

Population up but PR numbers down Report shows ageing population, more singles

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Singapore's population has risen to 5.18 million as of June – an expansion of 2.1 per cent or 107,000 since June last year – due to an increase in the number of citizens and foreigners. This was revealed in the Population Trends 2011 report released by the Department of Statistics Singapore yesterday.

However, there was a 1.7 per cent drop in the number of permanent residents (PRs) here to 532,000 from 541,000 last year.

It comes in the wake of PR numbers growing 1.5 per cent last year, and at least 6 per cent each year between 2005 and 2009.

Another report released by the National Population and Talent Division yesterday attributed the drop in PR numbers to immigration policy.

The report said: "Due to the tightened immigration framework, the growth in our PR population has slowed significantly since 2010.

"This has contributed to the slower growth of our resident population, from 1 per cent in 2010 to 0.5 per cent in 2011."

Recently, the Government also upped perks offered to citizens and scaled back on benefits for PRs.

Last year, the Ministry of Health announced cuts to health-care subsidies for PRs.

From July this year, PRs get subsidies of up to 60 per cent for Class C wards, while citizens get subsidies of up to 80 per cent.

In 2009, it was announced that PRs will have to pay three times more for school fees than citizens by next year.

The report also said that the number of citizens grew by 0.8 per cent between last year and this year, to the current size of 3.26 million citizens.

Dr Leong Chan Hoong, a research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, pointed out that the rise could be due to PRs converting their status to citizenship.

He said: "The Government has clearly said that it was going to re-calibrate the inflow of PRs, since 2009. At the same time, the Government has been encouraging PRs, who are eligible, to take up citizenship and sink their roots here."

According to the report, there are 1.39 million non-residents, or foreigners, here. The growth in the number of non-residents was 6.9 per cent this year, down from the peaks of 15 per cent in 2007 and 19 per cent in 2008.

The report reflected two worrying trends that the Government has been trying to deal with – Singapore's ageing population and a growing number of singles.

Reflecting the ageing population, the proportion of Singapore residents aged 45 years and over has expanded. The median age of the resident population rose from 37.4 years last year to 38 years this year.

There was also a drop in the ratio of working-age residents, aged 15 to 64 years, to elderly residents, aged 65 years and over. This year, there are 7.9 working-age residents for each elderly resident, down from 8.2 residents last year.

The number of singles is on the rise, too, making up 32 per cent of the population last year, up from 30 per cent in 2000.

Over the same period, the proportion of singles increased among younger males and females.

Among those aged 25 to 29 years, 75 per cent of the males and 54 per cent of the females were single last year, up from 64 per cent and 40 per cent respectively in 2000.