

## **Many new PRs, citizens young, well-qualified**

**Experts note the rising number of Singaporeans marrying foreigners; say spouse, kids should get PR or citizenship**

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SINGAPORE - Immigration statistics revealed by the Government for the first time showed that, between 2007 and last year, the majority of those granted citizenship and permanent residence were not economically active - with the number of dependents outstripping working individuals.

During this period, there were 259,040 new permanent residents (PRs) and 92,310 new citizens. Working individuals accounted for 48 per cent of the new PRs and 38 per cent of the new citizens.

On these statistics, population experts noted the increasing number of Singaporeans marrying foreigners and reiterated that their spouse or children should be granted PR or citizenship.

National University of Singapore sociologist Paulin Straughan told TODAY: "Of course, we should grant them PR and citizenship status as the dependents also supplement the population growth. If we don't do that, Singapore will no longer be family-oriented and no one will want to come here. Singaporeans who marry a foreign spouse will also move out, further impacting the slow population growth that we are already facing."

As for dependents of new PRs and citizens, Institute of Policy Studies researcher Leong Chan-Hoong said it was "only natural" that they seek PR or citizenship after sinking their roots here. While he felt that it is fair to grant them PR or citizenship privileges, proper checks would have to be conducted on their backgrounds for instance, he said.

The new statistics were contained in an issues paper released yesterday by the National Population and Talent Division (NPTD). The paper noted that new PRs and new citizens are "generally young and have good educational qualifications".

It added: "Each PR and Singapore Citizenship application is evaluated holistically on a set of criteria which includes the individual's family ties to Singaporeans, economic contributions, qualifications, age and family profile to assess the applicant's ability to contribute to Singapore and integrate into society and his/her commitment to sinking roots."

With a White Paper on population due to come out at the end of the year, the issues paper aims to set out the Republic's demographic challenges for Singaporeans "to understand the choices and trade-offs" at stake, and seek ideas and views on the formulation of population policies.

The issues paper noted that, given current birthrates and without immigration, there will be just two working adults to one elderly in 2030, down from the ratio of about 6:1 as of last year.

Should PRs and foreigners continue to make up about one-third of the workforce here, the ratio in 2030 could be kept at 4:1 - comparable to the ratios of many developed countries today.

"While foreign workers supplement our resident workforce and contribute to our economy, they do not add to our elderly population. This is because they return to their home countries after their term of employment ends. They also do not draw on Government subsidies designed for residents," the issues paper noted.

As of December last year, foreigners make up 43 per cent of the non-PMET (professionals, managers, executives and technicians) workforce and 21 per cent of the PMET workforce.

Apart from providing businesses with the flexibility to respond to fluctuations in economic conditions, having foreigners to supplement the local workforce would also help to anchor new industries here, the paper added.

NUS sociologist Tan Ern Ser said that, by laying out the facts, Singaporeans can "begin to deal with something concrete, rather than the nebulous ... we can arrive at some 'optimal' figures, rather than speak in fuzzy terms."

Dr Leong suggested that the authorities provide further breakdown of the profiles of the new PRs and new citizens according to their professions - similar to what the United States does - instead of just by educational qualifications. He also suggested that the Government set a population quota or a rate of foreigner influx to better prepare Singaporeans.

An NPTD spokesperson told TODAY that over the next few months, it will continue to engage the public on the topic through various avenues, including dialogues and online channels. Yesterday, it also launched the population.sg website, where the public can read the issues paper. Singaporeans can submit their views online from today until the end of October. They can also email [nptd\\_contact@nptd.gov.sg](mailto:nptd_contact@nptd.gov.sg) and send faxes to NPTD at 6352 3240. Views can also be mailed to 5 Maxwell Road, #13-00 Tower Block, MND Complex, Singapore 069110.