

Dear Sir/Madam,

Below is HOME's response to the Singapore government's 2015 Budget:

HOME welcomes the announcement that the foreign worker levy hike will be deferred for a year, and levy concessions have been made for families which hire foreign domestic workers. However, we urge the government to abolish levies completely. Since we already have policies which impose quotas and dependency ceilings to regulate the demand of foreign workers, there is no need to impose such an onerous tax burden on employers.

When business costs are high, employers will pass the burden of this increased cost onto the worker by demanding kickbacks or letting wages remain stagnant. Low wage foreign workers, who have little bargaining power can do little about this.

In addition, we note that this year's Budget does not have anything which benefits low wage migrant workers on work permit, even though they comprise nearly 20% of our population. Not only do migrant workers contribute to the economy through their labour, they also pay taxes. But neither the government, nor the National Council of Social Services (NCSS) allocates sufficient resources to non-profit organisations providing social support specifically for migrant workers on work permit. There is an urgent need for culturally sensitive social support systems, including accessible and affordable health care services.

The government should also do more to provide opportunities for cultural expression, education and skills training through scholarships and funding for such programmes. Problems such as high recruitment debts, long working hours, arbitrary termination of employment, low and unequal wages continue to afflict the community.

Migrant workers are an integral part of Singapore society and as we strive towards a more equitable and gracious society, we need to give them equal consideration. The absence of any benefits for them in this year's budget shows that as a nation, we have a long way to go before truly appreciating and valuing their contributions to Singapore.

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