

Chapter 20

Population and Immigration

Hong Kong continued to attract large numbers of visitors in 2011, with the Immigration Department handling 253 million inbound and outbound movements, 5.16 per cent up on the previous year. The city's attraction is due largely to its world-class tourism facilities, a liberal visa policy, excellent infrastructure, open business environment and strategic location in China and East Asia.

The provisional figure for the population of Hong Kong at the end of 2011 was 7 103 700, or 0.7 per cent up on the previous year. This was due to 54 000 more births than deaths. Over the period 2006-2011, the average annual growth rate of the population was 0.6 per cent.

The birth rate¹ in 2011 was estimated at 14 per 1 000, higher than the 13 per 1 000 in 2010. There was little change in the death rate² which was about six per 1 000.

The under-15 age group shrank from 14 per cent in mid-2006 to 12 per cent in mid-2011, while the 65 and over age group grew from 12 per cent in mid-2006 to 13 per cent in mid-2011. During the same period, the population's median age rose from 39.6 years to 41.7 years.

The overall dependency ratio of people aged under 15 and those aged 65 and over, to the working age group of people aged between 15 and 64, dropped from 354 per 1 000 in mid-2006 to 333 per 1 000 in mid-2011.

Immigration Department

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) is a separate travel area with autonomy over its immigration policy. In accordance with the Basic Law, the HKSAR Government exercises immigration controls over entry into, stay in and

¹ The birth rate refers to the number of known live births occurring in a calendar year per thousand mid-year population.

² The death rate refers to the number of known deaths occurring in a calendar year per thousand mid-year population.

departure from the HKSAR by people from foreign states and regions. The Basic Law also contains provisions regulating the entry of people from the mainland of China.

Besides upholding immigration control to maintain Hong Kong's prosperity and stability, the Immigration Department provides a wide range of services to local residents, including issuing HKSAR passports and other travel documents, identity cards; handling nationality and residency matters; and registering births, deaths and marriages. The department has enhanced these services through the use of advanced information technology.

The Immigration Department had an establishment of 5 190 disciplined staff and 1 464 civilian staff at the end of 2011.

Immigration Control

Hong Kong welcomes visitors and adopts a liberal visa policy. People from about 170 countries and territories can enter Hong Kong visa-free for stays of between seven and 180 days. The number of people entering and leaving Hong Kong in 2011 nearly surpassed 253 million, representing an increase of 5.16 per cent from the previous year. Over 190 million people arrived by land, mostly from the Mainland.

An electronic system, e-Channel, is installed at boundary crossings to provide automated clearance for Hong Kong residents and eligible visitors after enrolment. e-Channels for vehicles are also provided at vehicular control points. From December, 2011, eligible Mainland visitors may enrol for e-Channels and to use the service starting from 2012.

Legal Immigration

The Mainland is the major contributor to Hong Kong's immigrant population. During the year, about 43 400 Mainlanders joined their families in Hong Kong under a 'One-way Permit Scheme', which imposes a daily quota of 150.

Right of Abode

Article 24 of the Basic Law states that Hong Kong permanent residents, regardless of their nationalities, have the right of abode in the HKSAR, and may obtain permanent identity cards.

Certificate of Entitlement Scheme

Under Article 24(2)(3) of the Basic Law, people of Chinese nationality born outside Hong Kong of Hong Kong permanent residents are entitled to be permanent residents of the HKSAR with right of abode. The Immigration Ordinance stipulates that for a person to qualify for the right of abode under Article 24(2)(3) of the Basic Law, one of his or her natural parents must be a Chinese citizen who has the right of abode at the time of birth of that person.

The Government introduced a Certificate of Entitlement Scheme on July 10, 1997, under which a person's status as a permanent resident of the HKSAR under Article 24(2)(3) of the Basic Law can be established only by holding a valid travel

document such as a One-way Permit with a valid certificate of entitlement affixed to it. This arrangement enables systematic verification of right of abode claims and ensures orderly entry. Between July 1, 1997 and the end of 2011, some 189 900 certificate of entitlement holders entered Hong Kong from the Mainland.

