

Worker migration 'better way to boost population' **Raising fertility is a much slower method: academics**

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IMMIGRATION of foreign workers is essential if Singapore wants its population to grow, said academics at a session on population and urban planning at the Singapore Perspectives 2008 conference yesterday.

Assuming fertility rises but there is no net immigration into Singapore, the country's population would be about 4.77 million in 2030, according to projections by Yap Mui Teng and G Shantakumar of the Institute of Policy Studies.

It is only by assuming net immigration of 30,000 workers per annum or more by which Singapore will manage to increase its population to over six million by then.

'Raising fertility is a much slower way of increasing the population than net migration,' said Dr Yap.

Migration will mitigate the burden on the working population, which will have to support a higher number of children and elderly dependants.

By 2030, some 66 per cent of Singapore's population could be aged between 15 and 64, the so-called 'working ages', down from over 70 per cent in 2010, said Dr Yap.

About 19 per cent of the population could be over 65 years of age, and another 15 per cent could be below the age of 15.

This means that the number of workers per elderly person would fall from 8.3 in 2010 to 3.5 in 2030, she said.

However, a larger proportion of migrants will lead to other issues. Singapore's future population base will not be homogenous, said Malone-Lee Lai Choo from the National University of Singapore.

Urban planners will have to deal not only with 'quantitative' issues, like how many homes or roads the country needs, but will also need to accommodate different values, lifestyles and choices.

With more migrants, there may also be a more transient population, with some owning homes here even if they work elsewhere. The question will be how to provide for them without wasting resources or land, Dr Malone-Lee said.

While a few in the audience questioned the need to even grow the population to over six million, Dr Malone-Lee said the key issue was not the actual number of people but how to manage 'excessive consumerism' and 'waste'.