

HONG KONG: TOWARDS A PROACTIVE IMMIGRATION POLICY?

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Executive Summary

1. Hong Kong has revamped its Steering Committee on Population Policy to better tackle issues arising from its rapidly aging population.
2. If total fertility rate remains low at 1.2, Hong Kong's dependency ratio will increase by more than 30% in the next two decades.
3. Various schemes to draw talent to Hong Kong have been implemented from the 2000s when the government came under the pressure of the business and commercial sectors to draw talents, investments and tourists to boost the economy.
4. The admission of talents from beyond Hong Kong is restricted to "only those persons who possessed skills and expertise not readily available locally and remunerated at market rate."
5. Mainlanders make up the bulk of the entrants under the talent schemes. The next top sources of migrants were the United States, Australia and Canada.
6. Up to 150 mainland Chinese enter Hong Kong daily under the One-Way Permit (OWP) scheme, the key source of migrants to Hong Kong. The scheme to facilitate family reunion is administered by mainland authorities.
7. The adult OWP holders were generally not well educated and possessed little working experience. They do not meet the city's manpower requirements for more highly educated workers.
8. There have also been a growing number of births in Hong Kong by mainland women whose spouses are not Hong Kong permanent residents.

9. The total number of OWP entrants and births in Hong Kong to mainland couples is about 3.8 times more than that of entrants through the various talent and employment visa schemes.
10. The Hong Kong government is unlikely to be able to reclaim its right to screen OWP entrants from the mainland authorities in the near future. There is little it can do to control the influx of OWP new arrivals.
11. In view of the rising tide of negative sentiments towards mainlanders and the fear of “mainlandization” in Hong Kong, the government may have to turn to other sources of quality migrants to meet its manpower requirements.