

**For information on
9 July 2013**

Legislative Council Subcommittee on Poverty

Support for New-arrivals and Single-parent Families

Introduction

The Administration is always concerned about the service needs of new-arrivals from the Mainland and single-parent families. Various measures have been implemented to relieve their adaptation problem and enhance their capability to be self-reliant. The paper submitted to the Subcommittee in March this year (CB(2)823/12-13(03)) has outlined the relevant support services. This paper provides further information.

Situation of New-arrivals from the Mainland and Single-parent Families

2. According to the 2011 Population Census conducted by the Census and Statistics Department, there were a total of 171 322 persons from the Mainland having resided in Hong Kong for less than seven years, accounting for 2.5% of the total population of Hong Kong. Amongst them, males and females accounted for 53 939 (31.5%) and 117 383 (68.5%) respectively. The median age of males and females were 20.1 and 33.6 respectively. About 44.0% of those new-arrivals aged 15 or above had received upper secondary or post-secondary education. Most new-arrivals lived in Kwun Tong (23 327), followed by Sham Shui Po (18 939). Districts with more than 10 000 new arrivals include Yuen Long, Kwai Tsing, Shatin, Wong Tai Sin, North and Tuen Mun.

3. In order to better grasp the service needs and profile of new-arrivals, the Home Affairs Department (HAD) has been conducting a questionnaire survey on new-arrivals from the Mainland through one-way permits who arrive in Hong Kong for the first time. In the past few years, about 70% to 85% of the new arrivals indicated that they had difficulties in adapting to living in Hong Kong. Amongst them, “work” is one of the most difficult

areas to adapt , and more than half of new-arrivals expressed that they had plans to secure employment in Hong Kong. On the other hand, as housing problem is becoming more serious in Hong Kong, nearly half of the new-arrivals expressed that “living condition” is also difficult to adapt to. Other areas of difficulties include “family finance” and “language”, etc. On service needs, about half of new arrivals said that they would need support to “find jobs” and “apply for public rental housing”. About 20% of respondents expressed the need for assistance on “occupational skill training” and “English tutor classes”. Only about 10% expressed the need for “financial support from the Government”.

4. According to the 2011 Population Census, there were 81 705 single parents¹ in Hong Kong, and amongst them 64 040 were single mothers and 17 665 single fathers. The median age of single fathers was 47.4 and that of single mother was 42.5. The Census also indicated that close to 80% of single parents lived with their children only, and every single parent had 1.3 dependent children on average. In 2011, about 47 717 single parents were working, including 35 310 working single mothers and 12 407 working single fathers. In terms of education, during 2001 and 2011, the percentage of single parents with primary education or below fell from 29.3% to 17.5%, while those with post-secondary education increased from 7.6% to 14.6%.

Support Services provided by the Administration

5. Many general support measures provided by the Administration are applicable to new-arrivals from the Mainland and single parents. In addition, various Departments have been providing dedicated support services for these two groups of people.

Social Welfare Services

6. It is the Administration’s policy to provide welfare support for individuals and families in need (including new-arrivals from the Mainland and single parents). The 65 Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) and two Integrated Services Centres (ISCs) operated by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provide a

¹ Single parents refer to those mothers or fathers who have never married, widowed, divorced or separated, and living with children under the age of 18 in the same household.

spectrum of preventive, supportive and remedial welfare services. Such services include family life education, parent-child activities, enquiry services, volunteer training, outreaching service, support/mutual help groups, counselling and referral service. Extended-hour services are also available. Social workers will thoroughly assess the needs of service users and provide appropriate services. Through strategies of early identification and intervention, in-time support, collaboration across different sectors and provision of specialized services, the Administration aims to provide a range of services with a view to strengthening the functioning of family and rendering support to family-at-risk.

7. SWD provides funding to the International Social Service Hong Kong Branch (ISSHK) to operate the Cross Boundary and Inter-country Casework Service, which helps individuals and families handle and solve problems arising from geographical separation. Services provided include intake enquiries, counselling, emergency assistance, volunteer training, various groups and activities, and referrals. ISSHK is also approaching the new-arrivals at the Lo Wu Control Point and Registration of Persons Office of the Immigration Department. It provides the new-arrivals with information on Hong Kong's social services and may refer them to appropriate mainstream service units so as to help identify and prevent family problems at an earlier stage.

8. In addition, to enhance support for new-arrivals from the Mainland, SWD has linked up its hotline with the New Arrivals Connect Hotline run by ISSHK. New arrivals and their family members or families of persons holding two-way permits can choose to have their calls transferred to the New Arrivals Connect Hotline so as to receive specific and related services.

