

LCQ11: Importation of workers

Following is a question by the Hon Shiu Ka-fai and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (October 23):

Question:

Operators of many industries have relayed, one after another, that the problem of local labour shortage is serious, and different industries have for a long time been facing recruitment difficulties. Although they may apply for importation of workers currently through the Supplementary Labour Scheme (the Scheme), the situation of labour shortage has not been improved. Regarding the importation of workers (excluding foreign domestic helpers), will the Government inform this Council:

(1) Of the respective numbers of workers the importation of which was applied for and approved under the Scheme in each of the past five years, with a breakdown by job type and type of application (i.e. new application and application for renewal);

(2) Of the number of such workers in each of the past five years, broken down by the number of years for which they have been working in Hong Kong;

(3) Whether it has assessed the impact of a prolonged manpower shortage on the development and service quality of different industries; if so, of the outcome; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) Whether it has evaluated the effectiveness of the Scheme; if so, of the outcome; if not, the reasons for that;

(5) As the Secretary for Labour and Welfare and the Chief Secretary for Administration have indicated recently, one after another, that the Government will seriously and actively consider importing workers if individual industries face manpower shortage, whether the Government will introduce a relevant scheme this year; if so, of the details (including the announcement date and implementation timetable); if not, the reasons for that; and

(6) How Hong Kong compares with Singapore, Macao and Japan in terms of the policy on the importation of workers and the number of workers imported?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the concerned bureaux, I provide a consolidated reply to the Member's question as follows:

(1) and (2) From 2014 to 2018, employers applied to import 6 613, 4 689, 5 556, 4 390 and 5 095 workers respectively under the Supplementary Labour

Scheme (SLS). The numbers of imported workers approved respectively in these five years were 2 722, 2 880, 3 802, 2 765 and 3 225. The vetting of applications received towards year-end may be completed in the following year, and hence the number of imported workers approved each year does not necessarily fully reflect the approval results of the applications for importation of workers in the year. Breakdowns of the numbers of imported workers applied for and approved by job title are at Annexes 1 to 5. The employment contract of an imported worker under SLS is subject to a maximum span of 24 months. The Labour Department (LD) does not keep the numbers of imported workers by type of application (i.e. new application and application for renewal) or by the number of years for which they have been working in Hong Kong.

(3) to (6) The Government operates different schemes for employers to apply for importation of labour on account of their actual operational circumstances so as to supplement skills not readily available in the local labour market and sustain the competitiveness and development needs of Hong Kong. Depending on the skill levels and/or educational requirements of the job vacancies concerned, employers may apply to the Immigration Department for admission of professionals or to LD for importation of workers at technician level or below under SLS.

Having regard to the manpower shortage in the elderly care sector, the Government introduced measures in April 2014, allowing private residential care homes for the elderly participating in the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme to apply for importation of care workers for their non-bought places. As for the construction industry, the Government has been collaborating with the Construction Industry Council and stakeholders in the construction industry to implement multi-pronged measures to enhance training for skilled workers, attract more new recruits and promote the industry to widely adopt innovative technologies for productivity enhancement. If there are individual works projects with genuine manpower shortage in certain trades, the contractors may consider applying for importation of the required skilled workers on a temporary, time-limited and targeted basis through relevant schemes.

Relevant government bureaux and departments will continue to closely monitor the manpower demand and supply of different sectors, as well as enhance training and attract new recruits. On the premise of safeguarding the employment priority of local workers, the Government will explore with stakeholders the possibility of increasing imported labour on an appropriate and limited scale.

LD does not keep information on comparison among Hong Kong, Singapore, Macao and Japan in terms of the policy on the importation of workers and the number of workers imported.