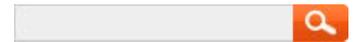


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Population policies through the years

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SINGAPORE'S population trends have been a source of worry for decades. But the fear was not always one of population decline.

1974

AIM: Zero population growth

As announced at the 1974 World Population Conference, government policy was 'to achieve zero population growth as soon as possible'.

Zero population growth occurs when the number of births and number of deaths is the same over a given period of time.

METHOD: Lowering the total fertility rate

(TFR) from 2.37 to the replacement level of 2.1 by 1980, and keeping it there.

Singapore's age structure - with more than half the population younger than 21 - meant that zero population growth would be reached only 50 to 60 years after the TFR reached replacement level.

RATIONALE: The Government feared that

further growth and development could be 'diminished or even negated by an ever-increasing population'.

Uncontrolled population growth would mean excessive demand for schools, hospitals and public services, 'bringing about a heavy burden on the State and a dilution of standards'.

The quality of life could be adversely affected if overpopulation meant overcrowding, noise, environmental pollution and even social unrest.

1975

TFR turning point

The TFR fell below replacement level for the first time to 2.08 - five years ahead of



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1977

3.5 million steady-state projection

A Ministry of Health publication estimates that zero population growth will be reached in 2030, with a steady-state total population of 3.5 million.

1980s

AIM: Reversing fertility trends

The continued TFR decline became a worry. From the mid-1980s, the Government began pursuing pro-natalist policies and relaxing anti-natalist ones.

In 1987, the New Population Policy was officially introduced: a move away from the 1972 'stop at two' policy, and towards encouraging women to have two or more children if they can afford it.

Then Minister for Trade and Industry Lee Hsien Loong said Singapore was aiming for the same target as before: for the population to replace itself.

Early 2000s

AIM: Preventing population decline

The Baby Bonus scheme is announced in 2000, and extended in 2004. It gives financial incentives to encourage women to have more children.

The focus remains on boosting fertility and preventing population decline.

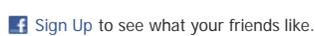
Mid-2000s

AIM: Population growth

A growing population is explicitly identified as important for growth in Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's 2006 National Day Rally speech.

'If we want our economy to grow, if we want to be strong internationally, then we need a growing population and not just numbers but also talents in every field in Singapore,' he said.

Sources: The Straits Times, Parliament Library

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