

# UPR Info Pre-sessions 52 — Singapore

Key human rights concerns & recommendations (2026 UPR cycle)

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The Online Citizen (TOC)

# Civic space: Executive control over speech (POFMA) + deterrent litigation

## Problem:

Minister-led determination of “falsehood” + compelled correction

→ compliance first; challenge later (high cost / high risk for small outlets)

### Escalation: Declared Online Location (DOL)

- Three alleged statements of falsehood enables DOL to be declared.
- A DOL declaration restricts operators from receiving financial benefit for 2 years.
- Illegal to provide financial support to the DOL location.

#### Entities' online locations being declared as DOL

- TOC: DOL designations repeated (2023; 2025)
- Kenneth Jeyaretnam (Politician) (2023)
- Gutzy Asia (TOC's publication): (2024)
- Transformative Justice Collective (NGO): (2024)

### Legal intimidation via defamation (examples)

- Roy Ngerng: S\$150k damages (Commentary) | Prime Minister
- Leong Sze Hian: S\$133k damages (Sharing of article) | Prime Minister
- Xu Yuanchen: S\$210k damages (Reporting) | Prime Minister
- Lee Hsien Yang: S\$200k each to two ministers | Cabinet Ministers

→ Six-figure damages + legal costs create severe chilling effects

### Recent POFMA Correction Directions against TOC (illustrative):

- 16 Dec 2024 — Report of Minister for Home Affairs and Law on the use of death penalty
- 23 Dec 2024 — Report on property transaction records involving the Minister for Home Affairs and Law and Minister for Manpower
- 25 Feb 2025 — Report on the lease of state land by the Minister for Home Affairs and Law

→ Pattern: disputes on public-interest reporting are resolved through compelled corrections and escalation.

## Recommendations (12 months)

- Establishing an independent review body to authorise or promptly review directions and DOL designations;
- Guaranteeing prompt judicial review on the merits, with cost caps/fee waivers for public-interest challenges; and
- Introducing safeguards to prevent strategic lawsuits or punitive legal costs from chilling public-interest reporting and civic debate.

# Access to information: FOI as a civic-space safeguard

## Problem:

No Freedom of Information law providing a right of access to government-held records.

### What FOI should include (minimum features)

- No general right of access to government-held information; requests are discretionary.
- Public-interest reporting often proceeds with information asymmetry, then meets enforcement rather than transparency.
- Even when questions are raised in Parliament, data may be withheld, incomplete, or presented in fragmented categories, making meaningful public scrutiny difficult.”

### Illustrative journalism use-case

- Sept 2024: 2 email requests to SLA (state land / property)
- Only automated acknowledgement; no substantive response
- POFMA Correction Direction issued after report was made
- Information gap undermines informed public debate
- FOI reduces asymmetry and lowers reliance on enforcement/corrections

### High-value datasets to publish proactively (examples)

- Elections administration and integrity: granular election results and related administrative records needed for independent scrutiny of boundary changes and electoral fairness.
- Capital punishment transparency: disaggregated data on executions and the death row population (offence type, nationality, and procedural stage).
- Migrant workers’ remedies: data on complaints and claims, resolution times, enforcement outcomes, and cases where workers are repatriated before their claims are resolved.
- Public resources and state decisions: records on allocation and management of state land and other significant public assets.

### **Recommendations (18 months)**

- Enact a Freedom of Information law to guarantee timely access to government-held information for public accountability.

# Death penalty: mandatory sentencing, executions, and transparency

## Key datapoints (civil society documentation):

- 42 executions since resumption in March 2022; predominantly for drug offences.
- Mandatory features and burden-shifting presumptions create arbitrary outcomes and constrain judicial discretion.

### Executions since resumption (Civil society tally)

- 2022: 11 (all drug offences)
- 2023: 5 (all drug offences)
- 2024: 9 (8 drug; 1 murder)
- 2025: 17 (15 drug; 2 murder)

→ Total since March 2022: 42

### Key fair-trial & access-to-justice concerns

- Post-appeal death row prisoners increasingly struggle to secure counsel; access to representation is diminishing in practice.
- New legislation/regulatory changes have made post-appeal applications harder to file.
- Court of Appeal ruled SPS/AGC acted unlawfully in copying/forwarding prisoners' private correspondence without consent (Oct 2024).
- Presumption clauses in the Misuse of Drugs Act shift the burden to the accused; constitutional challenge was dismissed (Aug 2025).

