

A larger, smarter, younger population?

Singapore's population would triple if everyone who wanted to migrate here did so: Gallup study

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Here is some good news for Singapore, which is facing an ageing population and a fierce fight for talent as the global economy recovers.

A Gallup study shows that Singapore is the one country in “developed Asia” that highly-educated and young people would want to settle in, should they have a choice of any country to migrate to.

The study, which was released yesterday, was an extension of an earlier Gallup survey in August which showed that Singapore is the No 1 destination for migrants.

The latest Gallup study said Singapore's overall population would triple if everyone who wanted to move here were allowed to. The total population here was 5.08 million as of end-June. It would also see its population of well-educated people quadruple and the number of young people increase six-fold.

The Gallup study is based on surveys of the migration desires of nearly 350,000 adults in 148 countries between 2007 and early this year. Gallup created three indexes — the Potential Net Migration Index, Potential Net Brain Gain Index, and Potential Net Youth Migration Index — to gauge the likely population changes if people who say they would like to migrate permanently actually moved to the country that they wanted.

The indexes were calculated by subtracting the number of people who said they would like to move out of a country from those who said they wanted to move in.

Well-educated people were defined as those with the equivalent of a bachelor's degree or higher. Youth were defined as those in the 15-29 age bracket.

The higher the index score, the larger the potential net population gain. Negative scores indicate net population loss.

Singapore is the only country in developed Asia — which includes Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan and Taiwan — which posted a positive Potential Net Brain Gain score.

Singapore's population of highly-educated people would increase by a whopping 317 per cent if everyone who wants to migrate to the island did so.

Dr Leong Chan-Hoong, research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, said the Gallup conclusion “regarding the attractiveness of Singapore to the young and the educated is mostly valid”.

"It's indicative of the branding effect and our effort to make Singapore home. Having said this, if you look at the data and the methodology (of the Gallup survey), it's important to keep in mind that Singapore has a small population," Dr Leong added. "Hence, given the small base, it is not surprising that any form of endorsement would have a large swing in percentage or ratio terms as the calculation is done with respect to the population size."

Mr Pan Zaixian, associate director of specialist recruitment consultancy Robert Walters Singapore's financial services and legal division, noted that compared to many other countries, Singapore has an enviable track record, having withstood many crises well over the year.

"For the well-educated, they will also be attracted to a merit-based and financially rewarding tax friendly, low interest rate climate and low corruption environment which are Singapore's strengths. And the more educated people are likely to identify with Singapore's constant strive to reinvent herself," said Mr Pan.