

Legislative Council Meeting of 17 March 2021
Motion on ‘Supporting the unemployed and underemployed’

Purpose

The Legislative Council (LegCo) passed at its meeting of 17 March 2021 the motion on ‘Supporting the unemployed and underemployed’ (at **Annex A**), which was moved by the Hon CHAN Ha-kan and amended by Dr the Hon Priscilla LEUNG and the Hon LUK Chung-hung. On behalf of the Government, the Secretary for Labour and Welfare has responded to the motion at the sitting (at **Annexes B1&2**, Chinese version only). Having consulted the relevant bureaux and departments, the progress of the relevant matters set out in the Government’s response are reported in the ensuing paragraphs for the Member’s information.

Latest Unemployment and Underemployment Situation

2. As affected by the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, Hong Kong’s labour market is under notable pressure, but the situation has stabilised recently as the fourth wave of the local epidemic receded. As announced on 22 April 2021, the unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) edged down by 0.1 percentage point from December 2020 – February 2021 to 6.7% in January – March 2021, and after seasonal adjustment it fell by 0.4 percentage point to 6.8%. The number of unemployed persons decreased slightly by 1 800 to 259 800. Meanwhile, the Labour Department (LD) recorded a total of 84 421 vacancies from the private sector in March 2021, representing an increase of 50.1% over both figures in February 2021 and March 2020.

3. As the Government stated at different occasions, a wider vaccination coverage in the community would help stabilise the pandemic situation, such that we would be better placed to continue to relax social distancing measures and other restrictions on social and economic activities on the basis of ‘vaccine bubble’ in a gradual and orderly manner. This would lead to a gradual recovery of the economy, and improvement to the unemployment rate.

Unemployment Assistance

4. The Government adopts a multi-pronged approach in assisting workers and grassroots to tide over the difficult times, including creating more job opportunities, upskilling or establishing new skills for employees in need and enhancing job matching between employers and employees, as well as providing financial assistance to the unemployed and their families who have financial difficulties. The Government had a further discussion on the matters concerned with Members at the meeting of the Subcommittee to Study the Setting Up of an Unemployment Assistance System in Hong Kong under the LegCo Panel on Manpower on 13 April 2021 as detailed at LegCo Paper No. CB(2)954/20-21(01).

The Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme

5. The objective of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme is to provide a safety net for those who cannot support themselves financially due to various reasons (including that of unemployment), and help them meet their basic needs. Over the past few months, there has been a significant increase in CSSA unemployment cases. There were 19 810 unemployment CSSA cases as at end-March 2021 recording about 60% increase as compared with that of early 2020, which shows that CSSA continues to serve as the safety net effectively. To give more targeted support for the unemployed and their families who face immediate economic difficulties, the Government has launched the time-limited 'Special Scheme of Assistance to the Unemployed' (the Special Scheme) under the CSSA Scheme to temporarily relax the asset limits for able-bodied persons by 100% for 12 months from June 2020 to May 2021. Furthermore, the Government implemented another time-limited new arrangement under the Special Scheme for six months from April to September 2021. Specifically, the cash value of insurance policies of able-bodied CSSA applicants will not be counted as assets during the grace period of one year.

6. As for the proposal on allowing unemployed persons to apply for the CSSA Scheme individually, the Government wishes to stress that such a move will not only affect the entire welfare system, including policies pertaining to social security, education, healthcare and public housing, but also undermine the prevailing familial function of mutual assistance among family members. This change in social policy may bring about

irreversible change to family system, which is the very foundation of future society. As such, the Government has no intention to accede to this suggestion.

The Working Family Allowance Scheme

7. The Working Family Allowance (WFA) Scheme aims to support lower-income working households which are not on CSSA and have longer working hours (e.g. engaging in full-time employment) by providing different levels of allowance according to the principle of rewarding hard work. Having regard to the impact of the pandemic, the Government has obtained the approval of the Finance Committee of LegCo on 26 March 2021 to reduce the WFA working hour requirements for non-single-parent households from June 2021 to May 2022, which include substantially reducing the working hour requirement for Basic Allowance from 144 to 72 hours per month, as well as reducing the working hour requirement for Medium Allowance from 168 to 132 hours per month, so that more low-income households will be eligible for WFA or some existing beneficiaries may receive slightly higher allowance. It is crudely estimated that an additional 24 000 households would benefit from this time-limited arrangement.

Support Measures from the Employees Retraining Board

8. The retraining services provided by the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) contributes to the Government's existing unemployment assistance system. Apart from the 140 000 regular training places provided annually covering areas of 28 industries and various generic skills, ERB has launched three tranches of the Love Upgrading Special Scheme (the Special Scheme) between October 2019 and January 2021 to provide training and allowance for trainees affected by the economic situation; since then 40 000 training places have been provided. The Special Scheme imposes no restriction on education attainment, where unemployed or underemployed persons may opt for full-time / part-time training courses according to their needs, and apply for training allowance. The statutory cap of training allowance has been increased from \$4,000 to \$5,800 per month. Following the completion of the third tranche of the Special Scheme in June 2021, ERB will launch the fourth tranche in July for six months until the end of 2021, benefiting an additional 20 000 trainees. ERB will continue to enhance the Special Scheme by providing more training options and more online courses for

trainees to engage in distance learning during the epidemic. ERB will also promote the First-Hire-Then-Train Scheme to more industries. As for the proposal to further increase the training allowance to \$9,000, it will deviate from the original intention to help trainees meet the travelling and meal expenses arising from attending retraining courses, and is even twisting the retraining policy, which makes it difficult to adopt.

