

## Google Translation

# Hong Kong (also) turns its back on refugees

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[http://elpais.com/elpais/2015/10/29/planeta\\_futuro/1446132927\\_743946.htm](http://elpais.com/elpais/2015/10/29/planeta_futuro/1446132927_743946.htm)

- The city, one of the richest in the world, has not signed the UN Convention for Refugees
- Some 10,000 live anchored in a legal limbo, unable to work
- [PHOTO GALLERY Living in the city that want to avoid the 'pull factor'](#)

After his father was murdered and one of his brothers, Abdul decided to flee Pakistan. In the winter of 2008, with 20 years, he traveled by bus the distance from Islamabad to the border with China. From there, he followed the train ride for seven days, until arriving at Shenzhen, facing Hong Kong. He is wearing a backpack, some clothes and a pair of shoes. His friends had told him that in Hong Kong could be safe. "All I needed was to stay alive," he says. He paid 700 euros to the owner of a clandestine boat and began the last leg of his flight along with eleven others. Remember that having already sailed and began to cloud shortly after a thunderstorm broke loose. The boat could not withstand the rain and began to sink. Together they tried to drain the water. Abdul shouted, then cried and prayed. "I will die," he thought. He jumped in and swam. No one knows how many minutes or hours passed until the Hong Kong maritime guard rescued first and stopped immediately. He believes he was held for nine days.

Abdul tells her story seven years later as if had happened a week ago. He speaks without pause, fast. Stumbles over the words but not his memory. Arriving home, just outside Hong Kong, Cantonese greets his Chinese neighbors. "Here live about twenty people, we share the bathroom and the kitchen," he explains. It refers to a shantytown of Villa Nai Wai, built in an area located beyond the mountains that draw the boundary between the special administrative region of Hong Kong and the rest of mainland China. The image of the place is that found in many slums: families huddled under holed plates, stacked and wired zinc, with moldy walls chipboard, nylon and patched with cardboard. Upstairs, several stones and many tackle hold the ceiling. Below is land, stretches of cement, tiles and some puddles with dead insects. Loose wires hanging everywhere. In the corridors, the smoke of incense mixed with the fetid stench of the

pit using as a toilet, in a cabin that is a den of rats and cockroaches. The remaining space is usually fought rickety chairs, a refrigerator and some burnt rusted TV.

This is not the only slum Hong Kong. The [NGO Vision First](#) details the existence of at least 60 slums, shacks leased with public money. "The genesis of these slums is that the government does not give refugees a sufficient amount for rent. But above all it is not allowed to work. In a city like this, if you can not work, how do you do for a living?". The question posed by the director of Vision First, Cosmo Beatson, which is around 10,000 asylum seekers living here in Hong Kong are made. By law, they should not be working. If they can be sentenced to more than a year in prison, as happened when Abdul was discovered while washing dishes in a restaurant. "My only crime was to try to pay for my living expenses, clothing, furniture, but I was treated like a criminal," he explains in his room at Nai Wai. At 15 square meters, Abdul has managed to accommodate a bed, a sofa, a table, a shelf and refrigerator. The rack, which did not fit among the furniture, hanging from the ceiling. He wants to move, but acknowledges that no alternative.

The Hong Kong government grants asylum seekers local monthly \$ 1,500 (170 euros) to lease a space to live. "With that money here is not rented for a bike parking," says Beatson. In a city that Forbes magazine housing price is almost 10 times that of New York, with that amount, the options are limited a makeshift room in a slum shacks or cage-bedroom reduced floors that come to be shared by 15 people or more. Indeed they sleep in cages around 100,000 people, according to the complaint Angela Lui [SOCO NGOs](#) , the elderly and immigrants majority. Both groups are part of the 20% of the 7 million Hong Kong residents living below the poverty line, according to the local organization.

Icon of capitalism in communist China, the "Pearl of the Orient" is no place for the poor. Refugees are not formally welcome in Hong Kong under British mandate since this land was kept outside the [United Nations Convention for Refugees, 1951](#). However, upon accession to the [Convention against Torture of 1992](#) , as cases the Abdul may be subject to an administrative scrutiny in order to verify its accuracy. Confirmed that in danger of death or torture in their home country, Hong Kong will not grant the residence but will refer you to a third country that supports refugees. The process can take a decade and the results are not encouraging: of the 16,700 applications filed since 1992 the city has recognized 37 victims of torture, according to figures presented by First Vision from official data.

