

Population and Immigration

Hong Kong's population was more than 7.4 million in 2021. The territory processed around 2 million entries and departures, a year-on-year drop of almost 92 per cent.

Hong Kong's provisional population at the end of 2021 was 7,403,100, or a decrease of 0.3 per cent over the previous year, due to 14,200 more deaths than births and a net outflow of 9,400 residents. Over the period 2016-21, the average population annual growth rate was 0.1 per cent. The birth rate¹ in 2021 was about five per 1,000, slightly lower than the six per 1,000 in 2020. The death rate² remained unchanged at seven per 1,000.

Between mid-2016 and mid-2021, the under-15 age group remained unchanged at 11 per cent, while the 65 and over age group grew from 16 per cent to 20 per cent. The population's median age rose from 43 years to 46 years. The overall dependency ratio³ increased from 373 per 1,000 to 438 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

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.

registers births, deaths and marriages. It strives to enhance its services using advanced information technology. It had 7,411 and 1,713 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 2020. Around 2 million people entered and left the city in 2021, a drop of 91.9 per cent from 2020.

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.

With a view to providing faster, more convenient and hygienic automated immigration clearance service, the Contactless e-Channel service for Hong Kong residents was implemented in December. After enrolment through the Contactless e-Channel mobile application, eligible residents can generate an encrypted QR code to enter the e-Channel, and confirm their identity with facial verification technology. Throughout the entire process, they are not required to touch any shared equipment in the e-Channel.

Entry for Residence

The Mainland is the major contributor to Hong Kong's immigrant population. In 2021, about 17,900 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-2021, about 221,900 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. The government doubled the annual quota to 4,000 in October and a total of 2,004 quotas were allotted under the scheme in 2021.

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, 22,886 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-2021, 275 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 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, 7,259 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 2021, 39 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-2021, the scheme had approved 35,456 applications involving total investments of \$316.9 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.

People 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 or 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 2021, the city arrested 1,376 Mainland illegal immigrants and 850 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. Passport applicants can collect their passports at the department's existing service counters or Chinese diplomatic and consular missions, or in a self-service manner at the new Passport Collection Kiosks at the department's headquarters, West Kowloon office and Tuen Mun office. From 29 November, the Immigration Divisions of the Beijing Office and the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices in Shanghai, Chengdu, Guangdong and Wuhan not only process HKSAR passport replacement applications, but also first applications for passports. Those living in the Mainland may also submit applications directly to the department in person, by post, through drop-in boxes or via the GovHK website and the Immigration Department Mobile Application, and choose to collect the passports at the Immigration Divisions of the above offices in the Mainland. In 2021, the department received 312,536 HKSAR passport applications, including 2,355 from overseas and 9,251 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 three appeals in 2021.

The department lobbies for greater travel convenience for HKSAR passport holders. In 2021, Oman agreed to grant visa-free access to HKSAR passport holders, while the period of visa-free entry for HKSAR passport holders to Uzbekistan was extended from seven days to 10 days. As of December, 168 countries and territories have granted 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. From 29 September and 29 November, in addition to existing applicable means of application, eligible applicants in the Mainland may submit a replacement application for a Doc/I or REP respectively in person at the Immigration Divisions of the Mainland offices without returning to Hong Kong to apply for the document. During the year, 23,968 Doc/Is and 18,721 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, 56,546 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 2,136,058 new smart identity cards were issued by the department in 2021.

Nationality Matters

The department is authorised by the Central People's Government to handle Chinese nationality applications from Hong Kong residents. In 2021, there were 332 declarations of change of nationality, 1,233 applications for naturalisation as Chinese nationals, 426 applications for renunciation of Chinese nationality and 11 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. In 2021, the unit handled 2,647 assistance requests, which were mainly related to the 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, 12,354 marriages were celebrated in marriage registries, 1,212 in licensed places of worship, and 13,203 by civil celebrants. The registrar issued 10,391 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, 38,684 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, 51,536 deaths were registered.

Websites

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

Immigration Department: www.immd.gov.hk

Security Bureau: www.sb.gov.hk