

WoG Briefing on State of the Population

Singapore's total population stands at 4.84 million, an increase of 5.5% over the previous year. The growth is largely due to the increase in the number of non-residents. The number of residents, i.e. Singapore citizens and permanent residents (PR), grew 1.7% to reach 3.64 million in June 2008.

Singapore continues to face the long-term demographic challenge of low fertility and an ageing population. Singapore's total fertility rate (TFR) of 1.28 in 2008 remained below the replacement level of 2.1. The proportion of residents aged 65 and above continued to increase from 6.8% in 1998 to 8.7% in 2008. These trends underscore the need to continue working on long-term strategies to build a sustainable population, in spite of the economic downturn.

ENCOURAGING MARRIAGE AND PARENTHOOD

More couples got married in 2008, but the trend of Singaporeans not marrying or marrying later continues to persist

More couples tied the knot in 2008, with 21,042 marriages (involving at least one citizen) registered compared to 20,775 in 2007. However, the general marriage rates for citizen males decreased from 47.9 married males per 1,000 unmarried males in 1998 to 42.1 in 2008, while that for females decreased from 49.0 to 39.3 married females per 1,000 unmarried females in the same period. There is a growing trend of people not marrying or marrying later. Over the past decade, the median age at first marriage increased from 28.3 to 29.7 years for males, and from 25.7 to 27.1 years for females. At the same time, a higher proportion of citizens aged 30-34 were single in 2008 (40.8% of males and 29.4% of females) compared to 1998 (33.3% and 21.6%).

These trends underpin the importance of facilitating socialisation opportunities for our singles so that they could meet their desired partners early. Mr Alex Chan and Ms Loh Jiali, who met through SDU-SdS's personalised matching service, decided to solemnise their wedding in September 2009 after dating for more than a year. Mr Chan said, "If both parties are ready and committed to each other, getting married would be the next natural step. We look forward to getting our new flat later this year, having our own home and starting a family."

With globalisation, more Singaporeans are also meeting their desired partners from abroad. The share of marriages involving citizens and non-citizens (among marriages with at least one citizen) has increased over the past decade, rising from about three in 10 (33%) in 1998 to almost four in 10 (39%) in 2008. With more foreign spouses in Singapore, we will need to help them integrate well into our society.

Singaporeans are also having fewer children after marriage. The average number of children born to ever-married citizen females aged 30-39 declined from 1.74 children in 1998 to 1.58 children in 2008. In order to provide for a more pro-family environment for Singaporeans, the Government enhanced the marriage and parenthood package in 2008. Amid this economic downturn, this package of measures is even more important in supporting Singaporeans who have decided to start and raise families. However, it is still premature to gauge the effectiveness of the package as it was implemented only in August 2008.

FACILITATING THE INTEGRATION AND NATURALISATION OF SUITABLE NEW IMMIGRANTS

Private, people and public sectors collaborate to foster integration of new immigrants

There were 79,167 new PRs and 20,513 new citizens in 2008, up from the 63,627 new PRs and 17,334 new citizens in 2007. More than half of the new residents aged 20 and above in 2008 had at least post secondary education, a reflection that Singapore continues to attract talented foreigners to become part of our society.

As more foreigners choose to sink roots in Singapore, helping them integrate into our society becomes even more important. The newly-established National Integration Council will drive efforts on social integration across the private, people and public sectors. It will also encourage more ground-up initiatives to integrate Singaporeans, both existing and new, where they live, work, in schools and through social and community involvement.

ENGAGING OVERSEAS SINGAPOREANS

Keeping the Singapore link alive

As of June 2008, there were more than 180,000 Overseas Singaporeans (OS), of which 63% were aged between 20 and 54. With more Singaporeans going overseas to work and study, it is crucial to help them stay connected and engaged with home, so that they can continue to identify with the larger Singapore family.

The Overseas Singaporean Unit (OSU) was set up in 2006 to reach out to Singaporeans overseas. In addition to the one-stop Overseas Singaporean Portal (www.overseassingaporean.sg), OSU's programmes include Singapore Day and the Distinguished Business Leaders Series. OSU has also collaborated with Singapore-linked partners to establish Overseas Singaporean Clubs in major cities for OS to come together, network and bond. Beijing-based business developer Mr Lionel Wong has actively organised activities for OS through the OS Club. "A support group is much needed by anyone who goes overseas to work or study, as they tend to be homesick and lonely. Nothing beats the nostalgic feeling of having a home away from home at gatherings with fellow Overseas Singaporeans. These gatherings remind us of who we are, and the importance of staying connected to Singapore and to fellow Singaporeans overseas," said Mr Wong.