



# **SBF SME Internationalisation Index**

## **November 2022**



# SBF SME Internationalisation Index: Business sentiment ratings of the markets that Singapore businesses have gone to or intend to go to.

**This report details findings from the SBF SME Internationalisation Index (SMEII). The findings look into the following areas:**

- Sentiments on the international economy and business outlook in overseas markets
- Sentiments on business activities in overseas markets
- Sentiments on the operating environment in overseas markets

## The SMEII serves to:



Measure the level of interest of Singapore businesses in going overseas.



Pinpoint the areas of assistance needed to facilitate businesses in their overseas expansions.



Further the government's vision in the internationalisation of Singapore businesses.



Function as a resource for Singapore businesses to identify opportunities in their overseas expansion journeys.

# Methodology

400

Singapore companies with current or planned overseas businesses **completed the survey** online or via telephone interviews from 17<sup>th</sup> August to 28<sup>th</sup> September 2022.\*



Respondents were **owners, C-Suite, senior management** or **designated representatives** of the businesses.

62



Markets were rated by the respondents. Individual ratings on 17 markets were presented in this report.

\*The survey also covered an additional n=286 companies that did not have current/planned overseas businesses. Their intent of going overseas was captured.



Respondents were from a **mix of industries**: Manufacturing, Construction & Civil Engineering, Logistics & Transportation, Wholesale Trade, IT & Professional Services, Other Services, Retail, Real Estate, Hotels, Restaurants & Accommodations, and Banking & Insurance

# Respondent Profile by Sector



	Nov 2022	Jun 2022	Dec 2021
	% of respondents	% of respondents	% of respondents
IT & Professional Services	17%	21%	17%
Manufacturing	17%	14%	15%
Wholesale Trade	13%	17%	18%
Other Services (e.g. Education, Repair & Servicing)	9%	8%	7%
Construction & Civil Engineering	9%	8%	8%
Banking & Insurance	7%	8%	9%
Retail, Real Estate, Hotels, Restaurants & Accom.	7%	6%	8%
Logistics & Transportation	7%	6%	6%
Others (e.g. Holding & Investment Companies)	14%	12%	12%
	100%	100%	100%
	n=400	n=503	n=600

The sample collected from August to September 2022 included both SMEs (82%) and larger companies (18%).

## Definitions to note:

### Production & Trade

Manufacturing  
Construction & Civil Engineering  
Logistics & Transportation  
Wholesale Trade

### Services

IT & Professional Services  
Other Services  
Retail, Real Estate, Hotels, Restaurants & Accommodations  
Banking & Insurance

# Six Sub-Indices together define the SMEII

## Components that make up each of the sub-index

### Infrastructure

- Reliable utilities
- Well-developed financial banking system
- Well-developed digital infrastructure
- Affordable digital infrastructure
- Support on innovation and digitalisation by the local government
- Well-developed logistics & distribution network

### Skillset

- Affordable and easily available staff with the right skills
- Workforce education
- Workforce ethics and motivation
- Policies that support businesses and investors
- Government support for upskilling
- Workforce is receptive to upskilling
- Availability of local tech partners/vendors

### Market Diversity & Inclusiveness

- Use of international business language
- Workforce ethnic diversity
- Workforce gender diversity
- Foreigner friendly
- Easy to bring in overseas talents
- Easy to find business partners that can be trusted
- Diverse pools of potential customers/ buyers

### Business Confidence

- Manageable cost of running business
- Stable social & political environment
- Strong growth potential\*
- Strong confidence in economic growth\*
- Government is effective in managing\* crises and external shocks\*

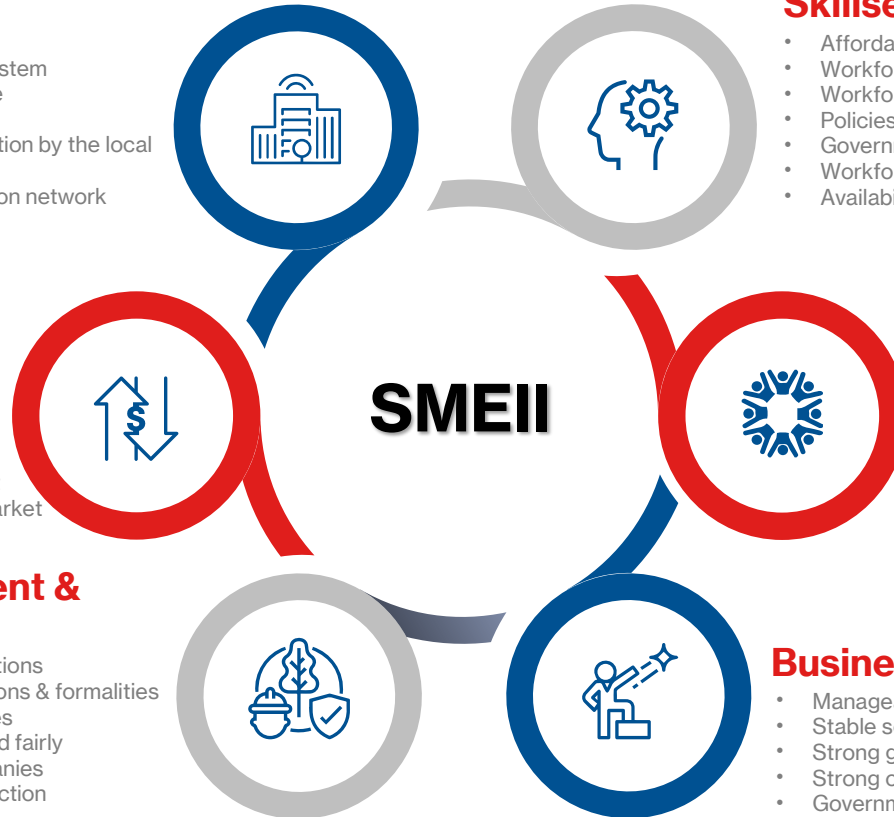
\* Added in June 2022 study

### Trade & Investment

- Easy to access credit/financing
- Transparent rules on capital investment
- Low level of tariffs or trade barriers
- Low level of non-trade barriers
- Legal protection for Singapore investors
- Easy to bring money/capital into the market
- Easy to repatriate capital/profit from the market

