

## LCQ5: Permits for Proceeding to Hong Kong and Macao

Following is a question by the Hon Ma Fung-kwok and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Security, Mr Michael Cheuk, in the Legislative Council today (May 22):

Question:

There are views that holders of Permits for Proceeding to Hong Kong and Macao (commonly known as One-way Permits (OWPs)) coming to Hong Kong are the new blood in replenishing Hong Kong's workforce. However, according to government figures, the daily quota of 150 for OWPs has not been fully utilised in recent years, and the proportions of OWP holders (OWPHs) aged between 25 and 44 as well as those who have worked in the Mainland have both shrunk. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of first-time arrivals on OWPs to Hong Kong in the past three years, together with a tabulated breakdown by work experience, place of origin, pursuing further studies after arrival in Hong Kong and taking up employment after arrival in Hong Kong; the number of such arrivals who subsequently returned to live in the Mainland;

(2) given that the Government's statistics have shown that the greatest difficulty for OWPHs in adapting to life in Hong Kong is work, and the support services most needed by them are assistance in seeking employment and career training, whether the Government has steered new arrivals to join the industries currently plagued by labour shortages and provided them with corresponding training, so as to enable their early integration into the Hong Kong society to become a new force in Hong Kong's labour market; and

(3) as there are views pointing out that population growth in the Mainland is gradually slowing down and its socio-economic conditions are improving continuously, coupled with the under-utilisation of the daily OWP quota in recent years, whether the authorities have conducted any review of the OWP system and explored with relevant Mainland authorities the feasibility of adjusting the OWP quota?

Reply:

President,

Regarding the question raised by the Hon Ma Fung-kwok, having consulted the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau and the Labour and Welfare Bureau, our consolidated reply is as follows:

It is stipulated in Article 22(4) of the Basic Law that "For entry into the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), people from other parts

of China must apply for approval. Among them, the number of persons who enter the Region for the purpose of settlement shall be determined by the competent authorities of the Central People's Government after consulting the government of the Region." The provisions of this Article, in accordance with the interpretation by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in 1999, mean that Mainland residents "who wish to enter the HKSAR for whatever reason, must apply to the relevant authorities of their residential districts for approval in accordance with the relevant national laws and administrative regulations, and must hold valid documents issued by the relevant authorities before they can enter the HKSAR".

Mainland residents who wish to settle in Hong Kong for family reunion must apply for Permits for Proceeding to Hong Kong and Macao (commonly known as One-way Permits (OWPs)) from the relevant authorities at the places of their household registration on the Mainland. The policy objective of OWP scheme is to allow Mainland residents to come to Hong Kong for family reunion in an orderly manner.

(1) The Immigration Department collects data on the demographic and social characteristics of all OWP holders when they first enter Hong Kong at the Lo Wu Control Point. The Home Affairs Department (HAD) has also been conducting regular surveys on new arrivals aged 11 and above from the Mainland who have arrived in Hong Kong for less than one year to identify their profile and service needs. The information collected in the two surveys is uploaded onto the website of the HAD in the form of quarterly reports for reference by relevant Government departments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in planning services for new arrivals. The reports are also available for public reference.

The number of OWP holders arriving in Hong Kong from 2021 to 2023 and their demographic and social characteristics are at Annex. The Government does not keep track of their education and employment status after their arrival in Hong Kong.

OWP holders having come to settle in Hong Kong can enter and exit Hong Kong and the Mainland with relevant identity/travel documents. As Hong Kong continues to integrate actively into the country's overall development, there are bound to be more frequent exchanges between the residents of the two places. The Government does not maintain statistics on OWP holders travelling to the Mainland after arriving in Hong Kong.

(2) In general, new arrivals holding OWPs will go to the Registration of Persons Office a few days after arriving in Hong Kong to apply for personal documents and complete relevant questionnaires of the HAD. In 2023, nearly 60 per cent of these new arrivals were aged between 25 and 54. The Government fully understands that they would like to obtain information on employment upon their arrival in Hong Kong. In fact, relevant Government departments have been providing various kinds of support services to new arrivals from the Mainland.

Regarding training and employment support, the Employees Retraining

Board (ERB) provides suitable training and employment services to eligible local employees aged 15 or above, including new arrivals. Apart from general training courses, eligible new arrivals may also enroll in courses tailored for them in order to acquire understanding of the community resources, an overview of local job market, work culture, etc. In 2023-2024, there were over 800 enrolments of new arrivals in these tailored courses, with a placement rate of nearly 90 per cent among those having completed the placement-tied courses.

In addition, the ERB Service Centre located in Tin Shui Wai offers instant, targeted and diversified self-help and support services to those with training and employment needs, including language and generic skills workshops, and mutual support groups for new arrivals.

The Labour Department (LD) provides diversified and free employment services to assist job seekers, including new arrivals, in securing employment. New arrivals can visit LD's job centres and industry-based recruitment centres to obtain employment services. In addition, LD sets up a "Dedicated Webpage for Mainland New Arrivals to Hong Kong" on its Interactive Employment Service website, which provides employment information. The employment programmes implemented by LD, including the Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged, Youth Employment and Training Programme, Work Orientation and Placement Scheme, and Re-employment Allowance Pilot Scheme to be launched on July 15 this year, provide employment support to them and assist them in entering the employment market.

Regarding community integration, the HAD provides a wide range of services through district networks and NGOs to help new arrivals integrate into the community. These services include organising activities for Mainland residents applying for OWPs to come to Hong Kong to let them first have a better understanding of the living environment in Hong Kong; organising activities for new arrivals to learn more about the situation in the local community; organising computer training classes, Cantonese/English workshops, etc, to provide them with practical knowledge, as well as providing them with access to information on relevant public services through talks, exhibitions and distribution of guidebooks.

(3) The current 150 daily quota for OWPs is the upper limit. The Mainland authorities issue OWPs in accordance with the actual number of eligible applications submitted and strictly follow the vetting criteria. The 150 quota will not necessarily be used up. There are different views in the community on the 150 daily quota for OWPs, including views for maintaining, increasing or reducing the quota. Some of the views include advocating early settlement of Mainland family members of Hong Kong residents in Hong Kong for family reunion.

The overall usage of OWP quota is indeed affected by various factors, including the apparent reduction in the past few years due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. With the resumption of normal travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland, we note that the number of OWP holders arriving in Hong Kong has resumed in 2023, with an average of 112 persons per day, close to the

pre-epidemic average of 116 persons and 107 persons per day in 2018 and 2019 respectively.

In the past decade, cross-boundary marriages made up about one-third of the registered marriages in Hong Kong. With Hong Kong's active integration into the country's overall development and more convenient travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland, together with more frequent exchanges between Hong Kong and Mainland residents, we believe that the proportion of cross-boundary marriages may continue to increase. Therefore, we should keep an eye on the trend in the long run. Moreover, given the current criteria of the Mainland authorities, Mainland spouses are required to wait for a certain period of time before becoming eligible to come to Hong Kong on OWPs. As such, there is a need to continue the arrangement of allowing separated spouses and their children born in the Mainland to come to Hong Kong for family reunion through the OWP system.

The Government will continue to keep a close watch on the usage of OWP quota and, taking into account the views of different sectors of the community and having regard to the overall interests of Hong Kong, continue to reflect to the Mainland authorities its views on matters relating to OWPs.

Thank you, President.