

**Joint Expert Group Meeting
organized by DESA & UN
ESCAP**

**Older Persons and
Intergenerational
Solidarity**

10 & 11 October 2023

Bangkok, Thailand



Hong Kong's approach to lifelong learning across generations

Professor Maureen Tam

The Education University of Hong Kong

Hong Kong SAR, China

Aim

To share and appraise the **Hong Kong** experience of promoting lifelong learning across generations to result in **intergenerational solidarity** by way of building a **network of 'elder academies'** through cross-sectoral collaboration.



Where is Hong Kong?

Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of China, located on the southern coast of the country.

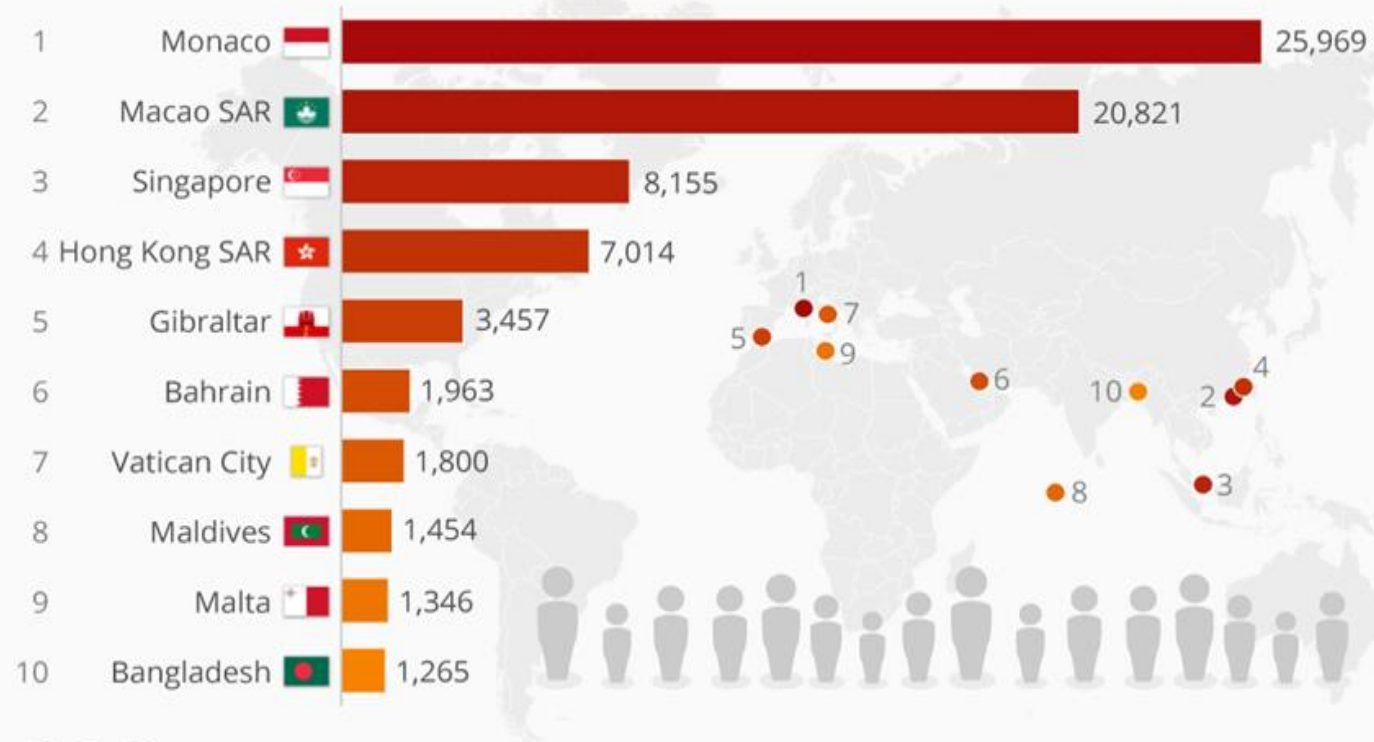
It is a major financial and cultural hub in Asia.

