



Foreword

Hong Kong is home to seven million people. Most were born here. Some came to join their spouses and parents for family reunion while others chose to build a future here.

Hong Kong has thrived as a result of the hard work, resilience and adaptability of her people. Without doubt, people are our most valuable asset and the foundation of this city's continued success.

But, Hong Kong is facing a number of significant population challenges.

Our population challenges

For a start, our population is ageing and ageing fast. According to projections, our labour force will start declining from 2018. Can our economy stay competitive with fewer workers? Should we increase the productivity of our labour force or find new sources of labour to keep our economy growing?

Skills mismatch and the lack of job diversity are growing concerns. Employers of certain industries have complained about not being able to recruit enough workers to fill vacancies. But at the same time some young people feel their path to upward mobility is being blocked by a lack of quality jobs.

Our birth rate is among the lowest in the world. Should we help young couples have as many babies as they desire, and if so, how? Against the low birth rate, net migration mostly from the Mainland will be the main source of our population growth. Social integration will require careful planning and community effort.

Our people are living longer. Many elderly of the next and future generations will be better educated, healthier and want to stay active in the community. How can we embrace these economic and social changes?

Hong Kong's future will be shaped by our ability to respond to the above challenges. The issues are not totally new. But the significance has yet to be fully appreciated and implications thoroughly deliberated in society. The Steering Committee on Population Policy (SCPP) is launching this public engagement exercise to help everyone better understand the challenges and bring population policy to the centre of public discussion, with a view to mapping out key strategies and specific measures to address those challenges.

Some key considerations

Population policy should not simply be a policy for economic growth. It should be for all Hong Kong people. It should focus on giving every one of us the chance to develop our full potential and enhance our well-being. A sustainable population policy should be one aimed at finding a balance between creation of economic wealth, equal opportunities for all people and better quality living.

Population is not just about numbers. The quality of people is equally if not more important. Hong Kong owes its success to her people's international outlook. In addition to nurturing local talent with global perspectives, Hong Kong must act like other world cities to attract talent from around the world. We must also make Hong Kong an attractive place for everyone to live and work here. Capital follows brains. Today the brains are very mobile. If Hong Kong is not attractive, they can go anywhere they want to go. And there is no shortage of such places in the world, and in this region, competing for talent.

Hong Kong also needs population growth to cope with a rapidly ageing population by adding people to the shrinking workforce to maintain competitiveness. This is especially relevant when our population has only grown at 0.6% per annum on average in the past decade and is expected to grow at roughly the same rate between now and 2041. A population cap as suggested by some in the community would compound, not solve, the population challenges we are facing.

Nor is changing the One-way Permit Scheme an answer. The Scheme is designed primarily for family reunion. At a time when cross-boundary marriages make up as high as 35% of locally registered marriages, there is a continued need for an orderly arrival of spouses and children of Hong Kong people for family reunion via the Scheme.

We nonetheless acknowledge that population growth will put pressure on infrastructure, housing, public services and the environment. We need to manage these challenges through continued planning and investment well ahead of time. We should also ensure population and economic growth is consistent with sustainability of the environment.

Give us your views

Population policy is a wide-ranging subject and is heavily entwined with many aspects of public policies. To give our public engagement exercise a better focus, we have chosen not to duplicate subjects currently studied by other institutions, such as retirement protection by the Commission on Poverty, housing by the Long Term Housing Strategy Steering Committee, public finances by the Working Group on Long-Term Fiscal Planning, as well as ongoing and projected elderly health and welfare needs by respective bureaux in conjunction with their major advisory bodies.

The issues are complex and multi-faceted and the SCPP has no preconceived views. Through this exercise, we hope to find solutions together with everyone in society all of whom have a stake in this city, for the current and future generations. The SCPP will rely heavily on public participation and wisdom to help us tackle these challenges together. I, together with Members of the SCPP, earnestly invite you to send us your views and suggestions on or before 23 February 2014.



Carrie Lam, GBS, JP
Chief Secretary for Administration
Chairman, Steering Committee on Population Policy

Your
views
matter

Your views can be sent via the following channels:

Email: views@hkpopulation.gov.hk

Telephone: 3142 2041

Fax: 2537 7068

Website: www.hkpopulation.gov.hk

Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/Thoughts4HK

Address: Secretariat of the Steering Committee
on Population Policy,
26/F, Central Government Offices,
2 Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar,
Hong Kong

Important note: your views and suggestions may be made public. If you prefer to remain anonymous, please say so.