

Parliamentary reply by Minister Grace Fu on the number of foreign spouses in Singapore granted citizenship and permanent residency

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Foreign Spouses in Singapore

(Numbers granted citizenship and permanent residency)

Mr Baey Yam Keng asked the Prime Minister over the last five years (a) what was the breakdown of foreign spouses of Singaporeans who were (i) granted permanent residence and citizenship and (ii) rejected permanent residence and citizenship, in terms of female and male spouses; and (b) what proportion of Singaporeans whose foreign spouses applied for permanent residence and citizenship were not in their first marriage.

Ms Grace Fu Hai Yien: Mdm Speaker, from 2008 to 2012, an average of 4,100 new Permanent Residents (PRs) and 4,100 new Singapore Citizens each year were foreign spouses sponsored by Singaporeans. Of these, about 82% of the new PRs and 92% of the new citizens were female.

In the same period, an average of 4,400 PR and 580 citizenship applications from foreign spouses sponsored by Singaporeans were rejected each year. Of these, about 90% of the PR applicants and 86% of the citizenship applicants were female.

Each PR or Singapore Citizenship application for a foreign spouse is evaluated carefully to ensure that the marriage is stable and that the sponsor is able to support the family. Those who do not qualify for PR status may be granted a Long-Term Visit Pass or Long-Term Visit PassPlus for them to remain in Singapore with their families.

Statistics on the proportion of Singaporeans who were not in their first marriage and sponsoring foreign spouses for PR or citizenship are not available at this time.

Mr Baey Yam Keng (Tampines): Madam, I thank the Minister for her reply. If I have the figures correctly, it seems that slightly more than half of the applicants were not successful in applying for PR for their foreign spouses. For these Singaporeans who have already married but do not satisfy the conditions to allow their spouses to stay in Singapore permanently, what is the Government expecting these Singaporeans and spouses to do in planning for the future? Are they expected to migrate, leave Singapore or maybe they should not marry a foreigner in the first place?

Ms Grace Fu Hai Yien: Mdm Speaker, when it comes to matters of the heart -- and marriage is one of them -- it is very difficult for the Government to have rules over them. But, hard as it may, we need to have certain rules. As Member Dr Lily Neo had said earlier on, we have to make sure that the immigrants that we take in do not strain our fiscal resources. Also, we have to make sure that the new immigrants have a very good chance of assimilating into our society. Many of the foreign spouses I have seen, have very good intentions of wanting to marry Singaporean men and wanting to settle down in Singapore. But they are unfamiliar with the place and the norms. Our PR and SC criteria basically encourage them to make sure that the family has the ability to support them and that they would be working to maintain a stable marriage. If they were to have a stable marriage with children, their chances of getting PR approval, and SC approval thereafter, would be

higher.

Having said that, there are about 50% of applications being rejected. Usually, as I have said, it is actually a matter of time. If they show that the Singaporean Citizen spouse has the ability to support the family, the marriage is stable, the family is intact, over time, their chances of attaining PR, and thereafter SC, would be better than those without family and children.

In the interim, we have the Long-Term Visit Pass and the Long-Term Visit Pass-Plus which allow them to seek employment and also to be entitled to some medical subsidies, just as a PR would. So it actually provides a good way to tide over this period - work on their income and marriage, keep the family intact - and then they will be in a very good position.

This is to satisfy the issue raised by Dr Lily Neo. That they are not a strain on society, and that they settle down first, spend some time to understand our local culture and learn our language as well.