

Sharp fall in transnational marriages in past 2 years

Covid-19 travel curbs cited as reason; rise in marriages between Singaporean couples offsets drop

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There has been a sharp fall in the proportion of Singaporeans marrying foreigners in the past two years due to Covid-19 travel restrictions disrupting such transnational unions.

In 2021, 29 per cent of all marriages involving at least one Singapore citizen, also called citizen marriages, were transnational marriages. This was down from 30 per cent in 2020 and 37 per cent in 2019, prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Singapore University of Social Sciences associate professor of economics Walter Theseira highlighted this fact from the Population In Brief 2022 report published by the National Population and Talent Division.

He was speaking at the Population Association of Singapore's webinar last Wednesday on issues relating to ageing, marriage and ferti-

ty, based on the latest population data released in September.

The association is a newly founded non-profit group, which promotes research on population issues in Singapore and Asia.

In 2019, there were about 8,100 transnational marriages registered in Singapore and this fell to about 5,800 in 2020 and about 6,800 in 2021.

The Population In Brief report defines a transnational marriage as one between a Singapore citizen and a non-citizen, who could be a permanent resident or a non-resident of Singapore.

Travel restrictions due to the pandemic were behind the fall in numbers, the report said.

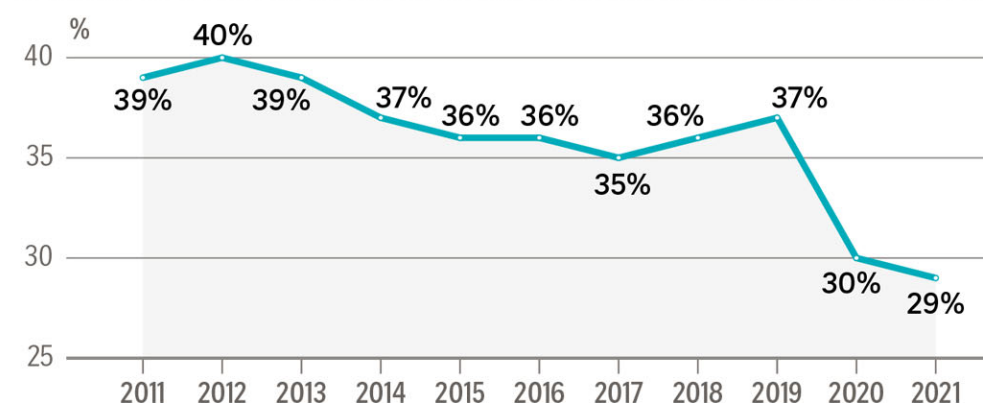
Marriage solemniser Joanna Portilla said pandemic travel restrictions, which include lengthy quarantines and border closures, made some transnational couples who asked her to officiate at their wedding postpone their nuptials.

They include a Singaporean woman whose Japanese husband-to-be said he could not take the length of leave needed to serve the quarantine required in Singapore and Japan, if they were to go ahead with their 2020 wedding.

So their big day was postponed to 2021.

Of the transnational marriages here in 2021, 69 per cent involved a

Transnational marriages as a proportion of citizen marriages



Source: POPULATION IN BRIEF 2022 STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

non-citizen bride with a Singaporean groom, with 96 per cent of these foreign brides being from Asia.

The remaining 31 per cent of these transnational marriages involved a non-citizen groom. About two in three of these men were from Asia, data from the report showed.

Prof Theseira said the sharp fall in transnational marriages during the pandemic may not be a cause for alarm in the short run, given that marriages between Singaporean couples rose slightly to offset the fall in transnational unions.

But in the longer term, because of their sheer number, transnational marriages are critical for Singapore's population sustainability as they impact population growth through fertility and the assimilation of foreign spouses.

For the past 20 years, transnational marriages have accounted for about between 30 per cent and 40 per cent of all citizen marriages a year, which he said was a huge proportion of marriages here.

While there are concerns over a minority of transnational unions, such as those involving men marrying Vietnamese women they

hardly know after introductions by matchmakers, he said the broader issue of transnational marriages deserves more research and attention.

At the webinar, Professor Jean Yeung, the association's president, said the sharp increase in all marriages in 2021 is likely to be a short-term fluctuation and not a long-term trend.

In 2021, there were 23,433 citizen marriages, up by 20.6 per cent from 19,430 citizen marriages in 2020. These marriages include transnational couples and couples who are both Singaporeans.

Prof Yeung, founding director of the Centre for Family and Population Research at the National University of Singapore, said one main reason for the increase is that couples postponed holding their nuptials in 2020 because of pandemic restrictions.

Wedding planners said many couples postponed their 2020 nuptials given the unpredictable shifts in the number of guests allowed at weddings and all the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic in 2020.

Another reason the 2021 figures are not a long-term trend is that the proportion of singles across the different age groups in the past decade has either remained stable or increased slightly, she said.

Prof Yeung said the number of babies born to Singaporeans in the future is likely to fall as there will be fewer Singaporean women in the peak child-bearing ages between 25 and 34.

The current cohort of Singaporean women aged between 15 and 24 is significantly smaller than the same age group a decade ago. So in 10 to 20 years, there will be fewer women of child-bearing age, she said.

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