

Population and Immigration

Hong Kong's population stood at nearly 7.5 million in 2020. The territory processed around 24 million entries and departures, a year-on-year drop of 92 per cent.

Hong Kong's provisional population at the end of 2020 was 7,474,200, or a decrease of 0.6 per cent over the previous year, due to 6,700 more deaths than births and a net outflow of 39,800 residents. Over the period 2015-20, the average population annual growth rate was 0.4 per cent. The birth rate¹ in 2020 was about six per 1,000, slightly lower than the seven per 1,000 in 2019. The death rate² remained unchanged at seven per 1,000.

Between mid-2015 and mid-2020, the under-15 age group grew slightly from 11 per cent to 12 per cent, while the 65 and over age group grew from 15 per cent to 18 per cent. The population's median age rose from 43 years to 45 years. The overall dependency ratio³ increased from 363 per 1,000 to 428 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. It strives to enhance 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 7,407 and 1,712 disciplined and civilian posts respectively 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. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government suspended passenger clearance services at most control points in phases from January. Around 24.2 million people entered and left the city in 2020, a drop of 92 per cent from 2019.

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 the participating countries.

Entry for Residence

The Mainland is the major contributor to Hong Kong's immigrant population. In 2020, about 10,100 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 when that person is born.

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 holding 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-2020, about 220,500 certificate of entitlement holders entered Hong Kong from the Mainland.

Quality Migrant Admission Scheme

Highly skilled or talented people are encouraged to settle in Hong Kong to enhance Hong Kong's economic competitiveness. Successful applicants need not secure an offer of local employment before relocating to Hong Kong. There was a quota of 1,709 places allotted to the scheme in 2020.

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, 21,612 professionals and entrepreneurs were admitted.

Technology Talent Admission Scheme

This 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. From the start of implementation in June 2018 to end-2020, 215 applications for visas or entry permits 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 stay and work in Hong Kong for one year after graduation. Non-local graduates who have left Hong Kong 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, 7,154 non-local graduates were approved to stay in or return to Hong Kong for employment.

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

This scheme facilitates the return to Hong Kong of those born overseas to Chinese Hong Kong permanent residents who have emigrated. Those approved under the scheme need not have secured a job offer upon their first entry. In 2020, 37 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 was suspended on 15 January 2015. By end-2020, the scheme had approved 35,449 applications involving total investments of \$316.8 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; 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 for employment (as professionals, for investment to establish or join in a business as entrepreneurs, or 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 reside in Hong Kong.

Illegal Immigration

The government keeps a close watch on illegal immigration and liaises closely with the Mainland and overseas law enforcement agencies on population movements and irregular migration. In 2020, the city arrested 828 Mainland illegal immigrants and 1,121 non-ethnic-Chinese illegal immigrants.

Personal Documentation

Travel Documents

The department strictly controls the issue of HKSAR passports, granting them only to Hong Kong permanent residents who are Chinese nationals with the right of abode in the HKSAR holding valid Hong Kong permanent identity cards. Since 2019, the department has issued a new generation of e-Passports, incorporating enhanced security features and an integrated chip containing the holder's personal data and facial image, in compliance with the standards specified by the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

Eligible applicants may submit HKSAR passport applications in person, by post, through drop-in boxes, via self-service Travel Document Submission Kiosks or via the GovHK website and the Immigration Department Mobile Application. From 30 October, passport applicants can choose to collect their passports at Chinese diplomatic and consular missions, or at the new Passport Collection Kiosks at the department's headquarters and its West Kowloon office, in addition to the department's existing service counters. Those living 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 Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices in Shanghai, Chengdu, Guangdong and Wuhan. In 2020, the department received 250,896 HKSAR passport applications, including 4,898 from overseas and 3,552 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 four appeals in 2020.

The department lobbies for greater travel convenience for HKSAR passport holders. In 2020, Kenya agreed to grant visa-on-arrival to HKSAR passport holders, bringing to 167 the number of countries/territories granting visa-free access or visa-on-arrival 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 eligible Hong Kong residents to travel to the Mainland and Macao. During the year, 16,181 Doc/Is and 21,756 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. During the year, 55,799 applications were approved.

Smart Identity Cards

The smart identity card is highly fraud-resistant. It uses fingerprint recognition technology to authenticate the cardholder's identity and enables self-service immigration clearance via e-Channels.

In 2018, the department started issuing a new form of smart identity card with enhanced security features and chip technology that provide better protection of personal data and against counterfeiting. An improved contactless chip interface enables faster clearance at e-Channels.

A phased replacement of all existing smart identity cards began in 2018, and 1,137,868 new smart identity cards were issued by the department in 2020.

Nationality Matters

The department is authorised by the Central People's Government to handle Chinese nationality applications from Hong Kong residents. In 2020, there were 209 declarations of change of nationality, 756 applications for naturalisation as Chinese nationals, 299 applications for renunciation of Chinese nationality and four applications for restoration of Chinese nationality.

Assistance to Hong Kong Residents Outside Hong Kong

The 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, overseas Chinese diplomatic and consular missions, foreign 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 provides emergency assistance. The unit handled 18,511 assistance requests in 2020, mainly from residents outside Hong Kong who were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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 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 any of the five marriage registries or 272 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. During the year, 12,206 marriages were celebrated in marriage registries, 1,393 in licensed places of worship, and 14,562 by civil celebrants. The registrar issued 7,594 Certificates of Absence of Marriage Record.

Births and Deaths

Under the Births and Deaths Registration Ordinance, parents must 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 services. During the year, 41,955 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 registrations free of charge. During the year, 50,653 deaths were registered.

Websites

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

Immigration Department: www.immd.gov.hk

Security Bureau: www.sb.gov.hk