

**Legislative Council House Committee
Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Mainland-HKSAR
Families**

Population Policy and Mainland-HKSAR families

The key objective of Hong Kong's population policy is to secure and nurture a population which sustains our development as a knowledge-based economy. Population policy should aim to redress population aging, foster the concept of active and healthy aging, promote social integration of new arrivals, and to ensure the long-term sustainability of our economic growth.

2. This Subcommittee has requested the Administration to address matters relating to family reunion and Mainland-HKSAR families from the population policy perspective.

Population Policy and Family Reunion

3. It is widely known that the population of Hong Kong is on an ageing trend, mainly due to a persistently low fertility rate of local women and longer life expectancy. According to the latest projections by the Census and Statistics Department, by the year 2039, the number of elderly persons aged 65 or above would rise markedly to constitute 29.2% of the population, the population's median age would reach 49, and the overall dependency ratio would rise to 625.¹ However, the demographic challenge faced by Hong Kong is not only quantity-related. Other facets include the quality-aspect of our workforce, the fiscal sustainability of our public services, and last but not the least, family unity and social integration of new arrivals, mainly from the Mainland, with the community.

¹ Overall Dependency Ratio refers to the number of persons aged under 15 and those aged 65 and over per 1000 persons aged between 15 and 64.

4. It has long been recognised that immigrants born outside Hong Kong contributes an important part of Hong Kong's population growth and will have profound impacts on the social and economic structure of Hong Kong. Therefore, from the population policy perspective, government policies should seek to address the education and training needs of new arrivals, and to help them settle and integrate into the community by enhancing their access to information and support services.

5. Since the early 1980's, Mainland spouse and children of Hong Kong residents may apply for settling in Hong Kong for family reunion through the One Way Permit (OWP) Scheme. The OWP Scheme is operated by the Central Government. The HKSAR Government from time to time exchanges views with the Mainland authorities and reflects to them views of various sectors in Hong Kong. Improvement measures have been implemented by the Mainland authorities in recent years to facilitate family reunion. For example, the waiting time for separated spouses has been shortened from six to seven years, to five years for Guangdong in 2005, and to four years for all provinces since 2009.

6. Since December 2009, the Mainland authorities introduced the "one-year multiple" exit endorsements for visiting relatives. Mainland residents of the category of separated spouses who have minor children with their Hong Kong spouses; and those of other circumstances of special family difficulty may apply for that type of exit endorsement from the Mainland authorities. The Exit and Entry Administration Offices of some provinces now offer facilitation to applicants applying for the same type of exit endorsement, so that they may apply exit and entry permits without having to return to their place of household registration.

7. Recently, following active discussions with the HKSAR Government, the Central Government decided that with effect from 1 April 2011, eligible Mainland "overage children" of Hong Kong residents may apply for OWP to come to Hong Kong for reunion with their natural parents.

The Current Review

8. In his 2010-11 Policy Address, the Chief Executive tasked the Steering Committee on Population Policy (SCPP) to focus its study on two topics, namely –

- (a) to examine ways to facilitate and support our elderly people to settle in the Mainland after retirement if they so wish; and
- (b) to study in detail the ramifications of children born in Hong Kong to Mainland women returning to Hong Kong to study and live.

Both topics cover a wide range of complex issues involving different policy areas. We have conducted discussion sessions with Legislative Councillors, members of the Commission on Strategic Development, District Councillors and community leaders, non-governmental organisations and scholars to hear their views. The SCPP will continue to focus its study on the two topics in the coming months and we aim to produce proposals in the fourth quarter of this year. Recommendations will be drawn up having regard to the policy objectives of the Population Policy as outlined in the first paragraph above.

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Chief Secretary for Administration's Office
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