Employment Support

9. The Administration has been providing various employment support services to help new-arrivals from the Mainland and single parents secure employment. These include the provision of employment market information, employment advisory services and employment programmes.

Employment Market Information

10. The Labour Department (LD) provides comprehensive and free employment services for job seekers (including new-arrivals from the

Mainland and single parents). This is done through a network of 12 job centres, two industry-based recruitment centres, two youth employment resources centres, a telephone employment service hotline, an interactive employment service (iES) website, and numerous vacancy search terminals installed at various locations.

11. To cater for the needs of new-arrivals, all job centres have set up special counters to provide them with job referral services. Job vacancy information is also available in simplified Chinese. Tailor-made employment briefings are organized regularly and resource corners are put in place at job centres to help new-arrivals understand the local employment market and improve their job search skills. LD also organizes large-scale and district-based job fairs to enhance the dissemination of vacancy information so as to shorten the time needed for job search.

12. Besides, in view that some single parents may wish to find part-time work as they need to take care of their children, LD has set up a dedicated webpage on part-time vacancies at the iES website to help them find suitable jobs.

Employment Advisory Services and Employment Programmes

13. All LD's job centres provide employment advisory services, where job seekers can meet employment officers. Depending on the situation of the job seekers, employment officers will provide them with the latest information on the labour market and training/retraining courses, give job search advice, and/or conduct career aptitude assessment, etc. LD also administers various employment programmes to enhance the employability of job seekers who have difficulties in finding jobs. These programmes include the Youth Employment and Training Programme which provides diversified pre-employment and on-the-job training for young school leavers aged 15 to 24 with educational attainments at the sub-degree level or below. There is also the Work Trial Scheme which arranges job seekers to undergo work trials in real working environment so as to gain hands-on working experience. On-the-job training allowance is provided under LD's Youth Employment and Training Programme as well as the Employment Programme for the Middle-Aged. These programmes respectively encourage employers to hire young people and middle-aged persons aged 40 or above with employment difficulties. Employers who employ young or middle-aged new-arrivals from the Mainland through these programmes can

also apply for the on-the-job training allowance.

New Dawn Project

14. SWD has launched the New Dawn Project to provide employment assistance to single parents and child carers on Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) whose youngest child is aged 12 to 14. The project aims at preparing these single parents and child carers to re-enter the job market. Up till the end of December 2012, 26 162 persons had participated in this project. Among them, 7 582 (29.0%) have secured paid employment, with 2 509 finding full-time jobs and 5 073 finding part-time jobs. In January 2013, SWD integrated and enhanced the various employment assistance programmes under CSSA. It commissioned NGOs to operate the Integrated Employment Assistance Programme for Self-reliance (IEAPS) to provide one-stop integrated employment assistance service for able-bodied CSSA recipients. Single parents and child carers on CSSA are also target service users of IEAPS.

Re-training

15. New-arrivals and single parents can apply for training courses offered by the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) based on their needs and interests. Single-parents with children aged 18 or below have priority in enrolment. In 2012/13, about 14% of the eligible persons for ERB courses were new-arrivals.

16. ERB also offers dedicated training courses for new arrivals, including one full-time placement-tied course on Certificate in Foundation Skills for Employment and four half-day or evening generic skills training courses. These courses help new-arrivals understand and improve their capability to adapt to the local employment market, acquire job search skills, and establish positive working attitude. The placement-tied Certificate in Foundation Skills for Employment course can refer students in need to the child care services provided through SWD's Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project.

Child Care Support

17. Various initiatives are available to help parents in need take care of their children. This is particularly important for single-parents who can be

relieved for work as a result.

Child care services

18. To support parents (including single parents) who are temporarily unable to take care of their children because of work or other reasons, the Government has been providing subvention to NGOs to run a variety of flexible child care services. Apart from the aided standalone child care centres which provide 690 places for children aged under three, there are child care centres attached to kindergartens, providing about 23 000 places for children aged under three. Some centres also offer Occasional Child Care Service (OCCS) for children aged under six to support parents with sudden engagements or various commitments, and Extended Hours Service (EHS) to meet the social needs of families and working parents who require longer service hours. In addition, Mutual Help Child Care Centres (MHCCCs) provide services for child aged under six. A total of about 2 000 places are provided under the MHCCCs, OCCS, and EHS. At present, the general service hours of the above day child care services cover the mornings and afternoons of weekdays and Saturdays.

