

Hong Kong has established itself as one of the world's major destinations for tourists and business visitors. In 2023, passenger arrivals and departures totalled about 212 million.

The Immigration Department is responsible for two main areas: for control of people moving into and out of Hong Kong by land, sea and air; and the documentation of local residents, including the processing of applications relating to the Nationality Law of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and claims to right of abode under the Basic Law (BL), the issue of travel documents and identity cards, and the registration of births, deaths and marriages.

Immigration Control: Hong Kong has all along adopted an open immigration policy. Nationals of about 170 countries and territories are allowed visa-free visits to Hong Kong for periods ranging from 7 to 180 days. Professionals and entrepreneurs are welcome to work and invest in Hong Kong. While every effort is made to facilitate the entry of visitors and those who contribute to Hong Kong's development and prosperity, immigration controls are designed and operated to prevent the entry of undesirable persons.

Every visitor to Hong Kong must possess a valid travel document, sufficient means of support and re-entry facilities to their places of domicile. Persons applying for permission to live, work or study in Hong Kong are required to obtain visas or entry permits before arrival.

The BL provides the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government with full autonomy on immigration control matters.

Policies to Attract Talent and Capital: Overseas professionals who possess special skills, knowledge or experience of value to and not readily available in Hong Kong, or who are in a position to make substantial contributions to the economy, may apply to work here under the General Employment Policy (GEP). Applicants must have a confirmed offer of employment, the remuneration package of which must be broadly commensurate with the prevailing market level for professionals in Hong Kong. In 2023, 26 270 overseas professionals were admitted under the GEP.

The Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals (ASMTP) was implemented on July 15, 2003 with assessment criteria in line with those under the GEP. The objective of this scheme is to attract qualified Mainland talent and professionals to work in Hong Kong in order to meet local manpower needs and enhance Hong Kong's competitiveness in the globalised market. The scheme has no sectoral restrictions and allows intra-company transfer of senior managers and professionals. As at the end of 2023, 181 876 Mainland talent and professionals were admitted under the scheme.

The Quality Migrant Admission Scheme (QMAS) was implemented on June 28, 2006. The scheme is a quota based

entrant scheme and operated on a points-based system. It seeks to attract highly skilled or talented persons the Mainland and overseas to settle in Hong Kong in order to enhance Hong Kong's economic competitiveness in the global market. Successful applicants are not required to secure an offer of local employment before taking up residence in Hong Kong. With effect from January 1, 2023, the HKSAR Government suspended the annual quota of the scheme for a period of two years. Meanwhile, the point-scoring scheme of the QMAS has also been revised to place a greater emphasis on the applicants' work experience. Under the General Points Test (GPT), applicants with not less than three years of work experience in multinational companies or reputable enterprises will be awarded 20 additional points. As at the end of 2023, a total of 24 945 applicants were allocated quotas.

After promulgating the first Talent List of Hong Kong in August 2018, the HKSAR Government updated the list in October 2021 by adding two professions, making a total of 13 professions and expanding the scope of some existing professions. The HKSAR Government announced on May 16, 2023 the expanded Talent List, with its coverage increased further from 13 professions to 51, which were immediately applicable to the QMAS, the GEP, and the ASMTP. Under the QMAS, eligible applicants who meet the requirements of respective professions on the list will be awarded 30 bonus points under the GPT to stand a better chance of getting approval. Furthermore, employers recruiting talent under the GEP and the ASMTP to fill vacancies falling within the professions on the list are not required to provide proof to substantiate their difficulties in local recruitment. Instead, they can make visa applications directly, thus shortening their time for recruiting outside talent.

The Technology Talent Admission Scheme was implemented on June 25, 2018. The scheme provides a fast-track arrangement for eligible technology companies/institutes to admit non-local technology talent to undertake research and development work for them in Hong Kong. Eligible technology companies/institutes would first have to apply for a quota. A company/institute allotted with a quota by the Innovation and Technology Commission can now accordingly sponsor an eligible person to apply for an employment visa/entry permit from the Immigration Department within the 24-month quota validity period. As at the end of 2023, 465 applicants were admitted under the scheme.

The Capital Investment Entrant Scheme was implemented on October 27, 2003. The objective of the scheme is to facilitate entry for residence by capital investment entrants, i.e. persons who make capital investment in Hong Kong but would not be engaged in the running of any business here. This scheme has been suspended since January 15, 2015. As at the end of 2023, formal approval was given to 35 461 applications. The amount of investments made under the scheme totalled

\$316.9 billion.

