

## Population and Immigration

*Hong Kong's population stood at more than 7.4 million in 2017. The territory processed over 290 million entries and departures, up 0.9 per cent from the previous year.*

The provisional figure for the population of Hong Kong at the end of 2017 was 7,409,800, or 0.4 per cent up on the previous year. This was due to 10,000 more births than deaths and a net inflow of 22,600 residents. Over the period 2012-17, the average annual growth rate of the population was 0.7 per cent. The birth rate<sup>1</sup> in 2017 was about eight per 1,000, same as in 2016. The death rate<sup>2</sup> also remained unchanged at about six per 1,000.

The under-15 age group in mid-2017 made up 11 per cent of the population, same as in mid-2012. On the other hand, the age group of 65 and above grew from 14 per cent to 16 per cent. During the same period, the population's median age rose from 42 years to 44 years. The overall dependency ratio<sup>3</sup> increased from 335 per 1,000 to 386 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 controls 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 provides a wide range of services to residents, including issuing HKSAR identity cards, passports and other travel

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<sup>1</sup> The birth rate refers to the number of known live births occurring in a calendar year per thousand mid-year population.

<sup>2</sup> The death rate refers to the number of known deaths occurring in a calendar year per thousand mid-year population.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

documents; handling nationality and residency matters; and registering births, deaths and marriages. The department enhances these services using advanced information technology.

The department had 6,212 disciplined staff members and 1,565 civilian staff members 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 290 million people entered and left the city in 2017, an increase of 0.9 per cent from 2016. Over 110 million people arrived by land, including more than 39 million visitors, most of whom were Mainland residents. The e-Channel, an electronic system installed at boundary crossings including vehicular control points, provides automated immigration clearance for Hong Kong residents, enrolled Consular Corps Identity Card holders, visitors and eligible Mainland visitors. The new Smart Departure system allows 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 and South Korea. This allows 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 2017, about 47,000 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.

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 the natural parents must be a Chinese citizen who has the right of abode at the time of that person's birth.

The Certificate of Entitlement Scheme, introduced on 10 July 1997, requires 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 systematic verification of right-of-abode claims and ensures orderly entry. Between 1 July 1997 and end-2017, some 212,900 certificate of entitlement holders entered Hong Kong from the Mainland.

### **Quality Migrant Admission Scheme**

The scheme seeks to enhance the city's pool of human capital by allowing talent to apply for entry and settlement without first securing an offer of local employment. It allotted 411 places to applicants in 2017.

### **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 locally. Non-local entrepreneurs, including start-up entrepreneurs, who can contribute substantially to the economy are also welcome to apply to come to Hong Kong to establish or join in a business. In 2017, 52,333 non-local professionals and entrepreneurs were admitted.

### **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. In 2017, 9,331 non-local graduates were approved to stay in Hong Kong or return for employment.

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

This pilot scheme facilitates the return of the second generation of Chinese Hong Kong permanent residents who have emigrated. Entrants are not required to have secured a job offer upon their first entry. In 2017, 80 applicants 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-2017, 33,550 applicants had received approval, investing a total of \$297.6 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, 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 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. During 2017, the city arrested 722 Mainland illegal immigrants, 55 per cent more than in 2016; and 893 non-ethnic-Chinese illegal immigrants, including Vietnamese, 60 per cent less than in 2016. 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 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. For eligible applicants residing on the Mainland, they 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 2017, the department received 739,349 HKSAR passport applications, including 7,808 from overseas and 3,244 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 2017.

The department lobbies for greater immigration convenience, including visa-free access for HKSAR passport holders. In 2017, Barbados and Togo agreed to grant visa-free access and visa-on-arrival access to HKSAR passport holders respectively. By the year end, HKSAR passport holders had visa-free or visa-on-arrival access to 159 countries and territories.

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 2017, 58,072 Doc/Is and 87,817 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 for verification of their eligibility for a permanent identity card. In 2017, 63,609 applications were approved.

### **Smart Identity Card**

The smart identity card issued by the department is highly fraud-resistant, making use of fingerprint recognition technology to authenticate the cardholder's identity and enabling cardholders to enjoy self-service immigration clearance via e-Channels. In 2017, 579,436 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 2017, there were 161 applications for declaration of change of nationality, 1,534 applications for naturalisation as Chinese nationals, 160 applications for renunciation of Chinese nationality and three 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 2017, the unit handled 3,311 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 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. In 2017, 22,621 marriages were celebrated in marriage registries, 1,975 in licensed places of worship, and 26,307 by civil celebrants. The registrar issued 20,160 Certificates of Absence of Marriage Records in 2017.

### **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 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. Four district birth registries provide birth registration service.

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 provide free death registration. In 2017, 56,890 live births and 45,883 deaths were registered.

**Websites**

Census and Statistics Department: [www.censtatd.gov.hk](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk)

Immigration Department: [www.immd.gov.hk](http://www.immd.gov.hk)

Security Bureau: [www.sb.gov.hk](http://www.sb.gov.hk)