
INFORMATION NOTE

Social and welfare services for new arrivals from the Mainland and permanent residents of Hong Kong

1. Background

1.1 The Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Mainland-Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Families (Subcommittee) was set up under the House Committee in December 2008 to study the population policy and measures relating to Mainland-Hong Kong families, and make recommendations in this regard. One of the key areas of work of this Subcommittee is to study the rights for the use of public services and facilities.¹ In this connection, the Subcommittee requested the Research and Library Services Division, at its meeting on 17 April 2009, to provide a general overview of the social and welfare services currently available to new arrivals from the Mainland and permanent residents of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR).

1.2 In view of the above purpose, this information note provides information relating to the following categories of social and welfare services for both new arrivals from the Mainland and permanent residents of HKSAR:

- (a) social security (Table 1);
- (b) public health care services (Table 2);
- (c) education for children (Table 3);

¹ Legislative Council Secretariat (2009a).

- (d) public housing (Table 4); and
- (e) other government support services (Table 5).

1.3 New arrivals from the Mainland refer to former Mainland residents who enter Hong Kong with a "One-Way Exit Permit" for settlement, and have resided in Hong Kong for less than seven years. Permanent residents of Hong Kong are those having an HKSAR permanent residency status, with right of abode privileges.

Table 1 – Social security services for new arrivals from the Mainland and permanent residents of Hong Kong

| | New arrivals from the Mainland | Permanent residents of HKSAR |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Major social security schemes | (a) Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme ⁽¹⁾ ; and (b) Social Security Allowance (SSA) Scheme ⁽²⁾ . | (a) CSSA Scheme; (b) SSA Scheme; and (c) Portable Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (PCSSA) Scheme ⁽³⁾ . |

Notes: (1) The CSSA Scheme provides a safety net for those Hong Kong residents who cannot support themselves financially for various reasons, such as old age, disability, illness, unemployment and low earnings.

(2) The SSA Scheme aims to provide a monthly allowance to Hong Kong residents who are severely disabled or aged 65 or above. There are four types of assistance under this Scheme, namely Normal Disability Allowance, Higher Disability Allowance, Normal Old Age Allowance and Higher Old Age Allowance.

(3) The PCSSA Scheme allows elderly CSSA recipients, who choose to take up permanent residence in Guangdong or Fujian, to continue to receive their monthly CSSA payment and annual long-term supplement.

Table 1 – Social security services for new arrivals from the Mainland and permanent residents of Hong Kong (cont'd)

| | New arrivals from the Mainland | Permanent residents of HKSAR |
|--|--|---|
| Residence requirements for CSSA and SSA ⁽⁴⁾ | <p><u>Applicants aged 18 or above</u></p> <p>(a) if the persons became Hong Kong residents before 1 January 2004, they must have resided in Hong Kong continuously for at least one year immediately before the date of application, without being absent for a maximum of 56 days during the one-year period; and</p> <p>(b) if the persons have become Hong Kong residents on or after 1 January 2004, they are not eligible for both CSSA and SSA.</p> <p><u>Applicants aged below 18</u></p> <p>(a) no residence requirements⁽⁵⁾.</p> | <p><u>Applicants aged 18 or above</u></p> <p>(a) the persons must have resided in Hong Kong continuously for at least one year immediately before the date of application, without being absent for a maximum of 56 days during the one-year period.</p> <p><u>Applicants aged below 18</u></p> <p>(a) no residence requirements.</p> |
| Eligibility criteria for PCSSA ⁽⁶⁾ | Not eligible under the current policy. | <p>(a) applicants must be aged 60 or above;</p> <p>(b) having lived in Hong Kong for at least seven years; and</p> <p>(c) having received CSSA continuously for at least one year immediately before the date of application.</p> |

Notes: (4) For CSSA and Normal Old Age Allowance under SSA, applicants are required to pass both income and assets tests in order to receive the respective assistance.

(5) Under the revised CSSA policy adopted in February 2008, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) will no longer approve independent applications for CSSA by children who are aged below 18 and born in the territory to non-Hong Kong permanent residents. Only under exceptional cases would the director or assistant directors of SWD exercise the discretionary power to vet and approve such applications. Further, if these children wish to apply for CSSA, they must submit applications on a household basis with their guardians. See Legislative Council Secretariat (2009a).

