

## MIGRANT WORKERS IN CONTEXT OF COVID-19

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### DESCRIPTION

With more than 90% of COVID-19 cases in Singapore being linked to low-wage migrant workers living in dormitories, the pandemic has forced us to re-examine our attitudes and responsibility towards these migrant workers who labour on our island with us and for us.

Our mindsets, perceptions, and attitudes towards them have started to shift even as we, as a society, realise our collective lapse in caring for this marginalised group.

However, as Circuit Breaker ends and the search for a new norm begins, will we return to casting the same social stigma on them? How can we play our part as individuals in treating them with respect and assimilating them into our community?

### KEY LEARNING POINTS

- Recognise that migrant workers play a vital role in our nation
- Understand the importance of social inclusion of migrant workers into our society
- Uncover our prejudice against them and be able to question the assumptions made

# MIGRANT WORKERS IN CONTEXT OF COVID-19

## MIGRANT WORKERS IN CONTEXT OF COVID-19 – Part 1 (Exploring the Topic)

**WHAT WAS THE MOST RECENT NEWS YOU READ OR HEARD ABOUT MIGRANT WORKERS?**



Source:

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/foreign-workers-still-needed-in-construction-wong>

### BUILDING CONTEXT

[Mini-sharing]

In your groups, share what was the most recent news you read or heard about low-wage migrant workers. Divide students into groups of 4 (the groups will be used for the next segment)

### UNDERSTANDING THE TOPIC

[Activity – 20min] What do you think?

This segment aims to get students to share their viewpoints on the topic at hand.

*These are the recommended topics, educators can explore other related topics on Migrant Workers in COVID-19 season.*

**Topic 1:** Alleged Food Waste by Migrant Workers

**Topic 2:** Do you want Migrant Workers dormitories near you?

**Topic 3:** Reliance on Migrant Workers

(Activity Handouts can be found at the end of the guide.)

*We have provided 3 options on how you can facilitate this segment.*



### TWITTER SHOWDOWN

#### **Option A: Twitter Showdown**

Instructions:

1. From the previous groups of 4, assign the groups either Netizen A or B
2. There will be a topic of discussion made known to the class.
3. Each group will have an opposing stance.
4. With the resources they have, they will use PEEL to come up with plausible points to support their stance.
5. They are to engage in a “Twitter Showdown” and convince the other group(s) by justifying their stand.

#### **Digital Interaction ideas:**

- Tweetgen:  
<https://www.tweetgen.com/create/tweet.html> generates their responses into a twitter post image. Following that, they can upload the image onto the class chat or SLS



### DISCUSSION

#### **Option B: Discussion**

Instructions:

1. Have students read various handouts for topic 1, 2 or 3 (depending on what you think suits the class).
2. After reading the handout, have the students jot down their thoughts on the issue.
3. Have students share in groups or as a class.

Varying methods to facilitate sharing:

- Think, Pair, Share
- Group sharing
- Mass sharing.

*An alternative could be to pair students reading similar articles and get them to share their thoughts with another pair of the opposite viewpoint.*



## RESEARCH AND DISCUSS

### TOPIC 1: ALLEGED FOOD WASTE



Source:

<https://www.msn.com/en-sg/news/singapore/photos-of-govt-provided-meals-for-foreign-workers-thrown-in-trash-explained/ar-BB13fUVM>

## Option C: Research and Discuss

Instructions:

1. Assign students to various topics in groups (ensure you have even group numbers, to allow groups to discuss their findings afterwards)

*The assignment can be done during class or prior to lesson.*

2. Give students time (recommended 15 mins) to research online on the topic to build their case.
3. In groups or as a class, have groups debate their views or engage in a group discussion on their findings.

### Topic 1: Alleged Food Waste

Netizen A (For): Will receive a handout with added information on the efforts put into ensuring food is delivered to the migrant workers.

Netizen B (Against): Will receive a handout with added information on how the food provided was not of their food preference.

