

Population and Immigration

Hong Kong's population stood at nearly 7.5 million in 2018. The territory processed over 310 million entries and departures, up 5.1 per cent from the previous year.

The provisional figure for the population of Hong Kong at the end of 2018 was 7,482,500, or 0.9 per cent up on the previous year. This was due to 6,700 more births than deaths and a net inflow of 62,700 residents. Over the period 2013-18, the average annual growth rate of the population was 0.7 per cent. The birth rate¹ in 2018 was about seven per 1,000, slightly lower than the eight per 1,000 in 2017. The death rate² remained unchanged at about six per 1,000.

Between mid-2013 and mid-2018, the under-15 age group grew slightly from 11 per cent to 12 per cent, while the 65 and over age group grew from 14 per cent to 17 per cent. The population's median age rose from 43 years to 44 years. The overall dependency ratio³ increased from 339 per 1,000 to 400 per 1,000.

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 control on 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 exercising immigration control, the Immigration Department issues HKSAR identity cards, passports and other travel documents; handles nationality and residency matters; and registers births, deaths and marriages. The department enhances its services using advanced

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.

information technology. It had 7,200 and 1,683 disciplined and civilian posts respectively as at 31 December.

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 seven to 180 days. More than 310 million people entered and left the city in 2018, an increase of 5.1 per cent from 2017. Over 110 million people arrived by land, including more than 45 million visitors, mostly Mainland residents.

The e-Channel is an electronic system installed at boundary crossings, including vehicular control points. It provides automated immigration clearance for Hong Kong residents, enrolled Consular Corps Identity Card holders, eligible Mainland visitors and other visitors. Smart Departure services allow eligible visitors holding electronic travel documents to perform self-service departure clearance through the e-Channels without prior enrolment. Reciprocal use of automated immigration clearance services is in place with Australia, Germany, Singapore, Korea and Thailand, benefiting passport holders of the HKSAR and of the participating countries.

Entry for Residence

The Mainland is the major contributor to Hong Kong's immigrant population. In 2018, about 42,300 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.

Chinese nationals born outside Hong Kong of Hong Kong permanent residents are entitled to be HKSAR permanent residents with the right of abode under Article 24(2)(3) of the Basic Law, provided that one of the natural parents is a Chinese citizen who has the right of abode under Article 24(2)(1) or Article 24(2)(2) of the Basic Law at the time of that person's birth.

The Certificate of Entitlement Scheme, introduced on 10 July 1997, stipulates that a person's status as an HKSAR permanent resident under Article 24(2)(3) can be established only by a valid travel document, such as a One-way Permit, with a valid certificate of entitlement affixed to it. This enables the government to verify right-of-abode claims systematically and ensures orderly entry. Between July 1997 and end-2018, about 215,300 certificate of entitlement holders entered Hong Kong from the Mainland.

Quality Migrant Admission Scheme

Highly skilled and talented people are encouraged to settle in Hong Kong to enhance the city's economic competitiveness. Successful applicants need not secure an offer of local employment before relocating to Hong Kong. The scheme allotted a quota of 555 places in 2018.

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 the city. Entrepreneurs, including those with start-ups, who can contribute substantially to the economy are also welcome to apply to come to Hong Kong to establish or join a business. During the year, 55,360 professionals and entrepreneurs were admitted.

Technology Talent Admission Scheme

This three-year pilot scheme provides a fast-track arrangement for eligible technology companies and institutes to admit non-local technology talent to undertake research and development work in Hong Kong. Between its launch in June and end-December, 24 applications were approved.

Employment of Non-local Graduates

Non-local fresh graduates of full-time, locally accredited programmes at degree level or above may apply to remain in Hong Kong for one year after graduation to take up employment. Non-local graduates who have left may also apply to return for work, provided the job they have secured is at a level commonly taken up by degree-holders and the remuneration package is at market level. During the year, 10,150 non-local graduates received approval to stay in Hong Kong or return for work.

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

This scheme facilitates the return from overseas of the second generation of emigrated Chinese Hong Kong permanent residents. Approved entrants need not have secured a job offer upon their first entry. In 2018, 71 applications were 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 has been suspended since 15 January 2015. By end-2018, the scheme had approved 35,117 applications involving a total investment of \$313.4 billion.

