

**Legislative Council Panel on Manpower  
Information Note**

**Survey on Supply and Demand of Domestic Helpers**

**Introduction**

This paper briefs Members of the findings of a survey on supply and demand of domestic helpers in Hong Kong.

**Background**

2. In October 2000, Education and Manpower Bureau commissioned, through Census and Statistics Department (C&SD), a consultancy firm to conduct a fact-finding survey on the supply and demand of domestic helpers in Hong Kong.

**Methodology**

3. The survey was conducted by face-to-face interviews with respondents. Out of the 5,596 households randomly selected from the registers of C&SD, 4,142 were successfully interviewed and enumerated. The findings from the sample were then analysed to deduce the situation for all households in Hong Kong.

4. The survey comprises four parts: (a) the current situation of the employment market for domestic helpers; (b) future demand for domestic helpers by existing employers; (c) potential demand for domestic helpers by prospective employers; and (d) potential supply of local domestic helpers. For parts (a) through (c), the heads of households were interviewed, whereas every household member aged 15 or above who indicated interest in taking up job vacancies of domestic helpers was interviewed for part (d).

**Major findings in the survey**

**(a) Current situation of the employment market for domestic helpers**

5. 10.1% of the households interviewed indicated that they were employing one or more domestic helper. 87.4% of these households were employing one FDH only, 12.1% were hiring one LDH and the remaining 0.5% were hiring two or more FDHs. That suggests that about 212,500 out of the total of 2.1 million households in Hong Kong were hiring either one FDH

(about 185,700) or LDH (about 25,700). 1,000 households were hiring two or more FDHs. In general, households with 5 members or more, with a higher income (\$30,000 or above) and with children under the age of 12 and/or members requiring special care are pre-disposed to hire a domestic helper.

6. Among the households employing domestic helpers, 87.9% were employing a FDH. The ratio of households employing FDH to households employing LDH was therefore about seven to one. Slightly more than half (53.8%) of the households employing FDHs opted for FDHs because their wages are lower than those for LDHs. Other reasons cited for employing FDHs included more suitable working hours (28%), more committed working attitude (20.2%) and more reliable (16.8%). For households employing LDH, 34.7% cited relative ease of communication with LDHs as the primary reason for their choice. Other reasons included more reliable (18.9%), wages are lower (18.4%) and more suitable working hours (14.2%).

7. 69.7% of the households employing LDH did so on a part-time basis<sup>1</sup> for a median of 12 hours per week. For the remaining 30.3%, i.e. households employing full-time LDH, the majority of LDHs (77.6%) did not stay overnight in their employer's residence. The survey reveals that a higher proportion (33.5%) of households with 1 to 2 members currently employing domestic helpers hire LDHs, when compared with the overall percentage (12.1%).

8. The skills requirements for FDHs and LDHs were similar: cleaning, food preparation, child-care and laundry. 50.6% of the existing and prospective employers of domestic helper considered FDHs would better satisfy their requirements, 18.8% considered LDHs more suitable and 30.6% considered FDHs and LDHs equally suitable. Almost all employers of LDHs (part-time or full-time) required cleaning, but fewer employers of part-time LDHs required cooking, laundry and child care services than in the case of employers of full-time LDHs.

#### **(b) Future demand by existing employers of domestic helpers**

9. Households employing domestic helpers were asked if they would hire a domestic helper, when the incumbent helper leaves. 86.9% of households employing a FDH and 81.4% of households employing a LDH said yes. This suggests that the future demand amongst households currently employing domestic helpers (both local and foreign) may shrink.

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<sup>1</sup> "Part-time" LDHs refer to those who work as a domestic helper for less than 30 hours per week. Conversely, "full-time" LDHs are those who work for at least 30 hours per week.

10. When asked their preference for the replacement, 96.5% out of the 86.9% households employing FDH would continue hiring FDH. On the other hand, 62.7% out of the 81.4% households employing LDH would continue hiring LDH. The rest of the households would switch from employing FDH to LDH (3.5% out of the 86.9%, or 5,700) and vice versa (37.3% out of the 81.4%, or 7,800). The results indicate that more households employing LDHs were likely to switch to employing FDHs.

11. The net effect of the projected shrinkage and switching is a possible reduction of the future demand by existing employers for LDHs and FDHs by as many as 6,900 and 22,300 respectively.

**(c) Potential demand by prospective employers of domestic helpers**

12. Of the households which did not employ a domestic helper, 2.3% declared their inclination to hire one within the next 12 months (1.03% for a FDH, 0.13% for a full-time LDH, 0.47% for a part-time LDH and 0.66% with no specific preference). Projecting this pattern for the total of 1.89 million households which do not employ a domestic helper, that would generate for the next 12 months about 43,000 job openings for domestic helpers: 19,300 for FDHs, 11,300 for LDHs (2,500 for full-time and 8,800 for part-time) and the remaining 12,400 for either FDHs or LDHs.

**(d) Remuneration**

13. The survey revealed that prospective employers of LDHs were prepared to offer a median hourly rate of \$50 for part-time service. This could meet the expectation from prospective part-time LDHs.

14. The median remuneration offered for full-time LDHs by prospective employers was \$3,500 per month which was significantly less than the median salary of \$5,500 per month expected by prospective full-time LDHs. However, in both cases, the number of hours of work to be covered by the proposed remuneration was not stipulated.

**(e) Potential supply of local domestic helpers**

15. The households interviewed in the survey covered 14,175 members who were aged 15 or above. 1.5% of them professed interest in taking up job vacancies as an LDH. This survey finding suggests that there is a supply of LDHs in Hong Kong.

16. Of the respondents who were willing to work as an LDH, 76.4% were

female, 77.7% were aged 40 or above, 57.3% with educational attainment at primary level or below, 71.9% were economically active (including being unemployed) and 23.8% were homemakers. The findings were generally consistent with the characteristics of typical LDHs, being middle-aged low-skilled females.

17. Of the respondents who were willing to work as LDH, 30.2% intended to work full-time. Of these, 64.6% did not wish to stay overnight in the employers' residence. The reluctance to work full-time and the preference to live-out are seen as disadvantages when LDHs compete with FDHs for employers who require services throughout the day. Conversely, LDHs would suit smaller households which do not have accommodation for a domestic helper or do not require full-time services.

### **Conclusion**

18. The survey shows that the demand for domestic helpers (both FDHs and LDHs) will continue to grow in the coming twelve months. This is mainly because the number of prospective employers (about 43,000) exceeds the potential shrinkage (about 29,000).

19. Members are invited to note the survey findings.

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