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"This is a racist and closed society. There is only respect for the rich foreigner "says Beatson. "If people come here with a lot of money no matter if it comes from Kenya, Nepal and Pakistan. There will always find a visa for business or investment. But when it comes to a domestic worker, an immigrant or asylum seeker, xenophobia is very strong, "he says. Asylum seekers wait an average of seven to 10 years for the light of statistics, a negative response. Currently 10,000 people are anchored in a legal limbo, under a draconian, exhausting system, which does not want to be associated with any kind of solidarity. Unequivocally and in that direction, the authorities stress that "humanitarian aid" granted to asylum seekers, "not intended to provide more assistance necessary" to avoid any "magnet effect" that could have "serious consequences for the sustainability of the program of aid and immigration control. "The city, considered one of the richest in the world, is well shielded against possible "abuses" that threaten your system headed liberal "shameful ranking of developed societies with greater inequality index" as [written in the country](#) Ruben Gonzalez, professor Development and International Relations at the City University of Hong Kong.

Under the strict control regime, an unknown number of refugees remain in slums, drifting and for years at the mercy of charity from NGOs or religious institutions. How many people are in this situation? The [NGO International Social Service](#) (ISS) does not respond to any specific questions about these slums. And should, because this Swiss organization has been selected by the local government to manage the amount allocated to accommodation of asylum seekers, money will never directly immigrants but the owner of the land, in the case of neighborhoods shacks. "Before handing it to the owner, International Social Service requested the relevant documents must meet certain requirements," said their spokesman in Hong Kong. They ensure that ISS also conducts visits to check, for example, sanitation of the place where refugees live. However, Abdul and all his neighbors say that there never received any responsibility for ISS.

On the proposal to visit the home of Pakistani young representatives of the organization do not have access for reasons of agenda. "In fact, do not care," says Abdul. Remember it was not until January, when an immigrant from Sri Lanka died in a shack because of a fire, the government began to pay attention to this reality denounced by means of local and international media. But according to the list of First

Vision (never denied by the government) of the nearly 70 neighborhoods were submerged as pig farms, only 10 have been closed.

Aideen McLaughlin of [Justice Centre Hong Kong](#), another NGO reference on refugees, does not know the number of immigrants living in slums or the amount of existing slums in the city. "There is growing concern among some NGOs about the situation. But we can not comment because we have not thoroughly investigated "he says. Moreover it recognizes that Justice Centre has received "all claims" by refugees regarding the services managed by International Social Service. As well as with housing, also with regard to food Swiss organization it has been severely criticized. But in the latter case, the government ruled in favor of the plaintiffs. During the past year, Member [Union of Refugees Hong Kong](#) brought forward demonstrations and protests with the aim to acquire personally foods instead of packages delivered by ISS food, the quality and quantity were called into question by refugees. "It was a very important step," adds Abdul referring to coupons can now be exchanged for food at authorized grocery stores. The NGO ISS does not comment on the matter, merely repeating information offered their website.

"But who wants to come here? Who wants to voluntarily leave their homes, their land, to come to Hong Kong? We all know that the Government welcomes the rich and powerful people and want to keep away the poor and refugees. That is why government policy by not allowing them to work, pushes them to commit crimes," notes the Hong Kong Lam Jaco spokesman Socialist Action, the only political group that openly defends the demands of the Union of Refugees. "Racism has become a growing problem here, in Europe and in other parts of the world, because in the midst of economic crisis, the defenders of this model tend to shift the responsibility to the people coming from outside." He adds: "That is demagoguery. Because in reality many of the problems experienced them suffer the poorest in this city. "

In the middle of August, with a suffocating humidity, Abdul just become a father of a girl. Plan to live with her partner, an Indonesian young and newborn, but do not know where or how. "I need to work and do it legally," repeated indignantly. "It is very unfair. The government cornered us. What I can do? "He asks with little room for optimism. For now, he knows that the mobilization and pressure from the Union of Refugees can be translated into concrete results. It also relies on the media and the support of local organizations. "Our obligation is not to leave them alone. We think that asylum is a basic pillar of democracy, it is not an ethnic minority. Is a right of all human beings, "emphasizes Lam.