

LCQ9: Promoting digital nomadism

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Johnny Ng and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (October 30):

Question:

It has been reported that digital nomadism (i.e. working remotely online while living abroad) has become a lifestyle with growing popularity in recent years. Some studies have estimated that the population of digital nomads worldwide would increase to 1 billion by 2035. There are views that hiring digital nomads is conducive to business operation by reducing employers' costs and expenses, while the presence of digital nomads in the host communities will also contribute to local economic growth. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Government will or has estimate(d) and assess(ed) the economic benefits that can be brought to Hong Kong by implementing digital nomad policies to attract talents to work and live in Hong Kong;

(2) as there are views pointing out that digital nomads can help expand the talent pool to a worldwide scale, and it is learnt that at present, about 60 countries and places across the globe have already introduced digital nomad visas (e.g. the digital nomad visa launched by Thailand this year has a validity of five years, permitting a stay of up to 180 days per visit, while the digital nomad visa introduced by Japan this year allows holders to bring along with them their family members), whether the Government will, by drawing reference from the relevant practices, issue digital nomad visas to overseas and Mainland talents, or even roll out related preferential policies (including temporary resident visas, accommodation allowance, family-friendly measures and tax incentives, etc) in order to attract specific types of digital nomads (e.g. talents related to Web 3.0, quantum computation and artificial intelligence), thereby attracting more talents to come to Hong Kong; if so, of the details of the plan and the timetable; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether the Government will, in the long run, consider launching an e-Residency programme to offer digital citizenship to foreigners, so as to attract more talents and enterprises from abroad to settle in Hong Kong?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Financial Secretary's Office (including the Office of the Government Economist and the Office for Attracting Strategic Enterprises), the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau and the Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau, I give the reply on behalf of the

Government as follows:

"Digital nomads" are essentially similar to visitors, who can live in one place but at the same time work remotely under an employment outside such place. "Digital nomads" will return to their places of origin or move to other places after a certain period of time.

In the case of Hong Kong, the Government has implemented a series of enhanced talent admission measures since the end of 2022 to entice global talents of diverse backgrounds and professions to settle and pursue development in Hong Kong. Talents will alleviate the post-pandemic manpower shortage in Hong Kong, fill local job vacancies and enrich the local talent pool for promoting economic development. As the objective of the Government's talents policy is to alleviate manpower shortage, we hope that admitted talents can make Hong Kong their home, inject impetus and contribute to the development of Hong Kong. "Digital nomads" are mobile. Although they will spend on various aspects in daily living during their stay in Hong Kong, they are no different from ordinary visitors. They do not fit well under the Government's talent attraction policy. The Government has no plan to introduce "digital nomad" visa arrangement under the talent admission regime.

At present, "digital nomad" visa arrangement is implemented in a small number of regions only. With limited statistics on relevant economic activities available, the Government is not able to estimate the potential economic benefits brought by adopting similar practice in Hong Kong. The "e-Residency programme" allows freelance workers to obtain some of the rights or facilitation granted to the citizens of the issuing place, or they may live and work in the issuing place. Such an arrangement involves complex issues such as taxation, civil rights and obligations, etc. It is currently implemented in a small number of regions only. The Government has difficulty in assessing its benefit and has no plan to implement such arrangement neither at present.