

Coming for Hope:

Policy Study on Hong Kong British National (Overseas) Holders Intending to Come to the UK

Project Result Key Findings and Recommendations



Hongkongers in Britain (HKB)

December 2020

Brief Background of Project

- ▶ **Deteriorating situation in Hong Kong**
 - National Security Law imposed by China on Hong Kong
- ▶ **UK Government offers a new BNO Visa Scheme from Jan 2021**
 - A path to settlement and UK Citizenship for 5.4 million eligible Hongkongers (2.9m BNO holders, 2.3m dependents, 187,000 18–23 year olds)
- ▶ **But there are areas for clarification and improvements**
 - In implementing these new laws, regulations, policies
- ▶ **HKB is committed to providing assistance to the successful implementation of this scheme**
 - With this project: a questionnaire survey and research report
 - To collect data/info from Hong Kong residents and their partners/families considering to emigrate to the UK

Objectives of Project (1)

► To identify and report on 5 areas:

1. Who is considering emigration to the UK and when
2. Whether and when they will apply for the BNO Visa Scheme
3. Their concerns and preparedness in transiting to a new life in the UK
4. Their vulnerabilities in connection to the Hong Kong protests
5. Their personal profiles (demographics)

Objectives of Project (2)

► From this data, the research aims to:

- Find out about the needs and concerns of these prospective Hong Kong emigrants
- Identify potential issues with UK policies and laws
- Offer potential solutions and policy suggestions
- Recommend to the Home Office to provide adequate support for these prospective Hong Kong emigrants

The Questionnaire Survey

- ▶ **Data collection period:**
 - 2 September – 1 October 2020
- ▶ **Total respondents:**
 - 315
 - 84% were in Hong Kong



Key Findings

Young and Educated Workforce

Our respondents' Profile

▶ **Tend to be younger**

- Average Age: 37
- 24% are aged 24–30
- 17% are aged 31–35
- 16% are aged 36–40

▶ **Highly educated**

- 71% have university degrees

▶ **Most have jobs (74%)**

- 26% study/work in business service and administration
- 17% study/work in financial services and banking

▶ **Most have decent incomes**

- 47% have an annual income of at least £36,000+
- Mean income: £33,270, this is 52% higher than the median income in Hong Kong in 2019
- But there is also a minority of Hongkongers (likely to be the youngest group) who has no or rather low incomes

Fig. A.1. Age group [Base=288]

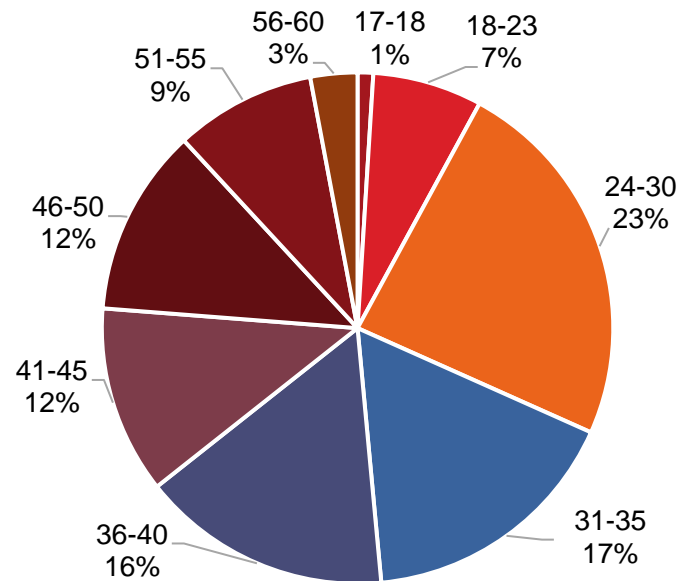


Fig. A.2. Current status [Base=287]

