

IPS study: S'poreans see value of having immigrants

Most Singaporeans accept the importance of having immigrants, but many also feel that they can do more to integrate into society.

According to an Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) survey, nearly nine in 10 citizens and permanent residents agreed that there is “a lot to learn” from the immigrants’ cultures, and it is good to have people of different nationalities living in the same neighbourhood.

But 67 per cent said immigrants are not doing enough to integrate into Singapore. The study findings were revealed yesterday at a National Integration Council (NIC) event, where the issue of immigrant enclaves was raised.

Meanwhile, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Grace Fu, who chairs the NIC, yesterday announced a new workgroup on the Singapore Citizenship Journey, a mandatory programme for those who are about to become citizens.

The workgroup will develop content that explains the values and obligations that Singaporeans share. It will involve both local-born and naturalised Singaporeans.

Good to have different nationals as neighbours, say S'poreans

But 67% of those surveyed feel immigrants are not doing enough to integrate into S'pore

Tee Zhuo

Most Singaporeans accept the importance and value of having immigrants, but many also feel that immigrants are not doing enough to integrate into society.

These were some of the findings of a study made public at a National Integration Council (NIC) event yesterday, where the issue of racial enclaves was also discussed.

Nearly nine in 10 (87 per cent) of citizens and permanent residents surveyed by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and racial harmony advocacy group OnePeople.sg agreed there is "a lot to learn" from the immigrants' cultures. A similar proportion (90 per cent) said it is good to have people of different nationalities living in the same neighbourhood. Most (72 per cent) also like interacting with new immigrants, but 67 per cent said immigrants are not doing enough to integrate into Singapore.

IPS senior research fellow Mathew Mathews said comfort levels towards new Singaporeans originally from other countries have mainly been stable. He also highlighted key challenges in integration, such as the perception of differential treatment and differences in norms and values.

The study polled 4,015 citizens and permanent residents (PRs) be-

tween August last year and January this year. Its findings on race and religion were released last month. It found that more Singaporeans now have close friends of another race compared with five years ago, and they are also more trusting of those from different races or religions. But more from minority groups are perceiving workplace discrimination, like when applying for jobs.

Dr Mathews said: "The results on race and religion provide a backdrop that (integration) is not something that is easy. Even among locals there are differences and certain things can exaggerate them."

On the finding that many Singaporeans do not think immigrants are doing enough to integrate, he suggested this could be an issue of perception and visibility. "We don't really see the contributions of immigrants, for example... in community work or associations."

Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Grace Fu, who chairs the NIC, was the guest of honour at the event attended by community groups, immigrant associations and other organisations. In her speech, she highlighted three integration challenges. She said as the Singaporean identity has become stronger, it has also become easier to observe differences rather than commonalities in newcomers.

Workers concerned about workplace competition and security in a period of technological and trade disruptions could also question the need for newcomers.

Divisive narratives also spread to Singapore more easily with greater connectivity and social media.

At a discussion later, Ms Fu also addressed the issue of certain racial groups being concentrated in some residential estates, saying the NIC is studying this regularly.

She was responding to comments from a member of the audience, who also referred to the Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP) for public housing, which specifies the proportion of units in an HDB block and precinct that can be owned by a particular racial group.

Ms Fu said private properties are a different ball game. "There needs to be some property sectors that are able to absorb the newcomers. If we have EIP in both public and private housing estates, where are they going to live?"

She said integration can be done in different ways such as through greater interaction at workplace and community work. "If we start excluding parts of Singapore, we are not going to succeed as a society... as an economy," she added.

New workgroup

Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Grace Fu yesterday announced a new workgroup on the Singapore Citizenship Journey, an existing mandatory programme for those who are about to become citizens.

The workgroup will develop content that explains the values and obligations of Singaporeans and the norms of our society, and create a common understanding of our culture and national history, said Ms Fu.

It will involve both local-born and naturalised Singaporeans and aim for representative participation.

The process will start with reflections on what being a Singaporean means.

"We value your input and we invite you to participate in choreographing this journey for new members to our Singapore family," said Ms Fu.

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