



Football development in Hong Kong

Figure 1 – Global ranking of men's football in selected places in Asia⁽¹⁾

	1999	2009	2019	Change of ranking
Japan	57 th	43 rd	28 th	↑ 29
Iran	49 th	64 th	33 rd	↑ 16
South Korea	51 st	52 nd	40 th	↑ 11
Australia	89 th	21 st	42 nd	↑ 47
Qatar	107 th	86 th	55 th	↑ 52
Hong Kong	122 nd	143 rd	141 st	↓ 19

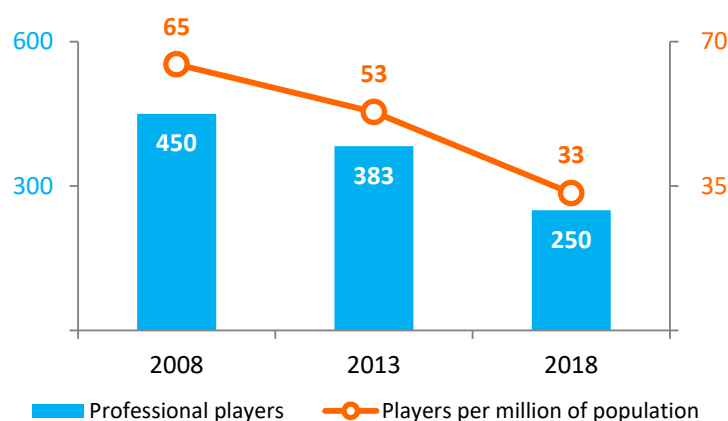
Note: (1) Ranking at the end of the year.

Figure 2 – Shortfall of public football pitches in Hong Kong in 2019

Soccer pitches	No. of pitches in 2019 ⁽¹⁾	Planning standards	No. of pitches needed ⁽²⁾	Derived shortfall
5-a-side	74	1:30 000	250	(176)
7-a-side	207	1:30 000	250	(43)
11-a-side	54	1:100 000	75	(21)
Total	335	-	575	(240)

Notes: (1) Those pitches which can be played by 5-7 persons each side are grouped as 7-a-side.
 (2) Figures are derived from the population as at end-2019 (i.e. 7.5 million) based on HKPSG.

Figure 3 – Number of professional football players in Hong Kong⁽¹⁾



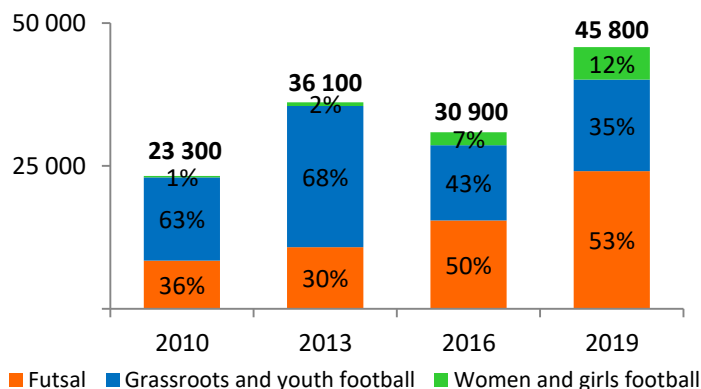
Note: (1) Football season between July and the next June.

Highlights

- Hong Kong was once acclaimed as the "Football Kingdom of the Far East" before the 1970s, but considerably lost its glamour afterwards. In a recent global ranking of football performance, Hong Kong men's team took the 141st position in 2019 only, down by 19 places from that of 122nd in 1999 (Figure 1). It was far behind the visible strides made by emerging giants in Asia, such as Japan, Iran, South Korea, Australia and Qatar. Their global positions have moved up by 11-52 places in two decades to the top 55 by end-2019.
- Conceivably, shortage of football pitches is one of the most important factors constraining local football development. In 2019, there were only 335 soccer pitches provided by the Government in Hong Kong, and most of which were of smaller size (Figure 2). Based on the latest Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines ("HKPSG") and the current population size, there is a severe shortfall of 240 football pitches, representing 72% of the existing pitch number. The grave shortage of pitches also precipitates illegal touting activities, causing additional hurdles to end-users.
- A shrinking pool of professional players is another major constraint. According to the Hong Kong Football Association ("HKFA"), the number of professional players with contract has declined sharply by 44% within a decade to only 250 in 2018, along with halving of its ratio per million of population from 65 to 33 concurrently (Figure 3). Local young talents are generally reluctant to turn professional because of (a) short career life in football playing; (b) low and unstable remuneration; and (c) apparently lower status relative to other occupations.

