

LCQ12: Employment Support under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Kin-por and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (March 26):

Question:

According to the paper submitted by the Government to the Panel on Welfare Services of this Council on November 22 last year, the Employment Support Services (EmSS) under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme will expire in September this year, and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) will replace the EmSS with the Support Programme for the Unemployed (SPU) for two years to assist recipients to enhance employability, better integrate into society and reduce reliance on the CSSA. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of able-bodied persons receiving the CSSA due to unemployment or low income and their average duration on the CSSA in each year since 2023;

(2) given that, as advised by the Government at the meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services of this Council on November 22 last year, the non-governmental organizations commissioned by the SWD to operate the EmSS are required during the contract period from April 1, 2020 to September 30, 2025 to assist at least 25 per cent of EmSS recipients in successfully securing employment or returning to mainstream education for at least one month, and at least 20 per cent of EmSS recipients to do the same for three months, but the respective percentages only stood at 22.8 per cent and 17.9 per cent as at September 30 last year, temporarily failing to meet the service performance requirements, of the counter-measures taken by the Government in this connection, and whether it has evaluated the effectiveness of the services concerned;

(3) as there are views pointing out that the objectives of the EmSS and SPU differ from one another in that while the former provides counselling services to recipients and requires them to make sustained job-seeking efforts, the latter focuses on ensuring meaningful engagement of participants through unpaid work, whether the Government will set service performance requirements for the SPU to make it distinct from the EmSS; and

(4) given the views that the Government used to measure the effectiveness of the EmSS by "the number of successful job placements", neglecting the evaluation of employment quality (e.g. wages and job stability), whether the Government has considered including more specific data (e.g. proportions of

those still remaining in the job at least one, three and six months after taking up employment, wage levels, and numbers of working hours) in its analysis of the long-term effectiveness of SPU, so as to ensure that future policy adjustments can be made based on empirical evidence?

Reply:

President,

As part of Hong Kong's social security system, the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme provides a safety net of last resort for people who cannot support themselves financially due to old age, ill health, disability, single parenthood, unemployment, low earnings or for other reasons to help them meet their basic needs. There are stringent means tests under the CSSA Scheme to ensure that finite public resources are targeted at catering for needy persons.

The CSSA Scheme not only provides cash assistance to needy persons, but also encourages able-bodied recipients with work ability to overcome employment barriers to achieve self-reliance. In April 2020, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) launched the enhanced Employment Support Services (EmSS) by commissioning non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to provide intensive counselling services to recipients, and enhancing the efficacy of NGOs in delivering the relevant services by leveraging the resources of the Labour Department (LD) and the Employees Retraining Board (ERB).

In general, unemployed able-bodied CSSA recipients aged 15 to 59 are required to receive the EmSS unless they have justifiable reasons for not being able to work (such as pursuing studies, or having to look after young children, sick or disabled family members at home). EmSS recipients need to comply with a number of obligations, mainly in terms of meeting NGO case managers and seeking employment continuously, failing which will result in CSSA stoppage for the relevant recipient and his/her household. Unemployed able-bodied CSSA recipients aged 60 to 64 may receive the EmSS on a voluntary basis.

I reply to the four parts of the question raised by Member as follows:

(1) The number of unemployed CSSA recipients and their average duration of receiving the CSSA in 2023-24 and 2024-25 are set out in Table 1 at Annex. The number of low-earning CSSA recipients and their average duration of receiving the CSSA in 2023-24 and 2024-25 are set out in Table 2 at Annex.

(2) to (4) The five-and-a-half year EmSS contract period will end in September 2025. During the contract period (i.e., from April 1, 2020 to September 30, 2025), NGOs are required to assist at least 25 per cent of the unemployed able-bodied EmSS recipients to secure employment or return to mainstream education for at least one month, and at least 20 per cent of these recipients to do the same for at least three months. As at December 31, 2024, these percentages stood at 23.1 per cent and 18.2 per cent respectively, which were close to meeting the performance requirements. The

SWD will continue to closely monitor the NGOs' service performance in the remainder of the contract period (i.e. January to September 2025).

