

Briefing – Hong Kong British Nationals (Overseas) VISA: Year 1 Review

Background

On 1 July 2020, in response to the enactment of the National Security Law in Hong Kong, the Prime Minister announced a new route for British Citizenship for BN(O) holders. The Hong Kong BN(O) visa route opened on 31 January 2021; this allows Hong Kong nationals who meet visa requirements to live, work, and apply for citizenship after 5 years in the UK.

Greater London

Greater London Boroughs Preferred by Hong Kong BN(O)s for Settlement in the First 6 Months by Percentages of Mentions in 2021



There have been a total of 140,500 applications since its introduction on 31st January 2021 up to the end of June 2022. Modelling by the Government estimates up to 322,400 visa applications in the first 5 years of the visa scheme, with around 30% of applicants likely to choose to settle in London.

From commissioned research, the GLA found that Southwest and Northwest London are the most common areas BN(O)s are choosing to settle in, including boroughs such as Kingston, Sutton, Richmond, Barnet, Ealing and Harrow. Far fewer Hongkongers have so far chosen to settle in East London, except for Greenwich, and Canary Wharf in Tower Hamlets

On Thursday 24 February 2021, it was announced that eligibility for the BN(O) route will be extended to applicants born on or after 1 July 1997 who have at least one BN(O) parent. Applicants will be able to apply independently of their parents and will also be able to be joined by their own eligible dependents. The changes will go live on 30th November 2022.

Funding and Support for London boroughs: Year 1 in review and Year 2 announcements

To support new arrivals to settle in the UK, the government launched a £43 million Integration Programme for the financial year 2021/2022 to improve access to housing, work and educational support and ensure successful applicants are able to integrate and contribute to their communities. As part of this package, Hong Kong BN(O)s would also receive support for destitution and improving their competency in English:

- £800 per head to support access to English language classes for BN(O) status holders (This has now increased to **£850 per head from 1st July 2022**).
 - Up to £2,720 per BN(O) household for destitution support
- Local authorities can submit their claims for the above costs on DELTA (DLUHC's in-house data collection platform) on a quarterly basis. You can access the DELTA platform by following this link: <http://delta.communities.gov.uk/>. For any questions about ESOL/Destitution support, you can contact hongkong@communities.gov.uk.

In addition, [the government also funded 47 national and regional projects](#) through the Hong Kong BN(O) Welcome Programme VCSE grant scheme, to offer a range of support, including educational resources, access to mental health services, and help for people to find jobs and start their own businesses. DLUHC announced a second year of the grant

scheme and a further £3 million for over 40 voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations to continue this work.

Finally, 12 ‘welcome hubs’ were established across the UK to coordinate support and give practical advice and assistance to new arrivals from Hong Kong. £917,000 were allocated to the GLA in the first year of the programme (2021/2022) to be administered through the London Strategic Migration Partnership (LSMP) for this purpose, with a further £917,000 being allocated to the GLA for a second year.

The GLA’s Hong Kong Welcome and Integration Programme: Year 1 in review

In July 2021, The GLA set out its objectives to support new arrivals from Hong Kong; developing a work programme spanning across the first year of the programme:

- **Research:** In October 2021, the GLA commissioned a team of consultants to deliver a programme of research and engagement to understand Hongkongers in London, and to develop a set of options for short and long-term interventions to support the social integration of new arrivals from Hong Kong. Some key findings include:

The new Hong Kong diaspora in London:

- The majority (64%-88%) have come with their families with children (a typical BN(O) family includes parents in their 30s/40s with at least one child, more likely to be at primary school age or junior secondary age)
- Most BN(O)s (60% to 85%) received a university degree or above and 70% have 11 + years of work experience
- 70% own an asset of £100,000+, 9% live in owned properties and 68%+ are likely to buy within 2 years

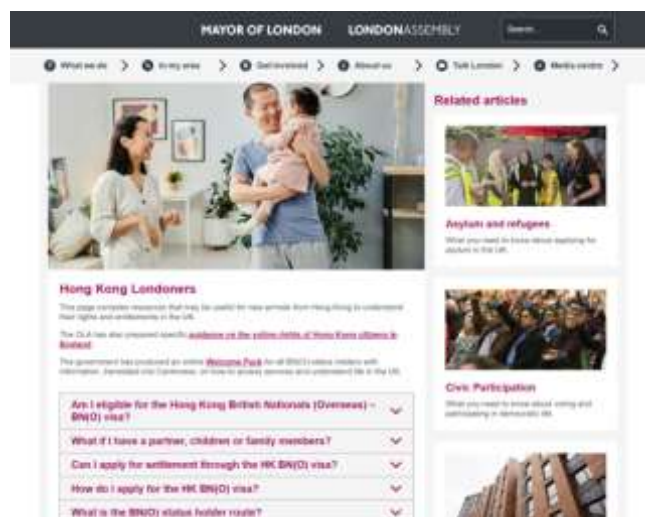
- The section below on challenges and lessons includes recommendations for boroughs regarding support for Hong Kong BN(O) visa arrivals. An Executive Summary of the report can be found [here](#).