Hong Kong



The Most Densely Populated Countries & Territories

Population per square kilometre in 2017



@StatistaCharts Source: UN via World Economic Forum

statista

Population statistics

- total population of 7.41 million in 2021

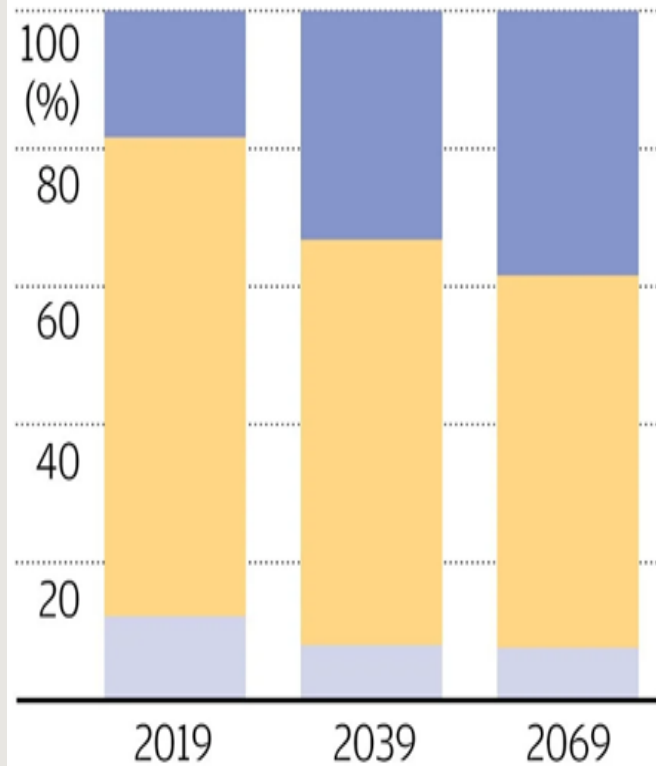
Ageing Population

- The proportion of older persons aged 65 and over in the total population rose from **13%** in 2011 to **20%** in 2021
- It is projected to be as high as **36.6%** by 2066
- The median age of the population increased from **41.7** in 2011 to **46.3** in 2021, also reflecting the ageing trend

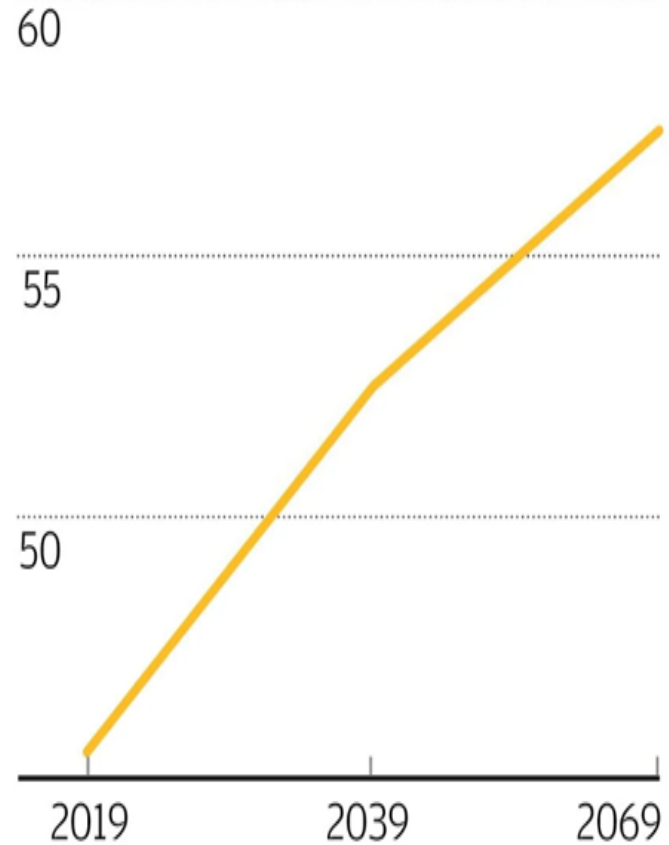
Hong Kong population projection for next 50 years