Quality Migrant Admission Scheme

A Quality Migrant Admission Scheme launched in June 2006 seeks to enhance Hong Kong's pool of human capital. Under the scheme, talented people may apply to enter and settle in Hong Kong without first securing an offer of local employment. At the end of 2011, a quota of 2 094 places had been allotted to applicants.

Capital Investment Entrant Scheme

A Capital Investment Entrant Scheme launched in October 2003 facilitates the entry of people who make capital investments in Hong Kong but do not engage in the running of business. The current threshold of investment (and net assets/net equity requirement) is \$10 million.

By the end of 2011, a total of 13 111 applicants had been granted formal approval under the scheme. They invested a total of \$94.9 billion.

Entry for Employment as Professionals

Hong Kong maintains an open and liberal policy towards people entering into the city for employment as professionals. Those with special skills, knowledge or experience of value to and not readily available in Hong Kong, or who are in a position to make substantial contribution to the economy, are welcome. Since the reunification of Hong Kong with China in 1997, over 320 000 non-local professionals have been admitted to Hong Kong via various admission arrangements to work in the city.

Employment of Non-local Students

Since May 19, 2008, non-local students graduating from a full-time and locally accredited programme at degree level or above may apply to remain in Hong Kong for one year to take up employment. Those who graduated from such a programme before that date may also apply to return to Hong Kong for employment provided the job they have secured is at a level commonly taken up by degree-holders and is remunerated at market rates.

Entry of Dependants

Hong Kong permanent residents or residents who are not subject to a limit of stay may sponsor their spouses, unmarried dependent children under the age of 18 and dependent parents aged 60 or above to enter Hong Kong as dependants. People who are admitted under the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme or the Capital Investment Entrant Scheme, or admitted to take up professional employment or to study in full-time undergraduate or post-graduate programmes in local degree-awarding institutions, may also sponsor their spouses and unmarried dependent children under the age of 18 to apply to enter Hong Kong as dependants.

Illegal Immigration

The HKSAR keeps a close watch on illegal immigration activities. 1 631 Mainland illegal immigrants were arrested during the year, 30 per cent less than in 2010. The number of Vietnamese illegal immigrants arrested was 281, or 25 per cent less than in 2010.

The Immigration Department maintains close liaison with the Mainland and overseas governments on matters relating to population movements and irregular migration. During the year, representatives from the Immigration Department participated in international and regional conferences and workshops held in Indonesia, Samoa and Thailand.

Emigration

The estimated number of emigrants from Hong Kong was 8 300 in 2011, most of whom went to the United States (4 000), Australia (1 700) and Canada (700).

Personal Documentation

Travel Documents

The Immigration Department started issuing HKSAR electronic passports (HKSAR e-Passport) on February 5, 2007. It is embedded with a contactless integrated chip containing the holder's personal data and facial image as the biometric identifiers in accordance with the standards specified by the International Civil Aviation Organisation. Issuance of the HKSAR passport is controlled strictly by the Immigration Department. The passports are issued only to Hong Kong permanent residents who are Chinese citizens with the right of abode in the HKSAR and who hold valid Hong Kong permanent identity cards.

Eligible applicants aged 11 or above may submit their applications through the internet and applicants aged 18 or above may also submit their applications through self-service kiosks at the Immigration Department's headquarters or its branch offices. A pilot programme was launched on December 29, 2011 for eligible applicants aged 11 to 17 to submit their applications through self-service kiosks at the Immigration Department's headquarters.

During the year, 587 462 HKSAR passport applications were received, including 9 074 from overseas.

The HKSAR Passports Appeal Board handles appeals against rejections of applications for HKSAR passports. It received six (four overseas and two local) appeals in 2011.

The Immigration Department continued lobbying for greater immigration convenience such as visa-free access for HKSAR passport holders. In 2011, the Republic of Serbia agreed to grant visa-free access to holders of HKSAR passport. By year-end, 143 countries and territories had granted visa-free access or visa-on-arrival to HKSAR passport holders.

