

INFORMATION NOTE

Hong Kong's population policy

1. Background

1.1 On 30 May 2012, the Government released the *Steering Committee on Population Policy Progress Report 2012* setting out the recommendations of the Steering Committee on Population Policy for addressing the short-term and long-term demographic challenges facing Hong Kong. The House Committee will hold a special meeting on 5 June 2012 to discuss the issue of population policy. To facilitate members' deliberations, this information note examines Hong Kong's population profile, highlights the development of population policy in the territory, and elaborates on the major issues relating to population policy in the light of the past deliberations at the Legislative Council.

2. Population profile of Hong Kong

2.1 According to the Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong's population was estimated at 7 103 700 at end-2011, representing a meagre increase of 0.7% over end-2010. The population size grew slowly during the past 10 years. The average annual growth rate in the first half of the last decade was 0.4%, compared with 0.6% in the second half. The trend of slow population growth should continue into the ensuing years, as Hong Kong's population is projected to increase by an average annual rate of 0.8% from 7.00 million in mid-2009 to 8.89 million in mid-2039. In addition to the slow population growth, Hong Kong's population profile has undergone changes in recent years as elaborated in the ensuing paragraphs.

Ageing population

2.2 Hong Kong's population has experienced an ageing trend over the past decade or so. The proportion of people aged under 15 decreased from 17% in 2001 to 12% in 2011. In contrast, the proportion of people aged 65 and above increased from 11% to 13% over the same period. Reflecting the above changing age structure, the median age of the population increased from 36.7 in 2001 to 41.7 in 2011.

2.3 The trend of population ageing is expected to be more evident in the years ahead. While the proportion of the people aged under 15 is forecasted to remain at 11%-13% throughout 2009-2039, the proportion of people aged 65 and above is forecasted to rise from 13% to 28% over the projection period. As a result, the median age of the population is projected to increase from 40.7 in 2009 to 47.6 in 2039 (**Appendix I**).

Rising overall dependency ratio

2.4 The increasing proportion of people aged 65 and above boosted the elderly dependency ratio¹ from 154 in 2001 to 177 in 2011. Meanwhile, the child dependency ratio² fell from 229 in 2001 to 155 in 2011 in tandem with the decreasing proportion of people aged under 15 over the period. The lower child dependency ratio contributed to a decline in the overall dependency ratio³ from 383 in 2001 to 333 in 2011.

2.5 The declining trend in the overall dependency ratio is unlikely to sustain in the coming years under the prevailing ageing trend. In particular, the proportion of people aged 65 and above is projected to rise markedly, thereby boosting the elderly dependency ratio from 171 in 2009 to 454 in 2039. The child dependency ratio will also rise slightly from 167 to 171 over the same period. As a result, the overall dependency ratio is projected to increase sharply from 337 in 2009 to 625 in 2039 (**Appendix I**).

¹ Elderly dependency ratio refers to the number of persons aged 65 and above per 1 000 persons aged between 15 and 64.

² Child dependency ratio refers to the number of persons aged under 15 per 1 000 persons aged between 15 and 64.

³ Overall dependency ratio is defined as the number of persons aged under 15 and those aged 65 and above per 1 000 persons aged between 15 and 64.

Low total fertility rate⁴

2.6 The total fertility rate has persistently been at a low level over the past decade or so. The total fertility rate was 1 189 per 1 000 women in 2011, compared with 931 in 2001. According to the Census and Statistics Department, the total fertility rate is projected to decrease from 1 055 in 2009 to 936 per 1 000 in 2039, which is well below the replacement level of 2 100 per 1 000 women⁵ (**Appendix II**).

Growing importance of immigrants to population growth

2.7 Amid low fertility rate, net inward migration (particularly new arrivals from the Mainland) has been a major source of population growth. Since the early 1980s, Mainland spouse and accompanying children of Hong Kong residents may apply for settling in Hong Kong for family reunion through the One-Way Permit Scheme. The scheme is administered by the Mainland authorities and the current daily quota is 150.⁶ During the last 10 years, the number of One-Way Permit holders coming to Hong Kong totalled 456 154 and 55% of them were aged 25-44.