To strengthen the development of our asset and wealth management business, financial services and related professional services, the HKSAR Government announced that the New Capital Investment Entrant Scheme would be implemented in 2024. Under this scheme, eligible investors who make investments of \$30 million or above in assets such as stocks, funds, bonds, etc. (excluding real estate) can apply for entry into Hong Kong. The Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates was launched on May 19, 2008 to complement the policy initiative “Developing Hong Kong as a Regional Education Hub”. Persons from outside the HKSAR who have obtained a degree or higher qualification in a full-time locally-accredited programme in Hong Kong (non-local graduates) may apply to stay/return and work in Hong Kong under the arrangement. With effect from December 28, 2022, the scope of the arrangements has been expanded to cover persons who have obtained an undergraduate or higher qualification in a full-time programme offered by a higher education institution in the Mainland cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area jointly established by universities of the Mainland and Hong Kong. The arrangement is introduced on a trial basis for a period of two years. Successful applicants may now be granted 24 months' stay on time limitation without other conditions of stay. They are free to take up and change employment during their permitted stay without the need to seek prior approval from the Immigration Department. As at the end of 2023, 141 925 non-local graduates were approved to work in Hong Kong under this arrangement.

To alleviate the manpower shortage in skilled trades, the HKSAR Government announced that the Vocational Professionals Admission Scheme would be run as pilot for a period of two years. Under the scheme, non-local students enrolled in designated full-time Higher Diploma programmes of the Vocational Training Council in Hong Kong for the 2024/25 and 2025/26 academic years will be allowed to stay in Hong Kong for one year after graduation to seek jobs relevant to their disciplines.

The Admission Scheme for the Second Generation of Chinese Hong Kong Permanent Residents was implemented on May 4, 2015 to attract the second generation of Chinese Hong Kong permanent residents who have emigrated overseas to return to Hong Kong for development. There is no quota under this scheme and applicants are not required to have secured an offer of employment before entry. Successful applicants under this scheme may now be granted a stay of 24 months without other conditions of stay. They are free to take up or change employment or to establish or join in business in Hong Kong during their permitted stay without the need to seek prior approval from the Immigration Department. As at the end of 2023, 670 applications were approved.

The Top Talent Pass Scheme (TTPS) was initiated on a trial basis for a period of two years on December 28, 2022 to attract high-income talents and graduates from the world's top universities. The three categories of eligible talents include (i) persons with annual income reaching HK\$2.5 million or above, or its equivalent in foreign currency, in the year immediately preceding the date of application, (ii) bachelor's degree graduates of the eligible universities with at least three years of

work experience over the past five years immediately preceding the date of application, and (iii) bachelor's degree graduates of the eligible universities in the past five years immediately preceding the date of application with less than three years of work experience. The first two categories are not subject to any quota, while the third is subject to an annual quota of 10 000. Talents admitted under the scheme will normally be granted an initial stay of 24 months on time limitation only without other conditions of stay. With effect from November 2023, the list of eligible universities under the TTPS has added eight top institutions from the Mainland and overseas. There are currently 185 eligible institutions on the list. As at the end of 2023, 50 612 applications were approved.

Persons admitted under the aforesaid policy, schemes or arrangement may apply to bring in 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 entered into by him/her in accordance with the local law in force of the place of celebration and with such status being legally and officially recognised by the local authorities of the place of celebration and unmarried dependant children below the age of 18 under the prevailing dependant policy.

Facilitation of Passenger Movements: In 2023, the total number of passengers moving into and out of Hong Kong was about 212 million. The number of visitors travelling to Hong Kong increased from 600 000 in 2022 to 34.0 million in 2023, increased by 55 times. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of the HKSAR had suspended passenger clearance services at most of the control points in phases from late January 2020 to early 2023. The normal travel of persons between Hong Kong and the Mainland has been resumed progressively in phases starting January 8, 2023, and fully resumed starting February 6, 2023.

Lo Wu is the busiest control point. In 2023, 45.37 million passengers passed through this control point. To further strengthen the economic relation between Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta region, 24-hour clearance service for cross-boundary passengers was introduced at the Lok Ma Chau Control Point on January 27, 2003.

The West Kowloon Station of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Hong Kong Port were commissioned on September 23, 2018 and October 24, 2018 respectively, further enhancing the overall passenger handling capacity of control points. To further support the logistics flow between Hong Kong and Shenzhen, the operating hours of cargo clearance was extended to 24 hours at the Shenzhen bay with effect from December 10, 2020. The Heung Yuen Wai Boundary Control Point commenced operation on August 26, 2020 with cargo clearance service only. It commenced full operation (including cargo and passenger clearance services) on February 6, 2023.

