

Family Status Equality in Hong Kong

Overview

The family structures of Hong Kong have undergone significant changes over the past few decades, most notably the increase of nuclear families, as led by various demographic and social-economic factors, such as increased participation of women in the workforce. Given a general lack of family-friendly employment policies and practices (FFEPs) in the workplace, employees have difficulties in achieving balance between work and family life.



2.685M households*

Domestic household is defined by Census and Statistics Department as a group of persons who live together and make common provision for essentials of living. A person living alone is also regarded as a household. Family, according to the United Nations, is defined as those members of the household, who are related, to a specified degree, through blood, adoption or marriage.

*Figure as at end-2020

Smaller & More Nuclear Families



- The average household size reduced from 4.5 in 1971 to 2.9 in 2011 and further to 2.7 in 2020.
- The proportion of households with six persons and above decreased from 16% in 1986 to 3.0% in Q4, 2020. The number of households composed of only a couple increased, indicating preference of more married couples to form families of their own and have fewer or no children.
- In 2016, the number of persons living alone was 243,475 for women and 215,540 for men, a rise of 91.7% and 33.0% respectively when compared with 2001.

Lower Marriage & Fertility Rate



- There is a trend for marriage postponement and non-marriage in both genders. Between 1991 and 2020, the median age of first marriage increased from 29.1 to 31.9 for men, while that of women rose from 26.2 to 30.4.
- There is an increased prevalence of spinsterhood. The number of never married persons aged 15 and above increased by 48.1% for female and 12.5% for male between 1991 and 2020. In particular, the percentage of never married women in the age group 40 to 44 increased from 11.4% in 1991 to 60.7% in 2020.
- The overall fertility rate decreased from 65.2 (per 1,000 female population) in 1981 to 45.1 in 1991 and further to 26.4% in 2020.
- Simultaneously, the fertility rate for younger age groups declined between 1981 and 2019. For women in the 20 to 24 age group, the age specific fertility rate decreased from 39.1 in 1991 to 11.1 in 2020. On the other hand, the fertility rate for older age groups (35 to 39) women showed a generally upward trend – from 30.4 in 1991 to 44.2 in 2020 – indicating a trend for postponement in marriage and child-bearing. The median age of women at first childbirth rose from 28.1 in 1991 to 32.3 in 2020.

More Divorces & Single Parents



- The crude divorce rate rose from 1.11 (per 1,000 population) in 1991 to 2.14 in 2020. The number of divorces also increased substantially from 6,295 in 1991 to 16,020 in 2020.
- The number of widowed/divorced/separated persons increased from 353,500 in 1991 to 796,800 in 2020. Their proportion in the population also increased from 8% in 1991 to 12.2% in 2020.
- As a result, the number of single parents increased from 61,431 in 2001 to 73,428 in 2016. Single mothers (56,543) far outnumbered single fathers (16,883).

Work and Family Balance

Only **17%** of employers implemented family-friendly employment policies¹

Working Hours – According to the Census and Statistics Department, the median weekly working hours of Hong Kong male employees in 2020 reached 44 hours, while that of female employees totalled 40 hours (excluding foreign domestic workers). To date, there is no statutory provision stipulating the standard or maximum working hours in Hong Kong, although over 100 countries/regions already introduced some form of statutory working hour limits, with 41% having adopted a 40-hour work week (*Source: International Labour Organization ILO*).

Maternity & Paternity Leave – The statutory maternity leave in Hong Kong has been extended to 14 weeks since 11 December 2020, in line with the 14-week period stipulated by ILO. As for the statutory paternity leave, this was increased from 3 to 5 days with effect from January 2019.

What the Employees said...



Nearly 48% of employees lived with children and/or elderly

15%

Job applicants alleged being discriminated on the ground of family status²

22%

were discriminated during pregnancy, maternity leave, and/or within first year after returning to work from giving birth¹

20%

working mothers encountered difficulties in applying for leave to take care of children¹

¹Study on Pregnancy Discrimination and Negative Perceptions faced by Pregnant Women and Working Mothers in Small and Medium Enterprises, Equal Opportunities Commission, 2016

²A Study on Family Discrimination in the Workplace in Hong Kong, Equal Opportunities Commission, 2018

Legal Protection

The **Family Status Discrimination Ordinance (FSDO)** was enacted in 1997. It makes unlawful for any person or organisation to discriminate against another person, male or female, on the basis of family status. A 'family status' means a person has the responsibility for the care of an immediate family member, that is, a person who is related by blood, marriage, adoption or affinity.

Sources from Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR:

- Quarterly Report on General Household Survey (Oct-Dec 2020)
- 2017 Year-end Population & 2016 Population By-census
- Women and Men in Hong Kong 2021