Increasing number of babies born to Mainland women

2.8 Another prevailing demographic trend in Hong Kong is the increasing number of births given by Mainland women. The number of births born in Hong Kong to Mainland women increased from 7 810 in 2001 to 43 982 in 2011. Within 2011, 6 110 or 14% were "Type I babies" and 35 736 or 81% were "Type II babies" (**Appendix III**). "Type I babies" refer to babies born by Mainland women in Hong Kong and whose fathers are Hong Kong permanent residents. "Type II babies" refer to babies born by Mainland women in Hong Kong and whose fathers are not Hong Kong permanent residents. They are also known as babies born to "doubly non-permanent resident pregnant women".

⁴ Total fertility rate refers to the average number of babies born alive to 1 000 women (excluding foreign domestic helpers) during their lifetime.

⁵ For a population to replace itself, each woman would have to produce on average a sufficient number of children. A total fertility rate of 2 100 children per 1 000 women is considered to correspond to the replacement level, allowing for factors such as sex differential at birth, mortality of infants/children and mortality of women before reaching their reproductive years.

⁶ Of the daily quota of 150 places, 60 places are allocated to Mainland children born to Hong Kong residents and holding the Certificate of Entitlement (eligible for the right of abode in Hong Kong), 30 to spouses separated for at least 10 years and their accompanying children, and the remaining 60 to applicants belonging to other categories.

2.9 In order to assess the impact of babies born to Mainland women on the Hong Kong population, the Census and Statistics Department conducted five rounds of "Survey on babies born in Hong Kong to Mainland women" during 2007-2011 to gather information about the parents' intention to have their babies returning to live in Hong Kong. The surveys classify babies born in Hong Kong to Mainland women into two categories, namely Type I and Type II babies.

2.10 According to the results of the five rounds of survey, while on average half of Type I babies would stay in Hong Kong after birth, only about 4% of Type II babies would stay in Hong Kong after birth. The remaining 96% of Type II babies would not live in Hong Kong before reaching the age of one, and 56% of their parents indicated the intention to bring their children back to Hong Kong later. In other words, about 57% of Type II babies would eventually settle in Hong Kong, as compared with the figure of 94% for Type I babies (**Appendices IV and V**).

3. Development of population policy in Hong Kong

3.1 Attention on the subject of population policy started way back in July 2002, when the then Chief Executive announced in his Inaugural Speech that there was an urgent need for development of a comprehensive population policy. Subsequently, the Government set up the Task Force on Population Policy in September 2002 with a view to, among others, identifying the major challenges to Hong Kong arising from its demographic trends and characteristics. In its report released in February 2003, the Task Force laid down the key objective of the population policy of Hong Kong, i.e. to secure and nurture a quality population which sustains the development of Hong Kong as a knowledge-based economy. The report also set out a number of recommendations on policy measures such as education and manpower development, training for new arrivals, and attracting talents and quality immigrants to Hong Kong.

3.2 In October 2007, the Chief Executive decided to set up the Steering Committee on Population Policy chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration to monitor and co-ordinate efforts on population policy, in view of the fact that a number of population policy issues cut across various policy areas and the need to review from time to time population-related measures based on the latest population projection.

3.3 In the past 18 months, the Steering Committee on Population Policy had focused its study on two specific topics as stated by the Chief Executive in his 2010-2011 Policy Address, namely ways to facilitate and support elderly people to settle on the Mainland after retirement, and ramifications of children born in Hong Kong to Mainland women returning to Hong Kong to study and live. The results of the review and the corresponding proposed measures were elaborated in the 2011-2012 Policy Address, including:

- (a) setting up a new "Guangdong Scheme" under the Social Security Allowance Scheme to provide Old Age Allowance ("OAA") for eligible Hong Kong elderly residents who choose to reside in Guangdong⁷; and
- (b) stepping up dissemination of information on the local education system to help Mainland families with Hong Kong-born children consider whether and how to arrange their children to return to Hong Kong for schooling.