### Business Environment & Regulations

- Predictable regulations & legislations
- Information available on regulations & formalities
- Support for Singapore companies
- Singapore companies are treated fairly
- Easy to partner with local companies
- Intellectual property rights protection
- Cybersecurity



# Computation of SMEII

## Business Sentiment



Overall Good Infrastructure

66%



Overall Good Skillset

58%



Overall High Level of Diversity

35%



Overall Good Business & Regulatory Environment

29%



Overall Friendly Trade & Investment Environment

28%



Overall Good Business Confidence

49%

*% of respondents indicating Strongly Agree / Agree*

Average of 6 ratings: **44%**

## Popularity

Percentage of companies already in the market

38%

Percentage of companies planning to enter the market

8%

Sum of percentages: **46%**

**SMEII: 45**

**(Average score of Business Sentiments and Popularity, out of 100)**

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# Introduction

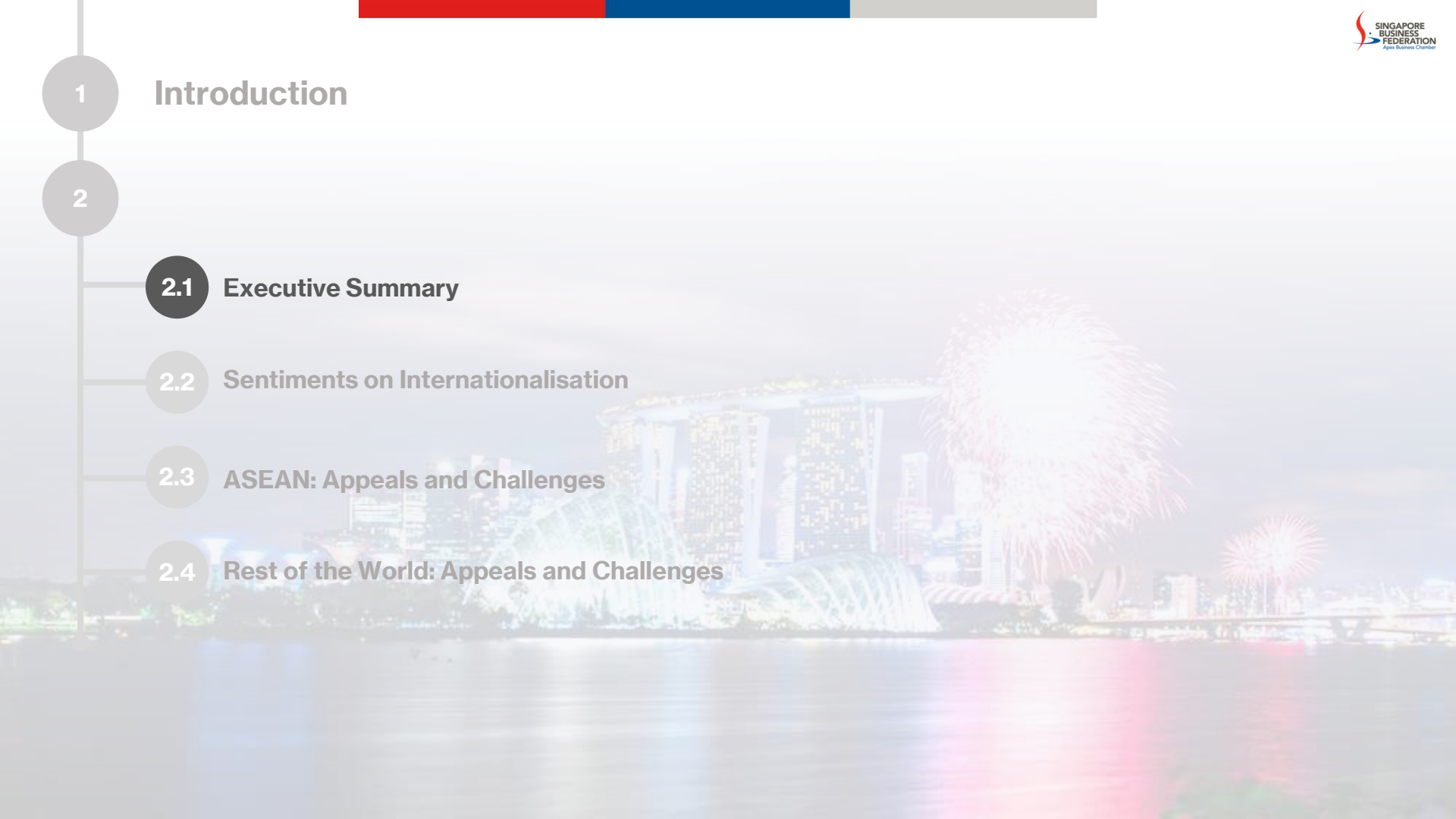
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**2.1** Executive Summary

2.2 Sentiments on Internationalisation

2.3 ASEAN: Appeals and Challenges

2.4 Rest of the World: Appeals and Challenges



# Executive Summary

**Overall market sentiment has improved from a year ago due to the reopening of economies and the relaxation of travel restrictions. This has provided an impetus for SMEs to grow their businesses.**

- The **overall internationalisation sentiment has improved** to 43%, from 38% a year ago.
- In the next three years, nearly six in ten (57%) companies with operations outside of Singapore plan to **further expand into new markets**, up from 53% last year.
- 14% of **companies with no overseas market, plan to expand abroad** in the next 3 years.



# Executive Summary

**While travel disruptions have reduced, supply chain disruptions and rising price inflation continue to negatively impact the costs of running businesses.**

- **Businesses reporting severe travel disruptions declined** from 59% a year ago to 44% due to the reopening of economies which provided opportunities for companies to resume travel for both business development and overseas operations management.
- **Supply chain disruptions have not abated**, affecting 41% of businesses (as compared to 44% in Dec 2021). The top causes cited by businesses are 'the pandemic' (69%), 'logistical delays' (64%), and 'border closures' (63%).
- **Half of the businesses** (51%), up from 40% in the last survey, **are negatively impacted by price inflation.**

# Executive Summary

**Despite the challenges, Singapore SMEs continue to plan for international expansion because they see the domestic market as being too small, along with the pull factors of internationalisation.**

- 67% of **companies** who have gone overseas or plan to go overseas **see the need to internationalise because the domestic market is too small** and that expanding abroad is the way to grow the business.
- The **key internationalisation pull factors** are related to **international sales revenue**, i.e. **accessibility to diverse customer pools**, and **future growth of overseas markets supported by trading ecosystems** such as digital and logistics infrastructures in destination markets as well as **overseas workforce availability**.

