

Survey: Fewer young Singaporeans think of emigrating

Three in five respondents feel they can attain their life goals without leaving the Republic

Fabian Koh

More young Singaporeans believe they can achieve their life goals here without having to move overseas, research has found.

The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) interviewed more than 2,000 local 19- to 30-year-olds and discovered that fewer were thinking of emigrating permanently.

Findings of the 2016 survey released yesterday showed 18.3 per cent had thought about emigrating, down from 21.2 per cent in 2010.

Meanwhile, 59.3 per cent said

that they could achieve the things they want in Singapore without having to leave, up from 45.6 per cent in 2010.

IPS senior research fellow Leong Chan-Hoong, who was part of the team behind the survey, said it showed that more people would rather improve their socio-economic well-being here, such as by studying and working hard, than simply emigrating for a better life.

"If you look back five or six years ago – today, we have a lot more emphasis on cultural immersion, not just at the university level, but also at the polytechnic, secondary and

even primary school level," said Dr Leong. "It is a way to internationalise Singapore and to let students know that there is a world out there with a completely different system and way of life."

However, the survey also noted that a larger proportion of Singaporean youth feel that an increase in emigration is inevitable as Singapore gets more stressful and competitive.

"As much as the economy as a whole has done pretty well, and Singapore is more stable than the US, Britain or Europe, the outcome may not be same for everybody," Dr Leong added.

"You may think that the economy has done well, but there may not be enough jobs for everybody."

On the pull of Singapore's na-

tional identity, 53.1 per cent of respondents said they would not renounce Singapore citizenship even if they were to become permanent residents in another country, up from 40.6 per cent in 2010.

Most survey respondents chose Australia as their preferred emigration destination, while New Zealand came in second. There was a slight drop in interest in the United States, Britain and Canada, which came in third, fourth and fifth, respectively.

According to the annual Population In Brief report released on Thursday, there were 216,400 overseas Singaporeans as of June this year. This is an increase from the 214,700 at the same time last year, and continues a steady upward trend over the past decade, from 181,900 in 2008.

Ms Denise Phua, a member of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Social and Family Development, said the world has shrunk in a sense due to technology, and countries are experiencing challenges similar to those of Singapore in the economy and other areas.

"If we are indeed part of a Singapore family and care about ensuring that everyone's potential can be maximised, then stay and help build a nation that is not only successful economically, but also significant and purposeful," she said.

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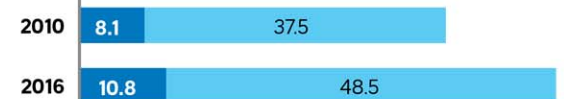
Attitudes towards emigration



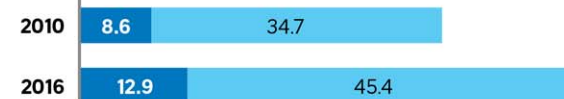
Nearly 1 in 5 thought about emigrating to another country to live there permanently very frequently or all the time.

(%) Strongly Agree Agree

I can achieve the things that I want without even leaving Singapore



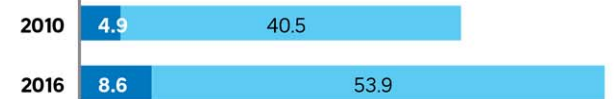
Increase in emigration is inevitable as Singapore gets more stressful and competitive



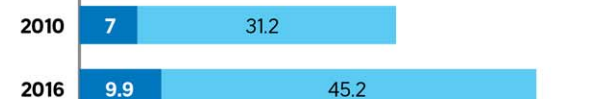
Attitudes towards foreign talent here

Foreign talent...

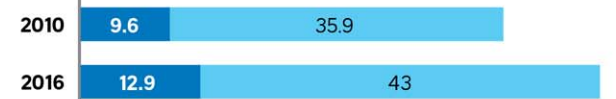
Contribute to Singapore's development as much as Singaporeans do



Compared with foreign talent, Singaporeans have more access to job opportunities and other forms of social resources (for example, Sinda, CDAC, Mendaki)



Foreign talent are using Singapore as a stepping stone to other developed countries



Source: IPS, NUS STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

More realise benefits of foreign talent, but worry about cohesiveness

More young people in Singapore feel that the country has benefited from the presence of foreign talent, according to newly released research findings.

An Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) survey in 2016 found that 62.5 per cent of 19- to 30-year-olds believe skilled workers who come here from other countries have contributed to Singapore's development, compared with 45.4 per cent in 2010.

Young Singaporeans also feel that they have greater access to job opportunities and other forms of social resources – such as schemes under self-help groups like Sinda, the Chinese Development Assistance Council and Mendaki – as compared with foreign talent.

"But on the other hand, they

also feel that Singaporeans shoulder more social responsibilities compared with foreign talent, so it is a bit of a mixed bag," IPS research associate Debbie Soon, who was part of the three-member research team, said of the findings released yesterday.

Mr Daniel Soh, managing partner of executive headhunting firm Leadership Advisory Inc, said workers from overseas bring expertise or international experience that is not readily available locally.

"Singapore's strong reputation for providing a quality lifestyle and safe living environment is a major draw for foreign talent to accept a working assignment here, without the need for lavish expat packages," he explained.

Ms Wendy Baker, business development and engagement partner of talent consulting firm ICE Asia, pointed out that work visas, including renewals, are becoming more difficult to obtain in Singapore.

There was a rise in the proportion of respondents who viewed the presence of foreign talent as having a negative impact on societal cohesiveness here, from 38.9 per cent to 48 per cent.

They also expressed increased scepticism about the long-term commitment of immigrants.

Mr Soh said most foreigners, especially those with families and young children, typically spend at least five to 10 years here.

Those who are single and more mobile may simply go where there

are better opportunities.

"These opportunities have to be very compelling, otherwise, most foreign talent would prefer to continue their career in Singapore," he said.

Ms Baker added that while there are foreigners who stay for the minimum contract period agreed upon with their employers before leaving for another country, there are those who enjoy living in Singapore and stay here for longer, adapting to the culture and often meeting and marrying a local along the way.

The survey was conducted from June to November 2016 involving 2,013 participants aged 19 to 30.

A similar study was conducted in 2010.

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