



## Immigration

Hong Kong has established itself as one of the world's major destinations for tourists and business visitors. In 2014, passenger arrivals and departures totalled about 290 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 Chinese Nationality Law 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 businessmen 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. Immigration can have a direct or indirect effect on such fields as housing, trade, tourism, economy, education, employment, aviation, shipping, crime prevention and public order. All these factors have to be taken into account in the operation of controls.

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

After reunification, 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 rate of Hong Kong. In 2014, 31 676 overseas professionals were admitted under the GEP.

The Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals 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

2014, 74 456 Mainland talents and professionals were admitted under the scheme.

The Quality Migrant Admission Scheme 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 from 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. As at the end of 2014, a total of 3 097 applicants were allocated quotas.

The Capital Investment Entrant Scheme was implemented on October 27, 2003. The objective of the scheme is to facilitate the 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. Entrants under this scheme are allowed to make their choice of investments amongst permissible investment assets without the need to establish or join in a business. The investment threshold under this scheme has been raised from \$6.5 million to \$10 million with effect from October 14, 2010. As at the end of 2014, 41 802 entrant applications were received. Of which, 27 997 applications were approved, including 25 504 for formal approval and 2 493 for approval-in-principle. The amount of investments made under the scheme totalled \$216.1 billion. <sup>Remark</sup>

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 and locally-accredited local programme in Hong Kong (non-local graduates) may apply to stay/return and work in Hong Kong under the arrangement. Successful applicants may be granted 12 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 2014, 41 194 non-local graduates were approved to work in Hong Kong under this arrangement.

Persons admitted under the aforesaid policy schemes or arrangement may apply to bring in their spouse and unmarried dependent children below the age of 18 under prevailing dependant policy.

**Facilitation of Passenger Movements:** In 2014, the total number of passengers moving into and out of Hong Kong was about 290 million, an increase of 4.7 per cent compared with 277 million in 2013. The number of visitors travelling to Hong Kong increased from 54.3 million in 2013 to 60.84 million in 2014, increased by 12 per cent. This included 46.99 million from the Mainland and 2.1 million from Taiwan.

Lo Wu continues to be the busiest control point. In 2014, 87.15 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 total passenger throughput there in 2014 was 28.54 million.

To enhance immigration clearance efficiency and overall passenger and vehicle throughput, the department introduced the Entry/Exit Processing and Records System at all control points in 2004, followed by the phased implementation of 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 December 2004. The department then extended the e-Channel services to cross boundary primary school students under the age of 11 and frequent visitors since December 2007 and May 2008 respectively. To provide faster immigration clearance to enrolled Hong Kong residents aged 18 or above who are existing e-Channel users, Express e-Channel service has commenced at the Lo Wu Control Point in March 2009. Furthermore, since the launch of the first e-Channel with voice navigation function in the world for visually impaired persons to perform self-service clearance at Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point in September 2013, the service was extended to the Macau Ferry Terminal Control Point in April 2014.

To further enhance immigration facilitation for Hong Kong and Macao residents, both the Hong Kong and Macao immigration authorities have introduced in December 2009 the e-Channel service to eligible Macao and Hong Kong residents who may use the automated clearance service at designated control points of the other side after successful enrolment.

Besides, to further enhance immigration facilitation for Mainland visitors, starting from the first quarter of 2012, enrolled Mainland visitors may use e-Channel services at nine control points, including Lo Wu, Lok Ma Chau Spur Line, Shenzhen Bay, Lok Ma Chau, Man Kam To, Macau Ferry Terminal, China Ferry Terminal, Kai Tak Cruise Terminal and Hong Kong International Airport by 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-EPP) by the Mainland authorities in May 2014, eligible e-EPP holders may use e-Channel service after successfully completing arrival clearance and enrolment at traditional counters upon their first visit to Hong Kong with the e-EPP.

With effect from December 2013, holders of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) passport are able to enrol for the automated immigration clearance service in the Republic of Korea whilst eligible Republic of Korea passport holders can also enrol for the e-Channel service in Hong Kong. Mutual use of automated immigration clearance service arrangements were implemented with the Republic of Singapore and the Federal Republic of Germany in September and November 2014 respectively.

As at December 2014, a total of 431 passenger e-Channels and 80 vehicular e-Channels had been installed at all control points.

In March 2013, the department implemented the non-stamping immigration clearance arrangement for visitors 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.

**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 valid travel document affixed with his certificate of entitlement.

The Registration of Persons Ordinance (Cap. 177) and 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 department started to issue HKSAR Passport on July 1, 1997 and a total of 774 032 were issued in 2014. The HKSAR passport is technically advanced. Since February 5, 2007, the department has started to issue electronic passports with enhanced security features. With effect from December 22, 2007, applicants aged 18 or above may apply for a HKSAR passport via the Internet and this service was extended to applicants aged 11-17 from November 30, 2009. Starting from August 25, 2008, applicants aged 18 or above may also submit their passport applications via the self-service kiosks. With effect from December 29, 2011, a pilot programme was launched for eligible applicants aged 11-17 to submit their passport applications through self-service kiosks installed at the Wan Chai Immigration Tower.