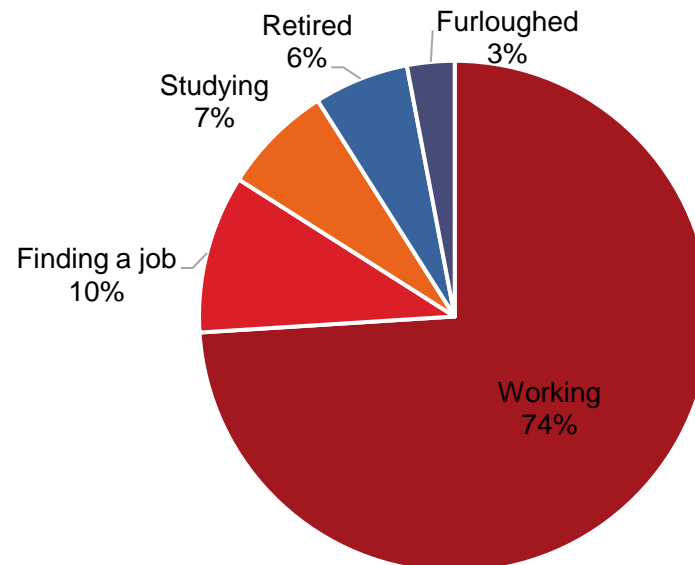


Fig. A.3. Highest level of qualification obtained

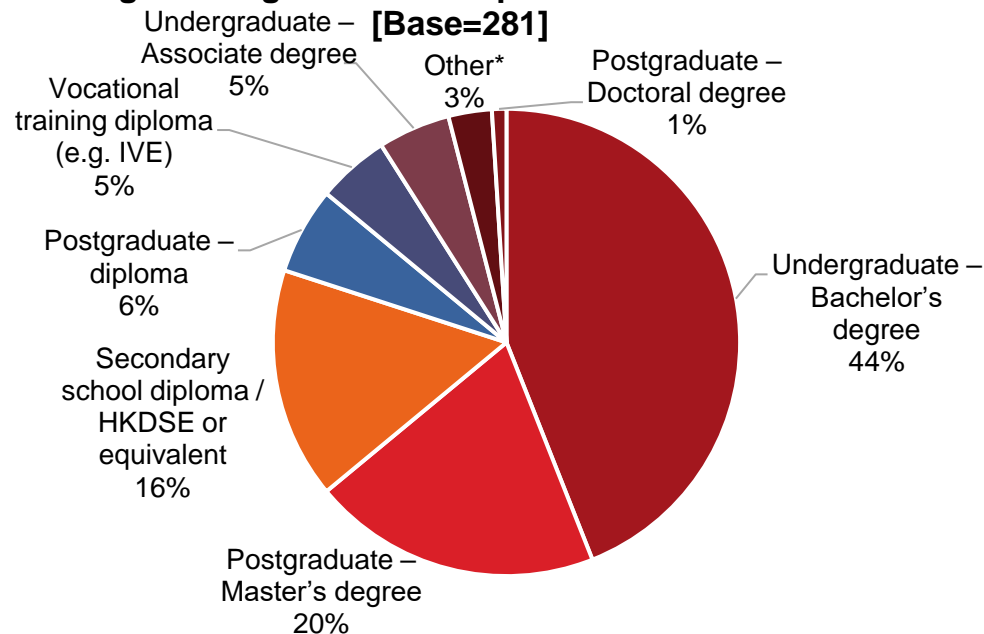


Fig. A.4. Industry/Field of study [Base=276]

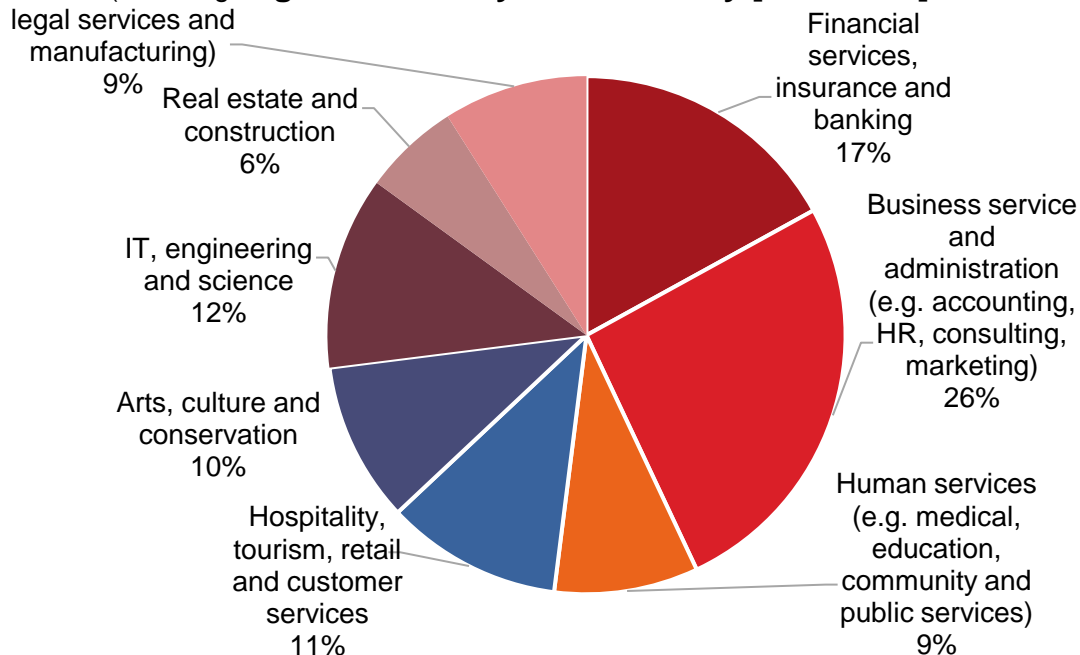
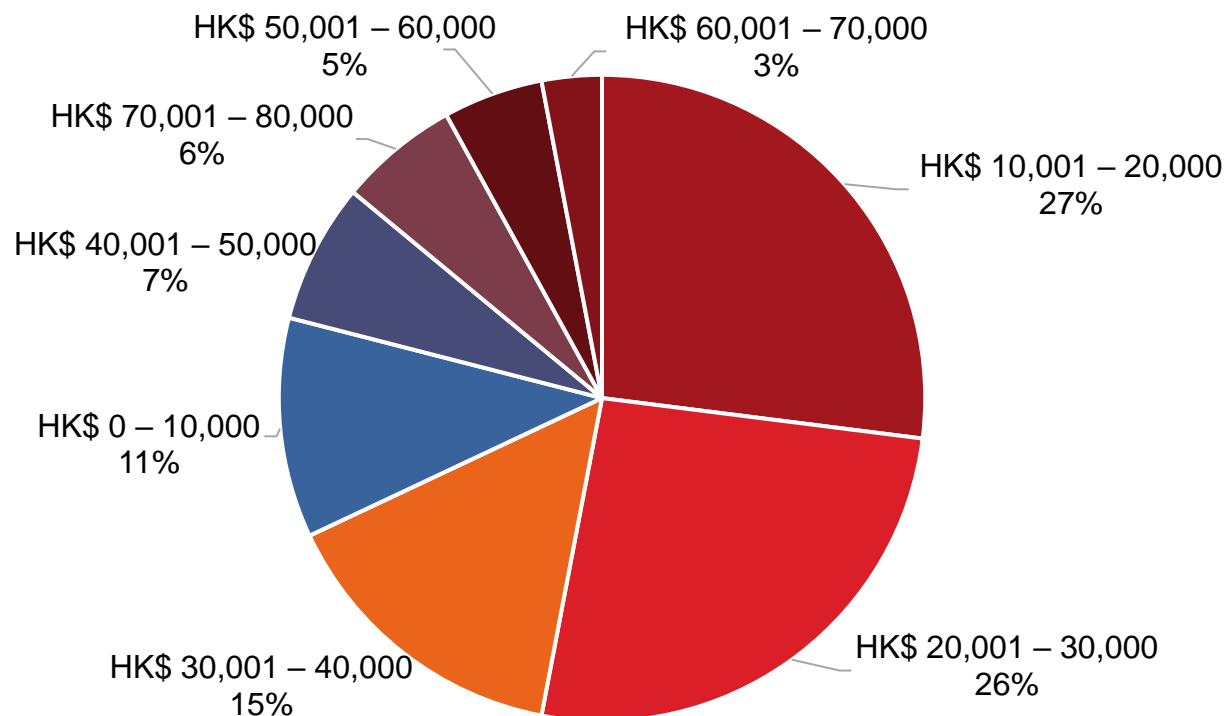


