

## **Foreigner numbers mirror economic figures**

### **Census data also shows PRs are having fewer babies than citizens**

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The just-released Census 2010 shows that over the past 10 years, Singapore's population trends have followed economic ones.

The number of non-residents - those who are neither citizens nor permanent residents (PRs) - responded the fastest and most drastically to economic change.

When the economy did well, their numbers grew quickly. From June 2007 to June 2008, for instance, they contributed 4.2 percentage points to the 5.5 per cent total population growth over the period.

When the economy faltered, the flow of non-residents into the country slowed.

Between June 2001 and June 2002, when the economy plunged following the Sept 11 terror attacks in the United States, there was an outflow of non-residents even though the total population increased by 0.9 per cent.

These population shifts may reassure Singaporeans who worry about the influx of foreigners, a contentious issue in recent years.

The Census data show that the number of PRs has been growing at a steady pace over the last decade.

There was a sharp spike from June 2008 to June 2009.

But it fell equally sharply from June 2009 to June last year, the plunge coming soon after the onset of the global economic crisis.

Overall, the Census showed that Singapore's population grew by 26 per cent over the last decade, numbering 5.08 million as of June last year.

The number of citizens grew by 8 per cent to 3.2 million - two-thirds of the total population.

Among the non-citizens, the number of PRs grew by 88 per cent to 541,000.

The number of those who are non-citizens and non-PRs increased by 73 per cent to 1.3 million.

The Census is conducted by the Government every 10 years. Yesterday's release, the first of a series, gave figures on education, language, religion and demographic characteristics.

Among the findings: The influx of PRs helped to bolster Singapore's ageing population.

The majority of PRs fall into the working age bracket of 20 to 50. The number of PRs in this age range has also increased over the decade, helping to make up for the corresponding dip in citizens of working age.

PRs also tend to be better-educated. Almost half of the PR population last year were degree holders, compared with 18 per cent of citizens.

But one worrying trend surfaced: PRs are having fewer babies than citizens across all age groups.

Among those aged 30 to 39, PRs had an average of 1.38 children last year, less than the citizen average of 1.55.

In keeping with a nationwide trend, PRs also had fewer children last year compared with 10 years ago.

This could mean that while PRs are making up for Singapore's ageing population in the immediate future, they may end up adding to the country's ageing woes in the long run.

Dr Gillian Koh of the Institute of Policy Studies, however, thinks this may not necessarily be the case.

The low birth rate among PRs is not surprising because many of them possess the professional, highly educated profile that Singapore wants to attract, she explained.

'They would thus have the outlook and mindset towards family life we typically associate with such people.

'If that's the case, being of high talent and high net worth compared to everyone else means they should also be able to provide for themselves when they're old,' noted Dr Koh.

While Singapore must prepare for a new paradigm where the elderly can provide for themselves because they are better-educated and work to an older age, the flow of PRs and new citizens will bolster the current generation of ageing Singaporeans, she added.

The Census also shows that the influx has made Singapore a more diverse society over the decade.

The proportion of residents born outside Singapore has grown.

Among these, the proportion of residents born in Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka shows a significant increase.

The proportion of Indian residents has also grown by 1.3 percentage points to 9.2 per cent. It has also grown more diverse.

The Tamil dialect group shrank by 4 percentage points to 54.2 per cent, while the 'others' dialect group grew by 4.3 percentage points to 29.1 per cent.

Two forthcoming Census releases will cover households and housing, and geographic distribution and transport.