

Labour Importation Scheme for Construction Sector to accept applications from next Monday

To cope with the manpower demand of the construction industry in pursuance of various infrastructural developments, the Chief Executive-in-Council has earlier endorsed the introduction of the Labour Importation Scheme for the Construction Sector (Construction Sector Scheme), which allows the importation of labour for the construction sector on an appropriate scale on the principle that employment priority for local workers will be safeguarded. The scheme, with a quota ceiling of 12 000, will be open for applications from next Monday (July 17).

A spokesman for the Development Bureau (DEVB) said, "The shortfall in construction manpower is anticipated to rise from the current 15 000 to 20 000, to over 40 000 in 2027. It is necessary to allow importation of labour on an appropriate scale as a supplementary measure to fill in the temporary manpower gap, so as to avoid any bottleneck caused by manpower shortage to the economic and infrastructural development of Hong Kong."

Under the Construction Sector Scheme, public sector construction works contracts with a contract value of no less than \$1 billion will be accorded priority. Principal contractors of eligible works contracts may submit applications, for themselves or on behalf of their sub-contractors, for importing skilled labour and semi-skilled labour (hereafter collectively referred to as "skilled workers"), and technicians and site supervisory personnel. The imported labour must fall under the eligible trades/disciplines of the Construction Sector Scheme.

Having considered and taken on board the recommendations by the Task Force on Short-term Labour Supply of the Construction Industry Council and the Labour Importation Scheme for the Construction Sector Consultative Committee, which comprise employers, employees and training institutions' representatives from the construction sector, the Government has established 29 trades of skilled workers and 18 positions of technicians and site supervisory personnel (see annex) as eligible for application under the Construction Sector Scheme as well as their respective employment terms and prevailing median wages. The relevant wage data regularly published by the Census and Statistics Department or the Vocational Training Council and the latest wage situations of the industry were also considered during the process. Applicants have to conduct local recruitment no more than four months preceding the submission of applications for importation quotas and according to the aforesaid employment terms and at a salary not lower than the prevailing median wages. Applications should only be submitted after a confirmation is made through local recruitment that sufficient local manpower cannot be so employed.

A briefing session will be held by the DEVB for the construction sector tomorrow (July 14) to introduce the application procedures and operational details of the Construction Sector Scheme. After the first application period which will last from July 17 to August 16, subsequent applications will be accepted on a quarterly basis (i.e. the second application period will be from October 1 to 31 and subsequent applications will be accepted each January, April, July and October). The Inter-departmental Committee of the Scheme will advise on each application for the consideration and decision by the Permanent Secretary for Development (Works). The application results will be issued to applicants within two months from the closing date of application.

An applicant is required to provide the imported labour residing in Hong Kong with accommodation at designated locations. Apart from providing on-site accommodation, the applicant can also rent the centralised quarter which is converted from the community isolation facility at Tam Mei. The conversion work is in progress with associated facilities being added for the quarter. The Construction Industry Council (CIC), which will manage the centralised quarter, is preparing for the operation and management arrangements. It is tentatively scheduled for commissioning in October and the operation arrangements will be announced separately. If approval has been given for the workers to arrive in Hong Kong before October, the applicant is allowed to arrange appropriate accommodation for the imported labour in the private market as an interim measure. The applicant has to make arrangements for the imported labour to move into the centralised quarter once it is available.

The application forms and details of the Construction Sector Scheme have been uploaded onto the DEVB webpage (www.devb.gov.hk/en/css). Applicants shall submit the completed forms together with the required documents in person or by post to the DEVB. For enquiries, please call the hotline 3199 7128.

Upon its launch, the Construction Sector Scheme will handle all quotas for importing construction labour. The Supplementary Labour Scheme implemented by the Labour Department will no longer accept applications for importation of labour for the construction sector.

The Task Force and the Consultative Committee will meet regularly to review and update the recommendations on eligible trades/disciplines, prevailing median wages and employment terms and to offer views to the DEVB on the overall operation of the scheme. The DEVB will also report to the Labour Advisory Board on the implementation of the Construction Sector Scheme half-yearly.

The spokesman stressed that the Construction Sector Scheme is a supplementary measure to fill in the temporary manpower gap. The Government and the construction sector have been undertaking multipronged measures to nurture local talent and address the manpower needs of the industry. In 2022, the Government allocated \$1 billion to fund enhanced training and the promotion of the industry's prospects by the CIC. The Government has also injected a total sum of \$2.2 billion into the Construction Innovation and

Technology Fund to promote the use of innovative technologies in the industry to uplift productivity.