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# Introduction

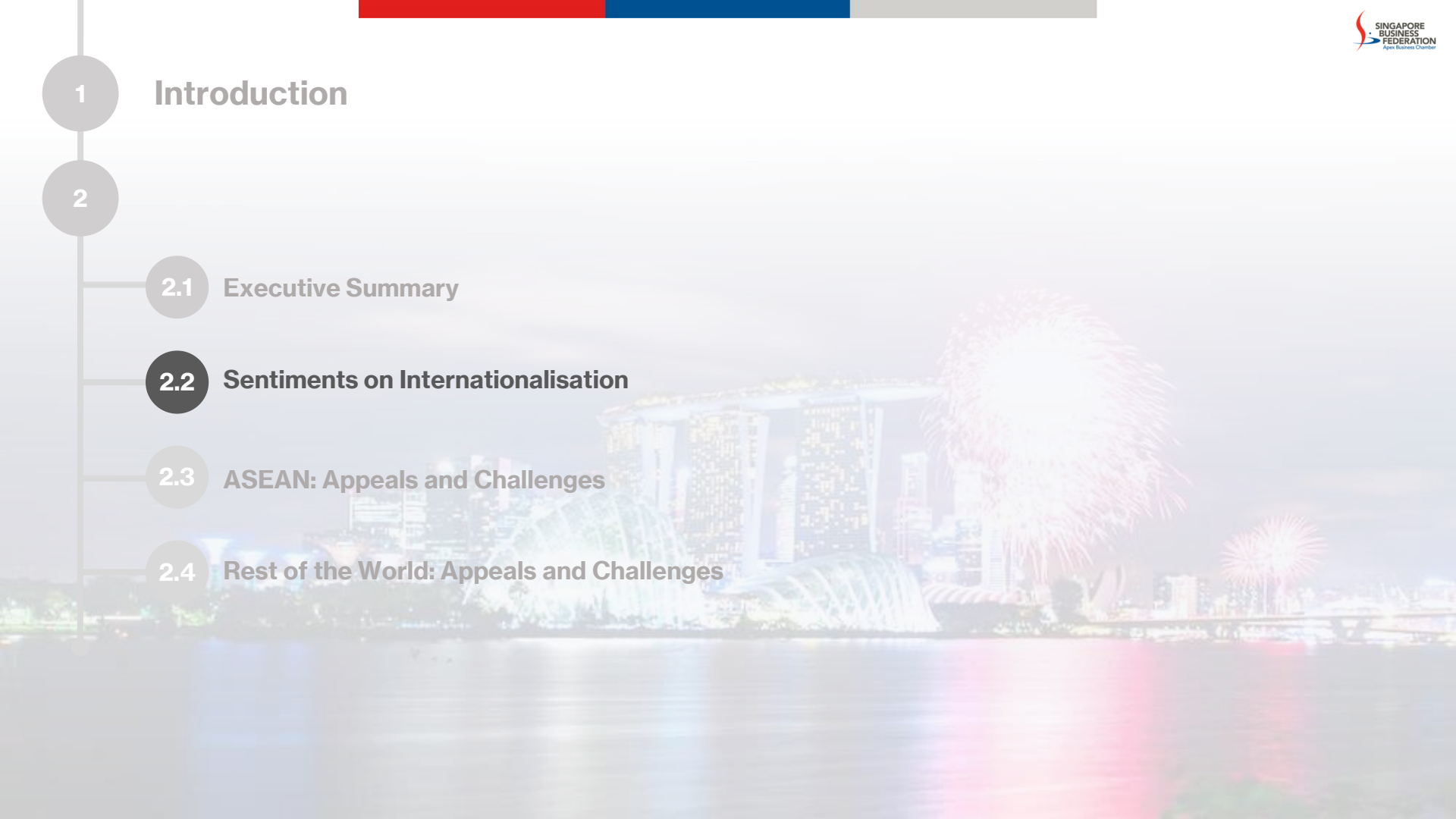
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2.1 Executive Summary

**2.2 Sentiments on Internationalisation**

2.3 ASEAN: Appeals and Challenges

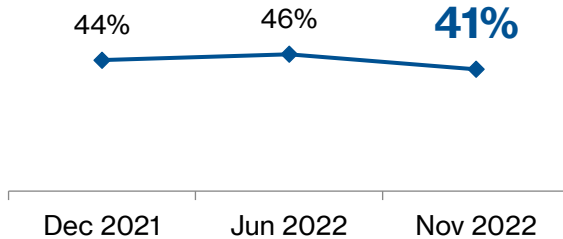
2.4 Rest of the World: Appeals and Challenges



# Supply chain disruption persists, spanning from logistical disruptions and border closures to shortages of raw materials.



## Supply Chain Disruption



**4 out of 10 of the businesses are seriously impacted in the past year in their ability to do business internationally**  
*Rated 7 or more out of a 10-point scale*

