

Population and Immigration

Hong Kong's population stood at more than 7.3 million in 2015, while there were over 290 million entries to and departures from Hong Kong, an increase of 2.1 per cent over the previous year.

The provisional figure for the population of Hong Kong at the end of 2015 was 7,324,300, or 0.8 per cent up on the previous year. This was due to 13,900 more births than deaths and a net inflow of 43,800 residents. Over the period 2010-15, the average annual growth rate of the population was 0.8 per cent. The birth rate¹ in 2015 was about eight per 1,000, slightly lower than the nine per 1,000 in 2014. The death rate² remained unchanged at about six per 1,000.

The under-15 age group shrank from 12 per cent in mid-2010 to 11 per cent in mid-2015, while the age group of 65 and above grew from 13 per cent in mid-2010 to 15 per cent in mid-2015. During the same period, the population's median age rose from 41 years to 43 years. The overall dependency ratio³ increased from 335 per 1,000 in mid-2010 to 363 per 1,000 in mid-2015.

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 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 enhances these services through the use of advanced information technology.

The department has 5,668 disciplined staff members and 1,543 civilian staff members as of 31 December 2015.

Immigration Control

Hong Kong welcomes visitors and adopts an open visa policy. People from about 170 countries and territories may visit Hong Kong visa-free for a period ranging from seven to 180 days. More than 290 million people entered and left the city in 2015, representing an increase of 2.1 per cent from 2014. Over 110 million people arrived by land, including more than 41 million visitors, most of whom were Mainland residents. An electronic system, e-Channel, installed at boundary crossings (including vehicular control points) provides automated immigration clearance services for Hong Kong residents, enrolled Consular Corps Identity Card holders, visitors and eligible Mainland visitors.

Reciprocal use of automated immigration clearance services has been introduced with South Korea, Germany and Singapore. These arrangements allow greater travel convenience for passport holders of the HKSAR and of the participating countries.

Legal Immigration

The Mainland is the major contributor to Hong Kong's immigrant population. In 2015, about 38,300 Mainlanders joined their families in Hong Kong under the 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 the 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 2015, some 208,100 certificate of entitlement holders entered Hong Kong from the Mainland.

Quality Migrant Admission Scheme

The scheme, launched in June 2006, seeks to enhance Hong Kong's pool of human capital by allowing talented people to apply for entry and settlement without first securing an offer of local employment. At the end of 2015, 3,305 places had been allotted to applicants.

Entry as Professionals or Entrepreneurs

Hong Kong maintains an open 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. Overseas entrepreneurs (including start-up entrepreneurs) who can contribute substantially to the economy may also apply to come to Hong Kong to establish or join in a business. Since 1 July 1997, more than 490,000 non-local professionals and entrepreneurs have been admitted via various admission arrangements.

Employment of Non-local Students

Non-local fresh graduates of full-time, locally accredited local programmes 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.

Admission Scheme for the Second Generation of Chinese Hong Kong Permanent Residents

This pilot scheme, launched in May 2015, aims to facilitate the return of the second generation of Chinese Hong Kong permanent residents who have emigrated. Entrants need not have secured a job offer upon their first entry. By the end of 2015, 108 applicants had been approved.

Capital Investment Entrant Scheme

This scheme facilitates the entry of people who invest capital in Hong Kong but do not run a business. It stopped accepting new applications in 15 January 2015. By the end of 2015, 28,243 applicants had received approval, investing a total of \$243.6 billion.

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 the city as dependants. Those who are admitted under the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme, the Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates, the Admission Scheme for the Second Generation of Chinese Hong Kong Permanent Residents or the Capital Investment Entrant Scheme, or are admitted to take up employment as professionals, for investment to establish or join in a business, for training, or for full-time undergraduate or postgraduate studies at 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: 783 Mainland illegal immigrants were arrested during 2015, 6 per cent more than in 2014; 2,278 Vietnamese illegal immigrants were arrested, 93 per cent more than in 2014; and 1,541 non-ethnic Chinese (excluding Vietnamese)

illegal immigrants were arrested, 92 per cent more than in 2014. The department maintains close liaison with the Mainland and overseas governments on matters relating to population movements and irregular migration.

Personal Documentation

Travel Documents

The department issues HKSAR electronic passports (HKSAR e-Passports), 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 HKSAR passport applications in person, by post, through drop-in boxes or round the clock via the GovHK website. Eligible applicants aged 18 or above may also submit applications via self-service kiosks at the six Immigration Branch Offices, while those aged 11 or above may use the self-service kiosk at the Immigration headquarters. Applicants living overseas may submit their applications through the nearest Chinese Diplomatic and Consular Missions. During 2015, 762,114 HKSAR passport applications were received, including 6,799 from overseas.

The HKSAR Passports Appeal Board handles appeals against rejections of passport applications. It received seven appeals in 2015. The department continued lobbying for greater immigration convenience, including visa-free access for HKSAR passport holders. In 2015, Zambia agreed to grant visa-free access to HKSAR passport holders while Laos agreed to visa-on-arrival access. By the end of the year, 152 countries and territories had granted visa-free or visa-on-arrival access to HKSAR passport holders.

Other travel documents issued by the department include the Document of Identity for Visa Purposes (Doc/I) and the Re-entry Permit (REP). The Doc/I is 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. The REP is issued to Hong Kong residents to travel to the Mainland and Macao. In 2015, 47,207 Doc/Is and 106,267 REPs were issued.

Identity Cards

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

Except those who are required to obtain Certificates of Entitlement, people who are claiming right of abode in the HKSAR must apply for verification of their eligibility for a permanent identity card. In 2015, 70,082 applications were received and 58,612 were approved.

Smart Identity Card

The smart identity card issued by the department employs state-of-the-art technologies and is highly fraud-resistant, making use of fingerprint recognition technology to authenticate the cardholders' identity and enabling cardholders to enjoy self-service immigration clearance via e-Channels. In 2015, 570,479 smart identity cards were issued.

Nationality Matters

The 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 department. In 2015, the department received 134 applications for declaration of change of nationality, 1,689 applications for naturalisation as Chinese nationals, 109 applications for renunciation of Chinese nationality and five applications for restoration of Chinese nationality.

Assistance to Hong Kong Residents Outside Hong Kong

The Assistance to Hong Kong Residents Unit under the 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, consulates in Hong Kong, HKSAR Government offices outside Hong Kong and other government departments to provide practical assistance to Hong Kong residents in distress outside Hong Kong. During 2015, 2,529 such requests were handled.

Marriages

Marriage registration 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 either party cannot 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 272 licensed places of public worship, or may engage a civil celebrant to celebrate their marriage at any place in Hong Kong. In 2015, a total of 22,986 marriages were celebrated in marriage registries, 2,242 in licensed places of public worship, and 26,219 by civil celebrants.

The registrar is also responsible for issuing Certificates of Absence of Marriage Records and 21,811 were issued in 2015.

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 15 designated police stations in the New Territories and outlying islands.

In 2015, 60,803 live births and 46,757 deaths were registered.

Websites

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

Immigration Department: www.immd.gov.hk

Security Bureau: www.sb.gov.hk