

# From HK to UK: Hong Kongers and their new lives in Britain



Welcoming  
Committee for  
Hong Kongers

REPORT SUMMARY  
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British  
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## INTRODUCTION

The Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers is an umbrella organisation that helps coordinate efforts from different sectors to support Hong Kongers who came under the BN(O) visa scheme to settle in the UK. It also conducts research to inform policy and share best practice.

This is a summary of the key findings and recommendations of the report *From HK to UK: Hong Kongers and their new lives in Britain*. The full report can be downloaded at:

[www.welcomehk.org/research-and-policy](http://www.welcomehk.org/research-and-policy)

The aims of this report are to use the evidence from a new survey of Hong Kongers in the UK to understand some of the key aspects of BN(O) Hong Kongers' new lives here and to inform policy and practice on settlement and integration. Our findings indicate that, while Hong Kongers are settling in well to life in the UK, they are experiencing obstacles that need to be addressed.

The survey ran over a period of 4 weeks between 12 June and 10 July 2023, with a sample of 2,089 people. Through

enabling a large, representative survey to be carried out, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has provided a rare opportunity for the needs of new migrants to be understood. While providing a clear picture of the decisions, challenges, and opportunities for BN(O) Hong Kongers, the findings may also be applicable to a much wider group of newcomers.

The survey covered diverse aspects of BN(O) Hong Kongers' new lives: decisions about where to live, employment, learning English, belonging and feeling welcome, financial pressures and physical and emotional wellbeing. Constraints on survey length meant that some important topics could not be included, for example children's education and civic engagement.

Read the full 'From HK to UK' report at [www.welcomehk.org/research-and-policy](http://www.welcomehk.org/research-and-policy)





## OUR FINDINGS

### 1. Many BN(O) Hong Kongers are well-qualified, but often say that their skills and experience are underused

BN(O)s are more highly educated than the average person in both Hong Kong and the UK and are over-represented in professional occupational groups. More than six in ten (59%) respondents have a degree at graduate (36%) or postgraduate (23%) level. This compares to just over a third (34%) of the UK population as a whole.

Though most BN(O)s are aged 25-64, currently only half are working: 35% full-time; 9% part-time; and 6% self-employed. The employment rate of just over 52% compares to the current UK national rate of 76%. This lower rate is explained by unemployment (of 18%) and lower participation rates among women and older BN(O) Hong Kongers. More than a quarter (27%) of those who are not in work are seeking employment - one in eight (12%) of all BN(O)s. Those who are not in work see confidence in speaking English (59%) and recognition of qualifications as the main barriers (28%).

Almost half of respondents, of all levels of skill and qualifications, say that their job doesn't match their skills and experience at all, or only a little. Those aged over 45 were least likely to have a good match, as were BN(O) Hong Kongers in Scotland, the East Midlands, the North West and the South West. Non-graduates and those with weaker English were also less likely to be in a well-matched job. More than a quarter of those in work are looking for another job, with higher pay the main motivation, followed by a better skills match or a more senior role.

There are marked gender differences in labour force participation rates, with men more likely to be working full-time (41% vs 28%) and women more likely to be taking care of the home (23% vs 4%). Men are also more likely than women to be self-employed. BN(O) Hong Kongers need careers information and advice, yet more than three-quarters have not received such help.

Almost half of respondents say that their job doesn't match their skills and experience



## 2. BN(O) Hong Kongers are coming to stay and integrate. Most feel welcomed but some have experienced isolation and discrimination

BN(O) Hong Kongers feel welcome in the communities where they have settled. They appreciate the positive reception they have received and are keen to become part of their local communities.

Almost all respondents (99%) said they intended to apply for settlement and also for British citizenship. A large majority (90%) have made contact with people where they live who are not Hong Kongers. Those in work, as well as parents, are especially likely to have contact with non-Hong Kongers. The most common type of social contact is with neighbours but schools, churches, sports and hobbies are also common ways of meeting people locally.

Yet despite relatively high levels of social contact, some BN(O) Hong Kongers are experiencing social isolation. Some respondents said they would like to meet more people, including other Hong Kongers. There is particularly strong interest in taking part in cultural events and festivals, with three-quarters of BN(O) Hong Kongers saying they are interested in these activities.

