

立法會 *Legislative Council*

LC Paper No. CB(2)438/13-14(02)

Ref : CB2/PL/MP + WS

Panel on Manpower and Panel on Welfare Services

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the joint meeting on 9 December 2013

Women employment

Purpose

This paper gives a brief account of past discussions of the Legislative Council ("LegCo") and its committees regarding women employment since the Fourth LegCo.

Background

2. According to the General Household Survey conducted by the Census and Statistics Department, the labour force participation rate of female (excluding foreign domestic helpers) in the third quarter of 2013 was 54.5%.

3. On 24 October 2013, the Steering Committee on Population Policy ("SCPP") released a consultation paper on population policy entitled "Thoughts for Hong Kong" and launched a four-month public engagement exercise to run until 23 February 2014. SCPP proposed to tackle the demographic challenges arising from the ageing population and the lowering of labour force participation rate through five policy strategies. One of the strategies was to explore effective measures to increase the quantity of labour force by encouraging more people to work by, say, encouraging female homemakers to work.

Deliberations by members

Employment services for female job seekers

4. Members had all along been concerned about the employment support for different job seekers, including female employees. According to the

Administration, it was committed to providing comprehensive employment services to assist job seekers, including females, to find suitable employment. Through a network of 12 Job Centres, two recruitment centres for the catering and retail industries, the Job Vacancy Processing Centre and the Telephone Employment Service Centre, the Labour Department provided a comprehensive range of employment assistance and counselling services for job-seekers. Job-seekers, including women who needed to take care of their families, might also make use of the Interactive Employment Service website to register for employment services and browse up-to-date information on employment and vacancies.

Measures to facilitate women to join the workforce

5. Members were of the view that provision of comprehensive child care support services was crucial to releasing females to join the labour force. In discussing measures to alleviate poverty as well as medium and long-term social welfare planning, members held the view that the Administration should strengthen its child care and after-school care services so that grass-roots women who had young children could be unleashed from household matters to join the workforce. Some members considered that the Administration should enhance the subvented child care services in remote areas by extending the service hours so as to enable and support residents in these districts to take up employment in other districts.

6. According to the Administration, it was aware of the demands of working parents on child care support. It hoped that through these services more women could be released to join the labour market. To support parents who were unable to take care of their children temporarily because of work or other reasons, the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") had all along been providing subvention to non-governmental organizations ("NGOs") to run a variety of child care services and after-school care services. NGOs provided various child care services to children of different ages, which included standalone Child Care Centres ("CCC"), Kindergarten-cum CCC, Occasional Child Care Services, Extended Hours Services, Mutual Help Child Care Centre services, 18-district based Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project ("NSCCP") and After School Care Programme ("ASCP"), etc. As at February 2013, the number of child care places provided in CCC and under NSCCP and ASCP were 23 000, 720 and 5 500 respectively. With a view to increasing their flexibility to cater for the special needs of families, the child care services were provided in a flexible manner, including extended service hours during weekday nights, weekends and public holidays.

7. The Administration further advised that to enhance the flexibility of child care services, SWD had launched NSCCP through NGOs and offered services to children aged under six on a territory-wide basis in order to enhance the flexibility and accessibility of the services, and at the same time promote community participation and mutual assistance in the neighbourhood. On

ASCP, the Administration had provided after-school care services for needy children aged six to 12 through NGOs, so that they could receive care as appropriate. To ensure that low-income families could afford the aforementioned services, SWD had been providing needy families with different forms of fee waiving subsidies. The Administration would continue to keep in view the operation of various service schemes in order to meet the needs of the community.

8. In the context of considering the manpower situation of residential care homes for the elderly, some members expressed the view that more child care services should be provided in the vicinity of these homes so as to encourage and facilitate more new arrival women to take up full-time or part-time jobs in these homes. To this end, members urged the Administration to set up an interdepartmental task force to study the subject matter and conduct comprehensive planning for the provision of and support services for child care services.

Remuneration package for child carers of NSCCP

9. Expressing concern that the remuneration for child carers of NSCCP was as low as \$19 per hour, some members urged the Administration to review the hourly payment rate for these child carers. Members held the view that they should be regarded as employees of the service operators and be remunerated on a par with the statutory minimum wage level so as to attract more carers to join the Project.

10. Reiterating its commitment to strengthening child care services in releasing women to join the workforce, the Administration, however, stressed that the intent of NSCCP was to encourage mutual support among the neighbourhood and child carers who worked as volunteers and were rewarded with some kind of incentive payment. The Administration considered that the imposition of statutory minimum wage on NSCCP would drive up the service charge to a level which users of NSCCP might not be able to afford. It also undertook to relay members' views to SCPP which worked on how to enhance child care service in developing population strategies.

Relevant papers

11. A list of relevant papers on the LegCo website is in the **Appendix**.

**Relevant papers on
Women employment**

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Welfare Services	10 January 2011 (Item V)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
Panel on Welfare Services	21 January 2013 (Item I)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
Panel on Manpower and Panel on Welfare Services	19 February 2013 (Item II)	<u>Minutes</u>
Panel on Welfare Services	19 February 2013 (Item V)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u> <u>Administration's response to issues raised by deputations</u>
Finance Committee	11 April 2013	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
Panel on Manpower	28 May 2013 (Item IV)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
House Committee	8 November 2013	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Information Note</u>
Legislative Council	13 November 2013	<u>Official Record of Proceedings</u> <u>Pages 13-26</u>