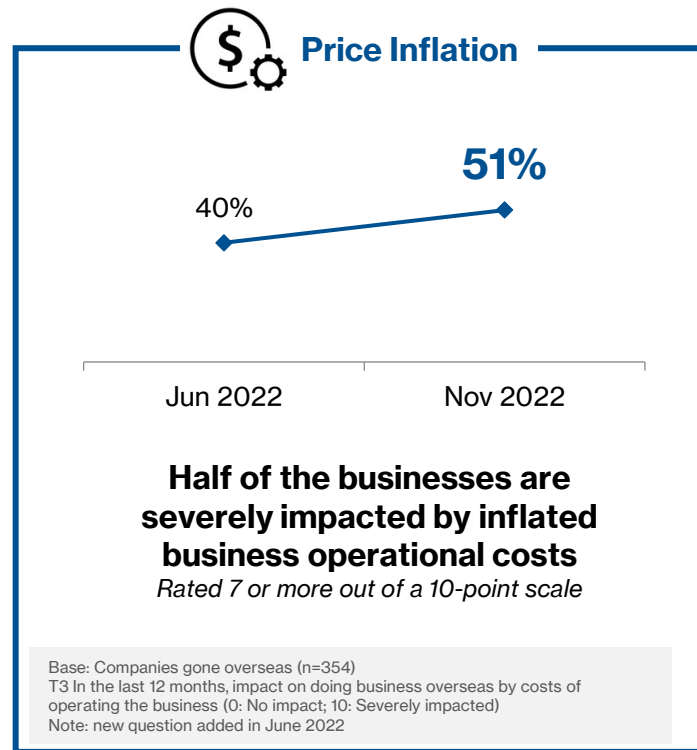
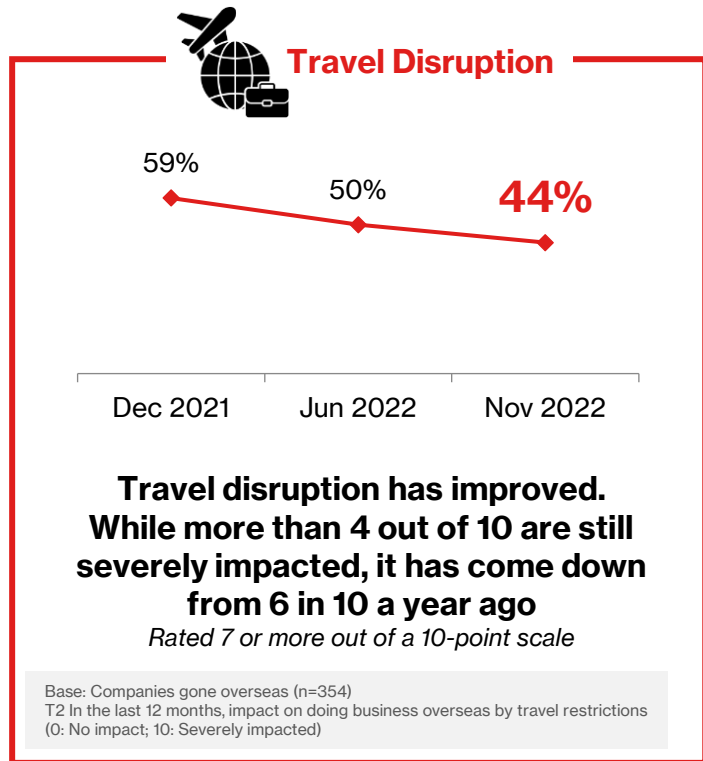
Base: Companies gone overseas (n=354)  
T1a Impact of doing business internationally due to supply chain disruption (0: No impact; 10: Severely impacted)

### Key reasons for disruptions

	Nov 2022	Jun 2022	Dec 2021
Pandemic	69%	73%	77%
Logistics disruptions	64%	60%	63%
Border closures	63%	63%	65%
Raw material shortages	42%	38%	36%
Political instability	34%	22%	23%
Regulatory changes	25%	28%	23%
Trade policy changes	17%	15%	15%

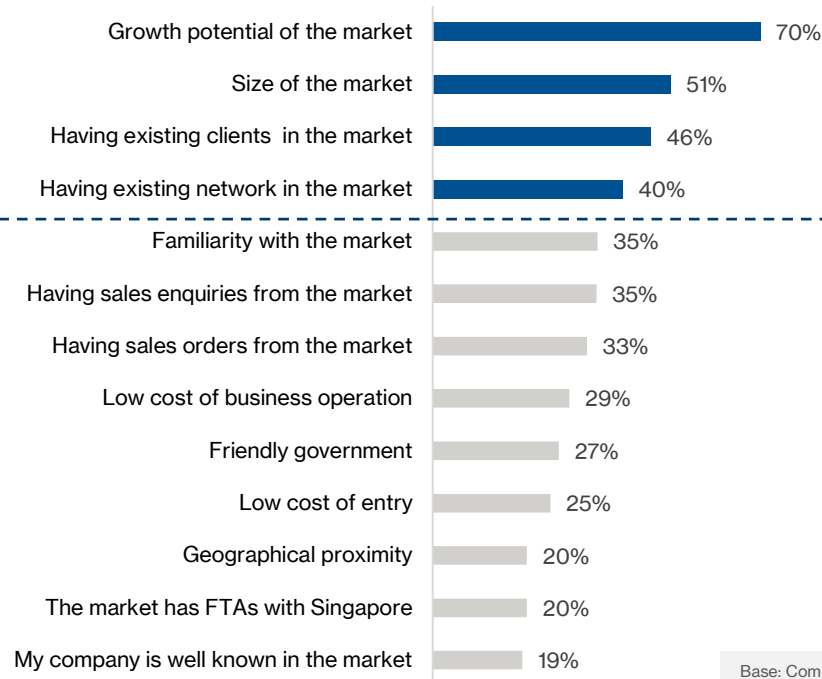
Base: Companies that experienced supply chain disruption (n=325)  
T1b External factors that disrupted supply chain of company (multiple answers)

**Travel disruptions have declined significantly. Price inflation such as rising labour and raw material costs, however, have a negative impact on more businesses.**



# Companies prioritise overseas markets based on their growth potential, size, and connections to client networks.

## Key Considerations in Selection of Overseas Markets for Expansion



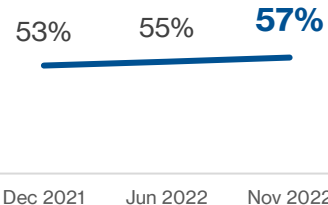
Base: Companies gone overseas or intending to go overseas (n=400)  
Q5c Key considerations when selecting overseas market to expand to (multiple answers)

**Interest in overseas expansions amongst internationalised companies over the next 3 years is increasing steadily. Over 10% of businesses with no overseas markets intend to internationalise over the same period.**

### Plan to expand to new markets in the next 3 years

#### Companies with Overseas Businesses

57% have plans to expand further to new markets within the next 3 years.

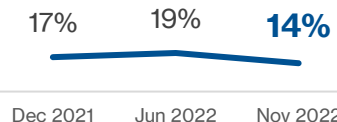


Base: All companies with overseas businesses (n=354)

Q2b Does your company have any plans to expand to new markets outside of Singapore in the future?