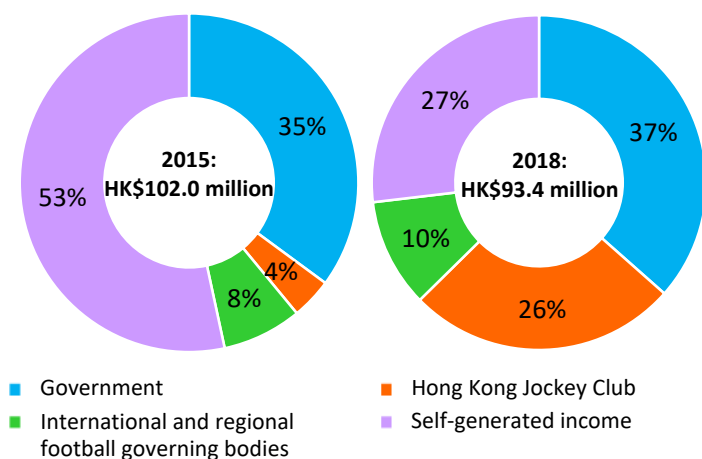
Football development in Hong Kong (cont'd)

Figure 4 – Number of participants in football development programmes of HKFA⁽¹⁾



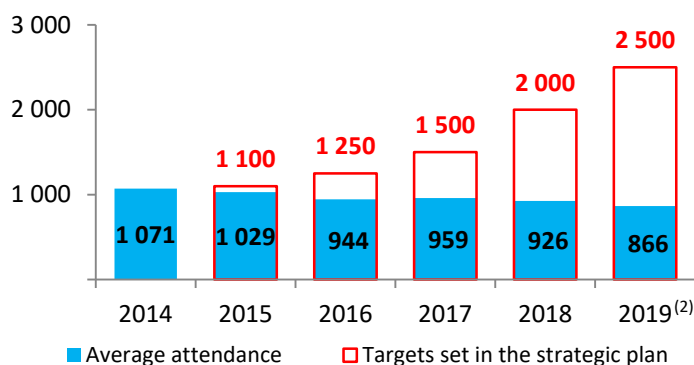
Note: (1) Financial year ending 30 June.

Figure 5 – Annual incomes of HKFA by source, 2015- 2018⁽¹⁾



Note: (1) Financial year ending 30 June.

Figure 6 – Average attendance per local football league match⁽¹⁾



Notes: (1) Football season between July and the next June.

(2) Data up to 31 October 2019.

Highlights

- Inadequate elite training is another hurdle. Although the total number of participants in three major development programmes of HKFA has almost doubled to 45 800 during 2010-2019, around two-thirds of them were of elementary or short-term nature like school or summer programmes (**Figure 4**). Also, more than half (53%) was trained under futsal (i.e. five-a-side games). To address the gap in elite football, HKFA is planning to pool training resources for 120 elite talents in each major age group under its new five-year strategic plan till 2025.
- Turning to financing of HKFA, its annual income fell by 8% from HK\$102.0 million in 2015 to HK\$93.4 million in 2018 (**Figure 5**). It is noteworthy that HKFA has become more reliant on external funding, with the proportion of funding support from both the Government and Hong Kong Jockey Club swelling from 39% to 63% during 2015-2018. By contrast, the share of self-generated income (e.g. gate receipts and commercial sponsorship) halved from 53% in 2015 to 27% in 2018. In view of its low business sustainability, the Audit Report published in April 2020 urged HKFA to "step up measures to generate" more income on its own.
- While Hong Kong has a huge number of spectators of overseas football games on television, very few of them watch local games in person. Over the past six seasons, the average attendance per match of the Hong Kong Premier League has fallen by a total of 19% to only 866 in 2019 (**Figure 6**). Not only is it far behind the spectator target of 2500 set by HKFA for 2019, it also weakens the appeal of local games in getting commercial sponsorship and broadcasting income, contributing to the downtrend in self-generated income of HKFA.

Data sources: Latest figures from Hong Kong Football Association, Audit Commission, Leisure and Cultural Services Department, Housing Authority and Fédération Internationale de Football Association.

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