(6) Applicants of PCSSA are required to pass income and assets tests as well.

Table 2 – Public health care services for new arrivals from the Mainland and permanent residents of Hong Kong

| | New arrivals from the Mainland | Permanent residents of HKSAR |
|-----------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Medical charges | <u> Holders of Hong Kong Identify Card or children aged below 11 with Hong Kong residency status </u> (a) general out-patient: HK\$45 per attendance; (b) specialist out-patient: HK\$100 for first attendance, HK\$60 per subsequent attendance, and HK\$10 per drug item; (c) in-patient (general acute beds): HK\$50 admission fee, plus HK\$100 per day; and (d) accident and emergency services: HK\$100 per attendance. <u> Recipients of CSSA </u> (a) payment of medical charges is waived. | |

Table 2 – Public health care services for new arrivals from the Mainland and permanent residents of Hong Kong (cont'd)

| | New arrivals from the Mainland | Permanent residents of HKSAR |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| Obstetric service charges ⁽¹⁾ | (a) antenatal and postnatal services provided at the Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs): free of charge; (b) specialist out-patient services at public hospitals: HK\$100 for first attendance, HK\$60 per subsequent attendance, and HK\$10 per drug item; (c) cost of child delivery: included in in-patient charges, i.e. HK\$50 admission fee, plus HK\$100 per day of hospital day; and (d) fees for other examinations, e.g. blood test, ultrasound examination: up to around HK\$150 per case, while free services may be offered by some public hospitals. | |

Note: (1) The public health care sector offers two obstetric packages to non-local pregnant women, including Mainland pregnant women in Mainland-HKSAR families. The charges are HK\$39,000 and HK\$48,000 respectively for booked cases and non-booked cases. Other related services include antenatal and postnatal services provided at MCHCs at a rate of HK\$700 per attendance (including drug charges and laboratory investigations), and specialist out-patient services at public hospitals at a rate of HK\$700 per attendance, with medication charged separately at cost, or purchased privately.

Table 3 – Education services for new arrivals from the Mainland and permanent residents of Hong Kong

| | New arrivals from the Mainland | Permanent residents of HKSAR |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| Admission to public school in Hong Kong ⁽¹⁾ | Yes. | |
| School fees | 12-year free primary and secondary education, up to secondary six under the new senior secondary education structure. | |
| Major means-tested financial assistance schemes ⁽²⁾ | <p><u>Pre-primary education</u></p> <p>(a) "Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme", providing financial assistance in the form of fee remission to allow children of needy families to receive pre-primary services, or attend full-time programmes in child care centres; and</p> <p>(b) "Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme", providing fee subsidy for children's pre-primary education in the form of pre-primary education vouchers.</p> <p><u>Primary and secondary education</u></p> <p>(a) "School Textbook Assistance Scheme", providing needy students with subsidies for textbook expenses, according to the "Textbook Grant Rates" announced by the Student Financial Assistance Agency every school year for each primary and secondary level; and</p> <p>(b) "Student Travel Subsidy Scheme", providing travel subsidies to needy students, who reside beyond 10 minutes' walking distance from school, and need to commute to school.</p> | |

Notes: (1) Children aged between six and 15 could be provided with a public school place by the Education Bureau, if they are holders of (a) Hong Kong Birth Certificate; (b) Hong Kong Identity Card; or (c) Permit to Remain in Hong Kong with appropriate endorsements.

(2) Students holding visitor visas, two-way exit permits, student visas, or whose parents are non-local students or holders of student-visa or visitor-visa, are not eligible for the above financial assistance schemes.