- **The Migrant Londoners Hub:** an online resource to help those newly arrived in London to navigate the city, supporting Londoners with immigration needs – including Hong Kong BN(O)s - with information about their rights.

It features dedicated content for local authorities, healthcare professionals and other organisations and individuals supporting migrants, people seeking asylum and refugees in our city.

The Hub is currently being translated into Cantonese, and a visual ‘map of services’ will also be available later this year.

- You can access the Hub via this link: <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/communities/migrant-londoners-hub>



- **Support to London’s local authorities:** The GLA’s Local Hong Kong Welcome Fund, aims to build local capacity to support the welcome and integration of new arrivals from Hong Kong, funding seven target London Boroughs to receive grants, totalling (approx.) £205,000.

The funded boroughs include Haringey, Hackney, Kingston, Sutton, Richmond, Tower Hamlets, and Waltham Forest

Funded projects support the integration of Hong Kong BN(O)s through, among other areas:

- Building Local Authorities’ capacity to support Hong Kong BN(O)s
- Information packs on Council services and local communities
- Supporting informal English learning and language exchanges
- Funding local Hong Kong organisations and community groups

- **Grant funding to Hong Kong Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprises (VCSEs):** The GLA’s Welcoming Hongkongers Fund is a small grants programme for Hong Kong-supporting organisations, funding 12 community organisations to receive individual grants of up to £10,000.

Funded projects support the integration of Hong Kong BN(O)s through, among other areas:

- Information sessions on rights and entitlements
- Mental health and peer outreach support
- Targeted activities for elderly and younger Hongkongers
- Cultural gatherings, city tours and outdoor activities

- **Mental Health Support:** Together with Thrive LDN, the GLA funded the co-development, production and dissemination of culturally appropriate Hong Kong mental health resources and the delivery of trauma-informed resources and training for frontline mental health services.

Some of these resources are now live on the Thrive LDN website, offering guidance and support on the wellbeing of children, young people, and adults from Hong Kong; guidance on accessing urgent mental health support; and support to professionals working with the Hong Kong Community:

- You can access the resources via this link: <https://thrivedn.co.uk/resources/supporting-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-of-hongkongers-in-london/>

- **Monthly steering group with key stakeholders supporting BN(O) integration in London:** The GLA launched a London Hong Kong Integration Steering Group (LHK) to provide strategic oversight and guidance for the Hong Kong Integration Programme in London, and establish a local forum to facilitate dialogue between local authorities, civil society organisations and community groups, holding the GLA to account on the effective delivery of this Programme.

The LHK Steering Group occurs monthly as it looks to facilitate cross-sectoral working in the provision of support for new arrivals from Hong Kong, and to ensure a harmonised, coordinated, and efficient approach to Hong Kong Integration across different local authorities and stakeholders, to more effectively identify and seek solutions to problems which harm the welfare of Hongkongers, or hinder their social integration.

If you are interested in attending, please email muhammad.abushiri@london.gov.uk,

Lessons and Challenges

There are a number of lessons local government can take in providing tailored and sensitive support to meet the needs of Hongkongers, including:

- **Awareness raising and signposting of available support** – While specific funding, support and provisions are available to Hongkongers, including the ESOL and Destitution Funding, many have been underclaimed and underutilised. While some of the explanation to this is structural, there is a role for local authorities in promoting access to ESOL/Destitution support to BN(O)s, as well as providing coordination locally, including with colleges and ESOL providers.
- **Hesitancy to engage with local authorities** – Hongkongers are very much a self-organising community and tend to seek help mostly from within their networks. Due to the political tensions in Hong Kong, many BN(O)s can be hesitant to engage with government bodies. Therefore, extra effort must be made to engage, listen, understand, and support Hongkongers' voices and concerns.
- **English Language Support** – Although many Hongkongers have a good level of English, many are not used to conversational English or lack the confidence to speak with others. Hong Kong BN(O)s are entitled to £850 worth of ESOL education, claimed back by local authorities from DLUHC. (Please contact the GLA for more details on the ESOL Offering for Hong Kong BN(O)s).
- **Limitations around data of arrivals** – The lack of official data around newly arrived BN(O)s is one of the major challenges for local authorities in measuring and understanding local BN(O) Populations Efforts have been made for the government to improve data collection, addressing the lack of data shared with SMPs and local authorities. The GLA has created methods to estimate populations based on new council tax registrations and school transfers. More information on these methods is available in the technical note below.¹

With the extended eligibility of the scheme due in November 2022, applicants born on or after 1 July 1997 who have at least one BN(O) parent will be eligible to apply for the BN(O) visa scheme independently to their parents. Lack of data on the location of new young arrivals can pose a challenge to Local Authorities when designing integration programmes.

- **Safety and security concerns** - For newly arrived Hongkongers, the safety and security of the community is a key concern. Along with a rise in hate crime towards Asian communities following the COVID-19 outbreak, there have been instances of politically-driven tensions between BN(O)s and the Chinese community. Hongkongers consider themselves as holding a distinct identity from the Chinese community, given the territory's history, its use of Cantonese, and its self-governance system.