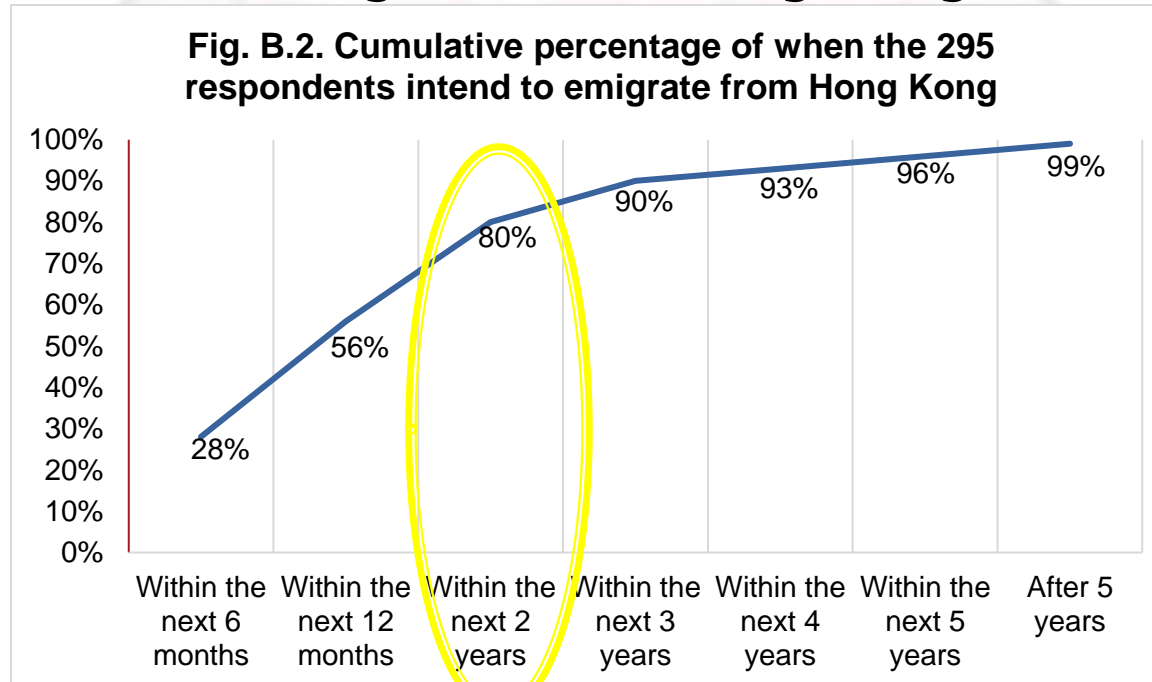
Fig. A.5. Monthly income [Base=277]



**Exchange rate is assumed to be £1=HK\$10*

Many Will Come Soon

- ▶ **Vast majority plan to emigrate within 2 years**
 - 88% intend to emigrate from Hong Kong, amongst them:

