

Hong Kong has established itself as one of the world's major destinations for tourists and business visitors. In 2019, passenger arrivals and departures totalled about 301 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 2019, 41 289 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 2019, 134 291 Mainland talent and professionals were admitted under the scheme.

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 accordingly sponsor an eligible person to apply for an employment visa/entry permit from the Immigration Department within the six-month quota validity period. As at the end of 2019, 99 applicants 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. With effect from 28 August 2018, applicants who meet the requirements of the Talent List will be awarded 30 bonus points under the General Points Test after assessment. As at the end of 2019, a total of 5 418 applicants were allocated quotas.

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 2019, 35 472 applications were approved, including 35 429 for formal approval and 43 for approval-in-principle. The amount of investments made under the scheme totalled \$316.6 billion.

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. 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 2019, 91 032 non-local graduates were approved to work in Hong Kong under this arrangement.

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 be granted a stay of 12 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 2019, 441 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 dependent children below the age of 18 under the prevailing dependant policy.

**Facilitation of Passenger Movements:** In 2019, the total number of passengers moving into and out of Hong Kong was about 301 million, which is similar to the figure in 2018. The number of visitors travelling to Hong Kong decreased from 65.15 million in 2018 to 55.91 million in 2019, decreased by 14.2 per cent. This included 43.61 million from the Mainland and 1.61 million from Taiwan.

Lo Wu continues to be the busiest control point. In 2019, 78.23 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 2019 was 24.80 million.

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. Since their commissioning till end of 2019, over 22 million and 24 million passengers travelled through the Express Rail Link West Kowloon Control Point and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Hong Kong Port respectively.

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 2019, a total of 729 multi-purpose e-Channels and 124 vehicular e-Channels were installed at all control points.

To further enhance immigration facilitation for Hong Kong and Macao residents, both the Hong Kong and Macao immigration authorities introduced in December 2009 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. In order to provide greater immigration convenience for Hong Kong non-permanent residents holding "HKSAR Document of Identity for Visa Purposes" and Macao non-permanent residents holding "Visit Permit for Residents of Macao to HKSAR", eligible non-permanent residents of the two places may, after successful enrolment, use the automated immigration clearance service of the other party for immigration

clearance with effect from December 2016.

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 Lo Wu, Lok Ma Chau Spur Line, Hung Hom, Shenzhen Bay, Lok Ma Chau, Sha Tau Kok, Man Kam To, Macau Ferry Terminal, China Ferry Terminal, Kai Tak Cruise Terminal, Tuen Mun Ferry Terminal and Hong Kong International Airport in phases. The service was extended to the newly commissioned West Kowloon Station of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link and Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Hong Kong Port in 2018. 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 e-EEP 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-EEP.

With effect from December 2013, HKSAR passport holders can enrol for the automated immigration clearance service in Korea whilst eligible Korean passport holders can also enrol for the e-Channel service in Hong Kong. Mutual use of automated immigration clearance service arrangements were implemented with Singapore, Germany, Australia and Thailand in September 2014, November 2014, June 2016 and September 2018 respectively.

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.

**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 2019, a total of 718 273 HKSAR passports were issued. Eligible applicants may submit their applications for HKSAR passports to the Immigration Department by post, through drop-in boxes, in person, via the internet, Immigration Department Mobile Application or the Travel Document Submission Kiosk. Applicants staying overseas may submit their applications through the Chinese diplomatic and consular missions or by post to the Immigration Department direct. Applicants who are in the Mainland may also submit their replacement applications and subsequently collect their new passports through 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.

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. Holders of the existing smart identity card will be invited to attend the newly established Smart Identity Card Replacement Centres (SIDCCs) in accordance with their year of birth to have their identity cards replaced within specified periods in phases. The whole Replacement Exercise will last for about four years until 2022. In view of the demographic changes of Hong Kong and to provide more convenience to the needy groups, the Immigration Department has introduced two caring arrangements in the Replacement Exercise. Firstly, identity card holders who have been called up under their age groups may bring along up to two family members or friends aged 65 or above to replace their identity cards together during the same visit. Besides, for the first time the On-site Identity Card Replacement Service will be provided to the elderly persons and persons with disabilities residing at residential carehomes (RCHs). The new identity cards will also be delivered to those RCHs afterwards, thereby saving their need to travel to SIDCCs for identity card registration and collection.

**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 2019, a total of 287 applications were received for declaration of change of nationality, 1 638 for naturalisation as a Chinese national, 207 for renunciation of Chinese nationality and 2 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, the Hong Kong Economic, Trade and Cultural Office in Taiwan or the Immigration Department in Hong Kong. In 2019, a total of 3 968 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 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 2019, the city arrested 284 Mainland illegal immigrants, 512 Vietnamese illegal immigrants and 347 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 7 279 uniformed officers and 1 697 civilians as at December 31, 2019. Its size and range of responsibilities now bear little resemblance to the embryonic organisation in 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 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 Tuen Mun 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, as well as 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.

In 2019, the Immigration Department processed 40 106 investigation/removal/deportation cases. 91 300 stops, 13 886 searches, 6 450 arrests and 10 053 detentions were made. 5 081 offenders were prosecuted.

In 2019, a total of 2 303 135 smart identity cards were issued, in which 1 705 076 were issued under the Replacement Exercise. Besides, a total of 29 313 copies of Certificates of Registered Particulars were issued.

In 2019, the Births and Deaths Registry registered 53 173 births and 48 706 deaths while the Marriage Registry registered 44 522 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, 2019, 330 375 couples (representing 46.4 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 and the Next Generation Smart Identity Card System in 2018.

The Next Generation Electronic Passport System (e-Passport-2 system) was launched on May 14 2019. The e-Passport-2 system has introduced various new functions to refine the passport application process, including support of online passport application submission for eligible applicants aged below 11 years old, passport application submission via mobile application and filling in an electronic form in advance upon scheduling an appointment. In addition, eligible applicants

may choose to use the photo-taking function at Travel Document Submission Kiosks free of charge, which makes the process faster and more convenient.

For the Next Generation Application and Investigation Easy Systems (APPLIES-2) project, subsequent to the award of contracts for development of APPLIES-2 by Government Logistics Department on 29 November 2019, the system analysis and design of the project was now in active progress. The new system, including 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, would enhance service delivery and operational efficiency of the Department and was planned to be implemented by phases starting from 2021.

#### Annual Passenger Movements

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Air	40 950 306	43 231 410	46 319 485	48 640 973	50 931 408	53 377 591	48 997 829
Land	208 675 554	218 966 219	222 642 921	221 323 294	221 674 873	235 654 782	236 170 478
Sea	27 776 468	28 359 645	27 659 206	26 732 286	26 825 232	25 653 997	16 095 799
Total	277 402 328	290 557 274	296 621 612	296 696 553	299 431 513	314 686 370	301 264 106

#### Travel Documents in Circulation

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
HKSAR Passport	4 966 652	5 117 471	5 382 416	5 601 752	5 772 326	5 915 359	6 124 810
Document of Identity	336 714	347 934	350 935	366 662	377 356	385 875	386 230
Re-entry Permit	567 452	561 087	548 286	519 077	488 035	477 692	457 916