

Population and Immigration

Hong Kong's population grew further in 2012, to almost 7.2 million, while there were some 268 million inbound and outbound movements, an increase of 15 million on the previous year.

The provisional figure for the population of Hong Kong at the end of 2012 was 7,173,900, or 0.9 per cent up on the previous year. This was mainly due to 48,500 more births than deaths. Over the period 2007-2012, the average annual growth rate of the population was 0.7 per cent. The birth rate¹ in 2012 was estimated at 13 per 1,000, similar to that in 2011. The death rate² remained unchanged at about six per 1,000.

The under-15 age group shrank from 13 per cent in mid-2007 to 11 per cent in mid-2012, while the 65 and over age group grew from 13 per cent in mid-2007 to 14 per cent in mid-2012. During the same period, the population's median age rose from 40 years to 42 years. The overall dependency ratio³ dropped from 349 per 1,000 in mid-2007 to 335 per 1,000 in mid-2012.

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 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.

Besides controlling immigration, the Immigration Department provides a wide range of services to local residents, including issuing HKSAR identity cards, passports and other travel documents;

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.

³ The overall dependency ratio is the ratio of the number of persons aged under 15 and 65 and over, to the number of persons aged between 15 and 64.

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 5,319 disciplined staff and 1,495 civilian staff at 31 December 2012.

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. Nearly 268 million people entered and left Hong Kong in 2012, representing an increase of 5.65 per cent from 2011. Over 100 million people arrived by land, mostly Mainland residents.

An electronic system, e-Channel, installed at boundary crossings (including vehicular control points) provides automated clearance for Hong Kong residents and eligible visitors after enrolment. From January 2012, eligible Mainland visitors may enrol and use the e-Channel service at various control points.

Legal Immigration

The Mainland is the major contributor to Hong Kong's immigrant population. In 2012, about 54,600 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, Chinese nationals born outside Hong Kong of Hong Kong permanent residents are entitled to be HKSAR permanent residents with right of abode. The Immigration Ordinance stipulates that for a person to qualify for the right of abode under Article 24(2)(3), one of his or her natural parents must be a Chinese citizen who has the right of abode at the time of that person's birth.

The Government introduced a Certificate of Entitlement Scheme on 10 July 1997, under which a person's status as an HKSAR permanent resident under Article 24(2)(3) 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 enables systematic verification of right of abode claims and ensures orderly entry. Between 1 July 1997 and the end of 2012, some 193,700 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, by allowing talented people to apply to enter and settle in Hong Kong without first securing an offer of local employment. At the end of 2012, 2,392 places had been allotted to applicants.

Capital Investment Entrant Scheme

The Capital Investment Entrant Scheme facilitates the entry of people who invest capital in Hong Kong but do not run a business. The current minimum investment (and net assets/net equity requirement) is \$10 million. By the end of 2012, 16,915 applicants had been approved under the scheme, investing a total of \$129.8 billion.

Entry for Employment as Professionals

Hong Kong maintains an open and liberal policy towards professionals entering the city for employment, welcoming those with special skills, knowledge or experience of value to and not readily available in Hong Kong, or who can contribute substantially to the economy. Since 1 July 1997, over 360,000 non-local professionals have been admitted to work in Hong Kong via various admission arrangements.

Employment of Non-local Students

Since May 2008, non-local graduates of a full-time and locally accredited programme at degree level or above may apply to remain in Hong Kong for one year after graduation to take up employment. Returning non-local graduates 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 18 and dependent parents aged 60 or above to enter Hong Kong as dependants. Those 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 18 to apply to enter Hong Kong as dependants.

Illegal Immigration

The HKSAR keeps a close watch on illegal immigration: 1,286 Mainland illegal immigrants were arrested during 2012, 21 per cent less than in 2011; 342 Vietnamese illegal immigrants were arrested, or 22 per cent more than in 2011; and 414 non-ethnic Chinese (excluding Vietnamese) illegal immigrants were arrested, 56 per cent more than in 2011.

The Immigration Department maintains close liaison with the Mainland and overseas governments on matters relating to population movements and irregular migration. During 2012, Immigration Department representatives participated in conferences and workshops in Colombia, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand.

Emigration

An estimated 7,600 emigrants left Hong Kong in 2012, the majority to the United States (2,600), Australia (2,200) and Canada (1,000).

Personal Documentation

Travel Documents

In 2007, the Immigration Department started issuing HKSAR electronic passports (HKSAR e-Passport), 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. The department strictly controls the issue of HKSAR passports, issuing them only to Hong Kong permanent residents who are Chinese citizens with the right of abode in the HKSAR holding 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 offices. A pilot programme was launched in December 2011 for eligible applicants aged 11 to 17 to submit their applications through self-service kiosks at the department's headquarters. During 2012, 654,029 HKSAR passport applications were received, including 16,634 from overseas.

The HKSAR Passports Appeal Board handles appeals against rejections of applications for HKSAR passports. It received 15 (11 overseas and four local) appeals in 2012.

The Immigration Department continued lobbying for greater immigration convenience, including visa-free access for HKSAR passport holders. In 2012, the Republic of Albania, the Republic of Montenegro, the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom of the Netherlands agreed to grant visa-free access to HKSAR passport holders and 147 countries and territories now grant 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 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. In 2012, 59,828 Doc/Is and 118,915 REPs were issued.

Identity Cards

The Immigration Department also issues identity cards to Hong Kong residents. There are two types: 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, those claiming right of abode in the HKSAR must apply for verification of their eligibility for a permanent identity card. In 2012, 82,099 applications were received and 64,804 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, enabling the department to use fingerprint recognition technology to authenticate the cardholders' identity and

cardholders to enjoy self-service immigration clearance via the e-Channels. In 2012, 613,121 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. In 2012, the department received 95 applications for declaration of change of nationality, 1,274 applications for naturalisation as Chinese nationals, 119 applications for renunciation of Chinese nationality and 5 applications for restoration of Chinese nationality.

Assistance to Hong Kong Residents Outside Hong Kong

The Immigration Department's Assistance to Hong Kong Residents Unit 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, offices of HKSAR Government outside Hong Kong and other government departments to provide practical assistance to Hong Kong residents in distress outside Hong Kong. During 2012, 1,791 such requests were handled.

The Registration of Outbound Travel Information, introduced in 2010, was enhanced in February 2012 to allow those studying or working overseas to register their overseas mobile phone number and receive SMS sent by the system.

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 but neither party 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. Couples may marry at one of the five marriage registries or any of the 268 licensed places of public worship, or may engage a civil celebrant to celebrate their marriage at any place in Hong Kong. In 2012, a total of 27,863 marriages were celebrated in marriage registries, 2,899 in licensed places of public worship, and 29,511 by civil celebrants.

The Registrar of Marriages is also responsible for issuing Certificates of Absence of Marriage Records and 21,704 were issued in 2012.

Births and Deaths

Under 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 that 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.

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

In 2012, 91,343 live births and 43,672 deaths were registered.

Websites

Security Bureau: www.sb.gov.hk

Immigration Department: www.immd.gov.hk

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