



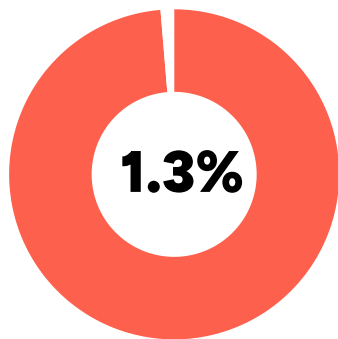
Refugees in Hong Kong

Thousands of people flee persecution and conflict to seek safety in Hong Kong every year. Yet, the territory never signed the 1951 Refugee Convention, leaving those seeking international protection at risk and subjected to ill-treatment. Although few are granted it, refugees can claim “non-refoulement” status to prevent them from being sent back to their country of origin. However, in the rare case their claim is upheld, the Hong Kong government does not grant them refugee status. Instead, it refers them to UNHCR for potential resettlement - a process that can take years.



Leitner Center
for International Law
and Justice

Key numbers



Only **1.3%** of all non-refoulement claimants are accepted



22,744
People sought protection in Hong Kong from 2014 to 2023



14,700
People are currently seeking protection in Hong Kong



130
Refugees have been resettled in the last five years.

Key concerns



1

Lengthy legal hurdles

Refugees face a complex and slow process, hindered by financial issues, lack of legal aid, and insufficient interpreters. And then only 1.3% of claims are approved.



2

Harsh living conditions

With minimal government support, claimants endure poor housing, restricted access to healthcare and education, and significant mental health challenges.



3

Uncertain futures for approved cases

Even after approval, individuals have limited rights and face a long wait for resettlement, with the constant threat of deportation.



Hugo's story

At age seven, Hugo* witnessed the brutal killing of his family amid conflict in an African nation. He later became a youth leader, which led to his imprisonment. After escaping, he made his way to Hong Kong in 2013.

Recognized by the Hong Kong government as having a "substantiated" non-refoulement claim, Hugo was not sent back to his country of origin. Yet he remained in legal limbo, still deemed an "illegal immigrant" without the right to work. Hugo's existence in Hong Kong is fraught with challenges. His hope for a free and dignified existence hinges on his resettlement to another country that will acknowledge his status as a refugee and offer him a chance to rebuild his life.

*Pseudonym used for protection reasons, source: [Hong Kong Free Press](#)

Recommendations



**Respect the right
to seek asylum**



**Apply the 1951
Refugee
Convention**



**Provide free legal
services and
expand legal aid**



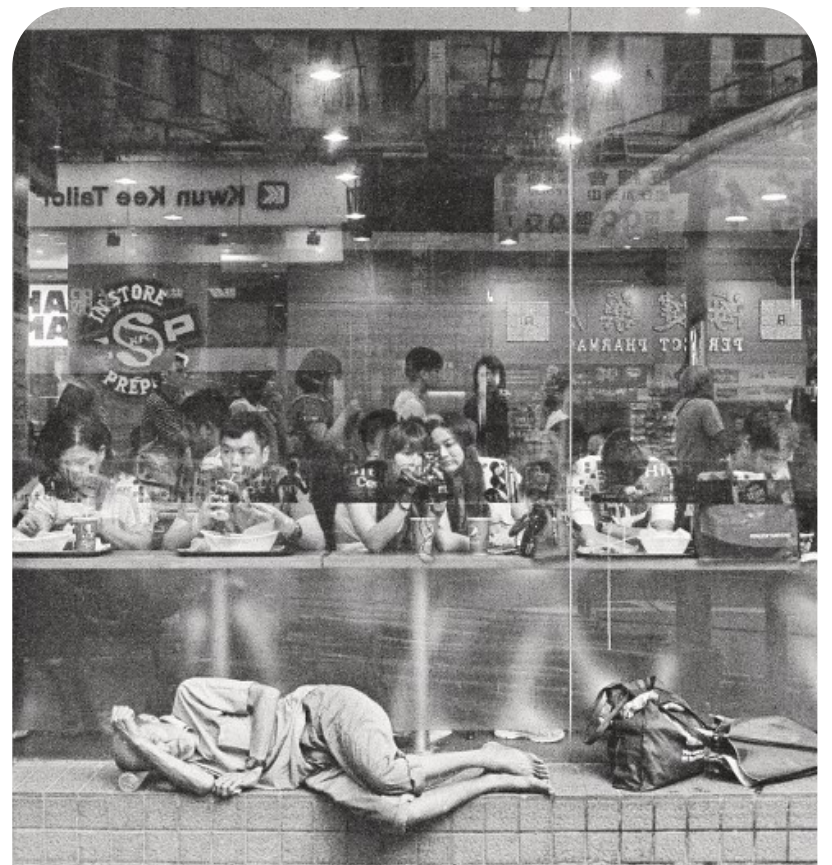
**Issue temporary
residence permits
to asylum seekers
and refugees**

About the Leitner Center

This overview is based on a chapter from the Leitner Center's latest report "Unseen struggles: Addressing migrant rights in Hong Kong" and its submission to the UN's Universal Periodic Review. The Leitner Center for International Law and Justice at Fordham Law School trains law students to become international legal experts and impassioned human rights advocates through its pioneering human rights programs, clinics, and education initiatives; facilitates capacity building and advocacy with local social justice organizations and activists around the world; and contributes to critical research among scholars in international human rights.



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ADDRESSING MIGRANT
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NOVEMBER 2023