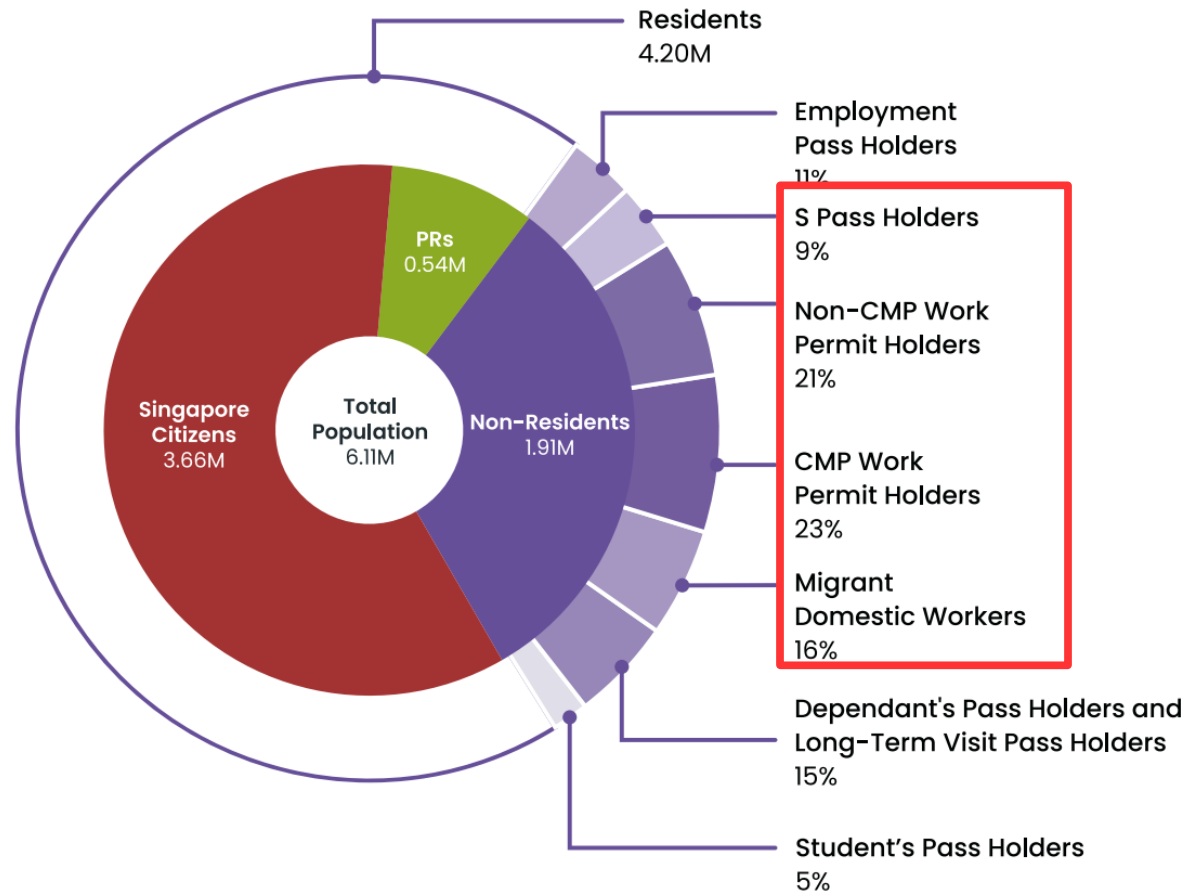
## Recommendations (24 months)

- Singapore should establish an immediate moratorium on executions, publish comprehensive and disaggregated data on executions and the death row population, and abolish mandatory death sentencing in law, with a view to full abolition.

# Migrant workers' rights: retaliation, debt, and access to justice

## Singapore's Total Population Stood at 6.11M

Diagram 1: Total population, as at June 2025<sup>2</sup>



- Work Permit holders: 1.18M
- S Pass holders: 177.6k

## Key gaps documented by civil society & media

- Retaliation risk for complainants/witnesses (incl. repatriation pressure)
- Recruitment fees remain high: typically S\$13k–16k for new construction jobs; S\$2k–5k for subsequent employment (up to ~20× monthly salary).
- Wage theft / illegal deductions / long resolution timelines
- Access to justice barriers: language + legal aid + procedural complexity
- Around 1.34 million low-wage and mid-tier migrant workers (2024).
- Survey indicator 1 in 8 dormitory workers paid late; 54% in construction/engineering underpaid for overtime.
- Documentation gaps: 1 in 6 workers not consistently receiving payslips; about ¼ of assisted workers did not receive payslips.

# Migrant workers' rights: retaliation, debt, and access to justice

**Illustrative case : Uddin MD Sharif (Bangladeshi migrant worker; in SG since 2008)**

**He has been a fervent advocate for migrant workers' rights, striving to combat the pervasive notion of disposability that often plagues this community in Singapore.**

**Jan 2024:** Employer receives harassment letters alleging loan-shark debt, including scans of Sharif's work permit + "joss paper."

**Late Jan–Feb 2024:** Sharif + employer file police reports; Sharif follows up repeatedly but reports limited/no updates.

**Early Mar 2024:** Employer issues termination notice; Sharif says it referenced "guidance" from MOM/police.

**Mar 2024:** Sharif secures a prospective new job; when the new employer submits the work permit application, harassment escalates — messages sent to the employer with his permit scan and threats ("If he work 4 u, u pay!!").

**After threats:** Prospective employer withdraws → work permit cannot be obtained, despite Sharif's reports/clarifications.

**Apr 2024:** Sharif is told to find a job by a set date or face repatriation; harassment risk follows him across employers → remedy cut off by status loss.

**May 2024:** Sharif left Singapore after the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) and the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) declined to extend his Special Pass

## Recommendations (18 months)

- Guarantee non-retaliation while claims are pending
- Provide safe job mobility pathways & time to secure new employment
- Expand legal aid + translation support for claims
- Publish annual data: complaints, resolution times, inspections, outcomes

# Treatment of detainees and police misconduct

## Key gaps:

### Treatment of detainees

- Delayed/limited access to counsel at early stages
- Limited independent oversight of detention conditions and interview practices
- Low transparency for families and public on safeguards and outcomes

**Recommendation:** Ensure prompt access to legal counsel from the outset of detention, and establish independent oversight of detention practices, with regular public reporting.

### Police misconduct and complaints

- No independent statutory complaints body separate from police/executive
- Opaque outcomes: complainants told “action taken” but receive no reasons/findings
- Lack of public reporting on allegations, investigations, and outcomes; Risk of POFMA correction directions

**Recommendation:** Establish an independent police complaints and oversight body with powers to investigate and require disclosure, and publish regular anonymised outcome data.

# Thank You

Data from local NGOs: Transformative Justice Collective (TJC) • HOME •  
TWC2