

立法會
Legislative Council

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Legislative Council
Panel on Financial Affairs

Minutes of special meeting held on
Tuesday, 11 June 2002 at 2:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Hon Ambrose LAU Hon-chuen, GBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon Henry WU King-cheong, BBS (Deputy Chairman)
Hon James TIEN Pei-chun, GBS, JP
Dr Hon David LI Kwok-po, GBS, JP
Hon NG Leung-sing, JP
Hon James TO Kun-sun
Hon Bernard CHAN
Hon CHAN Kam-lam
Hon SIN Chung-kai
Dr Hon Philip WONG Yu-hong
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon MA Fung-kwok
- Non-Panel member attending** : Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
- Members absent** : Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP
- Public officers attending** : Mr Frederick HO Wing-huen
Commissioner for Census and Statistics
- Mr Alvin LI Wing-kong
Assistant Commissioner for Census and Statistics (Social)

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Clerk in attendance : Ms Anita SIT
Chief Assistant Secretary (1)6

Staff in attendance : Mr WONG Tin-yau, Anthony
Senior Assistant Secretary (1)8

I Briefing on the Hong Kong Population Projections 2002-2031

LC Paper No. CB(1)1957/01-02(01) - Information note entitled "Hong Kong Population Projections 2002-2031" provided by the Administration

LC Paper No. CB(1)1671/01-02(01) - Publication on "Hong Kong Population Projections 2002-2031"

LC Paper No. CB(1)1671/01-02(02) - A Guide to Reading the Publication "Hong Kong Population Projections 2002-2031"

The Chairman welcomed the representatives of the Administration and at his invitation, the Commissioner for Census and Statistics (C for C&S) gave a presentation with the assistance of powerpoint on the Hong Kong Population Projections 2002-2031. The notes for his presentation were tabled, and issued to members after the meeting vide LC Paper No. 1996/01-02 dated 13 June 2002.

Discussion with members

Mainland residents coming to Hong Kong for family reunion

2. Mr SIN Chung-kai noted that the current daily quota for One-way Permits granted to Mainland residents to enter Hong Kong for settlement was 150. He asked about the percentage of the quota granted on grounds of family reunion, and whether the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) could project, based on the quota and the aforesaid percentage, when most Mainlanders would be reunited with their family members in Hong Kong.

3. C for C&S said that currently of the Mainland residents coming to Hong Kong under the One-way Permit System (OWPS), 40% were young children aged below 15 years and 80% of those aged over 15 years were female. Most of the latter were spouses of Hong Kong residents. It would therefore be accurate to say that most Mainland residents entering Hong Kong under the OWPS were

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granted the One-way Permits for family reunion reasons. While it would be difficult to project when most of the Mainland family members of Hong Kong residents would be reunited with their families in Hong Kong, there were statistics which might provide a rough indication of the demand for One-way Permits for family reunion reasons. Currently, there were between 15 000 to 20 000 Hong Kong male residents going to the Mainland to get married each year, and such marriages might produce about 30 000 children who might be seeking reunion with their family members in Hong Kong over the following years, in addition to the spouses. At Mr SIN's request, C for C&S undertook to reflect Mr SIN's concern to the relevant policy bureaux about the demand for One-way Permits on grounds of family reunion and the implications on the demographic characteristics of Hong Kong. C for C&S added that where appropriate, C&SD would provide support for the policy bureaux in respect of statistical matters.

Foreign Domestic Helpers

4. Mr NG Leung-sing noted that the median age of the population projected for mid-2031 would be 46, if foreign domestic helpers were included in the projection (Table 1), while the median age would be 47 if they were excluded from the projection (Table A1). He enquired about the reasons for this and asked whether the projection had taken into account the possibility that the proportion of foreign domestic helpers against the rest of the population would change over time. He also asked how foreign domestic helpers affected the composition and characteristics of the Hong Kong population. Mr NG also asked if the median age of the population from 1971 up to 2000 could be provided such that a more comprehensive perspective of the age characteristics of the population in Hong Kong could be constructed.

5. In response, C for C&S said that the median age was 21.7 in 1971 and 31.6 in 1991. As most families tended to employ foreign domestic helpers who were relatively young, the median age of the population would be younger if foreign domestic helpers were included in the projection. Overall, foreign domestic helpers accounted for about 3% of the population. It had been assumed that the increase in the number of foreign domestic helpers would taper off from year 2015 onwards. Since foreign domestic helpers as a community group had little or no impact on some economic and social areas such as property transactions and education, working out separate population projections with foreign domestic helpers excluded would facilitate the planning of public services by relevant government bureaux and departments. He added that marriages between foreign domestic helpers and Hong Kong residents had been rather rare and as such, such marriages was not a major factor effecting Hong Kong's population characteristics.

6. In reply to Ms Emily LAU's question regarding the diminishing net flow of foreign domestic helpers and imported workers as shown in column (4) of Table 14, C for C&S explained that the total number of foreign domestic

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helpers was expected to increase, but the increase would be at a decreasing rate as the demand for foreign domestic helpers was expected to level off over time.

