

Younger, higher-income S'poreans more positive about immigrants

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Younger Singaporeans, as well as naturalised citizens and permanent residents, view immigrants more positively.

Those with higher education, better pay or who live in larger housing types are also more positive about the economic impact of immigrants and immigration.

But they are less so when it comes to the social and cultural implications, according to findings by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) that were released yesterday.

In its study, IPS noted it is not surprising to find that naturalised citizens and PRs have more positive views of immigration and immigrants, given that they were part of this group themselves.

Some 45.1 per cent of Singaporeans were on the fence regarding the impact of immigrants on the country's development - similar to the results in Taiwan, the United States, Sweden and Switzerland.

Naturalised citizens and PRs, as well as younger Singaporeans, were more likely to view the impact positively. They were also more likely to agree that immigrants strengthen cultural diversity.

A total of 60 per cent of those in the youngest group aged 21 to 35 agreed with the statement that immigration helps to fill important job vacancies, compared with 43 per cent of those older than 65.

They were also more likely to agree that immigration offers people from poor countries a better living and asylum to political refugees.

While both the social and economic implications of immigration weigh on people's minds, higher proportions are concerned about the impact on unemployment, said Dr Mathew Mathews, head of the IPS Social Lab. He noted this is more apparent for those who are over 50, and those who are less educated and have lower incomes.

"For these groups, the economic threat weighs more strongly, as they wonder how much more immigration will continue to impact their livelihoods.

"It is inevitable that when people are concerned about immigrants as potential hindrances to their economic well-being, they will also be more antagonistic to them - and it has social implications."

Slightly over 46 per cent of those aged 21 to 35 disagreed with the statement that immigration increases the crime rate, versus less than 36 per cent for each of the other age groups.

Older and locally born citizens wanted stricter limits on the number of foreigners who can enter Singapore. Around half of Singaporeans aged above 50 also believed immigration increased

unemployment for the country, compared with 38.4 per cent of those aged between 21 and 35.

In addition, the study observed a "notable difference" between locally born citizens, and naturalised citizens and PRs, in their views on whether immigrants cause social conflict.

While 40.3 per cent of locally born citizens agreed that immigration leads to social conflict, 29.6 per cent of naturalised citizens and PRs agreed with the same statement.

"This diversity of views when it comes to immigration highlights the need for policymaking to consider potential impacts as well as the population's threshold for immigration in lived spaces," said IPS.

"When it comes to policy preferences vis-a-vis immigration, the majority of Singapore respondents are open to foreigners coming into Singapore, but believe that numbers should be within strict limits enforced by the state."