#### Companies without Overseas Businesses

14% of businesses that have not gone overseas, plan to do so within the next 3 years.



Base: All companies without overseas businesses (n=332)

Q2b Does your company have any plans to expand to new markets outside of Singapore in the future?

# ASEAN is the most important region for internationalisation for Singapore companies, followed by Asia ex-ASEAN.

## Regions that companies have existing operations in

Nov 2022 Jun 2022 Dec 2021

	Nov 2022	Jun 2022	Dec 2021		Nov 2022	Jun 2022	Dec 2021
ASEAN	79% (-3%)	81%	82%		63% (-5%)	66%	68%
Asia Ex-ASEAN	67% (-1%)	69%	68%		44% (-9%)	46%	53%
Oceania	24% (-2%)	23%	26%		21% (+3%)	20%	18%
Americas	25% (-)	24%	25%		20% (+3%)	18%	17%
Europe	22% (-2%)	24%	24%		26% (+5%)	18%	21%
Middle East & Africa	23% (-1%)	24%	24%		20% (-2%)	22%	23%

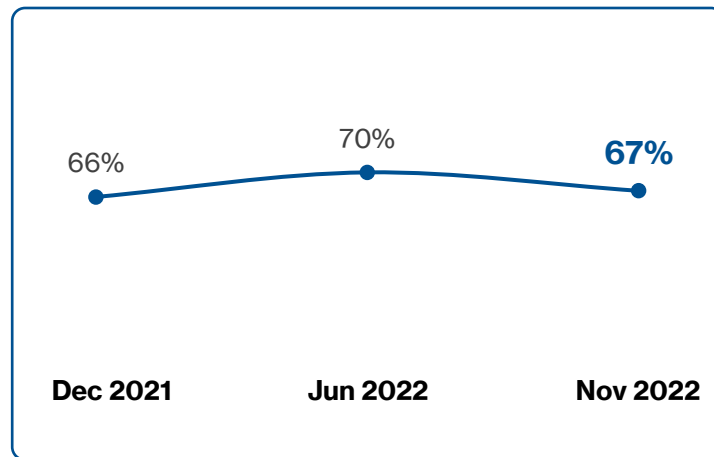
Base: Companies gone overseas (n=354)  
Q3a Which of these markets do you currently do business in?

Base: Companies intending to go overseas (n=247)  
Q3b Which of these markets do you plan to expand your business to in the next 36 months?



# In spite of the prolonged challenges from the pandemic, Singapore businesses continue to see the need to internationalise.

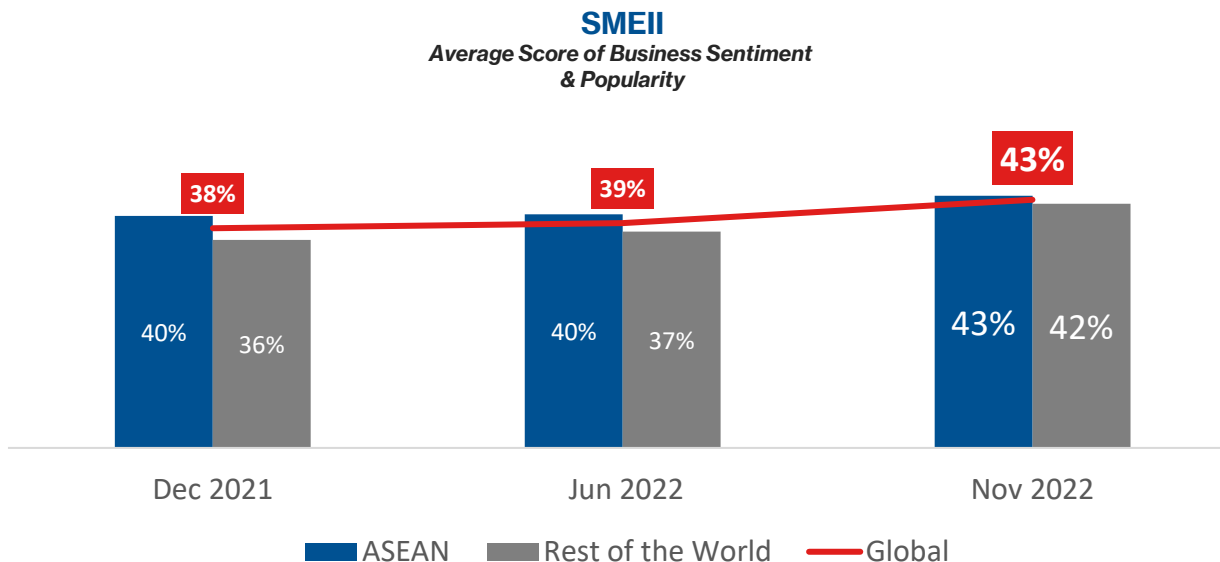
**67% Agree\*** that  
“The Singapore market is too small,  
internationalisation is the way to grow the  
business”



\* Rated 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale

Base: Companies gone overseas or intending to go overseas (n=400)  
A1 To what extent do you agree / disagree with the following statements? Please give a rating from 7 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).

**SMEII has been trending upward since December 2021, along with the progressive reopening of economies. The improvement in sentiments is somewhat more pronounced outside of ASEAN.**



**Average Score of Business Sentiment & Popularity**

**Business Sentiment:** Average percentage of respondents who indicated Strongly Agree / Agree to business sentiment statements Q6a-Q6f Ratings of statements on Infrastructure, Skills, Diversity, Business Environment & Regulations, Trade & Investment, and Business Confidence


















**Popularity:** Percentage of businesses that are already in or intend to go into specific markets

Q3 Specific markets that businesses are already in / intend to enter  
Base: Companies gone overseas or intending to go overseas (n=400)

Since Dec 2021, majority of markets have seen continuous sentiment improvements with the progressive reopening of economies. Rating for China has not improved due to its COVID-19 policy.

