

M'sia may become an ageing nation earlier than expected, statistics show

PETALING JAYA: Malaysia may become an ageing nation earlier than predicted after the country recorded the lowest fertility rate in four decades with fewer babies born in 2020, according to the Statistics Department.

"Looking at the last 10 years, for every thousand population, on average 17.2 people were born and 4.6 people died with a ratio of 3.7 births per one death.

"The decline in the ratio has an impact on the population structure in Malaysia.

"This will cause Malaysia to shift to an ageing nation earlier than previously projected, with the elderly population aged 60 years and above expected to reach 15.3% by 2030," said the country's chief statistician Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Uzir Mahidin in a statement yesterday.

It accompanied the release of the "Vital Statistics, Malaysia 2021" report containing the nation's latest birth and death statistics published by the department.

The report also revealed that fewer babies were born in 2020 as the country hit its lowest fertility rate in 40 years.

Mohd Uzir said the country's total fertility rate (TFR) of women in reproductive age fell to 1.7 babies in 2020 compared to 1.8 babies the previous year.

"The 2020 fertility rate is the lowest in four decades. In 1970, the rate was 4.9 children per woman.

"Since 2013, Malaysia's fertility rate has been below the United Nations' Statistics Division's replacement level of 2.1 babies," he added.

Replacement level refers to the amount of fertility needed to keep the population stable from generation to generation.

Mohd Uzir said the country's three major ethnic groups of bumiputra, Chinese and Indians all saw a decline in TFRs last year.

"The TFR for the bumiputra declined from 2.6 babies to 2.2 babies, Chinese (1.5 babies to 1.0 babies) and Indians (1.7 babies to 1.2 babies) in 2020.

"The TFR for Chinese and Indians has been below the replacement levels since 2003 and 2005 respectively," he noted.

The three most fertile states are Terengganu (2.9 babies), Putrajaya (2.8 babies) and Kelantan (2.7 babies).

They are the only states in Malaysia to record TFRs above the replacement level.

Mohd Uzir also said the falling fertility rate in Malaysia was a trend seen in other countries (refer to graphic) such as Britain (1.7 babies), the United States (1.7 babies), Japan (1.4 babies), Indonesia (2.3 babies) and Singapore (1.1 babies).

The number of live births in 2020 was 470,195, which was the country's lowest in over a decade, according to Mohd Uzir.

"This is a decrease of 3.6% compared to 487,957 in 2019.

"The decline in the number of live births has also contributed to the decline in the crude birth rate (CBR) from 15.0 births in 2019 to 14.4 per thousand population in 2020," he added.

Commenting on the falling trend in births, he said the decline was partially due to "the increase in women's level of education and participation in the labour force".

"In addition, factors such as the increase in average age of first marriage, urbanisation, lifestyle changes, economic status and increased use of family planning methods contribute to the declining trend of births," the chief statistician noted.

The statistical findings also saw Terengganu, Perlis and Labuan as the only states/territories producing more babies in 2020 compared to the previous year.

"In terms of CBR, all states except Labuan and Perlis recorded a decline. Terengganu recorded the highest rate at 21.6 births per thousand population," said Mohd Uzir.

Penang, meanwhile, recorded the country's lowest birth rate out of all states at 11.1. Malaysia also saw fewer deaths in 2020 compared to the previous year.

"The number of deaths recorded in Malaysia in 2020 was 166,507, a decline of 4.2% compared to 173,746 deaths in 2019," Mohd Uzir said.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2021/10/15/msia-may-became-an-ageing-nation-earlier-than-expected-statistics-show>