

EdUHK Research: Half of the Hong Kong People Misinformed about Refugee Issue Culture of Mutual Respect Urged: Over 80% of Hong Kong People Keen to Learn More about Other Ethnic Groups

20 August 2016



From Left to Right: Mr Andy Wong Kwun-nang, Dr Isabella Ng Fung-sheung and Dr Alex Chan Lih-shing

According to a survey conducted by the Department of Asian and Policy Studies at The Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK), about half of Hong Kong Chinese are somewhat misinformed about refugees and ethnic minorities. Some respondents even labelled asylum-seekers and refugees as “fake refugees” and associated them with “crimes”. The Department is calling for better civic education on refugee issues to ease such misunderstandings and establish a culture of mutual respect.

The survey, commissioned by the Department of Asian and Policy Studies and conducted by HKU POP between 12 and 28 July, successfully interviewed 1,001 Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong Chinese aged over 18. The results showed that over 60% (64.3%) respondents were feeling neutral towards the asylum-seekers and refugees in Hong Kong. However, Hong Kong people are generally misinformed about even very basic but essential information on asylum-seekers and refugees in Hong Kong. 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 Vietnam. 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
Yes	46.9%
No	38.6%
No idea/Difficult to say	14.6%
Total	100%

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

	Percentage
Pakistan	26.0%
African countries	12.5%
Vietnam	11.3%
India	7.1%
Other Southeast Asian countries	6.8%
Other Middle East countries	4.4%
Bangladesh	2.4%
China	2.1%
Nepal	1.6%
Philippines	1.3%
Indonesia	0.9%
Others	2.6%
No idea/Difficult to say	20.9%
Refuse to answer	0.1%
Total	100%

In multiple choice questions, over 60% of the respondents indicated that they received information from TV and 40% from the print media (more than one option could be chosen). When asked about their impression of the issues related to asylum-seekers and refugees, 66% of the respondents answered “fake refugees” and 49.4% answered “crime”. Although further investigation of media influence is needed, the tendency to form negative associations will inevitably affect overall perceptions of asylum-seekers and refugees.

With this in mind, 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 (64.5%); 2) reform the current USM system and re-train immigration department staff (36.9%); 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 (32.2%). Measures such as “building a detention camp” (26.5% of responses) and “deporting them” received little support. The results were different from what some government officials and legislators had been promoting as ways to handle the asylum-seekers and refugees like building a detention camp.

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

	Percentage of Cases
Arrest snakeheads and members of human trafficking syndicates	64.5%
Reform the USM system and retrain/employ more people to speed up the USM process	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 and improve their quality of life	32.2%
Hire more staff to speed up the USM process	30.6%
Build a detention camp	26.5%
Deport	2.2%
No solution	2.8%
Others	0.7%
No idea/Difficult to say	4.0%

The survey results also showed that almost half of the respondents believed that Hong Kong people are prejudiced toward people of colour. And almost 30% (28.8%) of the respondents believed that Hong Kong’s political parties are prejudiced towards people of colour. Of the 30% respondents, almost 60% (58.5) believed that the pro-establishment parties are prejudiced towards people of colour. However, 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 community is prejudiced towards people of colour

	Percentage
Disagree	39.4%
Partly agree	9.1%
Agree	48.6%
No idea/Difficult to say	2.8%

Total	100%
-------	------

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

	Percentage
Disagree	10.3%
Partly agree	5.7%
Agree	80.7%
No idea/Difficult to say	3.2%
Refuse to answer	0.1%
Total	100%

Commenting on the results, Dr Isabella Ng, the survey's principal investigator, said that the Hong Kong public is generally misinformed about asylum-seekers and refugees. However, the respondents did have a rather positive and 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. Dr Ng added that the findings imply that the government should strengthen civic education in schools, and it should also resolve the asylum-seeker and refugee issue with a steady, sensible and humanitarian approach.

-End-

For media enquiries, please contact Dr Ng Fung Sheung Isabella, Assistant Professor at the Department of Asian and Policy Studies (tel: 2948 6343), Dr Alex Chan (2948 7852) or Mr Andy Wong (2948-8563).



Dr Isabella Ng indicated that the government should resolve the asylum-seeker and refugee issue.