

China crackdown prompts thousands to flee Hong Kong as U.K. opens new visa route



Hong Kong citizens protest Friday outside the United Kingdom's Houses of Parliament in London against the limited rights of British National Overseas passport holders in the former U.K. colony. Photo: Wiktor Szymanowicz/NurPhoto via Getty Images

About 7,000 Hong Kongers have fled to the U.K. since China imposed a national security law on Hong Kong and the British government expects more than 300,000 to obtain extended residency rights over the next five years, per AP.

Why it matters: The announcement comes as the U.K. opened the new visa scheme Sunday — a day after China said it would no longer recognize Hong Kongers' British National Overseas (BNO) passports as valid travel documents or proof of identity.

Driving the news: The U.K. government announced last July when the security

law passed the new path to British citizenship for Hong Kongers who qualify for the BNO status, which was granted to those living in the city before the British government handed its former colony back to China in 1997.

- Under the offer, these Hong Kongers and their dependents have the right to remain in the United Kingdom for five years, during which time they can work or study.
- They would then be allowed to apply for “settled status” and, after an additional year, citizenship, Axios Dave Lawler notes.

The big picture: Some Hong Kongers told AP they’re leaving because they’re worried they’ll be punished for backing the pro-democracy protest movement — which has seen several prominent figures arrested or imprisoned in recent months.

- “Many others” said China’s erosion of the high degree of autonomy they previously enjoyed had become “unbearable,” and they want their children to have better future.
 - “Most say they don’t plan to ever go back,” AP notes.
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Source:

<https://www.axios.com/china-crackdown-thousands-flee-hong-kong-uk-4e94b3cd-262f-4fef-9158-39397bd968f6.html>

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