The department started to issue the smart identity cards on June 23, 2003 and the territory-wide identity card replacement exercise launched on August 18, 2003 was completed on March 31, 2007. On November 30, 2008, all the old identity cards issued before June 23, 2003 were declared invalid. Holders of old identity cards who have not replaced their identity cards during the specified call-up periods due to their absence from Hong Kong may apply for new identity cards within 30 days of their return to Hong Kong.

**Chinese Nationality Matters:** After the reunification, the department started to process applications relating to the Chinese Nationality Law. In 2014, a total of 137 applications were received for declaration of change of nationality, 1 458 for acquisition of Chinese nationality, 112 for renunciation of Chinese nationality and 3 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 Office of the Government of the HKSAR in Beijing and the Economic and Trade Offices of the Government of the HKSAR in Chengdu and Guangdong, the Hong Kong Economic, Trade and Cultural Office in Taiwan or the Immigration Department in Hong Kong. In 2014, a total of 2 068 requests for assistance were received.

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

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**Illegal Immigration:** In 2014, the number of Mainland illegal immigrants intercepted was 736, representing a decrease of 22.7 per cent when compared with 952 arrested in 2013. Some of the illegal immigrants came to Hong Kong to take up unlawful employment while some came here to meet their families and relatives. There was no Mainland pregnant illegal immigrant intercepted in 2013 and 2014.

**Administration:** Since its formation in 1961, the Immigration Department has expanded from 73 uniformed and 128 civilian staff to the present establishment of 5 554 uniformed officers and 1 528 civilians as at December 31, 2014. Its size and range of responsibilities now bear little resemblance to the embryonic organisation of 1961.

The work is carried out by Immigration Headquarters in Wan Chai on Hong Kong Island, branch offices and registries located throughout Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories; and from the 14 points of entry and departure. The 14 control points are located at the airport, the harbour, the River Trade Terminal, the Hong Kong-Macau Ferry Terminal, the China Ferry Terminal, the Tuen Mun Ferry Terminal (suspension of services since July 1, 2012 until further notice), 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, as well as the first control point with co-location facilities at Shenzhen Bay of Shekou, Shenzhen.

The Enforcement Division processed 43 527 investigations, 56 325 stops, 10 725 searches, 6 230 arrests and 10 045 detentions were made. 3 954 offenders were prosecuted.

In 2014, 548 271 applications for issue of identity cards were received. Besides, a total of 23 822 copies of Certificates of Registered Particulars were issued.

During 2014, the Births and Deaths Registry registered 61 322 births and 45 710 deaths while the Marriage Registry registered 56 393 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, 2014, 204 339 couples (representing 43.9 per cent of the marriages celebrated in the same period) had their marriages celebrated through the civil celebrants.

The Third Information Systems Strategy (ISS-3) Review by an external consultant was completed in September 2010.

Thereafter, the department has since started in phases to carry out feasibility studies and system implementation on the information systems (IS) recommended in the Review. The system design of the first project New Information Technology Infrastructure (ITI) was completed in mid 2014 and the two Data Centres commenced operation in June and October 2014 respectively. The tendering exercise for the second project of the New Immigration Control System was completed in November 2014 and related system design and development are underway. System rollout will start from early 2016 by phases. The implementation of the new system aims to maintain uninterrupted and quality clearance services to cope with continuous growth of passenger traffic and to support the Department in introducing new immigration initiatives. The feasibility study on the implementation of the Next Generation Smart Identity Card System was completed in October 2014 and funding approval of \$1,449 million was secured from the LegCo Finance Committee in May 2015 to replace the existing ageing computer system and to enhance operational efficiency and effectiveness in supporting the issue of smart Hong Kong Identity Cards. It was planned to implement the new system in early 2018. The feasibility study on the implementation of the Next Generation Electronic Passport System was completed in October 2014. Funding approval from the LegCo Finance Committee will be sought. For the feasibility study on the implementation of systems related to Visa Automation; Assistance to HK Residents, Births, Deaths & Marriage, Right of Abode Decision Support; and Enforcement Case Processing, it commenced in December 2014 and is scheduled to complete in late 2015.

#### Annual Passenger Movements

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Air	30 169 500	29 243 900	33 276 800	35 494 179	37 771 833	40 950 306	43 231 410
Land	166 105 200	169 968 000	181 852 000	190 618 159	202 575 135	208 675 554	218 966 219
Sea	26 703 000	23 908 200	25 918 500	27 291 600	27 379 087	27 776 468	28 359 645
Total	222 977 700	223 120 100	241 047 300	253 403 938	267 726 055	277 402 328	290 557 274

#### Travel Documents in Circulation

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
HKSAR Passports	3 934 288	4 088 337	4 261 263	4 524 015	4 652 737	4 966 652	5 117 471
Documents of Identity	312 037	324 728	321 647	334 635	343 795	336 714	347 934
HKSAR Re-entry Permit	493 778	509 749	535 504	561 830	574 547	567 452	561 087

Remark: CIES has been suspended since 15 January 2015.