

LCQ17: Importation of foreign workers in catering industry

Following is a question by the Hon Poon Siu-ping and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (December 18):

Question:

All along, employers may apply for importation of foreign workers under the Supplementary Labour Scheme. It is learnt that the number of cooks imported through the Scheme has continued to rise in recent years. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) Of the respective numbers of foreign workers in the catering industry the importation of whom (a) was applied for by employers and (b) was approved, in each of the past five years and from January to November this year, and set out by position the (i) numbers and (ii) median monthly wages of the foreign workers who were approved to come to work in Hong Kong, and a breakdown of the number of cooks among such workers by the cuisine in which they are specialised (e.g. Sichuan cuisine, Thai cuisine); and

(2) As some employees in the catering industry have pointed out that the economic downturn in Hong Kong in recent months has led to salary reduction for or dismissal of a large number of employees in the industry, whether the authorities will consider suspending the vetting and approval of applications for importation of foreign cooks, so as not to further reduce the employment opportunities of local workers; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) During 2014 to 2018, employers of the catering industry applied to import 146, 224, 275, 315 and 302 cooks respectively each year under the Supplementary Labour Scheme (SLS). The numbers of imported cooks approved respectively in each of these five years were 90, 85, 94, 126 and 155. The vetting of applications received towards year-end may be completed in the following year, and hence the number of imported workers approved in the year does not correspond to the number of imported workers applied for in the same year. As the statistics of SLS are compiled on a yearly basis, the collation of the relevant statistics of 2019 will be completed in the first quarter of 2020. The Labour Department (LD) does not keep statistics of imported workers by other job titles in the catering industry or by the cuisine in which the cooks are specialised.

According to the requirements of SLS, imported workers must be

remunerated at not less than the median monthly wages of the relevant job titles as published by the Census and Statistics Department. The median monthly wages applicable to the job title of cooks as at the end of the above five years are as follows:

As at the end of the year	Median monthly wage*
2014	\$12,650 to \$16,610
2015	\$13,350 to \$17,170
2016	\$13,540 to \$17,880
2017	\$14,230 to \$18,950
2018	\$14,730 to \$19,440

* The median monthly wages of the job title of cooks depend on the duties and skill levels. For example, the median monthly wages applicable to the job title of cooks as at the end of 2018 ranged from \$14,730 (Pantry Cook/Saucier) to \$19,440 (Barbecue Cook/No. 2 Cook).

LD does not keep statistics on the median monthly wages of imported workers approved for the catering industry under SLS.

(2) It is the established policy of the Government that employers must accord employment priority to local workers. Only employers with genuine difficulties in local recruitment may be allowed to import workers.

For the purpose of upholding employment priority for local workers, employers are required under SLS to launch a four-week open recruitment exercise to accord priority to filling job vacancies with local workers. Upon completion of the above recruitment procedures by employers, 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, and the views of training bodies/professional organisations on the local manpower supply situation of the job title concerned, etc. LD will then invite members of the Labour Advisory Board (LAB) to give views on the recommendation made by LD. The Commissioner for Labour will thoroughly assess various factors and the views and justifications provided by LAB members, before approving or refusing the application concerned for importation of labour as appropriate.

LD will continue to uphold the principle of according employment priority to local workers and prudently process SLS applications.