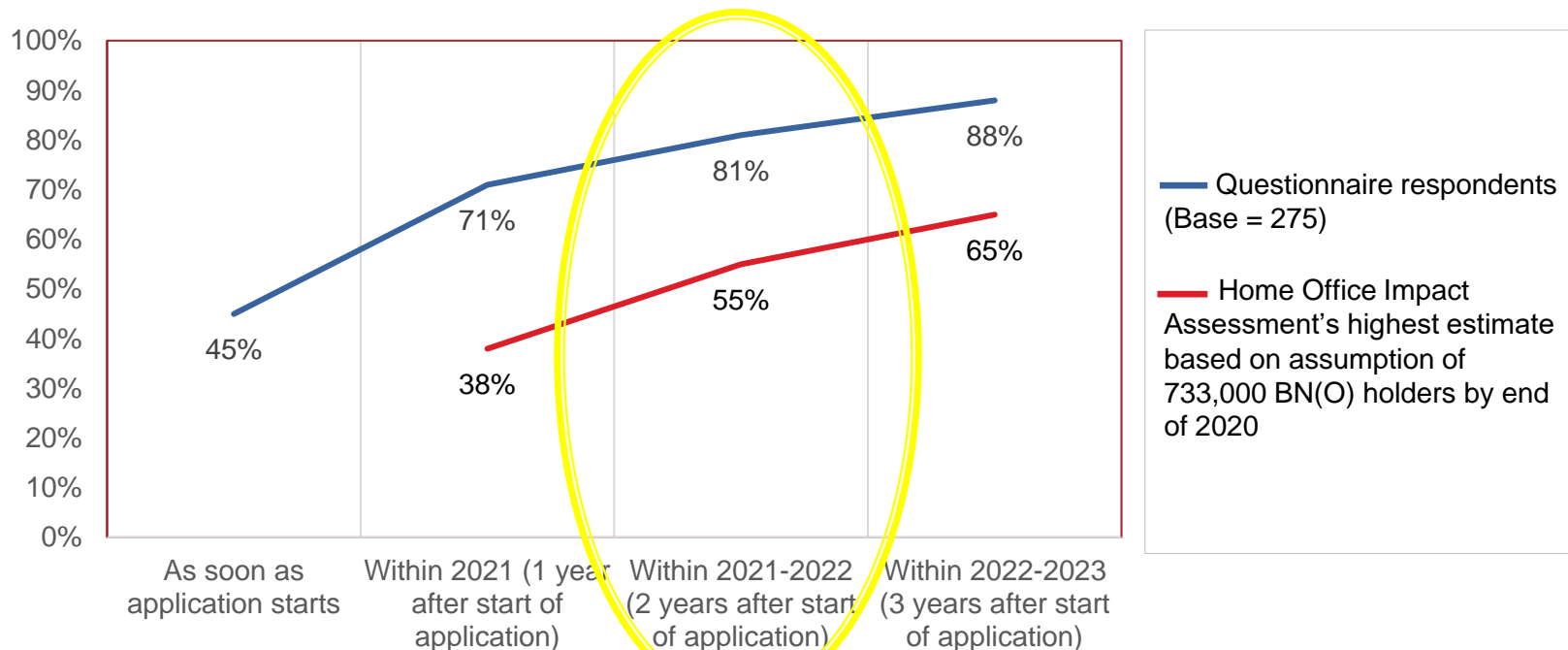


- 97% say they want to emigrate to the UK
- 90% are BNO holders
- 97% do not hold other foreign passports

Many Will Come Soon

- ▶ 93% intend to apply for the BNO Visa
- ▶ Majority of applications within 2–3 years

Fig. C.2. Cumulative percentage of when the 275 respondents intend to apply for the BN(O) Visa vs. Home Office Impact Assessment's estimation



Most Can Afford BNO Visa and Initial Costs, but Not All

- 63% plan to apply for the 5-year visa
- 16% plan to apply for the 30-month visa
- ▶ **Vast majority want to obtain full British citizenship**
 - 93% intend to apply for full citizenship after having lived in the UK for 5+1 years
- ▶ **Most say they can afford the visa fee + immigration health surcharge (88%)**
- ▶ **Most can sustain themselves in the first 6 months after arrival (84%)**
 - However, 16% say they do not have sufficient financial resources for the first 6 months after arriving in the UK

