

Low fertility rate, no immigration will lead to S'pore's population decline

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SINGAPORE: Singapore's resident population will decline and become extremely aged if the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is extremely low and if there is no immigration.

This is according to a landmark study on future population growth and change for Singapore published on Wednesday by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS).

The study produced four population scenarios based on varying TFR and immigration levels.

The study said with TFR at 1.24 births per woman and zero net migration, Singapore's population will decline to 3.03 million in 2050.

With 30,000 migrants added annually, the population projection is 4.89 million in 2050.

And with 60,000 migrants added annually, the population projection is 6.76 million in 2050.

The study also looked at a situation where TFR can be raised to 1.85 births per woman by 2025 with no new immigration. With such a scenario, the study said population size can still only hit 3.37 million in 2050.

The ratio of working people (between the ages of 15-64) to the elderly will also decrease. For instance, with low fertility and 30,000 new residents a year, the ratio drops from 8.6 in 2005, to 2.7 in 2050.

A key conclusion obtained from the study is that without immigration, the total population will decline, even if Singapore's total fertility rate rises from the current 1.15 to 1.85. The number of working people available to support each elderly person is also set to drop in all the scenarios.

However, Dr Yap Mui Teng, who is a senior research fellow at Institute of Policy Studies, said immigration can reduce the dependency burden.

Dr Yap said: "Under the scenario with higher net migration, there will be more people of working ages to support each elderly, compared to the scenario with low migration or scenarios with zero net migration."

Amid growing concerns from the ground about overcrowding and stiffer competition from foreign labour, some asked if population growth is absolutely necessary and how much is enough.

Associate Professor Paulin-Tay Straughan from the National University of Singapore said it is important for the government to determine how much population growth is needed to ensure a balance between a vibrant economy and the social health of society.

She said: "That's why these projections are so important. For us to understand how the projections are made, so that as a community together, we agree that these are the opportunity costs we're willing to accept because we all want to strive for this quality of life."

The government had earlier said it does not target a specific population size.

The study also projected that there will be fewer young people in Singapore if fertility rate remains low. The number of young people under 14 years of age will go down by more than half from 699,000 in 2005 to 274,400 by 2050.