Residents of non-Chinese nationalities in Hong Kong's population

7. Ms Emily LAU noted that in the Summary Results of the 2001 Population Census, the number of persons of non-Chinese nationalities living in Hong Kong had been declining substantially from 1996 to 2001. She asked if C&SD had projected that the number of persons of non-Chinese nationalities living in Hong Kong would continue to fall after 2001 and hence Hong Kong would become less a cosmopolitan city.

8. C for C&S said that the considerable drop in the number of persons of nationalities other than "Chinese" in Hong Kong after the Handover in 1997 was mainly due to the new classification of persons under the Nationality Law of the People's Republic of China (the nationality law) after the Handover. Under the Nationality Law, Hong Kong residents and former residents who were of Chinese descent and born in the mainland of China or Hong Kong were classified as Chinese nationals after 1997. This factor had to a great extent caused the number of British to have reduced considerably after the Handover. It was however projected that there would still be a steady inflow of persons of non-Chinese nationalities into Hong Kong mainly for employment reasons, and this partly accounted for the projected positive net flow of Hong Kong non-permanent residents other than legal entrants from the Mainland, foreign domestic helpers and imported workers (Table 14). Some of these non-Chinese persons might settle in Hong Kong and become permanent residents after they had lived here for seven years.

Fertility rates

9. Ms Emily LAU was concerned that Hong Kong's fertility rate was well below many other low fertility economies, as indicated in Table 7. She enquired about the reasons for Hong Kong's low fertility rate and the possibility for the fertility rate to rise in the future. C for C&S said that a number of factors might have contributed to the decline in fertility rate over the past two decades and the very low fertility rate in the recent few years. These factors included the uncertainty with Hong Kong's economic prospects, the declining marital rate, the trend of getting married later in life, and the rising number of couples not having any children. It was unlikely that the fertility rate of Hong Kong would drop at a drastic rate, and there was possibility that the fertility rate might gradually rebound in response to the catching-up effect and as the economy improved, though it was difficult to ascertain the extent of rebound. It should also be noted that in other countries such as the United States where the population was dispersely distributed between the urban areas and the country side, the fertility rate tended to be more stable.

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10. In response to Mr James TIEN's enquiry on whether the fertility projections had taken into account the births of children in the Mainland from marriages between Hong Kong residents and their Mainland spouses, C for C&S clarified that these children had been taken into account in projecting the number of legal entrants from the Mainland. They were however not included in the number of live births per 1000 women in Table 4 in the publication on population projections, which referred only to female Hong Kong residents.

11. In response to Mr SIN Chung-kai's enquiry about the composition and demographics of the 54 800 legal entrants from the Mainland (Table 14), C for C&S said that relevant data could be obtained from the Immigration Department. C&SD had also published special report and articles on the economic, household and housing characteristics of new arrivals from the Mainland having resided in Hong Kong for less than seven years. They were available from C&SD.

12. Mr James TIEN asked if there were projections on the number of female Hong Kong residents who would marry male Mainland residents, who might ultimately reside in Hong Kong and thus would have impact on Hong Kong's demographics. C for C&S replied that while the close proximity between the Mainland and Hong Kong would encourage inter marriages between the residents of both places, it was difficult to accurately project how many Hong Kong female residents would marry Mainland residents. As a reference, past statistics revealed that the number of Hong Kong male residents marrying Mainland residents ranged from 15 000 to 20 000 each year while the number of Hong Kong female residents marrying Mainland residents ranged from 1 000 to 2 000 each year.

Other issues

13. In response to Ms Emily LAU's question on the composition of mobile residents, C for C&S said that "mobile residents" were Hong Kong permanent residents who had stayed in Hong Kong for at least one month but less than three months during the six months before or for at least one month but less than three months during the six months after the reference time-point. Mobile residents comprised mainly Hong Kong residents who had landed in overseas countries with immigrant visas, but stayed for certain periods in Hong Kong, and those Hong Kong residents who were stationed in, or required to travel to, places outside Hong Kong frequently due to the nature of their work.

14. Dr Phillip WONG noted that the Mainland had recently been issuing Two-way Permits for Mainland spouses of Hong Kong residents to come to Hong Kong and asked how this would affect the population composition. He also noted that modern breakthroughs in science and medicine would extend people's life expectancy and lower the mortality rate. He asked if the Hong Kong Population Projections 2002-2031 had taken these factors into account in the assumptions.

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15. C for C&S said that Mainland visitors who had been issued Two-way Permits to come to Hong Kong were categorised together with other overseas visitors to Hong Kong as visitors rather than residents. As such, they would not be counted as part of the Hong Kong resident population, and thus would not affect the population projections in question, for which the Hong Kong Population was measured by the "Hong Kong Resident Population". C for C&S further said that medical science had been steadily increasing people's life expectancy since the 1950s. As the mortality rate of the Hong Kong population had already come down to a very low level, it would not be appropriate to assume drastic drops to occur. However, it could be seen from the projections that the life expectancy figures would actually still be on the increase, for males from 78.2 in 2001 to 82.3 in 2031 and for females, from 84.1 in 2001 to 87.8 in 2031.

16. The Chairman thanked C for C&S and his colleague for attending the meeting.

II Any other business

17. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 3:45 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat
19 September 2002