Balancing openness and integrity

Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland and Germany),
Solicitor (England & Wales and Hong Kong)
Of Counsel, KGP Legal LLC
alexander.ressos@kgplegal.com.sg
www.ressos.com.sg

The official formula

The government has expressed its approach to the inflow in a formula that recurs in official statements. The foreword of the Inter-Ministerial Committee states that its recommendations were calibrated to avoid placing undue burden on the large majority of legitimate businesses. It adds: "We continue to welcome legitimate investors and businesses, while remaining watchful and not falling prey to the allure of dirty money, to avoid tarnishing our hard-earned reputation as a trusted business hub."[1] The same foreword warns that no measure will eradicate money laundering completely and that some gatekeepers will always be unable to resist its allure.[2]

MAS has framed the competitive question in similar terms. Presenting the annual report in July 2026, its managing director, Chia Der Jiun, said that Singapore's competitiveness rested first on its position "as a trusted financial hub with access to a deep and diverse financial ecosystem and talent pool".[3] Trust, in this view, is the product that Singapore sells. Openness without integrity would destroy it, while integrity without openness would leave it without buyers.

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Four instruments of calibration

The preceding sections show that the state calibrates the inflow with four kinds of instrument. The first is price. The Additional Buyer's Stamp Duty makes it expensive for foreigners to buy homes, while the higher rates of income tax and buyer's stamp duty ask the wealthy to contribute more. The second is quantity. The number of new citizens and permanent residents is set each year by the government, without any entitlement on the part of applicants. The third is conditions. The Global Investor Programme and the family office incentives require investment, local spending and employment. Their thresholds have risen as demand has grown. The fourth is scrutiny. The anti-money laundering framework, the screening of family offices and the exchange of data between agencies examine the source of the wealth.

The combination is characteristic of Singapore. A state with broad discretion can adjust each instrument quickly, often with effect from the day after an announcement, as the increase of April 2023 showed. The disadvantage is uncertainty for the families concerned, who cannot rely on the rules that applied when they arrived. The advantage, from the state's perspective, is the ability to respond to market conditions and public opinion before either becomes a crisis.

Who benefits from the inflow

The political legitimacy of the inflow depends on whether ordinary Singaporeans see its benefits. The official answer points to jobs, investment and tax revenue. The Economic Development Board has cited the jobs created by investors under the Global Investor Programme, and MAS has pointed to the employment of about 2,200 locals by family offices with tax incentives and to their demand for the services of banks, law firms and other professionals.[4] The minimum spending and investment conditions attached to the incentives are designed to make these benefits concrete.

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The critical answer points to the costs. Wealthy arrivals compete for scarce land, raise the price of private housing and widen the visible gap between the very rich and the middle class. When their wealth is of doubtful origin, the reputational damage of a single scandal falls on the whole country. The government's policy can be read as an attempt to answer both sides: it captures part of the benefit through taxes, conditions and employment requirements, and it limits the costs through property measures and scrutiny.

Practical consequences for families and their advisers

For families considering a move to Singapore and for their advisers in Singapore, Geneva or elsewhere, the analysis has concrete consequences. The first concerns sequencing. Since the cost of buying a home depends heavily on residence status, the family should settle its residence route before committing to a property purchase, considering a rented home during the first years. The second concerns documentation. Banks, family office service providers and the authorities will examine the source of wealth with increased care. A family that can document the origin of its fortune clearly will move faster. The third concerns commitment. Applications for residence and for the renewal of re-entry permits are assessed in the light of the family's actual presence, investment and integration in Singapore.

- Choose the residence route first: Employment Pass, Overseas Networks & Expertise Pass, Global Investor Programme or permanent residence through employment, with realistic time frames.
- Check the current thresholds of the Global Investor Programme and of the family office incentives at the time of application, since both have been raised repeatedly.
- Calculate the Additional Buyer's Stamp Duty before any property purchase, including the 65 per cent rate for entities and transfers into trusts, and verify any treatment under free trade agreements.
- Prepare a source-of-wealth file with corroborating documents, since gatekeepers are expected to verify declarations independently.

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- Avoid structures whose main purpose is to justify a work pass or a residence status, since the authorities now cross-check company and immigration data.
- Screen the family and its business for politically exposed persons and sanctions exposure before approaching banks.
- Plan for changing rules: the state adjusts taxes, stamp duties and programme conditions quickly, often with immediate effect.

Notes

1. Inter-Ministerial Committee on Anti-Money Laundering, *Report*, October 2024, Foreword: recommendations calibrated "so that we do not place undue burden on the large majority of businesses, which are legitimate. We continue to welcome legitimate investors and businesses, while remaining watchful and not falling prey to the allure of dirty money, to avoid tarnishing our hard-earned reputation as a trusted business hub." ↩
2. Inter-Ministerial Committee on Anti-Money Laundering, *Report*, October 2024, Foreword: "there is no silver bullet to completely eradicate money laundering. At some point in the future, some bad actors will find new ways of laundering their illicit wealth, and some gatekeepers will be unable to say no to its allure." ↩
3. *The Business Times*, 29 July 2026, as above, quoting Chia Der Jiun: "First and foremost, our competitiveness rests on a broader base – on our position as a trusted financial hub with access to a deep and diverse financial ecosystem and talent pool." ↩
4. Monetary Authority of Singapore, "Written reply to parliamentary question on number of jobs created by single family offices", Gan Kim Yong, 5 February 2025 (mas.gov.sg, accessed November 2026): "SFOs receiving tax incentives currently employ about 2,200 locals"; "Written reply on SFOs", 5 August 2026: SFOs add to jobs in asset management and related services such as private banking, legal and tax advisory, accounting and fund administration. ↩

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Author contact: Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP · contact@ressos.com