

## LCQ4:Children living in subdivided units

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Johnny Ng and a reply by the Secretary for Housing, Ms Winnie Ho, in the Legislative Council today (July 12):

Question:

There are views pointing out that as children living in subdivided units (SDUs) face poor and crowded living environment, their physical and mental health, study and social life are affected. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the current number of SDU households in Hong Kong, with a breakdown by district, household size and household income, etc;

(2) of the current number of SDU households in Hong Kong with children and the number of such children, with a breakdown by their age and district of residence; whether it has estimated if the number of children living in SDUs will increase or decrease in the coming three to five years; and

(3) whether a mechanism is currently in place to accord priority to SDU households with children in the allocation of public rental housing (PRH) flats; whether it will draw reference from the authorities' practice of according priority to PRH applicants with elderly family members in flat allocation, and consider improving the criteria for vetting and approving applications for transitional housing and Light Public Housing, so as to enable SDU households with children aged 16 or below to be accorded priority in the allocation of such housing, as well as set a target that no children have to live in SDUs within the coming three to five years, together with a timetable and key performance indicators for the relevant work?

Reply:

President,

The Government has all along been paying attention to the housing needs of those who are inadequately housed. The current-term Government has proposed a series of measures, including the construction of about 30 000 Light Public Housing (LPH) units, so as to provide more housing options for households who have waited for public rental housing (PRH) for more than three years and are currently living in subdivided units (SDUs) with a view to improving their living environment.

After consulting the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD), our reply to Dr the Hon Ng is as follows:

(1) & (2) C&SD collected information on the population living in SDUs and their socio-economic characteristics in the 2021 Population Census. According to the census results, there were about 107 000 households living in SDUs in 2021, with an average household size of two persons, and a median monthly household income of about \$15,000. The number of households living in SDUs by District Council district, by household size and by monthly household income are at Annex I.

There were about 34 000 children (persons aged below 15) living in SDUs in about 25 900 households. The statistics by age group and by District Council district are at Annex II and III respectively.

The number of children living in SDUs reduced from 37 500 to 34 000 during the five-year period from 2016 to 2021. The proportion of children among persons living in SDUs (excluding foreign domestic helpers) also decreased from 18.1 per cent to 15.9 per cent. As the Government gradually increases the supply of traditional public housing, coupled with the additional short-term supply brought by LPH and transitional housing, we believe that it will bring changes to the SDU market, and help reduce the number of children living in SDUs.

(3) The Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA)'s objective is to provide PRH to low-income families who cannot afford private rental accommodation. HA handles eligible PRH applications under various categories according to the allocation policy of PRH. Given the limited public housing resources and the persistently pressing need for PRH, the eligibility criteria for PRH applications and priority for allocation of PRH units for the families with children are the same as ordinary families. As far as the current situation is concerned, if more priority schemes are set for the applicants, the quota for each scheme with priority allocation will be reduced accordingly. Therefore, we consider that the current arrangement has struck the balance among the needs of the applicants under various categories. We will continue to keep an open mind and closely monitor the needs of the society.

For transitional housing, operating organisations should allocate not less than 80 per cent of the units to persons who have waited for PRH for not less than three years (i.e. Category A tenants). Besides, organisations may formulate detailed criteria having regard to their service features, and reserve not more than 20 per cent of the units for other categories of applicants (i.e. Category B tenants), e.g. families who have waited for traditional PRH for less than three years but with imminent housing needs, etc. Operating organisations can apply to the Housing Bureau for adjusting the tenant ratio according to the actual circumstances of individual projects.

In selecting Category B tenants, operating organisations will consider a series of factors, e.g. whether the applicants have imminent housing needs, their current living environment, family situation (e.g. whether there are elderly member(s), child(ren), person(s) with disability in the family), etc. As the situations faced by different projects and organisations are not the same (e.g. location and service target), we hope to allow flexibility for

each organisation in considering the allocation of units to SDU households. The current practice has balanced the needs of various types of applicants, while allowing operating organisations flexibility to adjust and make suitable arrangements according to the actual needs of each case.

Taking the two large-scale projects, i.e. Yuen Long United Court and Pok Oi Kong Ha Wai Village, as examples, as at June 2023, cumulatively 379 beneficiary households which used to reside in inadequate housing have child(ren).

Priority will be given to family applicants of LPH. Some in the community consider that individual categories of applicants (e.g. children) should be accorded priority. We will keep an open mind and fully consider different opinions. We are now formulating the allocation principles of LPH in details, with a view to ensuring that LPH could help those with the most imminent housing needs under a fair and objective yardstick.

As aforementioned, as the construction of transitional housing and LPH completes successively in the coming years, more appropriate living environment will be available for households currently living in inadequate housing. Coupled with the increasing supply of traditional public housing, the number of SDUs of poor quality will decrease gradually, and the living environment of the families and children concerned will be improved.

Thank you, president.