Table 3 – Education services for new arrivals from the Mainland and permanent residents of Hong Kong (cont'd)

| | New arrivals from the Mainland | Permanent residents of HKSAR |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| Specific support measures for new arrivals | <p>(a) "School-Based Support Scheme Grant", providing a block grant for public sector schools to offer timely support to newly-arrived children at the commencement of the school term. The current rates of the Grant are HK\$2,830 per intake of newly-arrived child at the primary level and HK\$4,198 at the secondary level;</p> <p>(b) "Induction Programme", a 60-hour programme aiming to help newly-arrived children adapt to the local social environment and education system. Eligible children are those aged between six and 18, and have lived in Hong Kong for less than one year, or have studied in local schools in Hong Kong for less than one year. The induction classes are conducted in small group by non-governmental organizations (NGOs); and</p> <p>(c) "Initiation Programme", a six-month full-time integrated programme that newly-arrived children can choose to attend prior to joining mainstream schools, covering English and Chinese languages, learning and study skills, personal development and social adaptation.</p> | Not applicable. |

Table 4 – Public housing services for new arrivals from the Mainland and permanent residents of Hong Kong

| | New arrivals from the Mainland | Permanent residents of HKSAR |
|--|--|--|
| Eligibility for public rental housing | (a) persons aged 18 or above and within the income and asset limits can register on the "Waiting List"; and (b) persons aged under 18 cannot be independent applicants, and must apply together with their parents or legal guardians. | |
| Allocation of public rental housing | (a) at the time of allocation, at least half of the family members included in the application must have lived in Hong Kong for seven years, and are still living in Hong Kong; and (b) children aged under 18 are deemed to have fulfilled the seven-year requirement, if one of their parents has lived in Hong Kong for at least seven years, or if the children concerned have an established Hong Kong birth status as permanent resident. | |
| Priority of public rental housing allocation | No difference. | |
| Purchase of Surplus Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) flats ⁽¹⁾ | New arrival applicants can apply on White Form (WF) status, if one of their family members listed on the application form has lived in Hong Kong for not less than seven years on or before the date of submission of the application form. Other eligibility criteria include income and asset limits and property ownership restriction. | Hong Kong permanent residents can apply on both Green Form (GF) and WF statuses. GF applicants are normally tenants of public rental housing or specific groups of individuals who have satisfied the residence requirement. No income and asset limits, or any property ownership restriction are imposed on GF applicants. |

Note: (1) The Housing Authority has ceased the production and sale of HOS flats indefinitely from 2003 onwards. In January 2006, the Housing Authority decided to offer for sale in phases the unsold and returned HOS flats (collectively known as surplus HOS flats) from 2007 onwards to Green Form and White Form applicants. The current sales arrangements of HOS flats are only applicable to the surplus HOS flats.

Table 4 – Public housing services for new arrivals from the Mainland and permanent residents of Hong Kong (cont'd)

| | New arrivals from the Mainland | Permanent residents of HKSAR |
|--|---|---|
| Special support measures or priority schemes | <p>(a) under the revised "Addition Policy for Harmonious Families", adult new arrivals and their family members can be added to the tenancy of their elderly parents for family union, subject to passing the income and asset tests, as well as not breaching the one-line continuation rule⁽²⁾; and</p> <p>(b) a two-year pilot scheme of setting up a "Housing Advisory and Service Team" in Tin Shui Wai has commenced since April 2008 to help new tenants of public rental housing, who are primarily new arrivals, integrate into the new living environment.</p> | <p>(a) "Addition Policy for Harmonious Families" also applies to permanent residents;</p> <p>(b) "Amalgamation of Tenancies for Harmonious Families", which enables tenancies of elderly and younger public rental housing tenants to live together in one single public rental housing unit of suitable size;</p> <p>(c) "Enhanced Transfer Scheme for Harmonious Families", which allows transfer of public rental housing tenants to the same or nearby estates of their offspring or elderly parents; and</p> <p>(d) "Harmonious Families Priority Scheme", which reduces the waiting time on the "Waiting List" for six months, and allows applicants to either apply for one public rental housing flat in any district of their choice, if their household is composed of at least two members with one of them being the elderly parent or an elderly dependant relative, or opt for two non-urban public rental housing flats of the same district, if they are nuclear families with at least one elderly parent or elderly dependant relative.</p> |

Note: (2) Under the one-line continuation rule, an elderly tenant can only live together with the family of one married adult offspring.