Other travel documents issued by the Immigration Department include Documents of Identity for Visa Purposes (Doc/Is) and Re-entry Permits (REPs). Doc/Is are issued for international travel. They are issued to Hong Kong residents who are not eligible for the HKSAR passport and are unable to obtain a passport or travel document of any other country or territory. REPs are issued to Hong Kong residents to travel to the Mainland and Macao. During the year, 45 457 Doc/Is and 130 583 REPs were issued.

Identity Cards

The Immigration Department also issues identity cards to Hong Kong residents. There are two types of identity cards: the Hong Kong Permanent Identity Card issued to residents who have the right of abode in Hong Kong, and the Hong Kong Identity Card issued to residents who do not have that right.

Except those who are required to obtain Certificates of Entitlement, people who claim to have the right of abode in the HKSAR must apply for verification of their eligibility for a permanent identity card. In 2011, a total of 65 117 applications were received and 46 620 were approved.

Smart Identity Card

The Immigration Department introduced the smart identity card in June 2003. The card employs state-of-the-art technologies and is highly fraud-resistant.

The smart identity cards enable the Immigration Department to use the fingerprint recognition technology to authenticate the cardholders' identity and enable cardholders to enjoy self-service immigration clearance via the e-Channels. In 2011, a total of 568 624 smart identity cards were issued.

Nationality Matters

The Immigration Department is authorised by the Central People's Government to handle Chinese nationality applications from Hong Kong residents. Chinese nationals of the HKSAR who want to be treated as foreign nationals in the HKSAR must make a declaration of change of nationality to the Immigration Department. During the year, the Immigration Department received 152 applications for declaration of change of nationality, 1 219 applications for naturalisation as Chinese nationals, 52 applications for renunciation of Chinese nationality and 15 applications for restoration of Chinese nationality.

Assistance to Hong Kong Residents Outside Hong Kong

The Assistance to Hong Kong Residents Unit (AHU) of the Immigration Department works closely with the Security Bureau, the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the HKSAR, Chinese diplomatic and consular missions in overseas countries, the Office of the HKSAR Government in Beijing, the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Guangdong and other government departments to provide practical assistance to Hong Kong residents in distress outside Hong Kong. During the year, 4 045 such requests were handled.

Following the implementation of the Registration of Outbound Travel Information (ROTI) service in late 2010, the Immigration Department continued to work with the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer to enhance the service. Starting from December 12, 2011, registrants can receive updates on Outbound Travel Alert and related public information via their registered internet email address in addition to their My Messages box of MyGovHK.

Marriages

Marriage registration in Hong Kong is governed by the Marriage Ordinance. All marriages contracted under the ordinance involve the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. There is no residential or nationality requirement for marrying parties but neither of them can be under the age of 16.

The Registrar of Marriages should be given at least 15 days' notice of an intended marriage, which must then take place within three months of the notice. Other than solemnising the marriages at one of the five marriage registries or any of the 261 licensed places of public worship, couples may engage a civil celebrant to celebrate their marriage at any place in Hong Kong. In 2011, a total of 26 831 marriages were celebrated in marriage registries, 2 849 in licensed places of public worship, and 28 203 by civil celebrants.

The Registrar of Marriages is also responsible for issuing Certificates of Absence of Marriage Records. During the year, 14 603 such certificates were issued.

Births and Deaths

Birth and death registrations in Hong Kong are governed by the Births and Deaths Registration Ordinance. Parents must register the birth of their children in Hong Kong with the Registrar of Births and Deaths within 42 days of the birth. Registration is free of charge during the period. A fee is charged if the birth is registered after 42 days. Registration later than 12 months after birth requires the registrar's consent. There are four district birth registries providing birth registration service. Since March 9, 2010, all parents applying for birth registration of their newborn babies have been required to make prior appointment bookings.

Deaths from natural causes should be registered by relatives within 24 hours. Hong Kong has three death registries providing free registration. Death may also be registered at one of the 15 designated police stations in the New Territories and outlying islands.

During the year, 95 348 live births and 42 188 deaths were registered.

Websites

Security Bureau: www.sb.gov.hk

Immigration Department: www.immd.gov.hk

Census and Statistics Department: www.censtatd.gov.hk