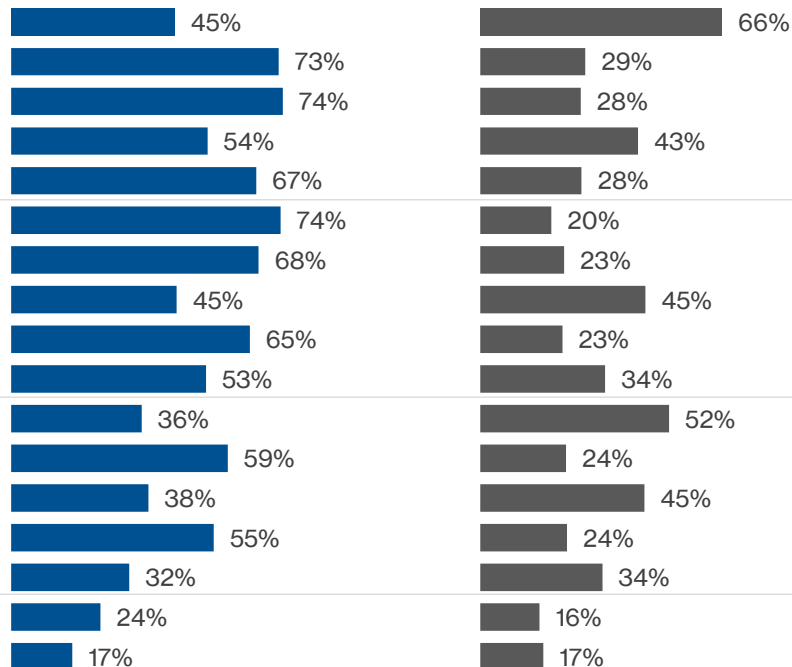
## SMEII

Average Score of Business Sentiment & Popularity

	Nov 2022	Jun 2022	Dec 2021
	%	%	%
Malaysia 	55 (+4)	52	51
Australia 	51 (+10)	46	41
Hong Kong 	51 (+2)	45	49
China 	48 (-)	45	48
USA 	47 (+8)	44	39
United Kingdom 	47 (+11)	46	36
UAE 	45 (+9)	33	36
Thailand 	45 (+3)	40	42
Japan 	44 (+6)	42	38
India 	44 (+13)	32	31
Indonesia 	44 (+4)	42	40
South Korea 	41 (+8)	40	33
Vietnam 	41 (+2)	38	39
Taiwan 	40 (+8)	35	32
Philippines 	33 (-)	33	33
Cambodia 	20 (+5)	13	15
Myanmar 	17 (+3)	15	14

## Business Sentiment

## Popularity



Average percentage of respondents who indicated Strongly Agree / Agree to business sentiment statements  
Q6a-Q6f Ratings of statements on Infrastructure, Skills, Diversity, Business Environment & Regulations, Trade & Investment, and Business Confidence

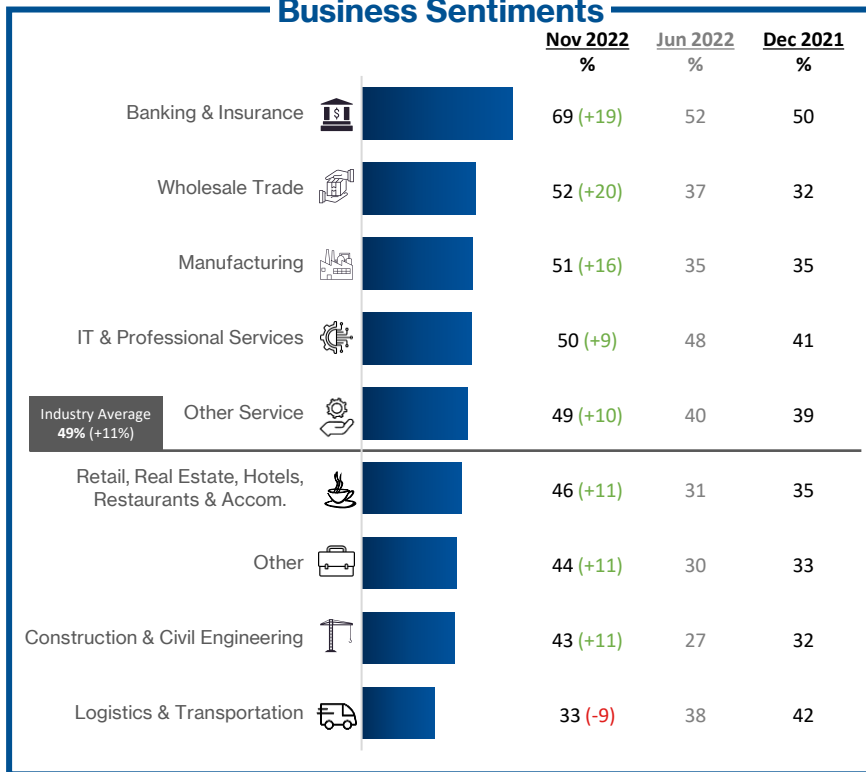
Percentage of businesses that are already in or intend to go into specific markets  
Q3 Specific markets that businesses are already in / intend to enter

( ) Compared with December 2021

Base:  
Companies  
gone overseas  
or intending to  
go overseas  
(n=400)

# Most industry sectors experienced significant boost in business sentiment ratings as economies reopen, reflecting businesses' improved outlook.

## Business Sentiments



( ) Compared with December 2021

The increase in sentiments is more pronounced in **Banking & Insurance, Wholesale Trade, Manufacturing, and IT & Professional Services.**

Sentiments in **Logistics & Transportation** continue to trend down since Dec 2021. This sector faces a greater impact from price inflation and have lower business optimism.



