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Thousands of Hong Kongers apply for new Canadian immigration programs amid crackdown

But Canada has yet to see a massive influx, unlike the decade or so before the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to China, when an estimated 335,000 migrated here

Tom Blackwell
Oct 21, 2021 • 1 day ago • 3 minute read • 33 Comments

Police set up a barrier as pro-democracy activists protest in the Wan Chai district in Hong Kong on October 1, 2021. PHOTO BY ANTHONY KWAN/GETTY IMAGES

Thousands of Hong Kong residents have applied for special new work permits and permanent-resident programs offered by Canada amid China's crackdown on the city, federal statistics reveal.

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More than two dozen Hong Kongers have also requested refugee status here since the beginning of last year, unusual for a jurisdiction that in the past was rarely if ever a source of political asylum seekers.

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The Immigration and Refugee Board "has accepted a number of refugee protection claims from persons alleging persecution against Hong Kong in the last couple of years," said board spokeswoman Anna Pape.

The government does not keep data on the movement of an estimated 300,000 Canadian citizens living in Hong Kong, making it unclear how many of those people have returned or are in the process of coming back.

But the applications for entry to Canada by non-citizens emerge amid early evidence of a significant exodus from Hong Kong in the wake of China imposing a new national security law and taking other measures that have steadily eroded freedoms there.

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Hong Kong registered a net outflow of 89,000 people in the first half of 2021, the largest population drop recorded since 1961, according to government statistics.

A poll released this week by the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, in line with other surveys, suggested 42 per cent of residents would leave if they had the opportunity. The U.K., Canada and Australia were the preferred destinations.

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Still, Canada has yet to see a massive influx, unlike the decade or so before the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to China, when an estimated 335,000 migrated to this country.

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The relatively modest number of non-Canadians applying is not surprising, given so many Hong Kongers already hold Canadian passports and can come any time they want, said immigration lawyer Sergio Karas.

The rest still enjoy some economic freedom — if not political liberty — and low tax rates, he added.

"I'm not sure everybody's keen about coming to a place where they are going to pay a lot more taxes."

In response to China's actions in the city, Canada introduced new policies earlier this year making it easier for certain Hong Kongers to work or immigrate here.

They include open-ended work permits that allow residents to be employed in Canada for up to three years. In the first four months after the program was announced in February, 3,481 people — not including dependents — had applied, said Nancy Caron, an Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada spokeswoman.

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Ottawa also introduced two new “pathways” for recent Hong Kong post-secondary graduates to obtain expedited permanent residence status in Canada.

IRCC had received 400 applications under those programs by July 31, less than two months after they were announced, with 17 admitted at that point, said Caron.

Regular applications from Hong Kong for permanent residence have not seen a marked jump. They totalled 1,826 in 2018, 2,207 in 2019, 2,105 in 2020 and 1,219 in the first seven months of this year.

The refugee statistics are a bit harder to track, given IRCC’s policy of hiding for privacy reasons numbers of 20 or less people in individual categories.

From 2013 to 2019, the department lists no applications from Hong Kong, meaning either the numbers were 20 or less, or non-existent.

Data for Hong Kong finally appears for the first time in 2020 — when the national security law was imposed — indicating that Canada received 30 applications for political asylum from the territory.

By the end of 2020, 21 had been finalized one way or another, but as of this June, the number of pending refugee cases from Hong Kong had climbed to 30 again.

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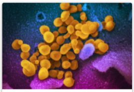

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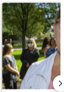

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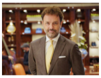

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"an estimated 335,000 migrated to this country.'Still, Canada has yet to see a massive influx, unlike the decade or so before the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to China, when an estimated 335,000 migrated to this country." And how many returned after getting their, "Get out of jail free," card?

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