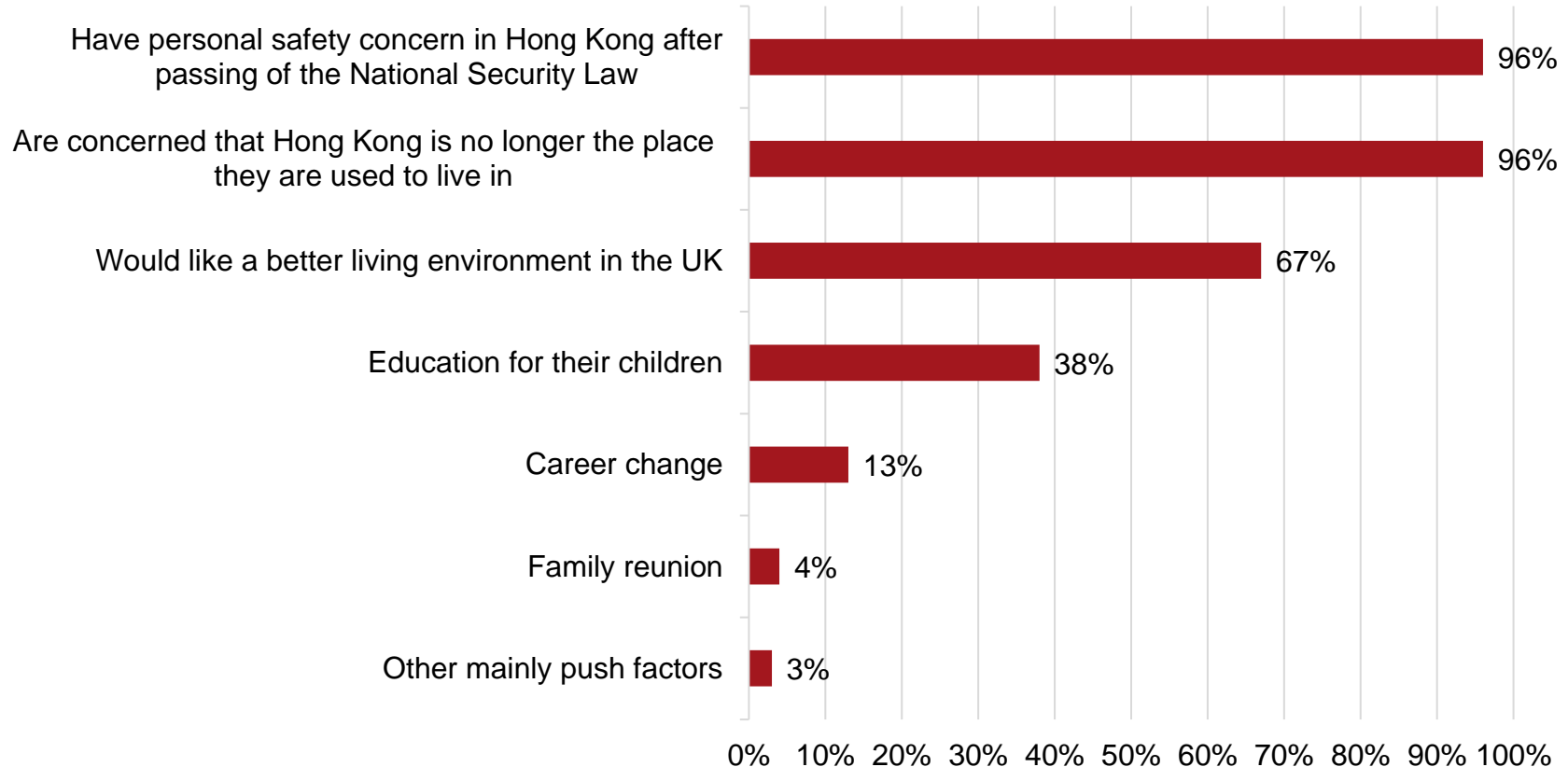
Coming with Families for Good

- ▶ **Most want to apply with spouses/partners and children**
 - 82% with spouses/partners wish to apply together
 - 75% with children wish to emigrate with them
 - Most children (82%) are under the age of 18
 - Much fewer wish to emigrate with their parents (16%)
- ▶ **For some, this is a path of no return**
 - 51% hope to return to Hong Kong at regular intervals during the 5+1 years
 - 14% say they will never return to Hong Kong

Why Leaving Hong Kong

- ▶ **Almost everyone is emigrating for safety and freedom**
 - 96% consider Hong Kong no longer a safe and free home that they are used to live in, after the passing of the National Security Law

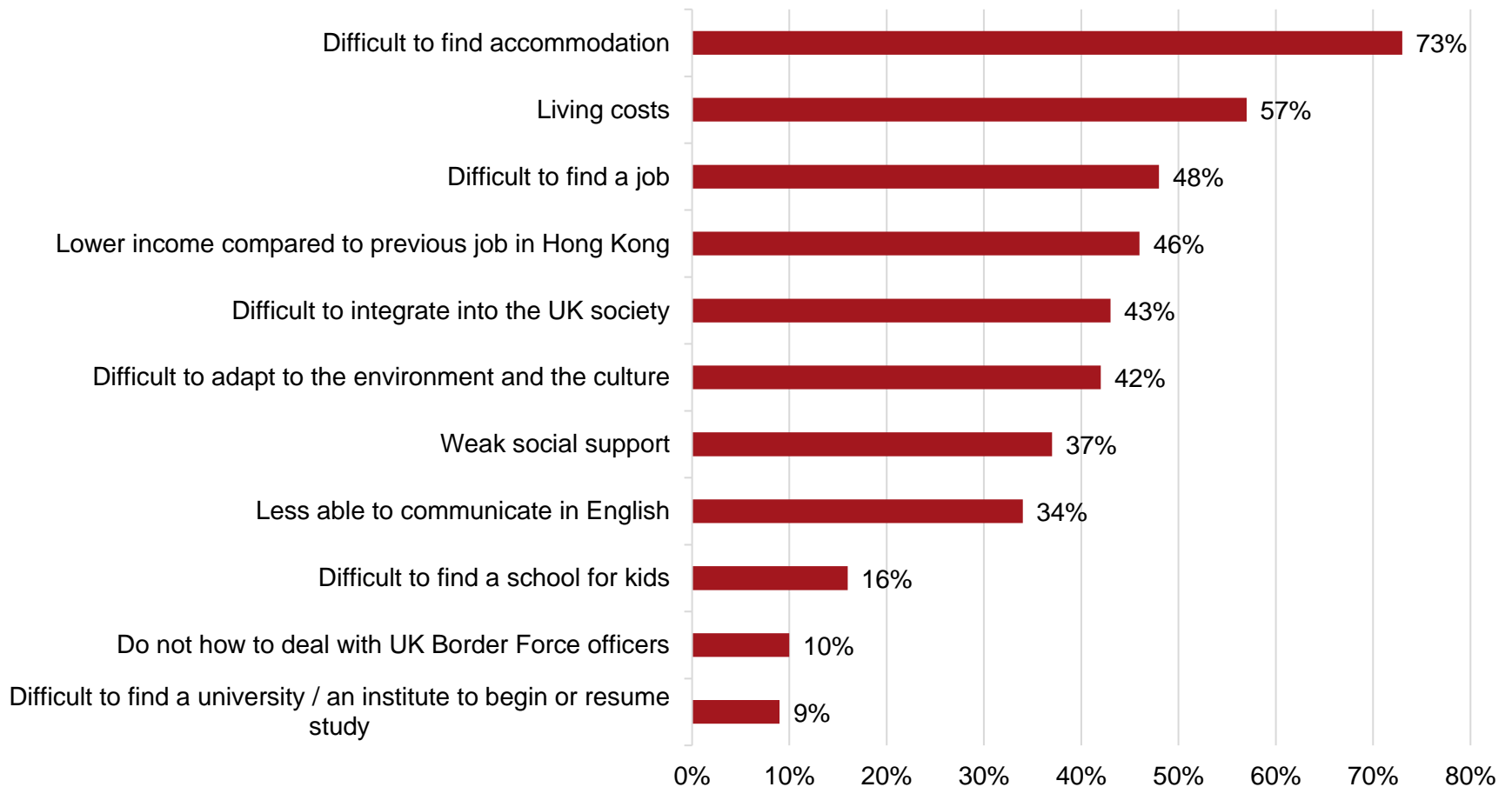
Fig. D.1. Reasons for considering to move to the UK [Base=283]