To facilitate Hong Kong residents' self-driving to Guangdong for business, visiting families or sight-seeing on a short-term basis, further making good use of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge and promoting the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the “Northbound Travel for Hong Kong Vehicles” (the Scheme) has been launched since 1 July 2023. The Scheme allows eligible

Hong Kong private cars to travel between Hong Kong and Guangdong via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge without the need to obtain regular quotas.

The Immigration Department has introduced the Automated Passenger Clearance and Automated Vehicle Clearance Systems (collectively known as e-Channels) for eligible smart identity card holders to perform self-service clearance at all control points since 2004. To enhance immigration clearance efficiency and the overall passenger and vehicle throughput, the Immigration Department has launched the new Immigration Control System in phases since 2016. As at the end of 2023, a total of 756 multi-purpose e-Channels and 164 vehicular e-Channels were installed at all control points.

In order to provide greater travel convenience for both Hong Kong and Macao residents, enrolled Macao permanent residents may use e-Channels to perform immigration clearance at all control points since December 2009. Reciprocally, eligible Hong Kong residents may use the automated immigration clearance service at control points in Macao. With effect from December 2016, Hong Kong non-permanent residents holding an HKSAR Document of Identity for Visa Purposes and Macao non-permanent residents holding a Visit Permit for Residents of Macao to HKSAR may also enjoy such facilitation.

Besides, to further enhance immigration facilitation for Mainland visitors, starting from the first quarter of 2012, enrolled Mainland visitors may use e-Channel service at control points in phases. To tie in with the introduction of the card-type electronic Exit-entry Permit for Travelling to and from Hong Kong and Macao (e-EEP) by the Mainland authorities in May 2014, eligible Mainland visitors holding an e-EEP can enjoy the e-Channel service at all control points. The Immigration Department adjusted the eligible age to 11 years old or above for holders of electronic Exit-Entry Permits for travelling to and from Hong Kong and Macao for using the e-Channel service starting from 29 April 2023.

Following the arrangements for mutual use of automated immigration clearance services with Korea, Singapore, Germany and Australia, a similar arrangement with Thailand was implemented in September 2018. Moreover, with effect from December 2018, further facilitation for enrolment for automated clearance services has been provided by Hong Kong and Singapore on a mutual basis, so that eligible passport holders of both sides can enjoy greater convenience when they travel between the two places.

In March 2013, the Immigration Department implemented the non-stamping immigration clearance arrangement for visitors in order to provide more efficient services and simplify the immigration clearance procedure. All arriving visitors at control points would be issued with landing slips in lieu of stamping on their travel documents. Upon departure, no slip would be issued and their travel documents would not be stamped. The non-stamping immigration clearance arrangement was extended to Hong Kong non-permanent residents in December 2013.

To provide greater convenience for departing visitors, self-service departure for visitors (Smart Departure) was first launched at the Hong Kong International Airport in October 2017. The service was extended to other control points in December 2017. Smart Departure employs facial recognition

technology for identity verification, which allows eligible visitors holding electronic travel documents to perform self-service departure clearance through Smart Departure e-Channels without prior enrolment.

In December 2021, the Immigration Department launched the Contactless e-Channel service at Hong Kong International Airport, Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Hong Kong Port, Shenzhen Bay Control Point and Kai Tak Cruise Terminal Control Point to allow registered Hong Kong residents to undergo self-service immigration clearance using an encrypted QR code generated by the Contactless e-Channel mobile application and facial recognition technology without the need to present their identity cards or touch the fingerprint scanner, thus bringing members of the public faster, more convenient and more hygienic immigration clearance service. The service was extended to all immigration control points in 2022.

The Immigration Department launched the Flight Token e-Channel service at HKIA on October 25, 2022. 'Flight Token' is one of the smart airport initiatives developed by the Airport Authority Hong Kong (AAHK) which utilises facial recognition technology for departing passengers going through various airport checkpoints from check in to boarding using their faces, thereby reducing the need for repetitive travel document and boarding pass checks. Eligible Hong Kong residents who choose to use the 'Flight Token' service of AAHK can use the Flight Token e-Channel service for automated departure clearance. Throughout the entire process, there is no need for them to present any documents.