Most working BN(O) Hong Kongers feel welcome or very welcome at work but more than one in five working BN(O)s feels isolated at work. Almost one in ten have experienced discrimination from colleagues.

## 3. Some locations are attracting fewer BN(O) Hong Kongers

BN(O) Hong Kongers are settling in locations across the UK. There are higher concentrations in London (18%), the South East (19%) and the North West (20%) but significant numbers across the South and Midlands of England. Some locations are attracting smaller numbers, including nations of the UK other than England (4% in Scotland and just 1% in Wales and Northern Ireland). Lack of familiarity is one factor in this uneven spread.







## 4. Financial struggles and emotional wellbeing

More than four in ten respondents said their financial health and wellbeing had worsened since arriving in the UK, with one in ten saying it had worsened greatly. The principal factor impacting on financial wellbeing is general high costs of living (53%). Difficulties accessing Hong Kong pensions is a source of financial stress for more than one in four BN(O) Hong Kongers.

Sections of the BN(O) community report low financial wellbeing: one in ten gave a score below 5 out of 10, rising to a fifth of those aged 25-34. More than one in five say they are living beyond their means, and almost one in ten have no savings to draw on. For younger people the biggest financial issue is finding employment. This makes it particularly urgent that Hong Kongers can overcome their difficulties finding work.

Physical and emotional wellbeing levels are generally good. However, anxiety about future life in the UK is also a common source of stress, cited by more than four in ten people. Coming to the UK has also not meant that BN(O) Hong Kongers have left worries about their homeland behind: many have concerns about friends and family in Hong Kong and about the social and political climate of the country.

BN(O) Hong Kongers would like better access to support services and there are numerous organisations, including those funded through the government's Welcome Programme, that can provide advice and help. However, fewer than one in six (15%) have had contact with organisations that help BN(O)s to settle and integrate into the UK.



## 5. There is a need for more English language teaching, but few have accessed what is available

Most BN(O) Hong Kongers rate their English reading, speaking and writing skills as very good. However, more than a third rate their speaking and writing skills as just 'good' and one in ten rate their spoken English as poor. Some say that a lack of confidence in English is holding them back in the labour market. Older BN(O) Hong Kongers, particularly the over-65s, are more likely to rate their English skills as poor.

BN(O)s are not eligible for ESOL provision funded by the Adult Education Budget. The visa conditions require a 3-year wait, yet because integration is dependent on English, this is too late. DLUHC has put in place a targeted support fund open to local authorities, providing up to £800 per head to support ESOL needs. However, only around one in six, and one in ten over 65s, have attended an English class or received formal training to help with their English.

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Making the most of BN(O) Hong Kongers' skills and abilities

BN(O)s are more highly educated than the average person in both Hong Kong and the UK and are over-represented in professional occupational groups. If their skills are properly utilised, BN(O) Hong Kongers can help to address skills gaps in a number of occupational areas and stimulate economic growth through new enterprises across the nations and regions of the UK.

The government and employers have given insufficient consideration to the potential of migrants who have arrived in the UK on non-work visas, including via humanitarian routes. There are likely to be at least as many as on work visas, yet many are likely to be unemployed or underemployed. This could be addressed through a coordinated strategy involving the key UK government departments of DLUHC, DWP, Business and Trade and the Cabinet Office, working with key employer bodies across sectors and regions.

A similar approach should be adopted by the governments of Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Government departments should work closely with regions, including the Combined Mayoral Authorities, to put in place strategies and action to make the most of migrants' skills and potential.

This strategy could include regular audits of labour market participation and, where possible, skills utilisation. It should include the most sizable groups of migrants who have arrived on humanitarian visas, for example Ukrainians, Afghans and Syrians.

To address the needs of BN(O) Hong Kongers for careers information and advice, the National Careers Service, Jobcentre Plus and other providers of advice and guidance on jobs and careers should ensure they meet the needs of migrants. This should include raising awareness of services available. It should also include referral to professional bodies that can help those with professional qualifications with recognition and transfer of qualifications. These organisations can also help raise awareness of the BN(O) visa among employers, since this may be contributing to difficulties many experience in finding work.