19. In order to provide more flexible and accessible services, SWD launched the pilot Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project (NSCCP) in October 2008. Upon the review of its effectiveness and demand, NSCCP was regularized and extended to all 18 districts in October 2011. Through NGOs, it offers at least 720 places to children aged under six. NSCCP consists of two service components: home-based child care services which operate from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m., and centre-based care groups which usually operate till at least 9 p.m. on weekdays, and cover Saturdays and some public holidays. The service operators have the flexibility to increase the number of home-based child care places on top of the minimum requirement set by SWD to meet the actual service demand. According to the record of SWD, about 23% of the households that benefit from the child care services between April 2012 and March 2013 were single-parent families.

20. The Special Needs Groups Task Force under the Commission on Poverty (CoP) decided at its meeting on 17 April to set up a working group to look into the issue of child care services. Following the working group meeting in late May, members visited the service operators of NSCCP in Sham Shui Po and Tin Shui Wai in late June. They also met with community organisations and stakeholders to know more about the project

and related childcare services as well as listen to views and comments of the community. The working group will explore ways to enhance child care support for new-arrivals from the Mainland and single-parent families.

After School Care Programme

21. SWD, through the NGOs, operates the After School Care Programme (ASCP), on a fee-charging and self-financing basis to provide homework guidance, skill learning, social activities and other services to children aged between six and 12. At present, the 145 ASCP centres provide around 5 500 places. In general, ASCP centres provide services in various sessions from Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. till 7 or 8 p.m. Depending on the actual need, individual centres may extend the service hours to the evening and operate on Saturday to accommodate the special needs of parents.

22. In general, there are vacancies available for various services (including daytime child care services and ASCP). To ensure that low-income families can afford the services, SWD provides different forms of fee waivers and subsidies and there are still unused quotas. The Administration will continue to review the operation of various service schemes to address the changing demands of the community.

Education Support

23. The Education Bureau (EDB) provides support services for newly arrived children, including school placement services for those aged six to 15, and provision of school information for those aged 15 or above to help them find the appropriate study pathways. Other support services include the full-time Initiation Programme, Induction Programme, and School-based Support Scheme Grant. These services aim to help newly arrived children integrate into the local community and overcome learning difficulties. Since the 2008/09 school year, the Initiation Programme and Induction Programme have been extended to cover newly arrived children aged under 18.

24. To facilitate the personal growth and full development of needy students, EDB has implemented the School-based After-school Learning and Support Programmes for schools and NGOs to organise various after-school activities. In 2012/13, its provision was around \$208 million, covering

about 217 000 eligible students. The Community Care Fund has also allocated \$28 million to EDB to conduct the After-school Care Pilot Scheme. Students can make better use of their time after school and before returning home for dinner to participate in more meaningful activities and learning, thereby alleviating the pressure of working parents (including single parents). More than 5 400 students have benefited from the Pilot Scheme. The CoP has agreed to extend the programme for one year to the 2013-14 academic year.

25. Students (including cross-boundary students) can seek help from stationing school social work service if they find difficulties in their academic work, social interactions, and behavioural and emotional development. Social workers will provide services according to the specific needs of students, and may refer the student to other service units to provide appropriate services where necessary.

Integration into the Community

26. HAD provides support services for new-arrivals to facilitate their early integration into the community. Services include :-

(a) District-based Integration Programmes

- Since 2011, HAD has implemented the District-based Integration Programmes for new-arrivals from the Mainland. These programmes aim to help the new-arrivals better understand Hong Kong, encourage them to participate more in the community and facilitate their early integration into society. The programmes have been implemented in Sham Shui Po, Wong Tai Sin, Kwun Tong, Kwai Tsing, Yuen Long, and Islands Districts. A range of activities are provided, including adaptation courses, mutual help networks for families and women, employees' training, volunteer services, talks on themes about family care and health education, and community visits, etc.
- Opinions collected by the District Offices and related organisations indicate that the programmes are widely welcomed by new-arrivals from the Mainland. Most participants considered that the programmes had allowed them to meet more new friends, build up social networks and acquire

different kinds of knowledge and techniques. They have become more confident and courageous and are more willing to share their feelings and express their views. In addition, they mentioned that in the past, they seldom toured around Hong Kong because they were not familiar with the environment. Participation in the programmes has enabled them to get to know more about Government facilities and historic scenes, enhanced their knowledge about Hong Kong and the community and increased their sense of belonging.

(b) Expectation Management Programmes

- Starting from October 2011, HAD has implemented the Expectation Management Programme in Shenzhen and Guangdong Province respectively to organise activities, including community education, support network and training courses for prospective settlers from the Mainland. This is to help them better understand the situation in Hong Kong before deciding to reside here.