*Educators to note the passing remarks students made.*

*These comments can help you identify existing mindsets and beliefs of the students on the issue.*

Possible discussion points:

- The Singapore Government can be seen as going out of the way to look after our Migrant Workers. Why do you think the Government is making these efforts?
- How does the information we consume influence our views on people or the issues? How can we be mindful about our media consumption habits and patterns (e.g. media vs personal biases)

Landing point: When we post or read something online, do we think critically and analytically about what we read (i.e. fact check)? What we read and pass on will also influence those around us on the issue at hand. We need to be mindful of our influence online, it can lead to negative consequences that feed misconceptions/stigmas and fake news.

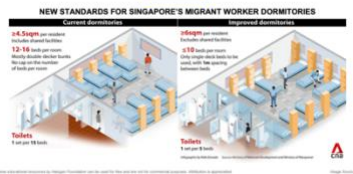
**TOPIC 2:  
DO YOU WANT MIGRANT  
WORKER DORMITORIES NEAR  
YOU?**



Source:

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/covid-19-singapore-new-dormitories-foreign-workers-conditions-12792538>

**TOPIC 2:  
DO YOU WANT MIGRANT  
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Source:

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/covid-19-singapore-new-dormitories-foreign-workers-conditions-12792538>

**Topic 2: Do you want Migrant Worker Dormitories near you?**

Netizen A (For): Will receive a handout with added information on how the dormitory do not affect the normalcy of life in the neighbourhood

Netizen B (Against): Will receive a handout with added information on how the actions of migrant workers affected the neighbourhood

*Educators to note that students may have preconceived stereotype and discrimination against Migrant Workers. As much as possible, do not be in a hurry to shoot down the student. Question their existing mindset and belief. How did the students develop such a perspective?*

Possible discussion points:

- *The Singapore Government can be seen as going out of the way to look after our Migrant Workers. Why do you think the Government is doing that?*
- *People have voiced concerns about having dormitories in residential areas. Are the concerns valid? How do some of our unchecked assumptions and comments make Migrant Workers feel?*
- *If the comments and concerns are not valid, why do you think people have such stereotypes? How can we break out of these stereotypes?*

Landing point: Migrant workers are part of our society, and ensuring that the living conditions are adequate is part of our responsibility as a nation. As a society, we can do our part, accepting them in our neighbourhoods and reduce the NIMBY (not in my backyard) syndrome.

**TOPIC 3:  
WAGES AND OVER RELIANCE**



Source:

<https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/limit-to-reducing-reliance-on-foreign-workers-dpm-heng>

**TOPIC 3:  
WAGES AND OVER RELIANCE**

There is a limit to how far Singapore can go in reducing the need for manual work, Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat said. "We still need to rely on a significant proportion of our foreign workers to do very difficult jobs which many Singaporeans will not want to do," he told CNA in an interview.

He noted that the use of digital technology could make Singapore's built environment sector more efficient and productive as it grapples with a shrinking local labour force. "For us, a combination of men and machines will be a very powerful one, and therefore we must make the best use of how digitalisation can enable us to be more productive and more efficient," he added.

The recent outbreak of Covid-19 among migrant workers in dorms has seen calls for Singapore to rethink its reliance on such labour.

Source:

<https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/limit-to-reducing-reliance-on-foreign-workers-dpm-heng>

**Topic 3: Reliance on Migrant Workers**

Netizen A (For): Will receive a handout on why we should reduce our reliance on migrant workers

Netizen B (Against): Will receive a handout on the importance of migrant workers for our economy

Possible discussion points:

- *What are the current jobs fulfilled by Migrant Workers?*
- *If the Migrant Workers don't do certain jobs, will locals do them?*
- *Can locals be encouraged to take on jobs that Migrant Workers currently do?*
- *What happens if nobody does some of these essential jobs?*

Landing point: We cannot do without migrant workers because they serve an essential role in our society. As such, we should embrace that they are part of our society.

Even if the consensus is that we can reduce our reliance on migrant workers, the reality is that their numbers will not reduce overnight. They will continue to be a part of our society for the next 5 to 10 years. In the time that they are here, we ought to treat them right.