Base: Companies gone overseas or intending to go overseas (n=400)  
Q6a-Q6f Ratings of statements on Infrastructure, Skills, Diversity, Business Environment & Regulations, Trade & Investment, and Business Confidence (% of respondents who indicated Strongly Agree / Agree)

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# Introduction

2

2.1

Executive Summary

2.2

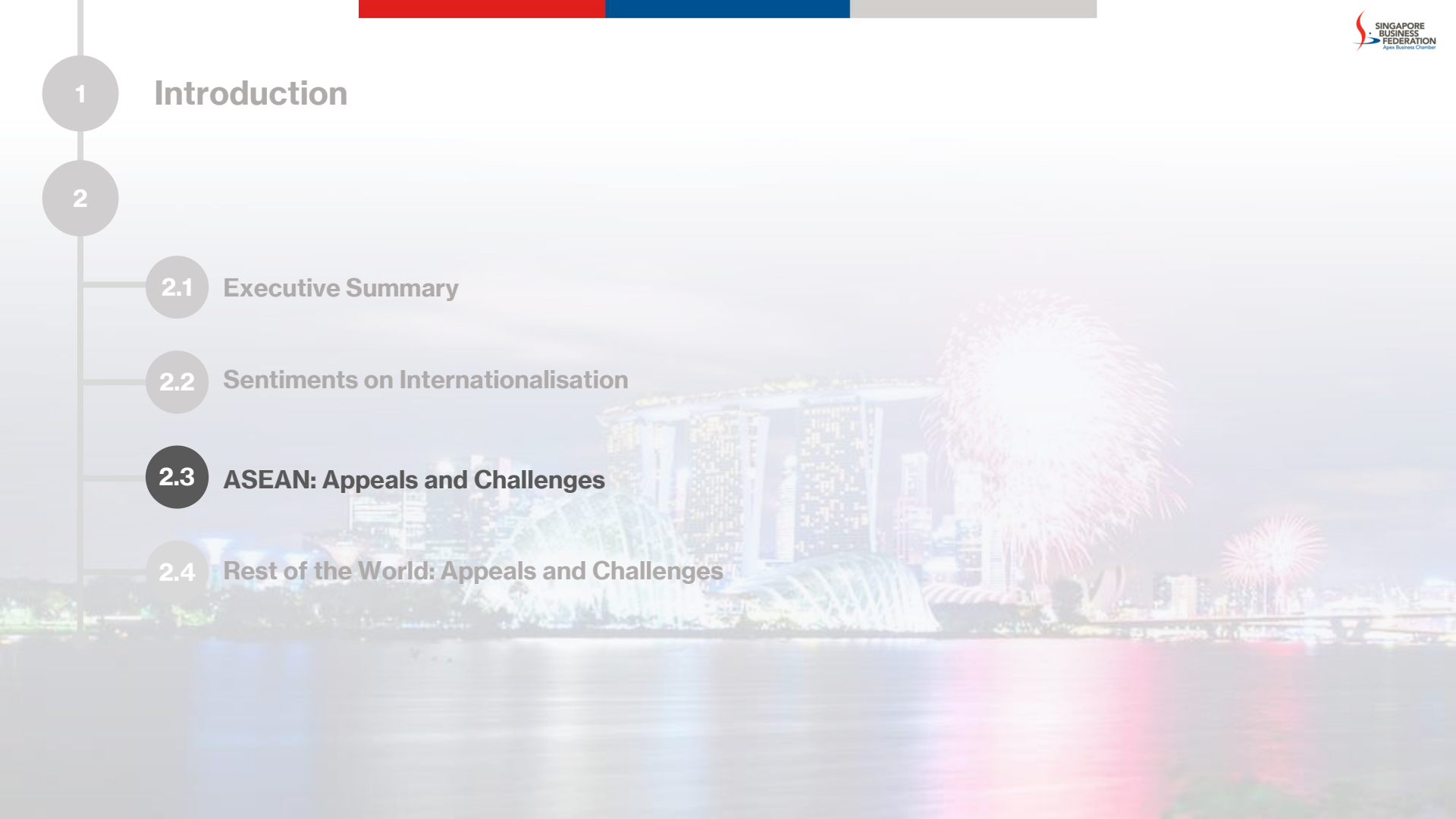
Sentiments on Internationalisation

2.3

**ASEAN: Appeals and Challenges**

2.4

Rest of the World: Appeals and Challenges



# ASEAN's Top 10 Internationalisation Appeals



## Market Potential

Strong market growth potential	89%
Manageable cost of running business	87%
Diverse Pools of potential customers / buyers	85%
Strong confidence in the economic growth	80%



## Trade Infrastructure

Reliable utilities	82%
Affordable digital infrastructure	79%
Well-developed logistics & distribution network	78%
Well-developed digital infrastructure	77%



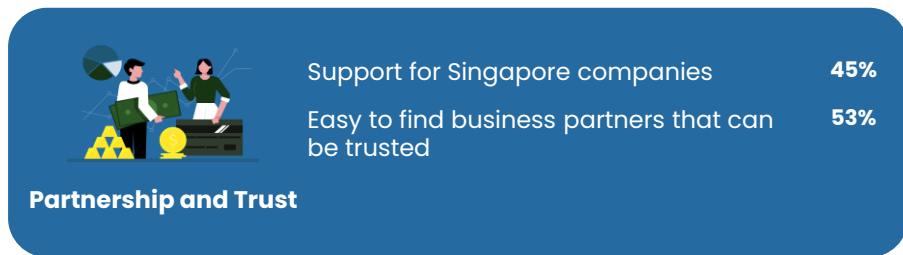
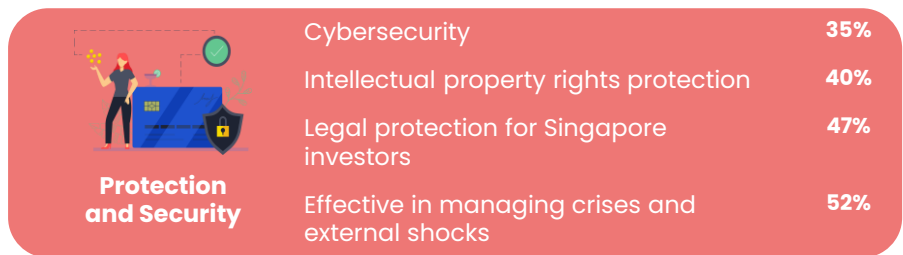
## Market Readiness

Workforce receptive to upskilling	79%
Foreigner-friendly	79%

**Singapore businesses are drawn to the ASEAN region because of its market potential, trade infrastructure, and market readiness.**

Base: n=318 (all companies rated on ASEAN markets)  
Q6a-Q6f Ratings of statements on Infrastructure, Skills, Diversity, Business Environment & Regulations, Trade & Investment, and Business Confidence (% of respondents who indicated agreement)

# ASEAN's Top 10 Internationalisation Challenges



**Singapore companies doing business in the region see dealing with trade policy and regulations, legal protection, cybersecurity, and identifying trusted partnerships as challenges.**