3.4 In addition to the two specific topics mentioned above, the Steering Committee on Population Policy has examined other policy areas including liberating the labour force from the existing working-age population, admission of talents from outside Hong Kong, and support for and integration of new arrivals. In the Progress Report 2012 released on 30 May 2012, the Steering Committee set out the findings of the review and put forward 10 recommendations broadly revolving around three major areas, namely (a) Mainland women coming to give birth in Hong Kong, (b) an ageing and shrinking labour force, and (c) supporting the elderly.

4. Deliberations at the Legislative Council

4.1 Population policy and related issues have been discussed by Members in the Council and at various committees, including Council meetings, the House Committee, Panel on Manpower, Panel on Education, Panel on Welfare Services, Panel on Security, and the Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Mainland-HKSAR Families. Members' major concerns are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

⁷ Please refer to paragraphs 4.15-4.17 for details of the "Guangdong Scheme".

Formulation of a comprehensive population policy

4.2 Some Members expressed concern that over the past many years, the Administration had neither formulated a long-term and forward-looking population policy nor proactively conducted regular reviews through departments concerned to enhance the quality and competitiveness of Hong Kong population and cope with the problem of a rapidly ageing population. They urged the Administration to conduct a comprehensive review of the population policy and assess the long-term needs of babies born in Hong Kong whose parents were not Hong Kong residents. The findings should then be incorporated into the overall planning for various policies including healthcare, education, welfare and employment.

4.3 The Administration did not subscribe to the view that Hong Kong had no long-term population policy in place. It stated that clear objectives had been set for Hong Kong's population policy, on the basis of which various policy bureaux were largely capable to develop and implement policies that were conducive to Hong Kong within their respective portfolios. The Administration would continue to develop the population policy to complement the development of Hong Kong.

Children born to Mainland women

Children born to Mainland women coming to settle in Hong Kong

4.4 For Type I babies, some of them were brought up on the Mainland due to child care arrangements. Members considered that arrangements should be made to facilitate early arrival of these children so that they could settle in Hong Kong at a young age. This would facilitate their integration into the local community and education system. As their arrival date depended on when One-Way Permits were issued to their Mainland mothers, Members urged the Administration to raise the issue of shortening the waiting time for issuing One-Way Permits with the relevant Mainland authorities.

4.5 According to the Administration, children born to Mainland-Hong Kong couples, irrespective of whether they were born in Hong Kong and who resided on the Mainland for various reasons, might come to Hong Kong together with their mothers when the latter had obtained approval under the One-Way Permit system. The current waiting time had been shortened to around four years since 2009. These children could still start their education in Hong Kong at a young age and should not have insurmountable problem settling in Hong Kong.

4.6 Members noted with concerns that Type II babies, who were Hong Kong residents by birth, might come back to study and live in Hong Kong even though they had returned to the Mainland with their parents after birth. However, it was uncertain whether and when they would come back to Hong Kong. Members urged the Administration to give due attention to the number of children who would be settling in Hong Kong in planning ahead the resources to meet the service needs of these children and their families, such as healthcare, education, transport, housing, employment, and law and order.

4.7 The Administration advised that the impact of Mainland women giving birth in Hong Kong would be reflected in the projections concerning population and household updated every two to three years by the Census and Statistics Department. These projections would form a common basis for the Administration's planning in various programme areas, such as housing, education, social services, medical and health services, and employment services. The Administration pledged that it would closely monitor the actual situation and update the relevant population projections and services planning as and when necessary.

Cross-boundary students

4.8 In the light of the increasing number of cross-boundary students⁸, Members considered that the Administration should:

- (a) improve the transport arrangements such as increasing the special quotas granted to the coach operators for operating cross-boundary school bus services and extending the "on-board clearance" services to all cross-boundary school buses⁹;
- (b) study the profiles and future needs of cross-boundary students; and
- (c) put forward long-term measures to cope with the increasing demand from cross-boundary students for various services, such as cross-boundary transportation services, school places and other support services, in a holistic manner.

