

LCQ13: Employment situation of ethnic minorities

Following is a question by the Hon Vincent Cheng and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (May 22):

Question:

Regarding the employment situation of the ethnic minorities (EMs), will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the numbers of EMs in employment, their unemployment rate and underemployment rate, in each of the past three years, together with a breakdown by ethnicity;

(2) given that since March 2015, the Labour Department (LD) has added an option of "Ethnic minorities are welcome for the post" in the Vacancy Order Form for employers to complete, so as to facilitate employment officers in matching suitable jobs for EM job seekers and encourage EMs to apply for the posts, how the percentages of the relevant posts being taken up by EMs in each of the three years following the implementation of the aforesaid measure compare with the percentage of all posts being taken up by EMs in each of the preceding three years;

(3) as LD will launch a pilot programme in which employment services are provided for EMs under a case management approach through non-governmental organisations, of the details and the implementation progress of the programme;

(4) of the latest progress in expanding the range of the language and industry-specific training courses provided by the Employees Retraining Board for EMs;

(5) whether it has reviewed the effectiveness of the work of the Government in the past three years on encouraging employers to hire EMs; if so, of the outcome, and whether improvements will be made; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(6) given that a concern group on EM rights and interests has proposed the setting up of an EM employment subsidy and support scheme, under which subsidies will be provided by the Government for employers on a short-term basis, and services such as pre-employment training, employment support and post-employment follow-up will be provided for EMs through relevant organisations, whether the Government has explored the feasibility of the proposal; if so, of the outcome; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My response to the question raised by the Member is set out below:

(1) According to the 2016 Population By-census conducted by the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD), statistics of the working population, unemployed population and unemployment rate of ethnic minorities (EMs) (which refer to persons of non-Chinese ethnicity) are set out at the Annex. The figures exclude foreign domestic helpers. C&SD does not have the relevant statistics on underemployment rate. Given the lower degree of accuracy in the unemployment estimates derived from the 2016 Population By-census (Note), the unemployment-related statistics of EMs are for general reference only and should be interpreted with caution. C&SD does not have the relevant statistics for 2017 and 2018.

(2) Since March 2015, the Labour Department (LD) has added an optional field of "Ethnic minorities are welcome for the post" in its Vacancy Order Form for employers to fill in so as to facilitate employment officers to match EM job seekers to suitable jobs and encourage them to apply for the posts. Job seekers (including EMs) may be placed into employment either through LD's referral service or by direct application to employers who advertise vacancies via LD. Currently, the vast majority of vacancies advertised through LD (including those indicating that "Ethnic minorities are welcome for the post") provide employers' contact details. Job seekers may obtain information on job vacancies through channels such as the Interactive Employment Service website and its mobile application, vacancy search terminals installed at various locations across the territory and large-scale job fairs without registration with LD, and make direct application to employers. Job seekers (including EMs) who are placed into employment through direct application are not required to report their employment status to LD. LD therefore does not have the percentage of the relevant posts being taken up by EMs.

(3) To further strengthen the employment support for EM job seekers, LD will launch a pilot programme in conjunction with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to provide employment services for EM job seekers through a case management approach so as to utilise NGOs' community network, expertise in case management and experiences in serving EMs. The commissioned NGOs have to provide one-stop employment support services for EM job seekers through a case management approach so as to reduce their barriers to employment. In addition to canvassing vacancies suitable for EMs and providing support in their job search, these NGOs will also provide post-placement follow-up services for EMs and their employers, such as assisting the employees to adapt to the new working environment, fostering both parties' understanding of each other's work expectations and practices, etc. LD will carefully consider the views of stakeholders, draw up other details of the pilot programme and conduct the tender exercise as soon as possible. The pilot programme is expected to be launched in 2020, which will be on a three-year pilot initially.

(4) Employees Retraining Board (ERB) has expanded the range of language and industry-specific training courses dedicated for EMs in 2019-20. It has added two new dedicated Chinese language courses at Qualifications Framework Level 2, which results in a total of 14 dedicated Chinese language courses covering vocational Chinese (reading and writing), Cantonese and Putonghua. ERB offers dedicated courses for EMs covering vocational training for 10 industry categories, namely "Property Management & Security", "Electrical & Mechanical Services", "Construction & Renovation", "Beauty Therapy", "Hairdressing", "Social Services", "Business", "Catering", "Hotel", and "Tourism". ERB will consult its focus group on training to explore developing more suitable dedicated courses in the above industry categories, tentatively targeting at the categories of "Electrical & Mechanical Services" and "Construction & Renovation".

(5) LD has been proactively promoting the working abilities of EMs among employers through various channels and making ongoing efforts to canvass vacancies suitable for EM job seekers through its employer network to enhance their employment opportunities. From 2016 to 2018, LD organised six large-scale inclusive job fairs and 36 district-based inclusive job fairs at which job seekers, including EMs, could submit job applications and attend interviews with employers on the spot. LD also organised experience sharing sessions for employers, during which NGOs serving EMs were invited to brief employers on the cultures of EMs and the skills to communicate with them to enhance their understanding in this regard. In addition, as mentioned in part (2) of the reply, since March 2015, LD has added an optional field of "Ethnic minorities are welcome for the post" in its Vacancy Order Form for employers to fill in. From 2016 to 2018, a total of 15 158 employers who advertised vacancies via LD indicated that EM job seekers were welcome to apply for the posts.

LD reviews its operation in providing employment and recruitment services for job seekers and employers on a continuous basis, and introduces adjustments and enhancements in a timely manner. As mentioned in part (3) of the reply, LD will launch a pilot programme for EM job seekers. The NGOs engaged will help LD proactively canvass vacancies suitable for EMs, and strengthen its post-placement follow-up services for EMs and their employers.

(6) At present, LD administers various special employment programmes such as the Youth Employment and Training Programme, the Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged and the Work Trial Scheme, etc. to encourage employers, through the provision of financial incentives, to take on job seekers (including EMs) with various employment difficulties and provide them on-the-job training to enhance their employability. LD will continue to strengthen the employment services for EM job seekers, such as implementing the abovementioned pilot programme to provide employment support services for EM job seekers, including post-placement follow-up services, in conjunction with NGOs.

Note: Enumerators need to acquire a full understanding of the labour force framework for collecting information related to unemployment. However, a large number of temporary field workers were employed to undertake the

enumeration work in the 2016 Population By-census, and they could not be expected to have a full grasp of the relevant knowledge and the required skills in asking screening questions. Thus, the accuracy of the unemployment information gathered would be lower.