Base: n=318 (all companies rated on ASEAN markets)  
Q6a-Q6f Ratings of statements on Infrastructure, Skills, Diversity, Business Environment & Regulations, Trade & Investment, and Business Confidence (% of respondents who indicated agreement)

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# Introduction

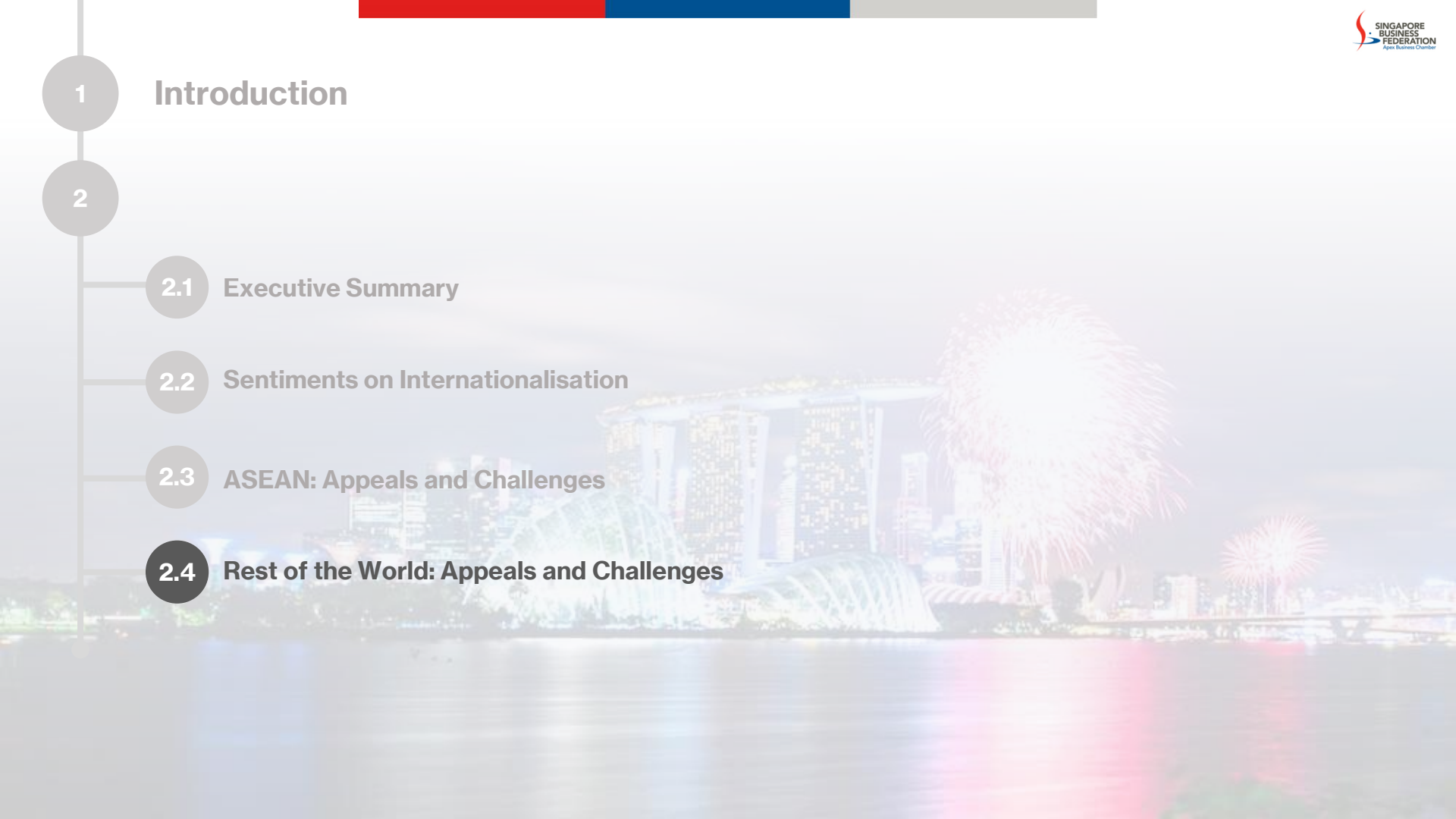
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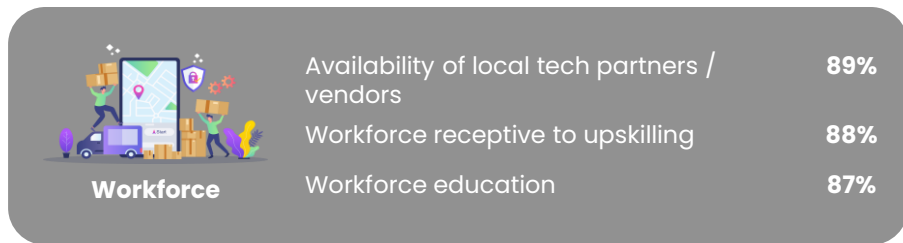
2.3 ASEAN: Appeals and Challenges

2.4 Rest of the World: Appeals and Challenges





# Rest of the World's Top 10 Internationalisation Appeals



**Singapore businesses are drawn to the rest of the world because of its trade infrastructure, market potential, and workforce.**

Base: n=223 (all companies rated on markets in the Rest of the World)  
Q6a-Q6f Ratings of statements on Infrastructure, Skills, Diversity, Business Environment & Regulations, Trade & Investment, and Business Confidence (% of respondents who indicated agreement)

# Rest of the World's Top 10 Internationalisation Challenges



## Trade Financing & Support

Support for Singapore companies	56%
Easy access to credit / financing	64%
Government support for upskilling	70%



## Trade Regulations, Protection

Predictable regulations & legislations	65%
Legal protection for Singapore investors	68%
Intellectual property rights protection	70%



## Trade Barriers

Easy to bring in overseas talents	62%
Easy to repatriate capital / profit from the market	65%
Low level of non-trade barriers	67%
Low level of tariffs / trade barriers	71%

**The key challenges for Singapore companies in the rest of the world are access to support and financing, dealing with trade regulations, and trade barriers.**

Base: n=223 (all companies rated on markets in the Rest of the World)  
Q6a-Q6f Ratings of statements on Infrastructure, Skills, Diversity, Business Environment & Regulations, Trade & Investment, and Business Confidence (% of respondents who indicated agreement)



# Thank you