To reinforce and enhance Hong Kong's competitiveness as an international and regional aviation hub, the AAHK expanded the SkyPier, which located at the HKIA, into the new SkyPier Terminal (SPT) with a vehicular bridge linking up the Hong Kong Boundary Crossing Facilities of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) with HKIA. The SPT had commenced operation on 30 August 2023 and fully commissioned on 12 December 2023, providing transfer coach service for transfer passengers travelling between Hong Kong, Zhuhai port and Macao port through HZMB with a view to providing new hassle-free travelling experience for bridge-to-air/air-to-bridge transfer passengers.

Starting from July 2023, the e-Channel service has been further extended to foreign domestic helpers, non-local students and imported workers. The above categories of Hong Kong residents aged 11 or above holding smart identity cards may enrol to use e-Channel service.

Right of Abode: Under the law, Hong Kong permanent residents have the right of abode in the HKSAR. Article 24 of the BL sets out six categories of persons who are permanent residents of the HKSAR. On July 1, 1997, the Immigration Ordinance (Cap. 115) was amended to align the right of abode provisions with those in the BL.

The Certificate of Entitlement Scheme was introduced on July 10, 1997. Under the scheme, a person's status as a Hong Kong permanent resident by descent can only be established by holding his/her valid travel document affixed with his/her certificate of entitlement.

The Registration of Persons Ordinance (Cap. 177) and its subsidiary legislation provide for the issue of permanent

identity cards to Hong Kong permanent residents. The permanent identity card contains a statement that the holder has the right of abode in Hong Kong.

Passports and Identity Cards: The Immigration Department started to issue HKSAR passports on July 1, 1997 according to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Passports Ordinance (Cap. 539) to Chinese citizens who have the right of abode in Hong Kong and who hold valid Hong Kong permanent identity cards and introduced electronic passports since February 5, 2007. The next generation HKSAR electronic passports was introduced on May 14, 2019 with further enhanced security features. In 2023, a total of 1 453 395 HKSAR passports were issued. Eligible applicants may submit their applications for HKSAR passports to the Immigration Department in person, by post, through drop-in boxes, via the internet, Immigration Department Mobile Application or self-service kiosks. Apart from submitting their applications via the internet or Immigration Department Mobile Application, or by post to the Immigration Department direct, applicants staying overseas may also submit their applications through the Chinese Diplomatic and Consular Missions whereas those who are in the Mainland may also submit their applications at the Immigration Divisions of the Office of the Government of the HKSAR in Beijing and the four Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices (HKETOs) in Shanghai, Chengdu, Guangdong and Wuhan of the HKSAR Government. Applicants overseas or in the Mainland who submit applications for a HKSAR passport directly to the Immigration Department by whichever means may choose to collect their passports at the Chinese Diplomatic and Consular Missions or Mainland Offices of the HKSAR Government.

The Immigration Department started to issue new smart Identity cards on November 26, 2018 and the Territory-wide Identity Card Replacement Exercise (Replacement Exercise) commenced on December 27, 2018. In view of the demographic changes of Hong Kong and to provide more convenience to the needy groups, it is for the first time the Immigration Department introduced the On-site Identity Card Replacement Service during the Replacement Exercise for the elderly persons and persons with disabilities residing at residential care homes (RCHs) to have their identity cards replaced and collected at their RCHs. Officers of the Immigration Department will continue to visit RCHs and to replace new smart identity cards for eligible residents in the RCHs until the first quarter of 2025. Following the conclusion of the Replacement Exercise on March 3, 2023, the Government announced on June 18, 2024 that the old form of smart identity cards issued before November 26, 2018 (old ID cards) will be invalidated in two phases in 2025. Phase I of the invalidation exercise will cover holders of old ID cards born in 1970 or after, whose old cards will become invalid on May 12, 2025. Phase II of the invalidation exercise will cover holders of old ID cards born in 1969 or before, whose old cards will become invalid on October 12, 2025.

Chinese Nationality Matters: The Immigration department is authorised to process applications relating to the Nationality Law of the PRC with effect from July 1, 1997. In 2023, a total of 366 applications were received for declaration of change of nationality, 2 147 for naturalisation as a Chinese national, 261

for renunciation of Chinese nationality and 15 for restoration of Chinese nationality.

Assistance to Hong Kong Residents Outside Hong Kong: Hong Kong residents outside Hong Kong in need of assistance (e.g. those who have lost their travel documents, being involved in traffic accidents, being arrested or detained) may approach the Chinese diplomatic and consular missions overseas, the Immigration Divisions of the Beijing Office and the HKETOs in Shanghai, Wuhan, Chengdu and Guangdong or the Immigration Department in Hong Kong. In 2023, a total of 3 035 requests for assistance were received.