Difficulties Expected on Arrival

- ▶ Finding accommodation, finding jobs, and social integration are the top three areas

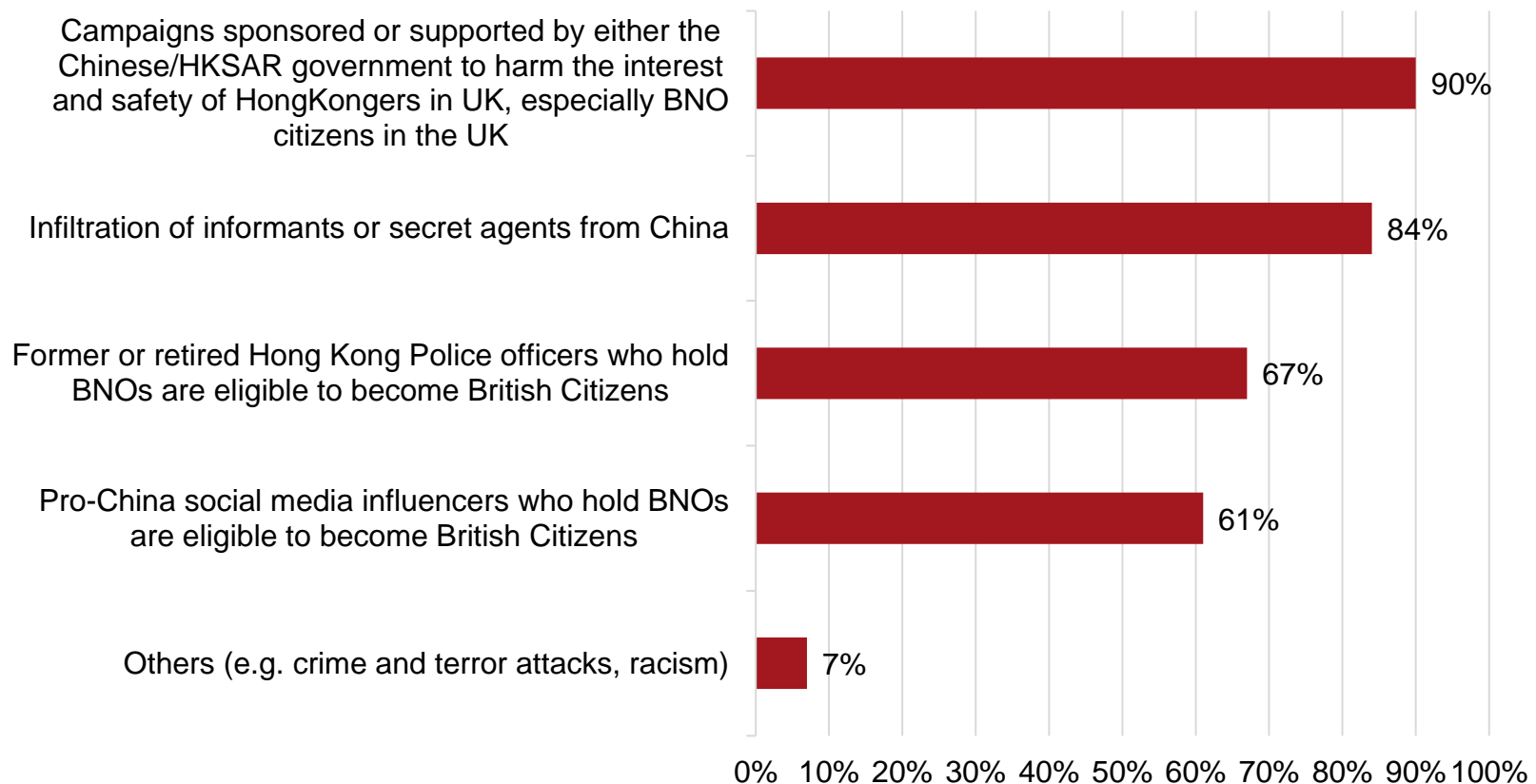
Fig. D.3 Difficulties respondents expect to face when arriving in the UK [Base=281]



