

Views on birth rates, foreign inflows sought

Public input will go towards White Paper to formulate policy for future

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SINGAPOREANS' opinions are being sought on various aspects of the population puzzle, with the Government looking to tap the public's ideas as it works on coming up with a policy for the future.

Over the next three months, they are being invited to send their thoughts on issues from raising birth rates and strengthening cohesion to managing foreign worker inflows and getting more Singaporeans into the workforce.

In a paper titled *Our Population, Our Future* released yesterday, the National Population and Talent Division (NPTD) sets out Singapore's demographic challenges, and proceeds to ask the public to submit input on some 15 questions.

Taken together, they reveal the dilemmas that policymakers face when addressing different aspects of the population puzzle.

Background story

ACKNOWLEDGE IDEAS

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- Nee Soon GRC MP Lee Bee

For example, one notes that the Government has cut the inflow of immigrants since 2009, and asks: 'Should we reduce the inflow further even if it means that our citizen population will age and shrink, and foreign spouses may find it more difficult to become permanent residents or Singapore citizens?'

Another asks: 'If the foreign worker inflow is to be tightened, which group should be targeted - construction workers, maids, professionals, Singaporeans' foreign spouses, or others?'

The feedback will go towards a government White Paper on population expected to be ready at the end of the year, said the NPTD.

Members of the public have until Oct 31 to send in their views at www.population.sg

The division has met close to 200 people including students and those from the community sector, businesses and unions to get their input, and will continue to do this through dialogues.

Political observers say the latest move to collect feedback is a sign that the Government understands the importance of population issues to Singaporeans - especially with immigration being a hot-button topic.

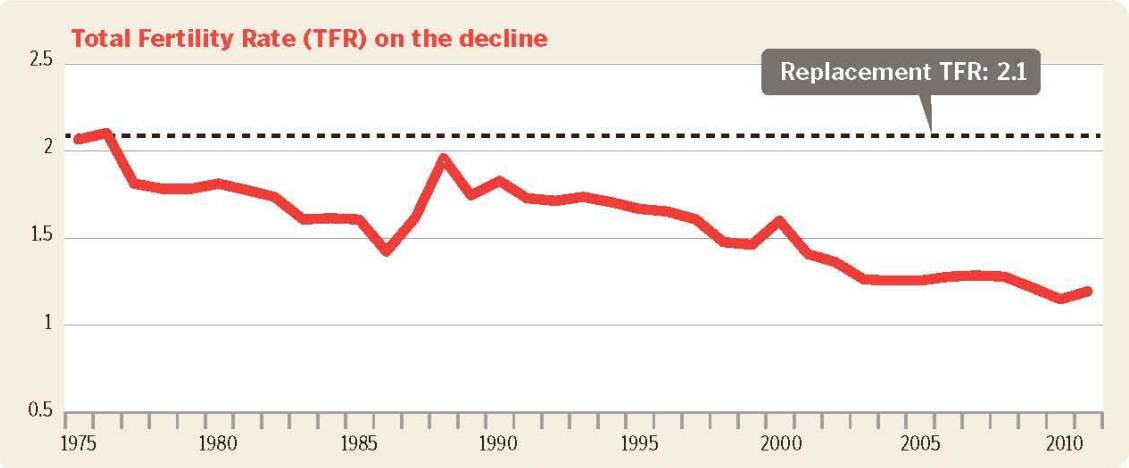
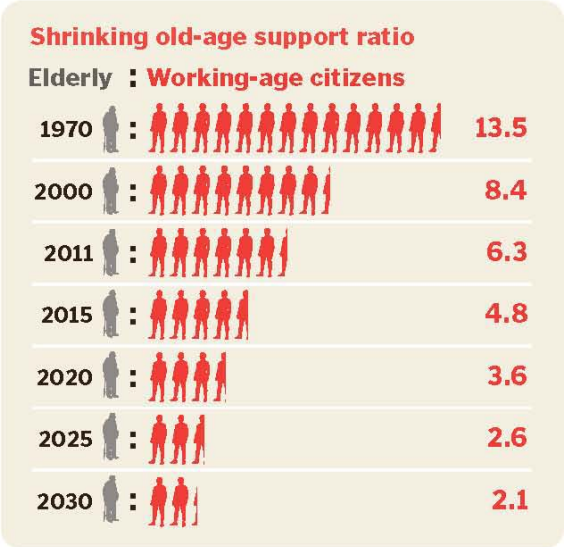
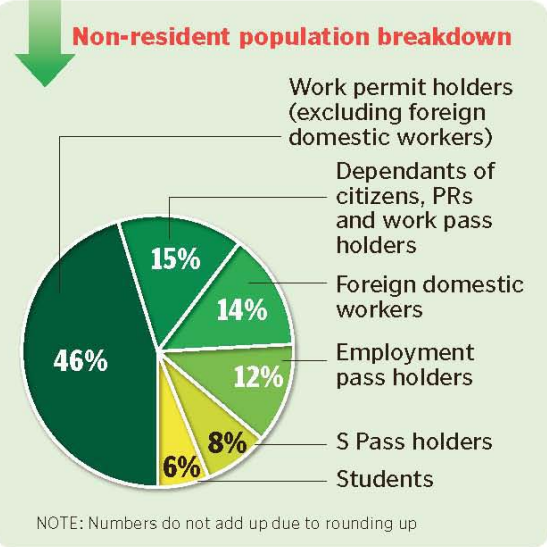
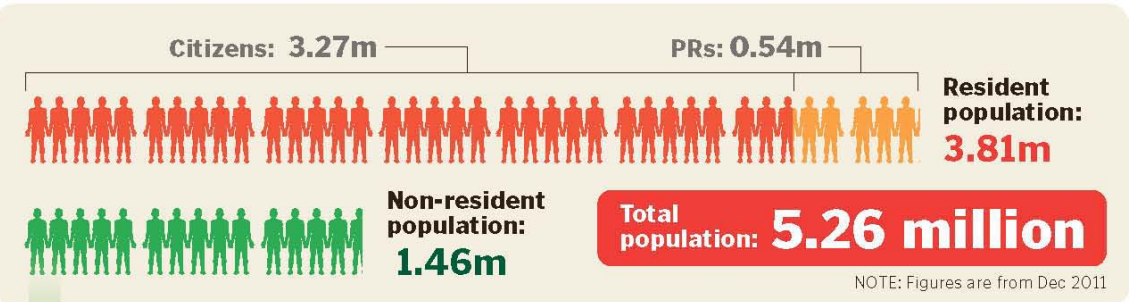
Institute of Policy Studies research fellow Carol Soon said: 'The Government could consolidate key suggestions and constructive criticisms and publish them on the website, as well as the Government's responses to these feedback.'

Nee Soon GRC MP Lee Bee Wah, who has already circulated the call for feedback on her Facebook page, believes that Singaporeans would welcome being asked for their views.

'Once the Government has decided which ideas it is going to adopt, it should acknowledge them so that residents feel good about participating and don't think they're writing into a black hole,' she said.

Agreeing, student Murugiah Komala, 24, said: 'It gets people interested and as people talk, more ideas are bound to get bounced around.'

■ SINGAPORE'S POPULATION IN BRIEF



Sources: DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICS and MINISTRY OF MANPOWER ST GRAPHICS