

## The Population Conundrum: Roundtable on Singapore's Demographic Challenges, 3 May 2012

### Summary Report

By IPS Demography and Family Cluster

The Roundtable discussion was organised by the Institute of Policy Studies in collaboration with the Civil Service College, and was focused on Singapore's demographic challenges resulting from declining fertility and mortality rates and issues related to replacement migration. The discussions centred on the potential implications of these demographic trends on Singapore's society and family life, the economy and quality of life.



The roundtable was convened at Orchard Hotel on 3 May 2012.



IPS Special Adviser Prof Tommy Koh speaking to roundtable participants.

### **Key Points from the Roundtable:**

1. Singapore is both a city and a country, and policy-makers have to consider not just municipal matters but also those of a nation-state. Singaporeans are not just urban city-dwellers, but are also citizens whose perceptions of social equity and the quality of life play a critical role in shaping political identity.
2. Diminishing marginal returns from an input-led growth model requires a shift in orientation towards higher productivity of land, labour and capital. Even in the population scenario with the highest population size and foreigner-to-resident ratio, future growth in the labour force would only be at a 0.9% compound annual growth rate (CAGR), well below Singapore's historic rates of labour force growth.
3. A more calibrated approach to in-migration is required, with a preference for in-migrants possessing skills and capabilities lacking in the Singapore economy.
4. Public policy needs to reflect not just the economic impact of in-migrants and foreign labour, but also incorporate the social costs and implications on overall societal well-being.
5. There is a need to think "outside-the-box" in dealing with societal and family issues such as delayed marriage and low fertility rates. In addition to financial incentives,

there also has to be genuine and sincere re-writing of the social compact between workers, employers and the government in establishing a better work-life balance. Reforming work-place and schooling practices would help to achieve the desired outcome of work-life balance.

6. Given land constraints in Singapore, there is a pressing need to improve the education system to groom the right talent for a knowledge-based economy that is less land and labour intensive. This would create a more liveable environment.

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Roundtable speakers and participants included (from top to bottom, left to right): Dr Hoon Hian Teck, Mr Yeoh Lam Keong, Dr Shandre Thangavelu, Dr Toh Mun Heng, Dr Ho Kong Chong, Dr Heng Chye Kiang, Dr Malone-Lee Lai Choo, Dr Liu Thai-Ker, Dr Chang Youngho, Dr Paul Cheung, Dr Tilak Abeysinghe, Dr Lai Ah Eng and Dr Paulin Straughan

Watch a video presentation of IPS population projections and find more information on this event at: [http://www.spp.nus.edu.sg/ips/RT\\_Singapore\\_Demographic\\_Challenges\\_030512.aspx](http://www.spp.nus.edu.sg/ips/RT_Singapore_Demographic_Challenges_030512.aspx)

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