When settling in London, Hong Kong BN(O)s have reported a general feeling of mistrust and lack of acceptance by longer-established Chinese migrant groups. Issues of community surveillance and self-censorship have also been identified. To address these concerns, the GLA is working with the Metropolitan Police to better inform engagement with this community and train Metropolitan Police staff on culturally aware and trauma-informed policing in this community.

Hong Kong community tension issues following the recent incident at the Chinese Consulate – Manchester

A clear example of how these tensions can manifest into clashes between the two communities was the recent [incident at the Chinese Consulate - Manchester](#).

On Sunday 16th October 2022, a Pro-Hong Kong democracy demonstration outside the Chinese Consulate in Manchester resulted in violence after several men left the consulate grounds and confronted the protesters. The reported “consulate staff” removed banners depicting images of Chinese President Xi Jinping and reportedly “dragged” a protester into the Consulate grounds and assaulted him before he was removed by Police.

This forms the background of increased tensions, fear and anxiety that communities and police forces operate in. Local Authorities across London should recognise and acknowledge the anxiety and distrust that some in the BN(O) community may hold.

- **Ensuring confidentiality and data protection:** Security concerns, along with the extra-territorial nature of the National Security Law, lead community members to be protective of their identity and personal information. When engaging with Hong Kong BN(O)s, it is important to keep such considerations in mind. The GLA has taken steps to not require personal details of community members in its activities and to ensure confidentiality of Hongkongers in any funded projects and/or promotional materials around this programme.
- **Preservation of Hong Kong culture –** As a migrant group that has fled oppression due to their political and cultural positions, culture plays a significant role within Hongkongers’ identity. Local authorities can help preserve this by considering support for cultural activities, Cantonese teaching in schools among other support.
- **Capacities of Schools -** School capacity continues to be raised as a concern, particularly when also considering the growing arrivals from Ukraine and Afghanistan. The report recommends that local authorities have a local advisor on school places, and to work with Hongkonger support networks to share information about local childcare services and receive early alerts of demand for school places.

The GLA’s Hong Kong Welcome and Integration Programme: Year 2

Our priorities for the second year of our Hong Kong Welcome and Integration Programme include:

- **Research:** Continuing engagement with Hongkongers to shape the direction and prioritisation of available funding to improve our understanding of Hongkongers’ needs.
- **Local coordination:** Continuation and expansion of the Local Hong Kong Welcome Fund, to build capacity within local authorities to support the welcome and integration of new arrivals from Hong Kong. (Applications expected to open for Local Authorities in late 2022)
- **Civil Society:** Continuation and expansion of funding for civil society to respond to the needs of Hongkongers, including support and incubation for newly established and emergent Hong Kong-led groups. (Applications expected to open for organisations in early 2023)
- **Intersectional needs:** the commissioning and grant-funding of services that support Hongkongers with intersectional needs (such as Older Hongkongers, Younger Hongkongers, LGBTQI+ Hongkongers and Hongkongers with disabilities).
- **Higher Education:** Development of a new Higher Education Fund that aims to build Higher Education capacity to support the welcome and integration of new arrival students from Hong Kong.

Funding for Local Authorities and Civil Society: The GLA will be opening a second round of funding for both Local Authorities and Civil Society in 2023 new year, so we encourage Local Authorities to consider how this funding could improve existing or develop new support for BN(O)s locally and apply.

Contact Information:

For more information on the GLA's Hong Kong Welcome and Integration Programme or general support for BN(O) in London, please contact: muhammad.abushiri@london.gov.uk

¹ Technical Note: How boroughs can estimate their local BN(O) population?

This is an extract from the GLA's Hong Kong diaspora research report on how to estimate local BN(O) populations. For more information please refer to the Summary or contact us.

- ❑ **Common Hong Kong Surnames Filtering Method** identifies BN(O)s by filtering Hong Kong surnames from the council databases
 - 1) A list of 173 most popular Hong Kong surnames is prepared and available with GLA
 - 2) Use the Surname List to filter possible Hong Kong households from new council tax registrations since July 2020 (when the Leave Outside The Rule (LOTR) route was made possible for BNO holders)
 - 3) Children are not included in council tax registration. Use the Surname List to filter new school applications number that are not transfers within the UK since July 2020
- ❑ Advantages:
 - Data is verifiable officially
 - GDPR personal data protection requirements are observed
 - Pilot test shows reliability. The result is almost the same as two other methods of estimations by (a) applying locational preference percentages to Home Office's actual application approval numbers, and (b) estimation by the number of verified members of local social media networks
- ❑ Limitations and Mitigation:
 - Some surnames are used by other ethnicities, e.g, "Lee" can be used by HKers, Koreans and Europeans.
 - Mitigation: Such surnames are remarked on the List. When those surnames are identified, check also the middle name which may provide some indications
 - The number of non-school age children and children going to independent school cannot be captured
 - Suggest to work closely with the local school admission team to keep most updated data on new school admissions who are not transfers within the UK

15