(c) Ambassador Scheme

- The Ambassador Scheme has been implemented since 2012 and aims to arrange persons with similar backgrounds and experiences as ambassadors to proactively contact the new-arrivals, introduce to them services provided by relevant government departments and organisations, and, where necessary, make referrals to government departments for specific follow-up actions.
- Some cases have been referred to relevant government departments or social welfare organisations for follow-up actions. The issues involved included education, finance, housing and employment. HAD and the commissioned NGOs have planned to recruit more ambassadors and volunteers to cultivate a caring culture for new-arrivals.

(d) Media partnership

- HAD has established media partnerships to produce dynamic and interactive programmes in order to enhance public understanding of new-arrivals and promote social harmony.

In 2012, under the theme of 「愛大同・由社企出發」, the two hosts of the talk-show programme *On a Clear Day* toured around Hong Kong and interviewed new arrivals working in different social enterprises. The interview focused on how new-arrivals could learn more about Hong Kong, integrate into the community and make use of their skills in a working environment. HAD will continue cooperating with the media to launch other programmes to promote social harmony.

(e) Social enterprises

- Under the Enhancing Self-Reliance Through District Partnership Programme, HAD provides support for the development of social enterprises, whose projects, such as Health & Beauty by Lok Kwan Social Service and Health-link by Hong Kong Employment Development Service, offer dedicated employment opportunities and training to new-arrivals.

(f) Language courses offered under the Community Care Fund

- Two assistance programmes were launched in 2011 and 2012 respectively to provide subsidy for non-school-attending new-arrivals from the Mainland to take international public examinations for language proficiency and participate in dedicated language courses offered by ERB. These programmes are to help the new-arrivals with their continued education or employment, enhance their competitiveness, and facilitate their early integration into the community.

(g) Service handbook for new arrivals

- HAD regularly updates the Service Handbook for new-arrivals to provide them with updated information services provided by the Administration and NGOs.

(h) Quarterly surveys

- HAD conducts regular surveys on new-arrivals from the Mainland to identify their profile and service needs. The survey results are distributed to relevant government departments and NGOs for their reference.

Housing Arrangements

27. New arrivals who are allowed to stay in Hong Kong without any stay conditions (except conditions which relate to the duration of stay) may, on the ground of family reunion, apply for addition into public rental housing (PRH) tenancies if they are either the spouses of or children under 18 or dependent family members of the tenants; or they are the spouses and children of one of the tenants' married children whose names are already on the tenancy. Adult offspring of an elderly tenant, together with their family members, can be added to the tenancy without the need to satisfy the seven-year residence requirement in Hong Kong. In addition, if they fulfil all the eligibility criteria, including the income and asset tests, they can immediately apply for public housing through registration on the Waiting List. At the time of allocation, as long as half of the family members have resided in Hong Kong for a minimum of seven years and are still living in Hong Kong, the household is regarded as having satisfied the residence requirement and will be allocated public housing.

28. Under the Compassionate Rehousing Scheme, SWD may recommend to the Housing Department (HD) new-arrivals or single parent families for PRH, if they have difficulties in meeting their genuine, imminent, and long-term housing needs and are not able to solve the problems by themselves. When preparing recommendations for Compassionate Rehousing, social workers will make professional assessments on the situation of individual cases, including whether there are sufficient medical or social grounds. Individuals or families in need may consult the IFSC in their districts. Social workers will make assessments on their service needs based on the family situation and provide appropriate assistance accordingly.

Financial Assistance

29. Apart from the various support services as set out above, the CSSA Scheme provides financial support for families in need to meet their basic needs. Special assistance is provided to single parents and family carers under the CSSA Scheme. Higher standard rates are provided for the above groups (ranging from \$1,800 to \$2,250, which are \$315 and \$405 higher respectively than those for other able-bodied adults). Single parents are also provided with a monthly supplement of \$290, recognising the difficulties they face in taking care of a family single-handedly.

30. As a general rule, CSSA applicants must have been Hong Kong residents for at least seven years. The requirement provides a rational basis for the allocation of public resources and helps sustain a non-contributory social security system. The Director of Social Welfare may, however, exercise discretion to waive the residence requirement in cases involving applicants with genuine hardship. The discretion will normally be exercised where a new arrival works to support his/her family members as a recognition of his/her efforts to become self-reliant.

Advice Sought

31. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

**Labour and Welfare Bureau
Education Bureau
Home Affairs Department
Housing Department
Labour Department
Social Welfare Department**

July 2013