

Singapore's population grows at slowest pace in a decade

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The Straits Times, 28 September 2017

If Singapore does not seem more crowded these days, that is because the total population hardly grew in the 12 months since June last year .

It expanded by a mere 0.1 per cent - or about 5,000 - to 5.61 million, the slowest growth rate in more than a decade.

In contrast, the total population - which includes residents and non-residents - in the decade before 2017 expanded by an average of 2.45 per cent each year.

The chief reason for the snail-paced growth is the decrease in the number of Work Permit holders.

As a result, the non-resident population shrank by 1.6 per cent to 1.65 million, the first drop in 14 years.

The fall in the number of Work Permit holders is due to the slowdown in two sectors - construction, and marine and offshore engineering - the National Population and Talent Division said in its annual Population in Brief report, which was released yesterday.

Non-residents consist of Work Permit holders, Employment and S Pass holders, foreign students, foreign maids and other dependants.

Dr Mathew Mathews of the Institute of Policy Studies said the reduced number of non-residents reflects "the tightening of the inflow of migrants", and is in line with government attempts to nudge industries to raise productivity "rather than just rely on additional labour".

He added that in the longer term, it is important to consider if "there is sufficient quality foreign manpower that can be injected into the Singaporean labour force".

"It is always a question of balancing the needs of a robust economy with sufficient manpower and ensuring a Singaporean core is not compromised," he said.

Associate Professor Tan Ern Ser of the National University of Singapore said if the fall in Work Permit holders is due to industries transforming and relying less on foreign labour, "then it may be good news for those who are unhappy about the large proportion of migrant labour in Singapore".

Meanwhile, Singapore's citizen population continues to age.

The proportion of Singaporeans aged 65 and older rose to 14.4 per cent, from 13.7 per cent in 2016.

Citizen births remained stable.

It fell in 2016 by 1.7 per cent to 33,167, after a record high in 2015 that experts attributed to the SG50 feel-good effect. Still, the 2016 figure is higher than the average of 32,200 in the past 10 years.

On the whole, the citizen population grew by 0.9 per cent to 3.44 million, owing to citizen births and immigration, the report said.

The breakdown of citizens by ethnicity did not change from a year ago: 76.1 per cent Chinese, 15 per cent Malay, 7.4 per cent Indian and 1.5 per cent other races.

The permanent resident population stayed flat at 527,000.

Citizen marriages - or marriages involving at least one citizen - rose marginally last year to 23,873. Of these, 36 per cent were between a citizen and a non-citizen, down from 41 per cent in 2010.

Citizen marriages involving two races stood at 21 per cent in 2016, the same as in 2015 but significantly higher than 10 years earlier, when it was 15 per cent.