

LCQ12: Sector-specific labour importation schemes

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Lo Wai-kiok and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (June 28):

Question:

On the 13th of this month, the Government announced the sector-specific labour importation schemes under which the construction and transport sectors are allocated a quota of 12 000 and 8 000 respectively for importation of labour. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Government has a timetable for introducing sector-specific labour importation schemes for other sectors with acute manpower shortages (such as the tourism sector); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) given that the Government has indicated that the sector-specific labour importation scheme for the construction sector should primarily apply to public sector construction works, and private sector construction works with special circumstances will also be considered, whether the Government has formulated a clear definition or guidelines for "special circumstances"; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) as some labour in foreign places have indicated that they do not know the details and application channels of the sector-specific labour importation schemes, whether the Government will step up publicity and promotion outside Hong Kong, so as to prevent labour in foreign places from being misled by unscrupulous labour service agencies; if so, of the details; and

(4) whether it will launch a one-stop online platform to enable practitioners of the relevant sectors and foreign job seekers to keep abreast of the latest recruitment information and application procedures, and provide answers to frequently asked questions; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government is highly concerned about the supply and demand of manpower in Hong Kong. The Government's manpower policy has all along been giving priority to local workers. On the premise of ensuring the employment priority for local workers, the Government allows increasing the number of imported workers on an appropriate and regulated basis, with a view to alleviating the manpower shortage in individual sectors/job categories. The Government will also adopt a multi-pronged strategy, including promoting training and retraining, providing appropriate employment support services

and driving technology adoption for productivity uplifting, etc, so as to address the manpower shortage problem.

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

(1) Various industries are currently facing an acute manpower shortage problem. Apart from the sector-specific labour importation schemes for the construction and transport sectors to be launched in July 2023 respectively by the Development Bureau (DEVB) and the Transport and Logistics Bureau, the Government will also enhance the coverage and operation of the existing Supplementary Labour Scheme (SLS) to alleviate the manpower shortage in other sectors. Enhancement measures included suspending the general exclusion of the 26 job categories (see Annex) as well as unskilled/low-skilled posts from the SLS for two years; and enhancing dissemination of application information to employers, streamlining the procedures for processing the SLS applications and refining the workflow of consultation with the Labour Advisory Board. The Scheme will also be renamed as Enhanced Supplementary Labour Scheme.

(2) The Labour Importation Scheme for the Construction Sector will accord priority to larger-scale public sector construction works exceeding a specified project value. Addressing the manpower needs of larger-scale public sector construction works can help release some local workers to other construction works, and alleviate the overall labour shortage of the construction sector.

While the DEVB believed that approved applications would mainly be public sector construction works, to provide reasonable flexibility, consideration will also be given to applications of private sector construction works with special circumstances, where the labour to be imported is of severe shortage in Hong Kong, such as construction personnel of special disciplines/trades, the local supply of which is very limited, e.g. mural painting artisans for conservation works of historical building.

(3) and (4) A thematic website will be launched for the Labour Importation Scheme for the Construction Sector to provide information related to the Scheme, such as application requirements and guidelines, links for downloading application forms and documents, leaflets, frequently asked questions, samples of completed applications, etc. The Construction Industry Council will also set up an enquiry hotline for interested applicants.

As far as the Labour Importation Scheme for the Transport Sector is concerned, the Airport Authority Hong Kong (AAHK) and the Transport Department (TD), as the executive bodies for handling applications relating to the aviation industry and the public light bus/coach trade respectively, will each arrange briefings for the relevant trades to introduce details of the Scheme, including application periods, application methods, eligibility criteria, terms and conditions of employment, Scheme requirements, documents required as well as other points to note. They will also upload relevant information on their thematic websites for reference by the trades and non-local workers. For any enquiries, the trades or non-local workers may also contact the AAHK and the TD by phone, email and/or fax.

The Labour Department (LD) planned to provide links to the thematic websites of sector-specific labour importation schemes on its homepage.

If the prospective imported workers are Mainland residents, employers must recruit the imported workers through the foreign labour service co-operation enterprises approved by the relevant Mainland authorities so as to protect the rights of these workers. Employers must also arrange imported workers to attend briefings on employment rights hosted by the LD, in which imported workers will obtain relevant information about employment rights and benefits as well as ways of making inquiries or filing complaints.