.sg.

Stay tuned for our next newsletter!

Presented by NTUC Strategy

If you would like to find out more about the team behind the research, click [here!](#)



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