

LegCo Panel on Manpower
(meeting to be held on 2.11.2001)

PROMOTION OF JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR
LOCAL DOMESTIC HELPERS

Introduction

This paper informs Members of the findings of a fact-finding survey on the supply and demand of domestic helpers in Hong Kong and seeks Members' view on the proposed measures to promote employment opportunities of local domestic helpers (LDHs).

Major Findings of the Survey

2. The Education and Manpower Bureau commissioned a consultancy firm in October 2000 to conduct a fact-finding survey on the supply and demand of domestic helpers in Hong Kong. The survey results revealed that about 212 500 out of the total of 2.1 million households in Hong Kong were hiring either a foreign domestic helper (FDH) (about 185 700) or a LDH (about 25 700). Among the households employing domestic helpers, 87.9% were employing a FDH. The ratio of households employing FDH to households employing LDH is about seven to one.

3. Slightly more than half of the households employing FDHs (53.8%) 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 reliability (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 reliability (18.9%), wages are lower (18.4%) and more suitable working hours (14.2%).

4. 69.7% of the household employing LDH did so on a part-time basis 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 at their employer's residence.

5. On the supply side, the survey suggested some 1.5% of people interviewed professed an interest in taking up job vacancies as LDHs. While there is a potential supply of LDH in Hong Kong, the majority is not prepared to work full time (69.8%). Of those who are prepared to work full time, most do not wish to stay overnight in the employers' residence (64.6%).

6. The survey also showed that the demand for domestic helper (both FDHs and LDHs) would continue to grow in the coming twelve months. The projected demand amounted to some 14 000 openings and many of the prospective employers have indicated that they did not have a specific preference for engaging either a FDH or LDH.

Analysis

7. The survey findings suggested that FDHs and LDHs are addressing the needs of different types of households. While LDHs may not be able to compete with FDHs in the full time market, they would appeal to smaller households which do not have accommodation for a domestic helper and do not require full time domestic services.

8. As there are about 504 900 small households in Hong Kong and

* Definition of full time workers : Workers who work 30 hours or above per week.

only 15 600 have employed domestic helpers, there is room to promote the employment of part-time LDHs.

Measures to Promote Employment Opportunities for LDHs

9. To attract potential employers to hire LDHs, we propose to implement the following measures:

- improve the quality of service of LDHs;
- enhance employment services for employers seeking LDHs;
- enhance publicity of LDH service; and
- preserve the part-time market of LDHs.

Improve the quality of LDHs

10. In a recent user survey conducted by the Employees' Retraining Board (ERB), it was found that whilst employers were generally satisfied with ERB retrainees, some 30% indicated that the retrainees' cooking skills could be improved. On the other hand, an analysis of the reasons why some vacancies remain unfilled by retrainees also showed that the need to cook and the need to take care of children are two main factors which deter retrainees from taking up those vacancies. Therefore, there is a need to upgrade the skills of retrainees so that employers' expectations can be met and retrainees will be more confident in taking up vacancies that required such skills. There is also a need to provide quality assurance for employers. We propose the following steps be taken to enhance the training and quality of LDHs:

- (a) Provide intensified and multi-skilled training for LDHs

Longer, specific and more practical training modules on cooking, childcare and elderly care be provided to upgrade the skills of LDHs. Intensified and multi-skilled training will

make them more appealing to employers, and thus enhance their employability and competitiveness. Given that the ability to prepare Chinese food is an area where LDHs have an advantage over FDHs, specific training in these areas will reinforce the strength of LDHs.

(b) Common assessment test

Common assessment test and skills certification will be provided by the ERB to assure the quality of LDHs and increase their acceptance by employers. LDHs who have passed the common assessment test will be issued a competency card as recognition of their skills. They can register with the central register as described in 10(a) below.

Enhance employment services for employers seeking LDHs

11. Good service delivery is vital to attract potential customers. To provide better service to employers, we propose to set up a centralised LDH employment service under the ERB. This service will include the following :-

(a) Central register of LDHs and job vacancies to be set up at ERB

A central database of job-seekers who had passed the common assessment test and employers seeking LDHs will be set up. The central database will have information on the skills, preferred working locations, preferred working hours of the LDHs and requirements of employers. As the pool of LDHs and employers will be larger, the scope for job matching based on the requirements of both employers and LDHs will be improved. The number of unfilled vacancies should be correspondingly reduced. The central database will also

contain information on LDH job seekers who, for reasons of their own, do not wish to take the common assessment test.

(b) Dedicated hotline

A dedicated hotline will be set up to provide employers with 'one-stop service'. The hotline will allow employers to have an easy and ready channel to engage LDHs.

(c) Comprehensive employment services

Eligible Training Bodies (TBs), which conduct LDH training, will be assigned as regional service units in various districts to deliver placement, referral, and post-placement services to employers in the respective area. Where required, TBs will offer additional services to employers, such as the provision of interview venues, preparation of employment contracts, arrange for employee compensation insurance coverage and medical check-up of LDHs. TBs will also provide post-placement services including evaluation and counseling for the first three months to help employees and employers over any problems they encountered. If a LDH needs to improve her skills in certain area, the TB will help to arrange additional training modules to upgrade her skills.

Given that reliability is an important factor for employers, ERB will explore the possibility of arranging backup services in the event LDHs cannot turn up for work due to legitimate reasons. Registration of the personal particulars of LDHs by the ERB should also offer an additional sense of security to the employer.

(d) Minimise geographical mismatch

To tackle the problem of geographical mismatch, it would be necessary to make it worthwhile for LDHs to travel across districts, from say Yau Tsim Mong district where there is a surplus of retrainees to Mid-Level where there is an unfulfilled demand. This can be done by providing some form of transport assistance to make it less expensive for LDHs to travel and to package several jobs in the same district so that the working hours will be attractive to them. TBs will be encouraged to arrange for job packaging.

12. The ERB will take on the central co-ordinating role and will monitor the delivery of the job matching services by TBs.

Enhance publicity of LDH service

13. To coincide with the establishment of the new LDH employment service, intensive publicity will be arranged so as to attract prospective employers to make use of the service.

Preserve the part-time market of LDHs

14. As the survey findings indicate that FDHs are meeting the demand of local employers for full-time, live-in domestic service. FDHs are filling a void as LDHs are generally not prepared to undertake full-time, live-in vacancies. However, the situation is different in respect of the part-time market. There is a growing pool of LDHs looking for jobs in this sector. We believe that FDHs should not be allowed to live outside of the employers' residence as such arrangements would affect the job opportunities of LDHs. We propose therefore that employers should only be permitted to engage FDHs where they are able to provide accommodation for FDHs in their residence. They should no longer be allowed to make arrangements for their FDHs to live outside of their residence.

15. We propose to amend the standard contract of employment for FDHs to put it beyond doubt that employers will be obliged to provide accommodation for FDHs in their residence. Immigration Department will not grant permission for employment if the prospective employer cannot satisfy the Director of Immigration that he/she can provide adequate accommodation for the FDH.

16. We believe that enforcing the live-in requirement for all FDHs would result in more job opportunities for LDHs and propose that the new requirement be applied to new contracts as early as possible in 2002. As a transitional measure, we suggest that existing contracts expiring before 1 January 2003 will be allowed to continue with the live-out arrangement. After that date, live-out arrangement will not be granted for contracts renewed.

Way Forward

17. The Government is actively discussing implementation details with ERB with a view to launching the proposed measures as described in paragraphs 9 to 12 as a pilot scheme in April 2002. Members are invited to comment on the proposals set out in this paper.

Education and Manpower Bureau

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