Taking into account the past experience of the EmSS, public views on the EmSS as well as the labour market situation in recent years, the SWD will replace the EmSS with the Support Programme for the Unemployed (SPU) starting October 2025. The SPU will be operated on a pilot basis for two years by NGOs and/or other organisations. All unemployed able-bodied CSSA recipients aged 15 to 59 will be mandated to participate in the SPU and take up unpaid work on a weekly basis arranged by the SPU operators, until they have secured gainful employment or returned to mainstream education. Incompliance with the unpaid work requirement will result in CSSA stoppage for the participant and his/her household. The SWD expects the SPU to be more effective in motivating the unemployed able-bodied CSSA recipients to connect with the community, develop a work habit and accumulate work experience to enhance employability, thereby reducing their reliance on the CSSA in the long term. Meanwhile, SPU participants will continue to have access to a range of free employment services and training resources as well as relevant training allowances provided by the LD and ERB.

SPU operators are required to identify and arrange participants to take up unpaid work on a weekly basis in accordance with the SWD's requirements. The SWD is in the process of ironing out specific implementation details of the SPU, and organisations interested in operating the SPU will be invited to submit proposals in due course. The SWD will collect data on participants' compliance and CSSA stoppage during the SPU implementation for assessing its operation and evaluating its effectiveness.

LCQ1: Elderly recipients of Disability Allowance retiring in Mainland

Following is a question by the Hon Stanley Li and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (March 26):

Question:

Under the existing policy, if elderly recipients of Disability Allowance (DA) retire in the Mainland, they are required to reside in Hong Kong for not less than 60 days in a payment year, otherwise the amount of their DA will be deducted. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of elderly DA recipients who have received a notice in the past two years informing them that their period of absence from Hong Kong would soon exceed the permissible limit, and the number of those who have

received such notices and had their DA deducted; whether the Government has gained an understanding of the reasons why these elderly people have been absent from Hong Kong for a period exceeding the permissible limit; if so, of the categories of such reasons;

(2) in order to assist elderly DA recipients in retiring in the Mainland, whether the authorities will consider exempting them from the permissible limit of absence from Hong Kong, so that they are not required to reside in Hong Kong for not less than 60 days in a payment year, or consider enhancing the existing Guangdong Scheme and Fujian Scheme to include elderly DA recipients in these schemes; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) as the Chief Executive has indicated in the 2024 Policy Address that elderly recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance who opt to retire in Guangdong will be subsidised to reside in designated residential care homes for the elderly in the Province with a monthly subsidy of \$5,000, whether the authorities will consider allowing elderly DA recipients who opt to retire in Guangdong to receive the same level of subsidy; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

At present, the Government operates a social security system that provides cash assistance to persons with disabilities and other needy persons, including the Disability Allowance (DA) under the Social Security Allowance (SSA) Scheme and the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme. No contribution is required from the recipients, and the amount of assistance is determined based on their level of disability, financial situation and personal or family circumstances.

DA is non-means-tested with no age restriction. It assists persons assessed to be severely disabled in meeting their special needs arising from disability. Eligibility for DA mainly depends on the results of the medical assessments conducted by medical practitioners of the Department of Health (DH) or the Hospital Authority (HA). In general, Normal DA is payable to persons assessed by medical practitioners of the DH or the HA as being severely disabled to the extent that he/she needs substantial help from others to cope with daily life whose disablement will last for not less than six months. In addition to being severely disabled, applicants for Higher DA must also be assessed by medical practitioners of the DH or the HA as being in need of constant attendance from others in daily life who are not receiving government-subsidised residential care services, care services in public hospitals and institutions under the HA, or boarding in special schools under the Education Bureau.

