

LCQ17: Work of SAR Government offices on Mainland

Following is a question by the Hon Jeffrey Lam and a written reply by the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Erick Tsang Kwok-wai, in the Legislative Council today (August 25):

Question:

Currently, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government has established offices in five Mainland cities (i.e. Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Chengdu and Wuhan) (Mainland Offices) to assist Hong Kong businessmen in handling the problems they encounter and provide support to those Hong Kong residents who are on the Mainland. Since the outbreak of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic, the authorities of the Mainland and SAR have implemented immigration control measures, which have restricted the flow of people between the two places and caused serious disruption to cross-boundary economic and trade activities. Regarding the work of the various Mainland Offices, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the following information on the requests for assistance received by the various Mainland Offices in each of the past three years:

(a) the number of requests, with a breakdown by (i) name of the Mainland Office involved, (ii) whether the assistance seeker was an enterprise or an individual, and (iii) type of issues pertaining to the request for assistance,

(b) the number of cases related to the COVID-19 epidemic, and

(c) the number of cases resolved, and the reasons why the remaining cases have yet to be resolved;

(2) of the special measures taken by the various Mainland Offices amid the epidemic to help Hong Kong businessmen deal with their business operation problems arising from the quarantine/testing measures of SAR or the Mainland (e.g. inability to fulfill contractual obligations on time due to lockdowns of certain areas, labour law issues arising from the work arrangements for local employees, and application for exemption from quarantine on return to Hong Kong); and

(3) of the facilitation measures for business operation of Hong Kong businessmen that the local Mainland provincial/municipal governments have introduced, as a result of the efforts of the various Mainland Offices, since the outbreak of the epidemic (set out by name of Mainland Office)?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the Hon Jeffrey Lam's question is as follows:

(1) In the past three years, the numbers of requests for assistance received by the five Mainland Offices of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (Mainland Offices), with a breakdown by nature, are set out in the table below:

Office	Assistance cases which were related to immigration and personal safety matters			Other assistance cases*		
	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2020
Beijing Office	88	111	54	54	34	44
Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Guangdong	165	225	410	124	129	90
Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Chengdu	52	53	70	10	4	20
Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Shanghai	50	45	63	23	25	17
Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Wuhan	20	22	2 622	7	5	6
Total	375	456	3 219	218	197	177

* excluding general enquiries

We do not have the breakdown of the requests of assistance according to the classification of enterprises or individuals.

In 2020, a total of 3 219 requests for assistance were received from Hong Kong residents in distress in the Mainland by the Immigration Divisions of the Mainland Offices. Among them, 2 980 were related to the COVID-19 epidemic, including cases in which assistance seekers were stranded due to transport conditions or needed medication provided in Hong Kong etc. The numbers of requests for assistance that were related to the COVID-19 epidemic and received by the Immigration Divisions in 2020 are set out in the table below:

Office	Number of requests for assistance related to the COVID-19 epidemic
Beijing Office	30
Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Guangdong	239
Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Chengdu	55

Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Shanghai	45
Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Wuhan	2 611

The Immigration Divisions had rendered practical assistance to the assistance seekers having regard to the actual circumstances.

(2) and (3) Since the epidemic, the Mainland Offices have maintained close liaison with the central ministries/commissions and various local government authorities. They have also reached out to Hong Kong businessmen and business associations in the Mainland to gauge the impacts of the epidemic, in order to convey their needs on disease prevention, business operation, resumption of work and production, etc. to the relevant Mainland departments in a timely manner.

Through different publicity channels, such as WeChat public accounts and monthly newsletters, the Mainland Offices have disseminated information on the Mainland's latest anti-epidemic measures, plans on the resumption of work and production, tax and fee concessions and supporting policies for enterprises, so that local Hong Kong businessmen would be kept informed of the latest situation and be able to make necessary preparations and arrangements. Moreover, with the support and assistance from the Mainland authorities, the Mainland Offices have organised an array of business talks and seminars for Hong Kong enterprises. Guest speakers including Mainland government representatives, experts and scholars as well as seasoned entrepreneurs were invited to speak on the latest national plan and developments, laws and regulations on labour, social security and taxation, and preferential policies to promote resumption of work and production in the Mainland. These initiatives have helped Hong Kong businessmen continue to access useful business information amid the epidemic.

During the epidemic, many Hong Kong people were unable to return to Hong Kong to renew their expired Hong Kong and Macao Residents Entry and Exit Permits (commonly known as Home Return Permits) due to the quarantine requirements of both the Mainland and Hong Kong. This caused great inconvenience to their daily lives in the Mainland. After liaison and appeals by the Mainland Offices with the relevant central ministries/commissions, the National Immigration Administration announced that, starting from October 2020, Hong Kong and Macao residents could apply for renewal or re-issue of Home Return Permits from the public security authorities above county level in the Mainland. This measure has benefitted Hong Kong people doing business, working and living in the Mainland, and substantially reduced the time and costs of their returning to Hong Kong for the renewal procedures in the past.

For other issues raised by Hong Kong people and businessmen in the Mainland, such as the COVID-19 vaccination arrangements in the Mainland, problems encountered when registering for the Health Code using the Home Return Permit and the resumption of direct flights between Hong Kong and the Mainland, the Mainland Offices have proactively conveyed their concerns to

the Mainland authorities and endeavoured to seek assistance and facilitation measures for Hong Kong people and businessmen where appropriate.