Table 5 – Other government support services for new arrivals from the Mainland and permanent residents of Hong Kong

| | New arrivals from the Mainland | Permanent residents of HKSAR |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| Services provided by the Home Affairs Department (HAD) for needy individuals | (a) introducing the "Tin Shui Wai Neighbourhood Mutual Help Project" in 2007 to allow mutual aid committees in Tin Shui Wai to apply for up to HK\$20,000 to organize events to promote a caring neighbourhood culture in the district; (b) launching the "Enhancing Self-Reliance Through District Partnership Programme" in 2006 for a period of five years to provide grants to approved non-profit-making organizations to set up social enterprises and create employment opportunities for the disadvantaged groups; and (c) providing emergency relief services, such as temporary shelters for people in need, in event of typhoon signal number 8 or above, cold or prolonged oppressively hot weather. | |
| | <u>Services for new arrivals</u> ⁽¹⁾ (a) publishing and regularly updating the "Service Handbook for New Arrivals" to inform new arrivals of basic information about living in Hong Kong, e.g. road safety, public transportation and useful telephone numbers; (b) providing a range of services and activities, such as familiarization courses, employment seminars, language classes and experience sharing, via District Offices, and in partnership with subsidized NGOs ⁽²⁾ ; and (c) conducting quarterly surveys to identify the service needs of new arrivals. | Not applicable. |

Notes: (1) HAD is responsible for co-ordinating the provision of services offered by various government departments for new arrivals.

(2) Currently, there are 29 subsidized NGOs partnering with HAD to offer services and activities to new arrivals from the Mainland.

Table 5 – Other government support services for new arrivals from the Mainland and permanent residents of Hong Kong (cont'd)

| | New arrivals from the Mainland | Permanent residents of HKSAR |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| Services provided by the Labour Department for individuals, who are legally employable in Hong Kong | (a) providing free employment services for job seekers through its job centres, telephone employment service hotline and interactive employment service website; (b) introducing the "Work Trial Scheme" to provide those job seekers, who have difficulties in finding jobs, or wish to change the field of work, with a one-month trial of real jobs offered by participating organizations; (c) providing "On-the-job Transport Allowance" of HK\$600 per month (up to 12 months), and "Job Search Allowance" of up to HK\$600 (on a reimbursement basis) respectively to eligible employees and job seekers, who reside in Yuen Long, Tuen Mun, North District and Islands; (d) organizing the "Youth Pre-employment Training Programme" to enhance the employability of school leavers aged between 15 and 19, through skill-based training, workplace attachment and career counselling; and (e) setting up the Recruitment Centre for the Catering Industry to help job-seekers find suitable jobs in the catering industry. | |
| | <u>Services for new arrivals</u> (a) providing tailor-made information materials for new arrivals; (b) organizing job fairs in priority districts to assist new arrivals in seeking employment; and (c) conducting regular tailor-made employment briefing sessions on the local job market. | Not applicable. |

Table 5 – Other government support services for new arrivals from the Mainland and permanent residents of Hong Kong (cont'd)

| | New arrivals from the Mainland | Permanent residents of HKSAR |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| Services provided by the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) | (a) legally employable persons aged 15 or above, and with education attainment of sub-degree or below, can enrol in training programmes funded by ERB and delivered through 72 training bodies. | |
| | <u>Services for new arrivals</u> (a) "Job Search Skills Course" (35-hour course), "Employment Set Sail Scheme" (ESSS) and "Community Harmony Course" (CHC) are specially organized to help new arrivals adapt to the local labour market and enhance their employability. ESSS is carried out in priority districts, such as Tin Shui Wai, Sham Shui Po and Yau Tsim Mong, whereas CHC is offered in Tin Shui Wai only. | Not applicable. |
| Services provided by the Social Welfare Department for needy families | (a) piloting the "Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project" from October 2008 to March 2011 to provide centre-based or home-based day care services for children aged under 6 to meet the needs of the parents at the neighbourhood level; and (b) operating Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) and Integrated Service Centres (ISCs) jointly with subsidized NGOs to provide services for families in need, such as family education, parent-child activities, counselling service and mutual support groups. Families with Mainland spouses of Hong Kong residents on two-way exit permits can also gain access to the one-stop services and assistance at both IFSCs and ISCs. | |

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