

Employment Support Scheme receives nearly 430 000 applications

A Government spokesman said today (June 15) that at the close of applications for the Employment Support Scheme (ESS) last night (June 14), the Government had received a total of 428 659 applications, including 168 799 applications from employers and 259 860 applications from self-employed persons (SEPs).

The spokesman said, "The public at large have responded well to the ESS. Employers are generally of the view that the scheme meets their needs. The application process through the online portal has been simple and smooth and the information required has not been burdensome. It is believed that the wage subsidy can help employers and employees get through hard times and the policy objective of safeguarding employment is being achieved.

"We have disbursed a total of around \$4.8 billion to the first batch of 25 500 employers, which is estimated to benefit more than 200 000 employees. Ninety-eight per cent of the employers receiving wage subsidies are micro or small and medium-sized enterprises with fewer than 50 employees. All employers receiving wage subsidies have undertaken not to make redundancies during the subsidy period (i.e. June to August) when submitting applications and to spend all the wage subsidies on paying wages to the employees."

In addition, the first batch of 24 000 SEP applicants have received a one-off lump sum subsidy of \$7,500 each into their assigned bank accounts. The total sum of the subsidy involved is about \$180 million.

The Government is expeditiously processing the remaining applications, striving to start disbursing the second batch of wage subsidies and one-off subsidies within this week. Details will be announced later.

The ESS Secretariat has notified successful applicants of the results of their applications via SMS and email in batches and arranged to deposit the wage subsidies into the applicants' assigned bank accounts. Applicants can log in to the ESS portal to check the amount of subsidy granted and the committed head count for the months of June to August 2020.

The spokesman reminded that the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) information (including the MPF scheme name or the MPF scheme registration or participation number) submitted by some applicants is not consistent with the relevant records as maintained by the MPF trustees. The ESS Secretariat or the processing agent has sent emails to these applicants to follow up. The relevant applicants should respond to the emails before the specified deadline, so that the ESS Secretariat or the processing agent can further process and approve the relevant applications.

"In addition, quite a number of individual applicants who have applied

for the one-off lump-sum subsidy of \$7,500 are in fact not eligible. Under the ESS, the applicant must have enrolled himself or herself in an MPF Scheme as an SEP and the relevant SEP MPF account should have been set up on or before March 31, 2020 (i.e. it cannot be backdated to that date or any earlier date), and had not been terminated as of March 31, 2020. Applicants who have set up MPF accounts as an employee (including employees who have ceased employment) are not eligible to apply for the one-off subsidy for SEPs," the spokesman said.

"The Government will review the experience and arrangement of the first tranche of the ESS and will later announce details of the second tranche of the ESS, with payment to be made in September this year for paying the wages of September to November 2020," the spokesman said.