4.9 The Administration advised Members that prior to the beginning of each school year, various bureaux including the Education Bureau, the Transport Department, the Police and the Immigration Department would coordinate the transport and immigration arrangements for students travelling across the border to attend schools in Hong Kong. The "on-board clearance" services were provided on a trial basis at the Sha Tau Kok Control Point and Man Kam To Control Point. The Administration might consider providing the service at other boundary control points if so warranted.

4.10 According to the Administration, the overall school places in the North, Tai Po, Yuen Long and Tuen Mun Districts were sufficient to meet the demand of cross-boundary students. To facilitate parents to arrange their children to stay on the Mainland for primary schooling, the Education Bureau had launched a pilot project to enable two schools for Hong Kong children in Shenzhen to participate in the 2008-2010 Secondary School Places Allocation System. A range of support services had also been provided to cross-boundary students.

⁸ The majority of cross-boundary students attend kindergartens, primary and secondary schools in North District, while a small number of them enrol in schools in Tai Po, Yuen Long and Tuen Mun.

⁹ The arrangement should provide more convenient border clearance services for cross-boundary students. They can travel directly to and from their schools by the school coaches, without the need to get off the coaches when crossing the control point.

Support for elderly people settling on the Mainland after retirement

Relaxing the permissible absence limits under the Social Security Allowance Scheme

4.11 Members had all along been concerned about the financial assistance for the needy elders. They had pointed out that while the nature of OAA was a token of respect to the senior citizens, this had in effect turned into a form of relief money for poor elders who lacked family support or retirement protection. Members strongly urged the Administration to relax the permissible limit of absence from Hong Kong to 360 days in a year, so as to obviate the need for OAA recipients to return to Hong Kong to continue to receive the allowance.

4.12 In response, the Administration proposed to relax the permissible limit of absence from Hong Kong for OAA from 240 days to 305 days a year, thus enabling elderly recipients to receive a full-year allowance as long as they had resided in Hong Kong for 60 days a year.¹⁰ Under the proposed arrangement, elderly people could enjoy greater flexibility in taking up residence, travelling or visiting relatives in the Mainland.

4.13 Some Members commented that as a result of inadequate retirement protection, some elderly people had chosen to retire on the Mainland because of a lower cost of living and family reasons. While Members had no objection to the new arrangement, they generally took the view that the permissible absence limits for OAA should be further relaxed and eventually removed, having regard to the fact that those elderly people who resided on the Mainland did not have a place to live in Hong Kong for a period of 60 days. Some Members also queried the rationale for setting the minimum residence period at 60 days.

¹⁰ If an OAA recipient has resided in Hong Kong for less than 60 days in a payment year, he or she would be eligible to receive allowance only for the periods during which he or she has resided in Hong Kong. The new permissible limit of absence has been effective from 1 February 2011.

4.14 The Administration replied that as OAA payment was non-contributory and largely non-means-tested, and was funded entirely by general revenue, the existing policy was for OAA recipients to regard Hong Kong as their place of residence and to be subject to an absence limit. The minimum residence period of 60 days was set after having regard to the definition of "Mobile Resident" captured in the "Hong Kong Resident Population" compiled by the Census and Statistics Department.

The Guangdong Scheme

4.15 The Chief Executive announced the Guangdong Scheme in his 2011-2012 Policy Address that would provide OAA for eligible Hong Kong elderly people who choose to reside in Guangdong. According to a survey conducted by the Census and Statistics Department in 2011, around 60% or 46 000 of Hong Kong residents aged 65 and above who were settled on the Mainland resided in Guangdong.¹¹

4.16 The Administration has proposed to implement the Guangdong Scheme in mid-2013. According to the Administration's proposal, the Scheme has basically the same eligibility criteria as that for OAA in Hong Kong with the same 305-day permissible limit of absence per payment year for successful applicants, except that the recipients would be required to reside in Guangdong instead of Hong Kong for at least 60 days for obtaining a full-year payment of the allowance. Successful applicants will receive the same payment rate as that for OAA in Hong Kong.¹² To address the needs of these elders, the Administration also proposed a special one-off arrangement at the initial stage of implementing the Guangdong Scheme to allow eligible elders who had already settled in Guangdong without having to first return to stay in Hong Kong.

