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Over half of the Hong Kong population support Rights of Abode for asylum-seekers' and refugee children
Almost 60% urged government to improve on human rights policy; freedom of speech; asylum-seekers and refugees rights and political freedom top of their concern

According to a survey conducted by the Department of Asian and Policy Studies at The Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK), over half of the Hong Kong Chinese support rights of abode for the asylum-seeker and refugee children. And almost 60% of the respondents urged the Hong Kong government to improve its human rights policy. It implies human rights is a concerned subject to the Hong Kong people.

The survey, commissioned by the Department of Asian and Policy Studies and conducted by HKU POP between February 27 and March 8, successfully interviewed 1,002 Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong Chinese aged over 18. This is a follow-up of the 2016 survey with questions relate to human rights as this year is a year of the Universal Periodic Review to the United Nations. The results showed that 59.1% of the respondents believed that the Hong Kong government needs to improve its human rights policy, and with Freedom of Speech (16.2%); Asylum-seekers and refugees' rights (8.1%) and Political freedom (4.4%) top of their concerns. Over half (51.6%) of the respondents support giving rights of abode to the asylum-seeker and refugee children.

Do you think the children of asylum-seekers born and educated in Hong Kong should have the right of abode?

	Percentage
Yes	51.6%
No	38.5%
No idea/Difficult to say	9.9%
Total	100%

What are the human rights issues do you think Hong Kong is facing? (Multiple Choice)

	Percent of cases
Freedom of speech	16.2%
Asylum-seekers and refugees rights	8.1%
Political freedom	4.4%
LGBT rights	4.1%
Freedom of press	3.9%
Racial discrimination	3.5%
Electoral system and suffrage	2.9%
Equality	2.6%

Regarding questions relating to their views on the asylum-seekers and refugees, 64.1% of the people are neutral to the asylum-seekers and refugees, 0.3% less than 2016; but feeling positive towards the asylum-seekers and refugees has increased from 4.7% in 2016 to 5.1% in 2018, a 0.4% increase.

When compared with the 2016 results, the results from this survey still showed that Hong Kong people are generally still misinformed about even very basic, but essential information on asylum-seekers and refugees in Hong Kong. But there is an increase (+3.7%) in terms of understanding that the asylum-seekers and refugees will not be granted citizenship under the current system. Still, almost half of the respondents thought that asylum-seekers and refugees could become Hong Kong residents, and most identified Pakistan as the major source country when in actual fact it is India and African countries come second in their answer whereas the number of asylum-seekers from Africa ranks ninth and below in the chart provided by the immigration department. Some of the results are listed below.

Do you think asylum-seekers can become Hong Kong citizens under the current Hong Kong immigration system?

	Percentage	Percentage
	2018	2016
Yes	46.4%	46.9%
No	42.3 %	38.6%
No idea/Difficult to say	11.3%	14.6%
Total	100%	100.0%

Where do you think asylum-seekers and refugees are mainly from?

Nationality	Percentage	Percentage
	2018	2016
Pakistan	19.3%	26.0%
Other Southeast Asian Countries	12.9%	6.9%
African countries	12.3%	12.6%
Vietnam	12.0%	11.3%
India	11.2%	7.1%
China	2.6%	2.1%
Syria	2.2%	-
Other Middle-Eastern countries	1.9%	4.4%
War-torn countries	1.4%	-
Nepal	1.4%	1.6%
Bangladesh	1.3%	2.4%
Other	2.8%	2.6%
No idea/difficult to say	18.6%	21.0%

Non-refoulement application (as at End of December 2017)

Source: Immigration Department <https://www.immd.gov.hk/eng/facts/enforcement.html>

Nationality	Number of claimants
Indian	1 291
Pakistani	1 242
Bangladeshi	852
Indonesian	625
Vietnamese	445
Filipino	410
Nepalese	207
Sri Lankan	152
Nigerian	101
Others	574
Total	5 899

In multiple-choice questions, 59.6% of the respondents indicated that they received information from TV, a slight decrease from 2016; and 40.5% from the print media (0.7% increase from print media) (more than one option could be chosen). When asked about their impression of the issues related to asylum-seekers and refugees, 61.5% (a 4.5% decrease from 2016) of the respondents answered “fake refugees” and 50.5% (a 1.1 % increase) answered “criminals”. Although further investigation of media influence is needed, the tendency to form negative associations will inevitably affect overall perceptions of asylum-seekers and refugees.

