

Govt to look at easing hurdles for new mothers to rejoin workforce: Chan Chun Sing

[Sign up now](#): Get ST's newsletters delivered to your inbox



Coordinating Minister for Public Services Chan Chun Sing at a fireside chat moderated by American Chamber of Commerce in Singapore chief executive Lei Hsien-Hsien on March 13.

ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI



Christine Tan



Summary ⓘ

- Singapore's TFR hit a low of 0.87 in 2023, prompting government action to address marriage and parenthood issues.
- The government aims to reduce obstacles for mothers returning to work and help women juggle careers with caregiving with support from husbands.
- Individuals' values and the importance of family, not just finances, are key to the decision whether to have children, says

Chan Chun Sing.

◆ AI generated

Published Mar 13, 2026, 11:28 PM

Updated Mar 14, 2026, 10:32 AM



SINGAPORE - Removing barriers that prevent new mothers from returning to work will be one of the Government's priorities as it seeks to raise Singapore's birth rate, said Coordinating Minister for Public Services Chan Chun Sing on March 13.

Helping women better balance caregiving and careers will also be central to the effort – and husbands must play their part too, he said at a fireside chat organised by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA).

Singapore's falling resident total fertility rate (TFR) and what was being done to arrest it was a topic raised by several participants at the dialogue at Tanah Merah Country Club, which capped off a charity golf tournament.

ADVERTISEMENT



Latest figures showed the Republic’s TFR [sank to a new low of 0.87 in 2025.](#)

This prompted the Government to form a new work group to look into marriage and parenthood issues, and to call for a societywide reset on how marriage and parenthood are viewed and supported.

Mr Chan, who is also Defence Minister, said the Government is prepared to try anything to address the issue.

This includes continuing to see what more can be done – within Singapore’s fiscal space – to take concerns over the cost of raising children “out of the equation”.

But the downward trend in TFR is not a uniquely Singaporean problem, nor is it strictly an issue of costs, he added.

“If money is the only issue that we have to tackle, then we should expect rich families to have more kids. But it’s not so,” he said.

ADVERTISEMENT

The Straits Times

Final boarding call: Vote now for your chance at over \$4,000 in prizes, including a Disney+ Annual Premium Subscription and Disney Store gift vouchers, before March 25.

Vote here: <https://str.sg/disneycruise>

In partnership with Disney Cruise Line

**Singapore's Biggest Disney Cruise
Who gets your vote?**

VOTE NOW

He added: “Money is one issue, (but) I think it has to do a lot more with individual choices, preferences and priorities.”

During the fireside chat, moderated by American Chamber of Commerce in Singapore chief executive Lei Hsien-Hsien, Mr Chan said one of the pain points that need to be tackled is the difficulty women face in returning to the workforce after they have children.

“Our ladies are all very educated, and they can contribute, and they want to contribute. How can we help them to juggle this?” he asked.

While tax incentives and other monetary support are necessary, they are not sufficient as women are also thinking about the impact that having a child has on their career progression, he noted.

He disclosed that his wife left the workforce and took no-pay leave to care for their children, and has been finding it hard to return to work.

“As a society, we need to see how we can better support the women if we want to crack this puzzle of how to have more children. Otherwise, it’s very difficult,” he said.

Mr Chan’s view echoed that of YWCA president Sim Hwee Hoon, who noted in her speech that women today take on multiple roles all at once, and yet their struggles often go unseen.

She said meaningful change in empowering women can happen only with strong male allies, and called for caregiving to be a shared responsibility where husbands, sons and brothers all do their part.

Mr Chan said that, at the end of the day, the choice of whether to have children is about one’s value system, and whether parents manage to inculcate in their children the importance of family.

Drawing from his past experience as education minister, Mr Chan said the strongest factor determining a child’s performance in school is not income level, but family stability. By the same token, there are healthy and happy families across the entire income spectrum, he added.

“The institution of family itself must be the first step that we get right – how we bring up our children (to) value family, and have those values with them as they grow up,” he said.

“I think that’s most critical.”

Having children must be an act of love and cannot be a cost-benefit analysis, as the latter will mean that couples will never have children, he added.

More on this topic

askST: What is total fertility rate? What does Singapore's record low rate mean?

The way we define success makes it hard to raise children in Singapore

Mr Chan said his hope is that Singaporeans define success not by how well this generation can do for itself, but by whether it enables the next generation to do even better.

“If we all share those values, then I think we are on the correct trajectory,” he said.

Over 200 supporters and donors of YWCA attended the dinner after the charity golf tournament, which raised about \$237,000 for the non-profit organisation.

Christine Tan is a journalist at The Straits Times reporting on crime, justice and social issues in Singapore.

See more on

[Families](#)[Fertility rate](#)[Birth rate](#)[Population/Demographics](#)[Chan Chun Sing](#)