Hong Kong residents may contact the Assistance to Hong Kong Residents Unit of the Immigration Department for assistance by six means which include calling the 24-hour hotline at (852) 1868, calling the 1868 hotline using network data or using the 1868 Chatbot via the Immigration Department Mobile Application, sending message to the 1868 WhatsApp assistance hotline, sending message to the 1868 WeChat assistance hotline or submitting the Online Assistance Request Form.

Registration of Outbound Travel Information (ROTI): Before travelling abroad, Hong Kong residents can use the online ROTI service to register their contact details and itineraries. The information they provide allows the Assistance to Hong Kong Residents Unit of the Hong Kong Immigration Department to contact and assist them in the event of an emergency outside Hong Kong.

Illegal Immigration: During 2023, the city arrested 351 Mainland illegal immigrants, 378 Vietnamese illegal immigrants and 935 non-ethnic-Chinese illegal immigrants excluding Vietnamese.

Administration: Since its formation in 1961, the Immigration Department has expanded from 73 uniformed and 128 civilian staff to the present establishment of 7 232 uniformed officers and 1 582 civilians as at December 31, 2022. Its size and range of responsibilities now bear little resemblance to the embryonic organisation in 1961.

The work is carried out by Immigration Headquarters, which has been moved from Wan Chai to Tseung Kwan O on June 11, 2024, branch offices and registries located throughout Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories; and from the 16 points of entry and departure. The 16 control points are located at the airport, the harbour, the River Trade Terminal, the Hong Kong-Macau Ferry Terminal, the China Ferry Terminal, the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal, Lo Wu, Man Kam To, Sha Tau Kok, Lok Ma Chau, MTR Lok Ma Chau Station, MTR Hung Hom Station for through trains to and from the Mainland, the two control points with co-location facilities at Shenzhen Bay and the West Kowloon Station of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link, the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Hong Kong Port which is the first control point linking Hong Kong, Zhuhai and Macao and adopting “separate locations” mode of clearance arrangement, as well as the Heung Yuen Wai which is the first land boundary control point that offers “direct access by passengers and vehicles”.

In 2023, the Immigration Department processed 39 528 investigation/removal/deportation cases. 77 150 stops, 17 788 searches, 5 491 arrests and 7 012 detentions were made. 4 050 offenders were prosecuted.

In 2023, a total of 1 405 336 smart identity cards were issued, in which 361 389 were issued under the Replacement Exercise. Besides, a total of 46 347 copies of Certificates of Registered Particulars were issued.

In 2023, the Births and Deaths Registry registered 33 289 births and 56 776 deaths while the Marriage Registry registered 47 519 marriages.

The introduction of the Civil Celebrants of Marriages Scheme since April 21, 2006 has brought greater convenience to marrying parties in their choice of place and time for wedding. For the period from April 21, 2006 to December 31, 2023, 397 920 couples (representing 47.1 per cent of the marriages celebrated in the same period) had their marriages celebrated through civil celebrants.

Acting on the recommendations of the report on the Third Information Systems Strategy, the Immigration Department has been gradually replacing the existing information systems, including the completion of the New Immigration Control System in 2017, the Next Generation Smart Identity Card System in 2018 and the Next Generation Electronic Passport System in 2019.

For the Next Generation Application and Investigation Easy Systems (APPLIES-2) project, consisting of the Visa Automation System; the Assistance to Hong Kong Residents, Births, Deaths and Marriage and Right of Abode Decision Support System; and the Enforcement Case Processing System, it is implemented by a "two-phase approach" to ensure a smooth transition from the old system to the new one. The first phase of the new system, which includes all the functions of the old system, was implemented by January 2022. The second phase, including electronic services for all types of visa application, electronic services for birth and death registration, etc., was also completed in August 2023.

Annual Passenger Movements

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Air	50 931 408	53 377 591	48 997 829	5 709 065	677 108	4 141 363	31 716 381
Land	221 674 873	235 654 782	236 170 478	17 467 772	994 193	1 120 792	171 966 540
Sea	26 825 232	25 653 997	16 095 799	1 030 238	280 574	33 275	8 071 179
Total	299 431 513	314 686 370	301 264 106	24 207 075	1 951 875	5 295 430	211 754 100

Travel Documents in Circulation

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
HKSAR Passport	5 772 326	5 915 359	6 124 810	5 793 186	5 483 161	5 412 157	6 070 494
Document of Identity	377 356	385 875	386 230	349 371	327 214	308 264	296 577
Re-entry Permit	488 035	477 692	457 916	375 227	295 649	233 085	235 598