National Security & Safety Concerns in the UK

- ▶ A sizeable few are worried about the national security of the UK that may jeopardise the safety of Hongkongers in the UK

Fig. D.4. Potential national security scenarios in the UK respondents would regard as making their stay in the UK unsafe [Base=152]



Most Have No Friends or Family in the UK

- ▶ **A typical BNO Visa applicant does not have any family or friends in the UK**
 - 52% respondents do not have friends in the UK
 - 88% do not have family in the UK

Priorities: Finding Accommodation and Jobs

- ▶ A typical BNO Visa applicant plans to work and rent a place to live upon arrival

Fig. E.1. Plans within the first six months of arriving in the UK [Base=283]

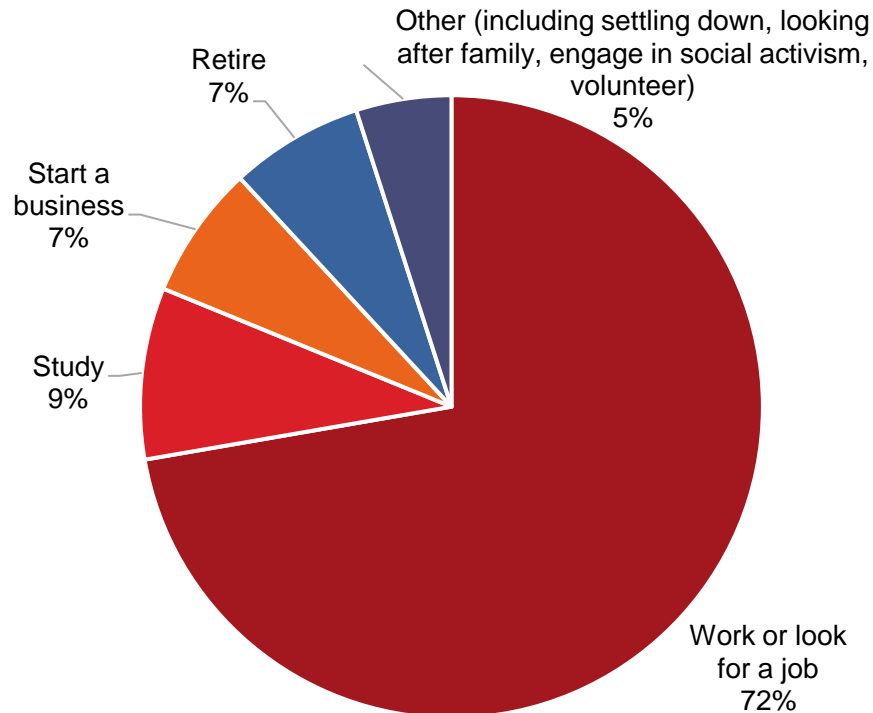
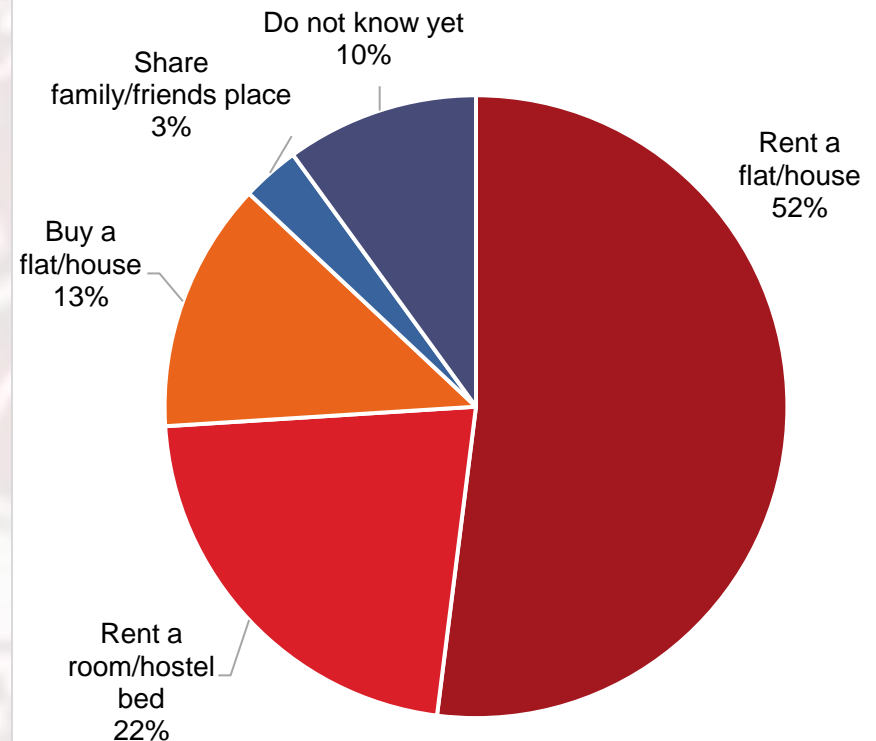


Fig. E.3. Plan of accommodation upon arriving in the UK [Base=283]