Entry of Dependants

Hong Kong permanent residents and residents who are not subject to a limit of stay may sponsor the following people to enter the city as dependants: their spouse, or the other party to a same-sex civil partnership, same-sex civil union, 'same-sex marriage', opposite-sex civil partnership or opposite-sex civil union; unmarried dependent children under 18; and dependent parents aged 60 or above.

Non-locals who are admitted under the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme, Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates, Admission Scheme for the Second Generation of Chinese Hong Kong Permanent Residents or Capital Investment Entrant Scheme, or are admitted to work as professionals, for investment to establish or join a business as entrepreneurs, for training, or for studies in a full-time undergraduate or postgraduate local programme in a local degree-awarding institution, may also sponsor their dependants, except parents, to enter the city.

Illegal Immigration

The HKSAR keeps a close watch on illegal immigration and liaises closely with the Mainland and overseas governments on population movements and irregular migration. In 2018, the city arrested 555 Mainland illegal immigrants and 639 non-ethnic-Chinese illegal immigrants.

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 in accordance with the standards specified by the International Civil Aviation Organisation. The department strictly controls the issue of HKSAR passports, granting 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, via self-service kiosks or round the clock on the GovHK website. Eligible applicants living overseas may submit their applications through the nearest Chinese diplomatic and consular missions. Those residing on the Mainland may submit their HKSAR passport replacement applications and then collect their passports at the Immigration Divisions of the Beijing Office and the four Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices in Shanghai, Chengdu, Guangdong and Wuhan. In 2018, the department received 705,853 HKSAR passport applications, including 8,052 from overseas and 2,673 from the Mainland.

The HKSAR Passports Appeal Board handles appeals against decisions about the issue, validity period, amendment or cancellation of a passport. It received 13 appeals in 2018.

The department lobbies for greater travel convenience. In 2018, four countries along the Belt and Road, namely Belarus, Bolivia, Antigua and Barbuda and Myanmar, agreed to grant visa-free access or visa-on-arrival access to HKSAR passport holders, bringing the number of countries and territories offering such access to 163.

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 eligible Hong Kong residents to travel to the Mainland and Macao. In 2018, 53,779 Doc/Is and 88,900 REPs were issued.

Identity Cards

The department 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 to verify their eligibility for a permanent identity card. In 2018, 69,232 applications were approved.

Smart Identity Cards

The smart identity card is highly fraud-resistant, making use of fingerprint recognition technology to authenticate the cardholder's identity and allowing for self-service immigration clearance via e-Channels. In 2018, 579,071 smart identity cards were issued.

On 26 November, the department started to issue a new form of smart identity card. The new card is more durable and features enhanced security features and chip technology that provide better protection of personal data and against counterfeiting. A contactless chip interface on top of the existing contact chip interface enables faster clearance at e-Channels.

The Territory-wide Identity Card Replacement Exercise was launched on 27 December. All holders of smart identity cards shall replace their cards by phases at nine replacement centres, where self-service registration kiosks and collection kiosks are available in addition to manned counters. Residents can make appointments and fill in the form on the internet or through the Hong Kong Immigration Mobile Application.

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 2018, there were 170 declarations of change of nationality, 1,805 applications for naturalisation as Chinese nationals, 188 applications for renunciation of Chinese nationality and four 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, overseas Chinese diplomatic and consular missions, 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. A 24-hour hotline, (852) 1868, provides emergency assistance to Hong Kong residents in any country or territory. In 2018, the unit handled 3,592 assistance requests.

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 any of the five marriage registries or 271 licensed places of worship, or engage a civil celebrant to celebrate their marriage at any place in Hong Kong other than the marriage registries and licensed places of worship. In 2018, 22,143 marriages were celebrated in marriage registries, 1,841 in licensed places of worship, and 25,713 by civil celebrants. The registrar issued 19,702 Certificates of Absence of Marriage Record.

Births and Deaths

Under the Births and Deaths Registration Ordinance, parents shall register the birth of their child in Hong Kong with the Registrar of Births and Deaths within 42 days of the birth. Registration is free 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. Four district birth registries provide birth registration service. In 2018, 54,330 live births were registered.

Deaths from natural causes should be registered by relatives within 24 hours. Three death registries and 15 designated police stations in the New Territories and outlying islands handle death registration free of charge. In 2018, 47,479 deaths were registered.

Websites

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

Immigration Department: www.immd.gov.hk

Security Bureau: www.sb.gov.hk