

More realise benefits of foreign talent, but worry about cohesiveness

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More young people in Singapore feel that the country has benefited from the presence of foreign talent, according to newly released research findings.

An Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) survey in 2016 found that 62.5 per cent of 19-to 30-year-olds believe skilled workers who come here from other countries have contributed to Singapore's development, compared with 45.4 per cent in 2010.

Young Singaporeans also feel that they have greater access to job opportunities and other forms of social resources - such as schemes under self-help groups like Sinda, the Chinese Development Assistance Council and Mendaki - as compared with foreign talent.

"But on the other hand, they also feel that Singaporeans shoulder more social responsibilities compared with foreign talent, so it is a bit of a mixed bag," IPS research associate Debbie Soon, who was part of the three-member research team, said of the findings released yesterday.

Mr Daniel Soh, managing partner of executive headhunting firm Leadership Advisory Inc, said workers from overseas bring expertise or international experience that is not readily available locally.

"Singapore's strong reputation for providing a quality lifestyle and safe living environment is a major draw for foreign talent to accept a working assignment here, without the need for lavish expat packages," he explained.

Ms Wendy Baker, business development and engagement partner of talent consulting firm ICE Asia, pointed out that work visas, including renewals, are becoming more difficult to obtain in Singapore.

There was a rise in the proportion of respondents who viewed the presence of foreign talent as having a negative impact on societal cohesiveness here, from 38.9 per cent to 48 per cent.

They also expressed increased scepticism about the long-term commitment of immigrants.

Mr Soh said most foreigners, especially those with families and young children, typically spend at least five to 10 years here.

Those who are single and more mobile may simply go where there are better opportunities.

"These opportunities have to be very compelling, otherwise, most foreign talent would prefer to continue their career in Singapore," he said.

Ms Baker added that while there are foreigners who stay for the minimum contract period agreed upon with their employers before leaving for another country, there are those who

enjoy living in Singapore and stay here for longer, adapting to the culture and often meeting and marrying a local along the way.

The survey was conducted from June to November 2016 involving 2,013 participants aged 19 to 30.

A similar study was conducted in 2010.