Vulnerable Groups & Pro-democracy Protests

- ▶ **There are vulnerable groups due to the protests since 2019**
 - A small proportion have been arrested for charges relating to the protests
 - A few suffered from physical injuries
 - Over a quarter suffered from psychiatric injuries
 - Some who suffered from physical/psychiatric injuries would need medical follow-up/mental health support when they come to the UK

Respondents' Main Recommendations

- ▶ **45% of respondents made recommendations to address certain issues in an open-ended question**
 - Many hope that the BNO Visa scheme could **exclude** those who may **harm national security and Hongkongers' safety** in the UK (e.g. Hong Kong officials and police)
 - Whilst including those **worthy of protection but not eligible** (e.g. those born after 1997 but parents have no intention to apply for the BN(O) Visa scheme)



Recommendations

1. Prepare for High Demand for Applications and Arrivals

- ▶ Before the BNO Visa Scheme opens for application, the Home Office should:
 - a) Reserve sufficient manpower resources across various departments and authorities both nationally and locally to prepare for the new wave of arrivals
 - b) Put in place an efficient set of procedures, and ensure clear communication of rules and changes to both front line officers and applicants
 - c) Formulate support mechanisms for a small proportion of (mostly young, low-income and/or vulnerable) applicants to settle down in the initial period after arrival in the UK, ensuring that they will not be overlooked

2. Exercise Discretion in Applications and Assist Vulnerable Groups

- ▶ Home Office should consider merits in individual applications and exercise discretion in cases worthy of offering exceptions and assistance
- ▶ Under the current application rules, all the family members must apply at the same time
 - This may impose difficulties to some families due to reasons such as splits in political views and thus no consensus over emigration, or certain family members are bound by their personal situations and cannot come at the same time with the whole family
- ▶ Home Office should exercise discretion to applicants who have criminal records or were arrested due to participation in the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests since 2019
 - i.e. no blanket refusal to applicants who are persecuted

3. Prepare for Demand for State Schools

- ▶ The UK government should make necessary provisions to prepare for an influx of children applying for the state school system, by coordinating closely with local government institutions and putting in necessary resources to handle the demand
 - Not only from the new academic year in September 2021, but as early as January 2021

4. Facilitate HK Migrants to Settle Down

- ▶ The UK government may **consider institutional arrangements** to steer measures of supporting Hong Kong migrants to settle down, e.g.
 - set up task forces for joined-up action across gov departments
- ▶ **Urgently address critical concerns** amongst respondents and **put in more resources** to facilitate Hong Kong migrants
- ▶ In order to facilitate smooth integration of Hongkongers into the British community, **mental health support should be made accessible to those in need**
- ▶ **Explore various initiatives at national government and coordination at county level** before the BNO Visa applications start, e.g.
 - temporary/subsidised housing
 - job matching
 - information centres/websites
 - home fee status for university tuition fees
 - allowing BN(O) students to access student finance loans

5. Consider Separate Programmes and Schemes for HK Migrants

- With a large number of prospective BNO Visa holders, the Home Office should consider introducing **separate programmes, schemes and policies tailored specifically for them in necessary areas of assistance**
- This may be **outside of general public funds that BN(O) Visa holders can access (e.g. similar to that of the EU Citizen Settlement Scheme)**
 - which gives preferential treatment to EU citizens including accessing public funds such as benefits and pensions and using NHS for free

6. Detect and Prevent Threats to National Security

- ▶ The UK Government should put in place **safeguarding mechanisms to detect and prevent threats on the national security front, e.g.**
 - a) Step up national security measures against **maligned infiltration and surveillance by the Chinese Communist Party, its informants, agents and supporters**, especially those who target at harming the interests and safety of Hongkongers in the UK
 - b) Introduce **vetting and more robust background & character conduct checks against BNO Visa applicants** with a view to detecting potential threats
 - c) Ensure that BNO visa applicants **will not pose threats to UK's national security** and go against norms and values of the British society

7. Update its Country Policy and Information Note (CPIN) for Hong Kong

- ▶ Home Office also **urgently needs to update its Country Policy and Information Note (CPIN)** for Hong Kong. Version 1.0 (Feb 2020) is incompatible with the latest domestic and foreign policies of the UK towards Hong Kong and China
- ▶ Its risk assessment is highly unfavourable towards prospective Hong Kong emigrants to the UK who have joined the pro-democratic protests in Hong Kong and have been arrested/persecuted
- ▶ This would have adverse impact on prospective BN(O) Visa applicants if version 1.0 of the CPIN is used to assess against their cases, which will likely lead to a refusal of their application

Info: Country Policy Information Note (CPIN) for Hong Kong Version 1.0 (Feb 2020)

- ▶ *“The CPIN does not suggest that the Hong Kong authorities are actively targeting those who may have been involved in the protests or subjecting them to treatment which is sufficiently serious by its nature and repetition to constitute persecution or serious harm”*
- ▶ *“Where a person was (or was perceived to be) involved in the protests, they are unlikely to be able to establish a well-founded fear of persecution.” “A person fearing the legal consequences of being (or being perceived to be) involved in the protests would fear prosecution not persecution”*
- ▶ *“CPIN also believes there is no victimisation in the application of the law by the authorities”*



Q & A

Full Questionnaire Link:

<https://forms.gle/MaRQ3cTwS5SiCdRi8/>

Full Report Available for Download:

<https://www.hongkongers.org.uk/policy-study-coming-for-hope>