That said, the respondents still believed that government should take positive and constructive steps to resolve the current situation. These were, 1) Arrest snakeheads and members of human trafficking syndicates (62.4%); 2) Hire more staff to speed up the process (38.3%) a 7.7% increase from 2016; 3) Reform the current USM system and re-train immigration department staff (36.6%), a 0.3 decrease from 2016; and 3) Allow asylum-seekers and refugees who have been in Hong Kong for over 5 years to work, which would both help to resolve the low-end labour shortage and improve their quality of life (33.9%), a 1.7% increase from 2016. Measures such as “Building a detention camp” (23.6% of responses) received little support, with building a detention camp a 2.9% decrease from 2016.

What policies should the government implement to solve the issues? (Up to three could be chosen)

	Percent of cases	Percent of cases
	2018	2016
Arrest snakeheads and members of human trafficking syndicates	62.4%	64.5%
Hire more staff to speed up the USM process	38.3%	30.6%
Reform the USM system and retrain/employ more people to speed up the USM process	36.6%	36.9%
Allow those who have been here for more than 5 years to work in low-end jobs so that they can help solve the labour shortage problem and improve their quality for life	33.9%	32.2%
Build a detention camp	23.6%	26.5%

The survey results also showed that more than half of the respondents believed that Hong Kong people are prejudiced toward people of colour. However, like 2016, over 80% of the respondents believed that Hong Kong people need to learn more about other ethnic groups.

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? In general, the Hong Kong people are prejudiced towards people of colour

	Percentage	Percentage
	2018	2016
Disagree	32.2%	39.4%
Partly agree	5.7%	9.1%
Agree	59.4%	48.6%
No idea/Difficult to say	2.8%	2.8%
Total	100%	100%

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? Hong Kong people need to know more about other ethnic groups

	Percentage	Percentage
	2018	2016
Disagree	10.9%	10.4%
Partly agree	3.7%	5.7%
Agree	82.8%	80.8%
No idea/Difficult to say	2.6%	3.2%
Total	100%	100%

Commenting on the results, Dr Isabella Ng, the survey's principal investigator, said that it was encouraging to see the concern and support the general public give to the asylum-seekers and refugees. It should be a wake-up call to the policy-makers who have been consistently attacking this marginalized group, believing that misguided knowledge would detriment the asylum-seekers' reputation in the community. The improvement on their

perception towards the asylum-seekers and refugees and their support in granting the rights of the abode to the asylum-seeker children reveal the humanitarian and the pragmatic side of Hong Kong people as Hong Kong's young population are dwindling. These results suggest how the Hong Kong government should respond, if the Hong Kong people are in favour of granting working rights to the asylum-seekers and refugees. What the government and some policy makers' suggestion on having detention camp to house the asylum-seekers and refugees is not supported.

The survey results also caution the government to handle human rights issue with care, and be aware of Hong Kong's political legacy from a democratic and liberal tradition and its position as an international city. As the results from the survey show that general population are not particularly satisfied with the government's handling of human rights' issue and believe that there is still room for improvement. The Hong Kong public are very concerned about Freedom of Speech, which suggests that Hong Kong people would like to see improvements on the aspects of Freedom of Speech, asylum-seekers and refugees' rights, and political freedom.

Even though the Hong Kong public is still misinformed about asylum-seekers and refugees, the respondents have increasing knowledge towards this marginalized group and a rather rational perspective on how the government should handle claimants' situations, and did express their desire for a multicultural, pluralistic society that features mutual understanding and support amongst different ethnic groups, especially when the Hong Kong community is increasingly aware of their prejudice towards other ethnic groups. Dr Ng added that the findings imply that the government should strengthen civic education in schools, and it should also tackle the asylum-seekers and refugees with a steady, sensible and humanitarian approach.

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