WOMEN'S WORKFORCE RE-ENTRY:
Challenges, Barriers & Opportunities

SCWO
Singapore Council of Women's Organisations

> KEY TAKEAWAY

Women want to work. The challenge is making suitable work accessible — and sustainable.

New research by the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (SCWO), in collaboration with the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) Women and Family (WAF) unit, examines the experiences of women navigating career breaks and returning to employment, alongside the support currently available to them in Singapore.

> ABOUT THE RESEARCH

20 FOCUS GROUPS

120 Women

4 Returnee Profiles

ONLINE POLL

502 Women

SUPPORT LANDSCAPE REVIEW

33 Initiatives alongside existing public support

35 International Programmes

> SIX THINGS THE RESEARCH TELLS US

The return-to-work journey can begin before women leave

For some women, the return-to-work challenge begins before they leave employment. Caregiving pressures, rigid schedules, heavy workloads and inconsistent access to flexibility can make work difficult to sustain.

Women want to return to work

80% of women polled who had taken or were currently on a career break intended to return to work. Work represented more than income — women also described independence, identity and purpose as reasons for returning.

A career break can make the journey back harder

Nearly **7 in 10** of all 502 women polled believed that taking a career break makes finding suitable work more difficult. Women described actively preparing themselves to return, but training, CV preparation and extensive job searching did not necessarily result in finding work suited to their experience and circumstances.

Different returners face different pressure points

There is no single return-to-work pathway: different returners face different barriers and require different forms of support.

Getting a job is not enough if the return cannot last

61% of women polled identified flexible work arrangements as their most desired form of return-to-work support. Some women accepted lower pay or seniority to secure workable arrangements. But flexibility without manageable workloads or progression prospects may still result in unsustainable employment. Success should mean not only returning to work, but being able to remain and progress.

Women do not always know where to find support that meets their needs

~2 in 5 of the 502 respondents knew where to find the support they needed to prepare for returning to work.

~2 in 5 of the 299 career-break respondents felt available support was well matched to their needs.

> SINGAPORE'S RETURN-TO-WORK SUPPORT LANDSCAPE

SCWO's landscape review identified 33 non-government return-to-work initiatives delivered by 26 organisations in Singapore, alongside existing public support, and compared these with 35 international programmes.



75% offered coaching or mentorship



55% offered technical, digital or vocational training

2 provided job matching or placement support

2 offered structured paid placements

FROM RESEARCH TO ACTION

SCWO will use the research findings as the starting point for its next phase of work, bringing research evidence together with ground and sector expertise to develop practical solutions and inform policy and workplace recommendations.

> BRINGING EVIDENCE & GROUND EXPERTISE TOGETHER

Women's Workforce Inclusion & Re-Entry Working Group

The Working Group brings together SCWO Member Organisations, relevant non-profit organisations, and tripartite and sector partners to:

Examine the evidence → Identify systemic friction points and opportunities for action → Translate findings into solutions and recommendations

> DEVELOPING COMMUNITY-LED SOLUTIONS

SCWO CoLab: Cultivating Solutions

An annual collaborative ideation programme that brings SCWO Member Organisations together to translate research findings into community-led solutions.

2026/27 Challenge
Creating Better Pathways for Women Returning to Work

How It Works

BRING AN IDEA
Member Organisations identify a gap or opportunity.

EXPLORE TOGETHER
Use the research and collective experience to interrogate the problem.

CULTIVATE THE SOLUTION
Facilitated ideation + expert input help strengthen the concept.

TAKE IT FORWARD
Promising solutions can progress towards potential funding and implementation.

> INFORMING POLICY & WORKPLACE CHANGE

The Working Group will also draw on the research findings and ground expertise to develop policy and workplace recommendations for relevant government, employers and sector stakeholders, translating identified friction points into proposals that can strengthen pathways for women who choose to return to work.

> A THREE-YEAR RESEARCH-TO-ACTION PROGRAMME

2026

WOMEN & WORK TRANSITIONS
Women's Workforce Inclusion & Re-Entry Working Group

2027

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
Domestic Violence Response Working Group

2028

CAREGIVER WELLBEING
Integrated Caregiver Support Working Group

SCWO is the national coordinating body representing women's organisations in Singapore. Through advocacy, collaboration and provision of critical services for women in need, SCWO works to amplify diverse voices and advance opportunities for women and the community.