Singapore's population growth slowest in 10 years

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Singapore: The Republic's population grew 1.3 per cent between June 2013 and June 2014 - its slowest rate of growth in the last 10 years, according to figures released by the National Population and Talent Division (NPTD) on Thursday (Sep 25).

In actual figures, Singapore's total population was 5.47 million as of June, up from 5.4 million a year ago, the NPTD said in its annual Population in Brief report.

The citizen population grew 0.9 per cent to 3.34 million, similar to last year's growth rate, while the Permanent Resident (PR) population stood at 527,700, down from 531,200 the year before.

The Government plans to continue taking in between 15,000 and 25,000 new citizens each year to keep the citizen population from shrinking, the NPTD report said. To keep the PR population stable, it will grant about 30,000 PRs each year.

Making up the population numbers is an issue of quality as well as quantity, noted Associate Professor Tan Ern Ser, who heads the Social Lab at the Institute of Policy Studies. "I think we have to be concerned that the people we bring in have the qualities and skills needed by the kind of jobs that we have," he said.

"In some sectors it is not just about whether they will bring competition among Singaporeans but also do we have enough people in the first place? Even when we add in Singaporeans, do we even have enough people to service those kind of jobs and industries?"

Measures taken by the Government to mitigate the inflow of foreign manpower saw the growth for the non-resident population slowing to 2.9 per cent, down from 4 per cent the previous year. As of June, there were 1.6 million non-residents in Singapore, up from 1.55 million a year ago.

Foreign employment growth, mainly driven by the construction sector, continues to slow down - it is 3 per cent, compared to nearly 6 per cent the previous year and a peak of 8 per cent between 2011 and 2012.

"We don't expect the Government to relax the foreign workforce policy, especially for the non-construction sector. This is with the view to force the businesses to restructure their production process to raise their productivity," said Associate Professor Tan Khee Giap, Co-Director of the Asia Competitiveness Institute at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

This is in line with the latest policy to ensure Singaporeans and PRs are benefiting from Placed-and-Train programme, he said. "If this scheme is successful then it can help to mitigate the restrictive foreign workforce policy. Singaporeans and PRs are being encouraged to work in sectors with higher productivity, through on-the-job training or internships while they are in polytechnic or even university."

More elderly, fewer babies

Singaporeans are living longer, with the number of citizens aged 65 years old and above rising from 11.7 per cent last year to 12.4 per cent in 2014.

The report also found that there are fewer working citizens to support the growing number of elderly. There are currently 5.2 working citizens for each elderly person, down from 7.6 in 2004.

Fewer Singaporeans got married, with the number of marriages involving at least one citizen decreasing from 23,192 in 2012 to 21,842 in 2013. The median age at first marriage has remained stable for both genders, with men getting married at the median age of 30.1 and women at 27.8.

Fewer babies were born, with the resident total fertility rate dipping from 1.29 in 2012 to 1.19 last year. The decline was seen across all ethnic groups, with Chinese experiencing the largest decline, the report said.