BN(O)s are excluded from publicly funded training provision until they have been in the UK for three years. This restriction should be reviewed since it exacerbates skill shortages as well as putting career progression of new migrants on hold.

As part of strategies on levelling up, social integration and skills and enterprise, the government should monitor labour market participation of BN(O) Hong Kongers and other migrants who have arrived on humanitarian routes. The first aim should be to move participation rates much closer to the UK average. The second should be to monitor under-utilisation of skills where data is available to do this.

**BN(O)s are excluded from publicly funded training provision until they have been in the UK for three years**



## 2. Spreading the gains and impacts

More BN(O) Hong Kongers are expected to arrive in the coming months and years, and around a third of those already here are thinking of moving in the next year. This provides areas of the UK where there are fewer BN(O) Hong Kongers with opportunities to attract more. With word of mouth and recommendations the key influences on people's decisions about where to live, nations and regions with fewer Hong Kongers will need to be more proactive. Nations and regions could provide information online, including on websites, Youtube and other social media platforms. Information might also include case studies and testimonies.

To attract more Hong Kongers, nations and regions could provide information about the things that matter to them. These include crime and safety, affordable housing options, good schools, local transport and social and cultural opportunities. Employment opportunities, particularly in professional roles, will also be of interest to BN(O) Hong Kongers.

## 3. Steps to belonging and feeling welcome

While many BN(O) Hong Kongers feel welcome in their communities and eager to integrate, our survey also found that some face isolation in the community and at work.

We recommend that local authorities take the lead in collating and disseminating information about social and cultural activities that bring together migrants and the host community. They can work closely with key local institutions, to encourage participation: libraries and schools, for example, can become hubs to bring together migrants and the wider community. Online listings of regular activities and of events, as well as social media, are likely to be effective in reaching a wider audience, including migrants with weak social connections.

Employers should ensure that workplaces are not segregated by ethnicity or country of origin, either occupationally or socially. Employer and industry bodies should give consideration to how social connection and integration at work can be improved so that migrants feel fully involved and included in all aspects of workplace life.

## 4. Supporting financial and emotional wellbeing

BN(O) Hong Kongers would like better access to support services and there are numerous organisations, including those funded through the government's Welcome Programme, that can provide advice and help. However, fewer than one in six (15%) have had contact with organisations that help BN(O)s to settle and integrate into the UK. Local authorities should help to make BN(O)s aware of organisations offering support and activities. This information should be made available online and through social media as well as through libraries, schools and other local venues.

Services such as health and education should also be made aware that BN(O)s may need help. The government should provide information to schools and to health services about the BN(O) Hong Konger population so that service providers are aware of factors impacting on emotional wellbeing.

The NRPF requirement in the BN(O) visa should be reviewed, since it is affecting the integration of some newcomers with the greatest need. It is also likely to be a factor in low take up of English classes, and is limiting access to further and higher education.

Difficulties accessing the Hong Kong pension is a source of financial stress for more than one in four BN(O) Hong Kongers, as the survey revealed. This issue should be taken up by government bodies and agencies with responsibility for access to pensions, as well as by the financial institutions themselves.

**Fewer than one in six BN(O)s have had contact with organisations that can help them to settle and integrate into the UK.**



## 5. English as the key to integration

Good spoken and written English is needed for all aspects of integration, including for work, social mixing and political and civic participation. To strengthen the current provision and the awareness of English teaching available to BN(O)s, they should be made aware of the availability of free college courses during the visa application process. Information should also be distributed by local authorities and by key institutions such as schools and workplaces.

Colleges and local authorities should ensure that English courses cover all levels from beginner to advanced. They should also refer to providers who do not operate the 3-year residency rule. Some combined authorities and local areas have ESOL hubs and networks. These should monitor demand and take-up from BN(O)s and facilitate onward referral between providers.

Awareness of provision could also be improved through outreach in community organisations, libraries and other social venues as well as through advertising online and in social media. Local authorities have an important role to play in this process.





The Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers is an independent, non-profit umbrella group for all those who care about the integration of new arrivals from Hong Kong.

We help coordinate the efforts of multiple organisations to support Hong Kongers settling in the UK – from civil society and communities to business, education and government, across the UK's nations and regions.

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