¹¹ It refers to staying on the Mainland for a period of at least one month in the past six months before the time of the survey. See Labour and Welfare Bureau (2012).

¹² The current rate of OAA has been increased to HK\$1,090 since February 2012.

4.17 Members welcomed the proposed Scheme in general and some urged the Administration to launch the Scheme as early as practicable. Some Members considered that the Scheme should be extended to other provinces such as Fujian in view of the fact that recipients of the Portable Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme could choose to stay in Guangdong or Fujian.¹³ The Administration responded that Guangdong was at present the only place having the right conditions for implementing the Scheme, taking into consideration the growing integration and unique relationship between Hong Kong and Guangdong.

Admission of talents from outside Hong Kong

4.18 The Administration has been admitting talents from other places to work or settle in Hong Kong under admission schemes such as the General Employment Policy ("GEP")¹⁴, the Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals ("ASMTP")¹⁵ and the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme ("QMAS")¹⁶ to enhance Hong Kong's manpower resources and strengthen Hong Kong's competitiveness in the globalized market. In 2011, a total of 38 931 applications were approved under the three schemes, up from 34 655 in 2010.

4.19 While some Members expressed support for the talent admission schemes, some other Members raised concerns about the negative impacts of the schemes on the employment opportunities of the local workforce, particularly for local university graduates. Some Members also considered it important to put in place a monitoring mechanism under the respective schemes to prevent possible abuse of the schemes.

¹³ The Portable Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") Scheme was introduced in 1997 to enable elders aged 60 and above on CSSA to continue to receive CSSA if they take up a permanent residence in Guangdong. The Scheme has been extended to cover CSSA recipients who choose to retire permanently in Fujian since 2005.

¹⁴ GEP is a quota-free employment-based scheme for attracting professionals possessing skills and knowledge not readily available locally from overseas places other than the Mainland to work in Hong Kong. A total of 131 276 applications were approved between 2007 and 2011.

¹⁵ ASMTP was introduced in July 2003 to attract qualified Mainland talents and professionals who possess skills, knowledge or experience of value to and not readily available locally to work in Hong Kong. A total of 49 021 applications were approved between 2003 and 2011.

¹⁶ QMAS was introduced in June 2006 to attract highly skilled or talented persons from overseas places to settle in Hong Kong. The scheme operates on a points-based system and has an annual quota of 1 000. A total of 2 094 applications were approved between 2006 and 2011.

4.20 The Administration responded that there was a need to bring in talents from outside Hong Kong to meet the manpower needs of the local economy. The Administration advised that the Immigration Department would adhere to the well established principle that only those persons who possessed skills and expertise not readily available locally and remunerated at market rate would be approved for entry under ASMTP and GEP. The Immigration Department would from time to time conduct field inspections to verify the information provided in the applications when processing applications under ASMTP and GEP. Regarding the prevention of possible abuse of QMAS, the Administration explained that minimum requirements for application and a point system had been established under the scheme. The selection of entrants would be made by the Advisory Committee on Admission of Quality Migrants and Professionals which comprised members from various sectors of the community.¹⁷

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¹⁷ The Advisory Committee on Admission of Quality Migrants and Professionals is a non-statutory advisory committee advising the Director of Immigration on implementation of ASMTP and QMAS.

Appendix I

Actual and projected age structure and dependency ratios⁽¹⁾

	2009	2014	2019	2024	2029	2034	2039
Percentage of population							
Aged 0-14	12%	11%	12%	13%	12%	11%	11%
Aged 15-64	75%	74%	70%	66%	63%	62%	62%
Aged 65 & above	13%	15%	17%	21%	25%	27%	28%
Median age	40.7	42.3	43.4	44.4	45.7	46.8	47.6
Dependency ratios							
Child	167	154	173	188	189	181	171
Elderly	171	196	247	317	391	432	454
Overall	337	350	420	505	580	612	625

Note: (1) Figures as in middle of the year. Figures in mid-2009 are the actual figures which form the base for projection.

