

Hong Kong Refugee Advice Centre

Factsheet

The Hong Kong Refugee Advice Centre trains volunteer lawyers and interpreters in the protection and promotion of refugee rights. We supervise our volunteers who provide legal advice and representation to asylum-seekers claiming refugee status before the UNHCR in Hong Kong. Since we began as a small project within Christian Action in October 2005, together with our volunteers we have provided document preparation assistance or full representation to over 70 individual claimants or families, as well as hundreds more through information sessions and summary advice appointments.

Q. What is a Refugee?

- A. The legal refugee definition is set out in the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (the "Refugee Convention"). A refugee is someone who has a real fear of serious human rights deprivations ("persecution") in their country of origin related to their political opinion, religious views, race, nationality, or membership of a particular social group. A social group shares a characteristic that cannot be changed. It can include gays & lesbians, women who have transgressed social mores, or women victims of domestic violence. Importantly, to be recognized a refugee also has to show that their home government was unwilling or unable to protect them, and that they could not relocate to another part of their home country and be safe.

Q. Why do Refugees come to Hong Kong?

- A. Hong Kong has long been a safe haven for people fleeing persecution in the region. After the first waves of Chinese refugees in 1949, Hong Kong then saw the arrival of Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s. Today about 2500 claim refugee status every year in Hong Kong, mostly coming from South Asia and Southeast Asia. Hong Kong is still seen as a safe and stable place in a troubled region, a place where human rights are respected.

Q. How are Refugee claims processed?

- A. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ("UNHCR") decides refugee claims in Hong Kong. The Refugee Convention does not apply to Hong Kong. Therefore legal aid is not provided for this judicial procedure. Rejected claims cannot be appealed to Hong Kong courts. The vast majority of claimants represent themselves.



Join Us

You can help make legal aid for asylum-seekers in Hong Kong a reality. Please join us in our vision for fair treatment of this vulnerable community.

Advocates Circle

The Advocates Circle is an elite group of people joining forces to turn the Hong Kong Refugee Advice Centre's vision into reality. Through individual contributions of HKD 20,000 or more, the Circle provides cornerstone support for this refugee legal aid project.

Advocates Circle members are prominent or emerging leaders in legal and business fields who have pledged to support the Refugee Advice Centre and bring legal assistance to hundreds of refugees.

See over for more information.

Q. What happens to people who are accepted?

- A. Those who are recognized as refugees get resettled to a third country. Hong Kong will not absorb refugees into its territory. While they await processing of their claims and resettlement, refugees are not allowed to work or even volunteer.

Q. What happens to people who are rejected?

- A. Rejected claimants are deported to their countries of origin.

Q. Why do Refugees need legal assistance?

- A. Refugee claims are complicated. Every aspect of the Refugee Convention definition has a large body of international jurisprudence, commentaries and guidelines to help explain how the countless permutations that arise in refugees' experiences fit the definition. Refugee claimants generally don't know about UNHCR procedures. They need help to articulate which parts of their testimonies are most relevant, what evidence they need to gather to support their claim, and what their rights are throughout the process. For refugees who have experienced trauma, such guidance is crucial for their mental and emotional well-being, not to mention their dignity. The rights at stake for refugees are extremely important, since a mistaken rejection means deportation to face persecution again. Therefore legal aid is crucial to ensuring that at the very least, refugee claimants get fair treatment throughout the UNHCR procedure.

Monthly donations

For as little as HKD 600, or the cost of a nice meal out, per month you can provide full legal representation to an asylum-seeker. Please indicate your interest if you prefer this option and we will follow up with you.