## MIGRANT WORKERS IN CONTEXT OF COVID-19 – Part 2 (Exploring Impact of the Problem)

**WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE ACTIVITY?**

**WHAT WAS ONE EMOTION YOU FELT? WHY?**

**WHAT WAS ONE COMMENT MADE THAT STOOD OUT TO YOU?**

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**WHAT ARE YOUR IMPRESSIONS OF MIGRANT WORKERS NOW?**

**WHAT CAUSED THESE CHANGES?**

●

### EXPOUNDING ON IMPACT

#### **Option A and C: Debrief**

Possible questions:

- *What happened during the activity?*
- *What was an emotion you felt during the activity? Why?*
- *What was one comment made during the activity that stood out to you? (or got you thinking)*

**What about now? What are your impressions on migrant workers and what caused the changes?**

(with the recent heavy coverage on Migrant Workers issues during Covid-19)

*Educators to note if there are any differences in the words and phrases they have used to describe their current impression in comparison to their first impression.*

**Do you think all the comments made by the netizens A and B are correct?**

Possible responses:

- *No, because some comments are subjective,*
- *they don't have the full picture of the information, they only have one side of the picture*
- *Yes, because the article was from a trusted source*

Ask ourselves before we post: Do we have the right facts? We need to always test our assumptions and not let our assumptions frame the truth.

**WHAT WAS ONE THING THAT STOOD OUT TO YOU IN THE ARTICLE?**

**WHAT IS ONE THOUGHT YOU HAVE WHEN READING THIS?**

**PRIOR TO COVID-19, WHAT ARE YOUR IMPRESSIONS OF MIGRANT WORKERS?**

**SINGAPOREANS READ MEAN TWEETS TO MIGRANT WORKERS**



Source:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMgLxBtbQkU> (until 1:42)

## **Option B: Discussion Debrief**

Possible questions:

- *What was one thing that stood out to you in the article?*
- *What is one thought you have when reading this?*

**[Discussion] Prior to Covid-19, what are your impressions of migrant workers?**

Possible questions or prompts:

- *Have you heard from your parents that “if you don’t work hard, you become a bangalah”*
- *Where do you see them usually? What are they doing?*
- *What do you hear others say about them?*

Possible responses:

- *Parents tell children not to go close to them*
- *Dirty, inconsiderate, and make Singapore unsafe*
- *Sleep in void decks*
- *Underpaid*
- *Work long hours, very tiring job*

What some of you shared, is the stigma that we might have on migrant workers. Stigma means a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person. Maybe, in a couple of negative encounters or experiences, we developed a negative perspective of this group of people. And as we spread it to our circle of influence, it becomes a social stigma.

**[Video] Singaporeans read mean tweets to Migrant Workers**

We are going to watch a video, when you watch this video, take note of an emotion that you felt.

**[Discussion] Will you say these things to the migrants workers in real life?**

Possible responses:

- *No*
- *Yes, maybe not me but others might do it or say accidentally*

The fact is these comments are made by Singaporeans. Why is it that we post it online but we don’t say these



	<p>things in real life?</p> <p>Possible responses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <i>Angry or frustrated in the moment</i></li><li>- <i>Never think at that moment</i></li><li>- <i>Social media is our space for us to share with our friends</i></li></ul> <p>Possible areas to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Because it is anonymous<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Anonymity creates a 'safe space' for people to share when mistreated,</li><li>o anonymity removes the need to be accountable for what we said, hence we are less careful of.</li></ul></li></ul> <p>How would what I post or say to influence others around me?</p>
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## MIGRANT WORKERS IN CONTEXT OF COVID-19 – Part 3 (Solutions)



### CONCEPTUALISING SOLUTIONS

#### [Video] Migrant workers share stories on kind deeds by S'poreans

This video features 3 migrant workers and their encounters with Singaporeans in an everyday situation. When you watch this video, think about what are some things we can do as a society to keep our communities closely knitted.

#### [Quick Sharing] What are some things you think we can do as a society to keep our communities closely knitted?

Possible areas to consider:

- the day to day attitudes we bring in our encounters with them
- actions and behaviours

You do not need to have a thank you note nicely written or a bottle of 'liang teh' prepared for every encounter you might have with them, think about how we can embrace them as a part of our society.

End