Source: Census and Statistics Department.

Appendix II**Actual and projected total fertility rates⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾**

Year	Total fertility rate
2009	1 055
2014	1 023
2019	983
2024	975
2029	982
2034	962
2039	936

Notes: (1) Figure in 2009 is the actual figure which forms the base for projection.

(2) Total fertility rate refers to the average number of babies born alive to 1 000 women (excluding foreign domestic helpers) during their lifetime.

Source: Census and Statistics Department.

Appendix III
Number of births given by Mainland women in Hong Kong

Year	Type I⁽¹⁾	Type II⁽²⁾	Others⁽³⁾	Total
2001	7 190	620	Not available.	7 810
2002	7 256	1 250	Not available.	8 506
2003	7 962	2 070	96	10 128
2004	8 896	4 102	211	13 209
2005	9 879	9 273	386	19 538
2006	9 438	16 044	650	26 132
2007	7 989	18 816	769	27 574
2008	7 228	25 269	1 068	33 565
2009	6 213	29 766	1 274	37 253
2010	6 169	32 653	1 826	40 648
2011	6 110	35 736	2 136	43 982

Notes: (1) "Type I babies" refers to babies born by Mainland women in Hong Kong and whose father are Hong Kong permanent residents.

(2) "Type II babies" refers to babies born by Mainland women in Hong Kong and whose father are not Hong Kong permanent residents.

(3) Mainland mothers chose not to provide the father's residential status during birth registration.

Source: Census and Statistics Department.

Appendix IV

Intentions of Type I babies⁽¹⁾ parents about their babies' future living arrangement in the five rounds of surveys by the Census and Statistics Department

	First round	Second round	Third round	Fourth round	Fifth round
Staying in Hong Kong	65%	53%	47%	54%	31%
Not living in Hong Kong before age one	35%	47%	53%	46%	69%
With intention of being brought back to Hong Kong	90%	87%	87%	87%	88%
Others ⁽²⁾	10%	13%	13%	13%	12%
Overall proportion of babies living in Hong Kong eventually	97%	94%	93%	94%	92%

Notes: (1) In the survey conducted by the Census and Statistics Department, babies born in Hong Kong to Mainland women are classified in two categories. "Type I babies" refers to babies born by Mainland women in Hong Kong and whose fathers are Hong Kong permanent residents, while "Type II babies" refers to babies born by Mainland women in Hong Kong and whose fathers are not Hong Kong permanent residents.

(2) Figures include those cases that the parents chose the options "not yet decided", "possibly will not bring back" and "definitely will not bring back".

Source: Census and Statistics Department.

Appendix V

Intentions of Type II babies⁽¹⁾ parents about their babies' future living arrangement in the five rounds of surveys by the Census and Statistics Department

	First round	Second round	Third round	Fourth round	Fifth round
Staying in Hong Kong	9%	3%	3%	4%	1%
Not living in Hong Kong before age one	91%	97%	97%	96%	99%
With intention of being brought back to Hong Kong	58%	28%	61%	67%	64%
Others ⁽²⁾	42%	72%	39%	33%	36%
Overall proportion of babies living in Hong Kong eventually	62%	30%	62%	68%	64%

Notes: (1) In the survey conducted by the Census and Statistics Department, babies born in Hong Kong to Mainland women are classified in two categories. "Type I babies" refers to babies born by Mainland women in Hong Kong and whose fathers are Hong Kong permanent residents, while "Type II babies" refers to babies born by Mainland women in Hong Kong and whose fathers are not Hong Kong permanent residents.

(2) Figures include those cases that the parents chose the options "not yet decided", "possibly will not bring back" and "definitely will not bring back".

Source: Census and Statistics Department.

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