

LCQ18: The situation of importation of labour

Following is a question by the Hon Yiu Pak-leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (May 8):

Question:

The Government successively launched the Labour Importation Scheme for the Transport Sector – Aviation Industry and the Enhanced Supplementary Labour Scheme (ESLS) last year to alleviate the manpower shortage across different sectors. However, members of various sectors have relayed to me that these two schemes, which have been implemented for more than half a year, are not as effective as expected and have failed to help them alleviate the imminent manpower shortage. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of imported workers who have arrived to work in Hong Kong since the implementation of the Labour Importation Scheme for the Transport Sector – Aviation Industry, with a breakdown by the 10 job types under the scheme;

(2) of the respective numbers of applications received and approved by the authorities and the number of workers involved since the implementation of the ESLS, and whether the authorities will compile statistics on/estimate the number of workers who have arrived to work in Hong Kong; of the aforesaid information on the 26 job categories normally excluded from the Supplementary Labour Scheme;

(3) of the respective numbers of applications from the hotel, guesthouse and travel agent industries received, being processed, approved and rejected by the authorities and the job types involved since the implementation of the ESLS; whether the authorities will compile statistics on/estimate the number of workers who have arrived to work in Hong Kong; and

(4) as members of the industry generally consider that the progress of processing applications under the ESLS has been slow, making it difficult to alleviate the imminent frontline manpower constraints facing the industry, and the Government indicated in the reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on the 10th of last month that new measures will be introduced shortly to further improve the workflow of processing relevant applications, of the anticipated reduction in the average time taken to process each application following the implementation of the new measures?

Reply:

President,

To cope with the challenges brought by manpower shortage, the Government has enhanced the mechanism for importation of workers on the premise of safeguarding the employment priority for local workers. On July 17, 2023, the Transport and Logistics Bureau (TLB) launched the Labour Importation Scheme for the Transport Sector – Aviation Industry (Aviation Scheme). The Labour Department (LD) has also implemented the Enhanced Supplementary Labour Scheme (ESLS) since September 4, 2023 to enhance the coverage and operation of the Supplementary Labour Scheme, including suspending the general exclusion of the 26 job categories as well as unskilled/low-skilled posts from labour importation for two years.

In consultation with the TLB, my reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(i) The Aviation Scheme allows aviation-related companies with direct contractual relationships with the Airport Authority Hong Kong to suitably import workers on the prerequisite of safeguarding the employment priority of local workers, with a quota ceiling of 6 300.

In the first round of application from July to August 2023, the TLB approved the applications from 28 eligible companies with a total of 2 841 quotas covering all 10 job types under the Aviation Scheme. As at April 2024, 1 450 imported workers had arrived to work in Hong Kong and their distribution with a breakdown by job type is at Annex 1.

The second round of application under the Aviation Scheme was conducted from March to April 2024. The TLB approved the applications from 27 eligible companies with a total of 2 982 quotas also covering all job types. The employers concerned have already started recruiting imported workers and those approved in the second round are expected to arrive to work in Hong Kong starting from June to July 2024.

(2) and (3) From September 4, 2023 to April 30, 2024, 4 239 applications seeking to import 41 470 workers were received under the ESLS. Of these applications, 31 574 imported workers intended to take up posts which were generally excluded from labour importation before (21 662 and 9 912 respectively for the 26 job categories and the unskilled/low-skilled posts). During the same period, 1 277 applications seeking to import 8 586 imported workers were approved under the ESLS, including 4 929 workers approved to take up posts which were generally excluded from labour importation in the past (3 910 and 1 019 respectively for the 26 job categories and the unskilled/low-skilled posts). A breakdown of the numbers of imported workers applied for and approved by the 26 job categories is at Annex 2.

In addition, apart from the approved applications, as at April 30, 2024, 1 028 applications in respect of those received after the launch of the ESLS had started or completed the local recruitment exercise, seeking to import 11 313 workers. The LD expects that the vetting of most of these applications will be completed in the second quarter of this year. The exact number approved will depend on the results of local recruitment and the application

details of the cases.

As at April 30, 2024, the major posts related to the accommodation services industry (including the hotel and boarding house sectors) received under the ESLS included room attendant, waiter/waitress and receptionist, etc. A breakdown of the numbers of applications received, under processing, approved and refused relating to the accommodation services industry is at Annex 3. The LD does not maintain a breakdown on the travel agency sector.

Employers approved to import workers under the ESLS are required to sign a standard employment contract with each of its prospective imported worker. They shall arrange their prospective imported workers to submit visa/entry permit applications to the Immigration Department within the period specified in the approval-in-principle letter (generally within six months from the issue date of the said letter). The arrival time of the imported workers depends on the progress of the employers' handling of the relevant procedures. The LD does not maintain the number of imported workers arriving and working in Hong Kong under the ESLS.

(4) The time required for the LD to process each application under the ESLS is affected by a number of factors, including whether the applicant employer has provided sufficient information or has requested changes to the application details during processing. If the job vacancies involves novel job titles or special skills, the LD will need more time to seek advice from relevant bureaux and/or departments, training bodies, professional bodies, etc., to set the reasonable wages, entry requirements, scope of duties, etc.

The LD has uploaded to the ESLS dedicated website the "List of Common Posts" covering the median monthly wage, working hours, entry requirements and duties of 156 common posts in different industries for employers' reference. To further enhance the workflow of processing applications, the LD on May 2, 2024, introduced a series of new measures, striving to complete the processing of newly-received applications for common posts within around three months. The new measures include:

(i) introducing an application form for common posts and assigning designated teams to process these applications to expedite the preliminary screening process for commencement of the four-week local open recruitment;

(ii) deploying staff designated to vet applications submitted by employers. The LD will remind the employers as soon as possible in case the information on the application forms is incomplete or the required supporting documents are missing;

(iii) exercising flexibility in the handling of recruitment advertisements placed by employers during local recruitment, and avoiding to extend the four-week local recruitment period as far as possible; and expediting the process of following up on interview results;

(iv) organising briefings for employment agencies involved in labour importation matters to explain the application arrangements of the ESLS to facilitate employment agencies to assist employers on the handling of

applications; and

(v) increasing the frequency of circulating the recommendations on the applications of the ESLS to the Labour Advisory Board.

The LD will continue to closely monitor the implementation of the ESLS, safeguard the employment priority for local workers and improve the processing of applications.