

Hong Kong has established itself as one of the world's major destinations for tourists and business visitors. In 2017, passenger arrivals and departures totalled about 299 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.

After the 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 2017, 39 952 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 2017, 106 470 Mainland talent 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 2017, a total of 3 989 applicants were allocated quotas.

The Capital Investment Entrant Scheme (CIES) 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 2017, 35 078 applications were approved, including 33 550 for formal approval and 1 528 for approval-in-principle. The amount of investments made under the scheme totalled \$297.6 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 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 2017, 70 083 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 2017, 315 applications were approved.

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 the prevailing dependant policy.

Facilitation of Passenger Movements: In 2017, the total number of passengers moving into and out of Hong Kong was about 299 million, which is similar to the figure in 2016. The number of visitors travelling to Hong Kong increased from 56.65 million in 2016 to 58.47 million in 2017, increased by 3.2 per cent. This included 44.19 million from the Mainland and 2.09 million from Taiwan.

Lo Wu continues to be the busiest control point. In 2017, 81.71 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 2017 was 28.69 million.

The 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 department has launched the new Immigration Control System in phases since 2016. As at the end of 2017, a total of 595 multi-purpose e-Channels and 94 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 12 control points, including 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. 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 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, the Federal Republic of Germany and Australia in September 2014, November 2014 and June 2016 respectively.

In March 2013, the 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 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. Since February 5, 2007, the department has introduced electronic passports with enhanced security features. In 2017, a total of 736 837 HKSAR passports were issued. Applicants may submit their applications for HKSAR passports to the department by post, through drop-in boxes or in person. Eligible applicants aged 11 or above may also submit their applications via self-service kiosks or the Internet. Applicants staying overseas may submit their applications through the Chinese diplomatic and consular missions or by post to the 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 department started to issue 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: The department is authorised to process applications relating to the Nationality Law of the PRC with effect from July 1, 1997. In 2017, a total of 161 applications were received for declaration of change of nationality, 1 534 for naturalisation as a Chinese national, 160 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 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 2017, a total of 3 311 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 2017, the city arrested 722 Mainland illegal immigrants, 55 per cent more than in 2016; 598 Vietnamese illegal immigrants, 44 per cent less than in 2016; and 295 non-ethnic-Chinese illegal immigrants excluding Vietnamese, 74 per cent less than in 2016.

Administration: Since its formation in 1961, the Immigration Department has expanded from 73 uniformed and 128 civilian staff to the present establishment of 6 212 uniformed officers and 1 565 civilians as at December 31, 2017. 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 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, 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 42 162 investigations, 68 307 stops, 13 368 searches, 7 258 arrests and 10 948 detentions were made. 5 412 offenders were prosecuted.

In 2017, 571 436 applications for issue of identity cards were received. Besides, a total of 26 710 copies of Certificates of Registered Particulars were issued.

During 2017, the Births and Deaths Registry registered 56 919 births and 45 883 deaths while the Marriage Registry registered 50 907 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, 2017, 282 157 couples (representing 45.7 per cent of the marriages celebrated in the same period) had their marriages celebrated through civil celebrants.

Hong Kong ("Smart Departure") at Hong Kong International Airport in October 2017 so as to enable eligible visitors holding valid electronic travel documents to perform self-service departure clearance through e-Channels without prior enrolment. The service was further extended to all control points in December 2017. It enhances not only the effectiveness of immigration control and the overall passenger handling capacity of control points but also provides greater travel convenience for visitors. Meanwhile, the System Analysis and Design of the Next Generation Smart Identity Card System have been completed and System Development is under way. The new system is planned to be implemented in phases starting from the third quarter of 2018 to replace the existing ageing computer system so as to enhance operational efficiency and effectiveness in supporting the issue of Hong Kong Smart Identity Cards. Furthermore, the Next Generation Electronic Passport System aims to replace the existing ageing computer system and to enhance operational efficiency and effectiveness in supporting the issue of Hong Kong travel documents. The tendering exercise of the new system was completed and system design is under way. It is planned to be implemented in phases starting from early 2019. For the Next Generation Application and Investigation Easy Systems (APPLIES-2) project, the preparatory work for funding application and tendering exercise is under way and it is expected to be implemented in phases starting from early 2021.

Annual Passenger Movements

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Air	35 494 179	37 771 833	40 950 306	43 231 410	46 319 485	48 640 973	50 931 408
Land	190 618 159	202 575 135	208 675 554	218 966 219	222 642 921	221 323 294	221 674 873
Sea	27 291 600	27 379 087	27 776 468	28 359 645	27 659 206	26 732 286	26 825 232
Total	253 403 938	267 726 055	277 402 328	290 557 274	296 621 612	296 696 553	299 431 513

Travel Documents in Circulation

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
HKSAR Passport	4 524 015	4 652 737	4 966 652	5 117 471	5 382 416	5 601 752	5 772 326
Document of Identity	334 635	343 795	336 714	347 934	350 935	366 662	377 356
Re-entry Permit	561 830	574 547	567 452	561 087	548 286	519 077	488 035

Remark: The CIES has been suspended since January 15, 2015.