Population by age

Under 15 15-64 65 or above



Median age



Note: all figures exclude foreign domestic helpers

Source: Census and Statistics Department

SCMP

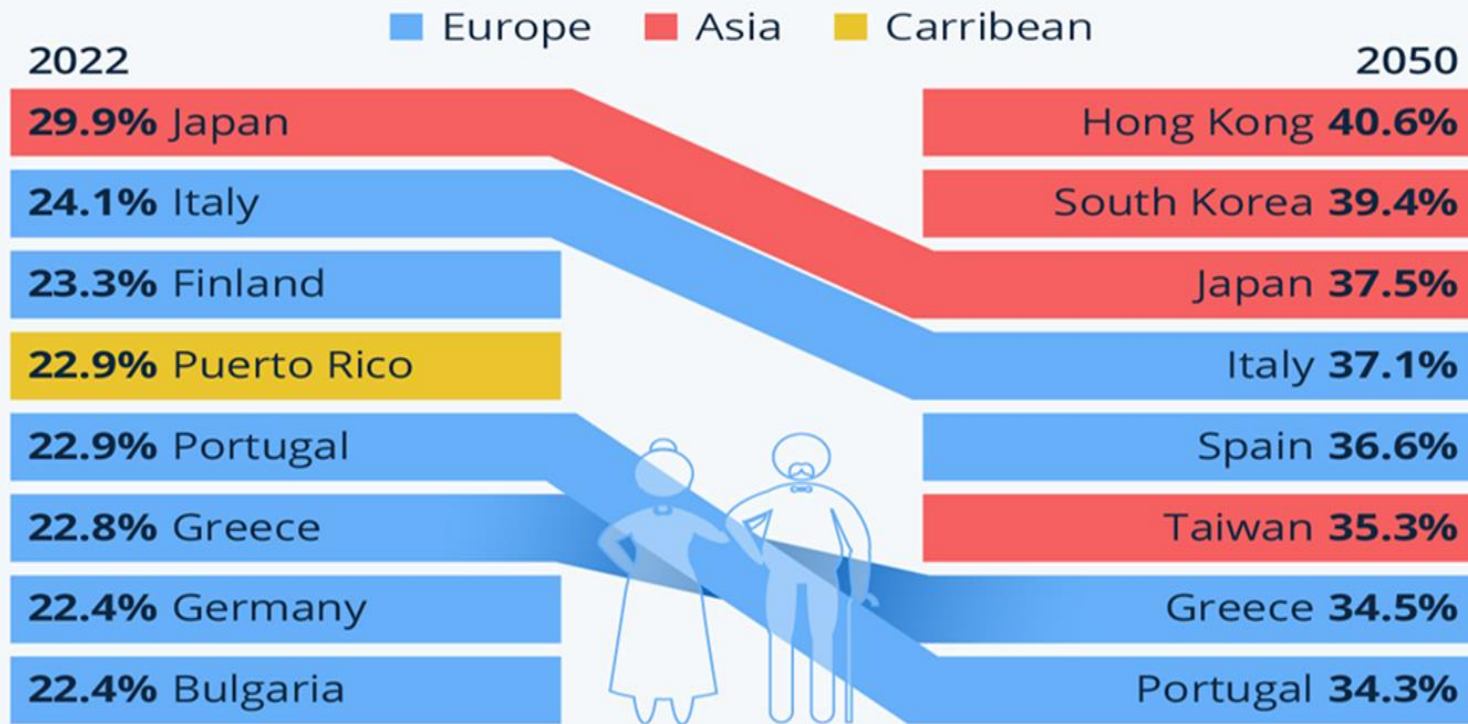
The ageing trend

due to improvements in healthcare, living standards, and advancements in medical technology

Fertility rate is very low at 0.87 in 2020.

The World's Oldest Populations

Countries/territories with the highest share of people aged 65 and older*



Hong Kong men and women live an average 82.9 years and 88 years respectively in 2020, topping the world in life expectancy.