I reply to the three parts of the question raised by the Member as follows:

(1) and (2) To ensure reasonable allocation of limited public resources and the long-term sustainability of the social security system, DA applicants and recipients must comply with the relevant residence requirements and permissible limits of absence from Hong Kong before application and during receipt of payment. This is to ensure that they maintain a close connection with Hong Kong, preventing people who have been living in other places for an extended period of time from receiving the allowance immediately upon return to Hong Kong, or continuing to receive the allowance despite prolonged absence from Hong Kong. In addition, the medical assessments required for DA recipients must be conducted by the medical practitioners of the DH or the HA to ensure the quality and consistency of assessments. The majority of DA recipients receive social welfare and medical services in Hong Kong on a long-term basis.

During receipt of payment, DA recipients are entitled to a permissible limit of 305 days absence from Hong Kong in each payment year. In other words, a recipient is eligible for a full-year allowance if he/she has resided in Hong Kong for not less than 60 days in a payment year. If a recipient has resided in Hong Kong for less than 60 days in a payment year, he/she will only receive the allowance for the period of residence in Hong Kong. This arrangement provides considerable flexibility for recipients who need to travel frequently between Hong Kong and places outside Hong Kong (including the Mainland).

Based on the records provided by the Immigration Department, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) will issue a Notification of About to Exceed the Permissible Limit of Absence from Hong Kong (Notice) to SSA recipients who are about to exceed the permissible limit of absence from Hong Kong. The Notice serves to remind recipients of the relevant permissible limit of absence from Hong Kong and to avoid being overpaid arising from exceeding the permissible limit. The SWD does not have information on the number of Notices issued to elderly DA recipients, the number of recipients whose allowance has been deducted, nor the reasons for their exceeding the permissible limit.

The Government has no plan to make DA a portable cash assistance or to abolish its permissible limit of absence from Hong Kong.

(3) The Government plans to launch the three-year Pilot Scheme for Elderly Recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance to Reside in Residential Care Homes in Guangdong (Pilot Scheme) in the third or fourth quarter of 2025. The Pilot Scheme provides a subsidy to elderly CSSA recipients who choose to retire in Guangdong to stay in residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) under the Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong, with a view to providing an additional retirement option to improve their living environment and enhance their quality of life. The Government will provide a monthly subsidy of HK\$5,000 to each elderly recipient to help them meet the expenses of staying in a designated RCHE in Guangdong. The Pilot Scheme mainly targets relatively healthy elderly CSSA recipients who are capable of taking care of themselves. At present, the Government has no plan to provide the same level of subsidy to elderly DA recipients who choose to retire in Guangdong.

SCED to visit Beijing

The Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Algernon Yau, will depart for a visit to Beijing this afternoon (March 26).

During his stay in Beijing, Mr Yau will call on the China National Intellectual Property Administration, the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He will also visit an enterprise and meet with representatives of the wine industry.

Mr Yau will return to Hong Kong in the afternoon on March 29. The Under Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Dr Bernard Chan, will be the Acting Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development during Mr Yau's absence.

Fraudulent websites and internet banking login screens related to Chong Hing Bank Limited

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) wishes to alert members of the public to a press release issued by Chong Hing Bank Limited relating to fraudulent websites and internet banking login screens, which have been reported to the HKMA. A hyperlink to the press release is available on the [HKMA website](#).

The HKMA wishes to remind the public that banks will not send SMS or emails with embedded hyperlinks which direct them to the banks' websites to carry out transactions. They will not ask customers for sensitive personal information, such as login passwords or one-time password, by phone, email or SMS (including via embedded hyperlinks).

Anyone who has provided his or her personal information, or who has conducted any financial transactions, through or in response to the websites or login screens concerned, should contact the bank using the contact information provided in the press release, and report the matter to the Police by contacting the Crime Wing Information Centre of the Hong Kong Police Force at 2860 5012.

Fraudulent websites and internet banking login screens related to The Bank of East Asia, Limited

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