

Survey on what makes S'poreans abroad tick

CHARISSA YONG, THE STRAITS TIMES

For every 15 citizens in Singapore today, one lives abroad.

A group of researchers is embarking on a study to understand what makes these overseas Singaporeans tick.

They aim to ask 3,000 citizens who live and work abroad about their experiences and challenges overseas, and how they view their Singaporean identity over time.

Dr Leong Chan-Hoong of the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), who is helming the study, said it is timely as South-east Asia's economies pick up steam and the Government encourages businesses to go abroad.

"There is a strong economic imperative to work and live beyond the shores of Singapore for people who are ready," said Dr Leong.

About 6 per cent of Singapore citizens lives overseas, he noted.

The number of Singaporeans residing abroad has climbed 24 per cent in the past 10 years.

The latest population statistics show 213,400 Singaporeans lived overseas last year, compared with 172,000 in 2007.

Dr Leong said the survey goes beyond the usual topics of financ-

es and housing to look at people's relationships and concerns, and what they think of the future.

For instance, it asks about overseas Singaporeans' network of friends and relatives in Singapore and in the country they live in.

CONCERN

"There is this concern that if you work and live abroad, your sense of national identity will be diluted," said Dr Leong, who lived in New Zealand for four years as a doctoral student.

"But research shows that an overseas stint can sometimes strengthen your sense of national identity," he said, adding that the survey findings may illuminate how true this is for Singaporeans.

Dr Leong, who conducted a 2011 survey of the attitudes of 2,000 young Singaporeans here towards migrating abroad, will also pose the same questions in this survey.

"Sometimes, we think that the grass is greener on the other side and that being a permanent resident in another country gives you more security," he said.

"But those who have worked and lived abroad may realise there is more security back in Singapore."

Dr Pramit Khetrupal, 29, who has lived in London as a medical student and doctor, agreed.

"We take many things for granted in Singapore, like being able to walk down a street carefree in the middle of the night without a concern for safety, which suddenly doesn't apply after leaving home," he said.

"But I was also awed by the ideals of British society and have shifted from feeling national pride about Singapore to realising that both systems can learn from each other."

IPS' Social Lab has made a call for participants through the Government's Overseas Singaporean Unit.

Any overseas Singaporean student, working adult or their dependants can register for the survey at www.tinyurl.com/OS-survey2017.

They must have a registered foreign address or have been away from Singapore for at least six out of the past 12 months.

The survey will close in September, and the preliminary findings will be released by the end of the year.

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