* only includes countries/territories with a population of more than 1 million people
Source: United Nations Population Division



Hong Kong is facing the challenge of a fast-ageing population

- the government has put in place policies and strategies to foster active ageing, where **lifelong learning** is believed to play a vital role in promoting the quality of later life.

Policies of lifelong learning for older adults in Hong Kong

Two periods:

1. Pre-1997

- elder learning programmes first emerged in late 1980s
- non-formal approach
- elderly care centres, social services NGOs
- non-credit bearing
- mostly personal development in nature

2. Post-1997

- Elderly Commission was set up in 1997
- Advice on policies and programmes to the government
- Learning as part of healthy/active ageing
- Encouraged by the government – social campaigns, initiatives, funding support

The Elder Academies (EA) Network

Was set up in 2007

Main characteristics:

- district-based
- school-based
- promotes intergenerational learning and harmony
- cross-sectoral collaboration: government, NGOs, schools, universities, community centres
- government plays a coordinating role
- EAs are autonomous in course offering

Growth over the years (2007 – 2023)

- Initially 78 EAs; now **190** EAs in schools, NGOs and universities
- Government support in the form of a small start-up grant
- From the informal, uncoordinated approach in the past
- To a **more coordinated** and better conceptualized collaborative network
- **Elder Academy Development Foundation** -- \$10 million (US\$1.3m) in 2009-10
- \$50 million (US\$6.3m) in 2013-14

Objectives of the Elder Academy Scheme

- 1. To promote lifelong learning**
- 2. To maintain healthy physical and mental well-being**
- 3. To help foster a sense of worthiness in elders**
- 4. To optimise existing resources (such as classrooms after school hours)**
- 5. To promote harmony (solidarity) between the old and young**
- 6. To strengthen civic education**
- 7. To promote cross-sectoral harmony through collaboration**

The Elder Academy Network is claimed to be unique with Hong Kong characteristics

It has two distinct features:

1. It adopts a cross-sectoral, collaborative approach where the government plays a coordinating and supporting role

- The network is characterised by the co-investment and **joint engagement** between the government and the various stakeholders
- a network comprising schools (primary and secondary), universities and NGOs, providing **offerings at different levels** that cater to the wide-ranging interests and capabilities of older adults
- the **cross-sectoral linkages** and the network of a wide range of providers have made the Elder Academy Network a unique model

2. Another distinct feature is its emphasis on intergenerational learning and solidarity

- promote **intergenerational interactions** between older persons and school children, linking the older and younger generations through a series of purposive interactions with **reciprocal benefits**
- school children will **teach elders** about IT such as the use of computers and smartphones. Reciprocally, elders may **tutor school kids** about school subjects like Chinese, English or Mathematics
- Such **co-learning** plays an important role in building cohesiveness, trust, and solidarity

Intergenerational learning inside the university classrooms

- younger undergraduate students will **learn together** with older persons who also take part in class discussions, resulting in intergenerational sharing of views and experiences
- older adults enrol in university courses as **auditing students**, who do not take part in any assessment, and neither will earn credits towards a degree qualification
- provide a platform for **intergenerational interaction** and communication to enhance elders' understanding of society, and to build a sense of responsibility in contributing to society among young people

Critique of the Elder Academy Network

- Current funding – small and non-recurrent
- Lacks financial stability
- Operated on a market-oriented basis
- Offering courses that meet market needs and wants
- Tension between what should be and what is being offered
- EAs are poorly resourced – quality issues

Critique (continued)

- EAs in schools/NGOs offer interest courses
- EAs in universities – linked to regular offerings
- Little cross-sectoral communication – duplication of offerings and an insufficient range of courses
- Limited to addressing the ‘wants’ in programme offering
- Courses wanted are for interest and leisure-time enjoyment

Way forward

- EA should be critically **reviewed** for effectiveness
- Establish **relationship** between lifelong learning and intergenerational solidarity
- Evaluate if policies have achieved the **desired outcomes**
- Evaluate if current **provisions** are enough
- Evaluate the **funding** model
- Such evaluative information should be valuable to both Hong Kong and the international community

End of presentation

Thank you