

Singapore fertility rate falls to record low

AFP, 17 January 2011



AFP/File – Singapore's fertility rate slumped to a new low in 2010, meaning the city-state must keep bringing ...

SINGAPORE (AFP) – Singapore's fertility rate slumped to a new low in 2010, meaning the city-state must keep bringing in foreign workers to support economic growth as the population ages, a senior cabinet official said Monday.

The resident fertility rate -- or number of babies born per woman per year -- dipped to 1.16 last year, down from the previous record low of 1.22 in 2009, said Deputy Prime Minister Wong Kan Seng.

The rate is well below the 2.1 babies needed for the population to replenish itself naturally.

"The key hurdle to achieving a sustainable population lies in our weak local fertility rate," said Wong, who also oversees a body that coordinates population policies.

"For more than 30 years, we have not been having enough babies to replace ourselves," he said in a speech to a forum organised by the Institute of Policy Studies.

While the government has pledged to put the interests of Singaporeans first, the country needs to continue employing foreign workers, Wong Deputy Prime Minister Kan Seng said.

He said the government would continue encouraging couples to produce more children, but admitted that raising the fertility rate would take time.

"For the foreseeable future, we will need to tap on immigration to augment our population, to support economic growth and to mitigate the impact of ageing," he said.

Singapore has for years rolled out the welcome mat for foreign workers, whose numbers rose drastically during the economic boom from 2004 to 2007.

But after the 2008 global financial crisis, the government took a fresh look at its open-door policy following complaints from citizens that foreigners were increasingly competing for jobs, housing, medical care and even for space on metro trains.