

LCQ9: Working Holiday Scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Pui-leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (January 15):

Question:

To provide an opportunity for young people in Hong Kong to gain first-hand experience living and working in a foreign culture and broaden their horizons, the Government has established bilateral Working Holiday Scheme arrangements (the Scheme) respectively with the governments of 14 countries, such as Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada and Korea. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of Hong Kong young people going to partner economies and young people from partner economies coming to Hong Kong through the Scheme in each of the past five years, with a breakdown by the type of short-term employment taken up by them; if it does not keep such information, of the reasons for that;

(2) as it is learnt that Hong Kong has different requirements under the Scheme for young people from different partner economies in respect of medical, healthcare (including hospitalisation), repatriation and liability insurance, whether the authorities will consider unifying the relevant standards; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) as it is learnt that a Hong Kong youth participating in the Scheme was unfortunately killed in a car accident during his stay in Australia, of the follow-up actions taken by the authorities in respect of the incident, and whether they know if the young victim has received compensation from the insurance company; whether the authorities will step up publicity to remind Hong Kong young people participating in the Scheme to take out specialty risk insurance covering working holidays instead of the general travel insurance; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Working Holiday Scheme (the Scheme) provides Hong Kong youths aged between 18 and 30 with the opportunities to broaden their horizons and experience different cultures through living and working temporarily while holidaying overseas. In consultation with the Immigration Department (ImmD), my reply to the Member's question is set out below:

(1) Based on information provided by the governments of partner economies and the ImmD, the numbers of working holiday visas granted to Hong Kong youths and youths from partner economies from 2020 to 2024 (as at June) by economy are at Annex 1 and Annex 2.

Hong Kong youths and youths from partner economies who participate in the Scheme are not required to notify or obtain approval from the governments of the partner economies or the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government before taking up short-term employment. Therefore, the HKSAR Government does not maintain figures on the types of short-term employment taken up by participants of the Scheme.

(2) The HKSAR Government adopts a standard agreement framework to negotiate bilateral agreements with the governments of various economies under the Scheme. During negotiations, the governments of the partner economies may, having regard to their own circumstances and considerations, discuss and agree with the HKSAR Government on appropriate terms of the bilateral agreements (including arrangements for healthcare and insurance), with a view to protecting the participating youths and providing the necessary flexibility for implementing the Scheme.

(3) To protect Hong Kong youths participating in the Scheme, the Labour Department (LD) reminds participants of important points to note through various channels, including the dedicated website of the Scheme, promotional materials and school briefings. Specifically, participants are advised to take out appropriate medical, hospitalisation and liability insurance (including suitable speciality risk insurance covering working holidays) before travelling to partner economies to ensure the necessary protection during their participation in the Scheme. The LD will continue its promotional efforts in this regard.

Hong Kong residents who encounter difficulties or require urgent assistance outside Hong Kong may call the ImmD's 24-hour assistance hotline (852) 1868; call the 1868 hotline using network data or use the 1868 Chatbot via the the ImmD Mobile Application; send messages to the 1868 WeChat or 1868 WhatsApp assistance hotlines; or submit online forms to seek assistance from the ImmD.

Besides, our country provides consular protection services to Chinese citizens (including Hong Kong residents of Chinese nationality) around the world through over 280 Chinese Diplomatic and Consular Missions (CDCMs) to safeguard their legitimate rights and interests overseas. The ImmD has been maintaining close communication with the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the HKSAR and CDCMs, and collaborates with relevant HKSAR Government departments (such as overseas Economic and Trade Offices) to provide practicable assistance to Hong Kong residents abroad who are in distress. The HKSAR Government provides assistance to youths participating in the Scheme in accordance with the above mechanism.