

LCQ16: Importation of labour

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 (May 25):

Question:

Operators of quite a number of industries have relayed that with a shortage of labour in Hong Kong, they have for a long time been facing recruitment difficulties. Moreover, some studies have pointed out that the ageing population and the persistently low fertility rate in Hong Kong have resulted in a continuous decline in the labour force. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the "child dependency ratio" and "elderly dependency ratio" in Hong Kong in each of the past 10 years; whether it has assessed the changes in such ratios in the coming 10 and 20 years, and their impacts on Hong Kong's labour force, society and economy;

(2) of (i) the respective numbers of applications received and approved by the Government for importation of labour at technician level or below (excluding foreign domestic helpers), as well as (ii) the respective numbers of workers involved (with a tabulated breakdown of these two figures by type of industry), in each of the past five years; the number of enterprises involved in such applications;

(3) of the conditions that enterprises in general have to meet at present for applying for importation of labour, as well as the application procedure and the time required;

(4) whether it has assessed if the existing measures relating to application for importation of labour at technician level or below meet the actual needs of Hong Kong's different industries, economy and society; if it has assessed, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; whether it will consider improving the measures concerned; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) whether it has made reference to the policies of other jurisdictions (such as Singapore, Macao and Japan) on importation of labour, and the effects produced by such policies; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

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

(1) The child dependency ratio and the elderly dependency ratio of Hong Kong during 2012 to 2021 are shown in the table below:

Year	Child dependency ratio (Note 1)	Elderly dependency ratio (Note 2)
2012	152	183
2013	149	190
2014	150	198
2015	154	208
2016	155	218
2017	157	228
2018	159	238
2019	160	249
2020	159	262
2021	157	282

Note 1: Child dependency ratio refers to the number of persons aged under 15 per 1 000 persons aged between 15 and 64.

Note 2: Elderly dependency ratio refers to the number of persons aged 65 and over per 1 000 persons aged between 15 and 64.

According to results of the population projections released by the Census and Statistics Department using the mid-2019 population estimate as the base, population ageing is expected to continue. It is projected that there will be a significant increase in the number of deaths, coupled with a decrease in the number of births. Therefore, the child dependency ratio of Hong Kong is projected to decrease gradually, while the elderly dependency ratio is projected to rise continuously in the next 20 years. The projected child dependency ratio and elderly dependency ratio in selected years are shown in the table below:

Year	Child dependency ratio	Elderly dependency ratio
2026	158	357
2031	144	435
2036	132	483
2041	125	521

In the face of population ageing, the Government will continue to adopt various measures to encourage more people to join the labour market. The Government will also continue to actively invest in education and training to enhance labour productivity.

(2) and (3) Pursuant to the established policy of the Government, employers

must accord employment priority to local workers and only employers with genuine difficulties in local recruitment may be allowed to import workers. The Government operates different schemes for employers to apply for importation of workers on account of their actual operational circumstances so as to supplement skills that are not readily available in the local labour market, and sustain the competitiveness and meet the development needs of Hong Kong. Depending on the skill level and/or education requirement of the jobs concerned, employers may apply to the Immigration Department or the Innovation and Technology Commission for admission of professionals, or to the Labour Department (LD) for importation of workers at technician level or below under the Supplementary Labour Scheme (SLS).

Employers are required under the SLS to launch a four-week open recruitment exercise to accord priority to filling job vacancies with local workers. Upon employers' completion of the above recruitment procedures, the LD will analyse each application so as to assess whether the employer has sincerity to recruit/train local workers, its genuine need for manpower, size of its local workforce, the views of training bodies/professional organisations on the local manpower supply situation of the concerned job title, etc. The LD will then make recommendations and invite members of the Labour Advisory Board (LAB) to give views. The Commissioner for Labour will thoroughly assess various factors and the views and justifications provided by the LAB members, before approving or refusing the concerned applications for importation of labour as appropriate.

The time for the LD to process each SLS application is affected by various factors. In recent years, the processing of most SLS applications has taken about five months.

The numbers of applications received and approved under the SLS by the LD from 2017 to 2021 are at Annex 1. Breakdowns of the numbers of imported workers applied for and approved by industry are at Annexes 2 to 6. The LD does not keep the number of enterprises involved in such applications.

(4) and (5) Relevant government bureaux and departments have been closely monitoring the manpower supply and demand of different sectors, as well as enhancing training and attracting new recruits. On the premise of safeguarding the employment priority of local workers, the Government allows admission of professionals and importation of workers, and will explore with stakeholders the possibility of increasing imported labour on an appropriate and regulated basis, to alleviate the shortage of manpower in individual sectors/job categories. The Government will make reference to the policies of other places on importation of workers when required.