Creating Jobs

9. According to the information provided by the Civil Service Bureau, the Government has, through the Job Creation Scheme under the Anti-epidemic Fund, created around 30 000 time-limited jobs in the public and private sectors in two years' time for people of different skill sets and academic qualifications, especially graduates and young people who lack work experience, to relieve the worsening unemployment due to the pandemic. As at end-March 2021, around 31 000 jobs have been created under the Scheme. About half of the jobs are created in the Government while the other half are in the non-governmental sector. Amongst, over 20 000 jobs have been filled while the recruitment of the remaining jobs has already commenced or will commence shortly. Moreover, the 2021-22 Budget announced the allocation of an additional \$6.6 billion to create around 30 000 more time-limited jobs.

10. Besides, the Chief Executive's 2020 Policy Address has announced that the Government will create more sector-specific job opportunities which are particularly suitable for graduates in recent years. Sectors like the green industry, construction industry, innovation and technology industry, property management industry, creative industries and legal profession are covered. In addition, the Chief Executive's 2020 Policy Address announced the launching of the Greater Bay Area Youth Employment Scheme to encourage and assist young people of Hong Kong to seize the career development opportunities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. The Scheme provides 2 000 places, around 700 of which are designated for innovation and technology (I&T) posts. As at 22 April 2021, a total of 2 302 vacancies, including 1 053 general posts and 1 249 I&T posts were provided by 311 enterprises. These vacancies were uploaded to the thematic website of the Scheme for open application by eligible young people. To encourage employers' engagement of youth pursuing professional qualifications, the Vocational Training Council and the Hong Kong Institute of Engineers jointly organise the Engineering Graduate Training Scheme, which provides salary subsidies for employers of

graduates. Similar schemes are now offered to aspiring architects, surveyors, bank practitioners and green professionals by the Development Bureau, Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau and Environment Bureau.

Improvement of the rights of employees

11. The motion mentioned about the requirement of continuous contract (i.e. being employed by the same employer for four weeks or more, and has worked for at least 18 hours in each week) under the Employment Ordinance (EO). The objective of the continuous contract requirement is to accord employees who have a regular employment relationship with their employers a comprehensive range of employment protection and benefits under EO. According to the result of the survey on employees with short duration or working hours released by the Census and Statistics Department on 18 March 2021, a majority of employees in Hong Kong (93.1%) were employed under a continuous contract. LD reported the survey result to the Labour Advisory Board and the Panel on Manpower of LegCo in April 2021 as detailed at LegCo Paper No. CB(2)971/20-21(05). The Government will continue to communicate with employees and employers as well as other stakeholders, listen to various views and convene further discussion on the continuous contract requirement at an appropriate juncture. As for the motion's suggestion of exploring the development of 'job sharing', the Government is of the view that the labour market of Hong Kong has all along been flexible, and has solemnly stressed during the debate of this motion and at various occasions that it will not encourage the culture of 'job sharing'.

Resumption of Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Flow of People

12. According to information provided by the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, the Government has extended the Return2hk Scheme¹ for Hong Kong residents returning from Guangdong Province to other provinces and municipalities in the Mainland since 29 April 2021. Hong Kong residents can choose to return to Hong Kong via the Hong Kong International Airport or the existing land boundary control points without being subject to 14-day compulsory quarantine requirement upon

¹ As at 30 April 2021, a total of 140 436 return journeys have been made by Hong Kong residents under the Return2hk Scheme.

fulfillment of the specified conditions under the Scheme. The Government has been communicating and liaising closely with the relevant authorities in the Mainland and the Macao Special Administrative Region Government on pandemic control measures and arrangements for cross-boundary travel for residents of the three places. The Government is actively exploring the resumption of normal cross-boundary activities amongst residents of the three places in a gradual and orderly manner when the pandemic situation in the three places is under control and without increasing public health risks of the three places.

Conclusion

13. The Government will put in extra efforts to contain the pandemic, revive the economy, and put in place appropriate measures to assist those in need as affected by the pandemic.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
Civil Service Bureau
Food and Health Bureau
Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau
May 2021

(Translation)

Council meeting of 17 March 2021

**Hon CHAN Hak-kan's motion on
"Supporting the unemployed and underemployed"**

Motion as amended by Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG and Hon LUK Chung-hung

That, the unemployment rate in Hong Kong had all along remained at a low level of below 4% from 2011 to 2019, but due to the blow of the riots and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic, coupled with the impacts from the uncertainties in overseas markets, the Hong Kong economy has suffered a continued decline with the unemployment rate hitting a record high time and again, reaching 6.4% which is a new high in 16 years; apart from about 260 000 people being unemployed, there are about 150 000 people being underemployed, and the six-month Employment Support Scheme ('ESS') ended in late November 2020, it is therefore generally expected in society that the waves of closures of enterprises will continue, and the unemployment and underemployment rates will also rise further; to support the unemployed and underemployed who are in financial distress to tide over the difficulties, this Council urges the Government to actively consider implementing the following measures:

- (1) establishing an unemployment assistance to help alleviate the financial pressure of the unemployed;
- (2) establishing a support fund for occupation switching to assist the eligible unemployed in switching to other trades, becoming self-employed or starting their own businesses;
- (3) enhancing the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme by waiving for the unemployed who are living with family members the requirement that applications must be made on a household basis, so that they may apply on their own, and at the same time further relaxing the asset limits, thereby lowering the application threshold;
- (4) enhancing the existing Working Family Allowance Scheme and establishing an 'underemployment allowance' to provide direct support for low-income working families;

- (5) creating more temporary posts, including providing more internship programmes exclusively for young people and fresh graduates;
- (6) expediting the promotion of different government projects and further increasing the number of related civil service posts (including professional posts), and extending the ‘First-Hire-Then-Train’ Scheme of the Employees Retraining Board to more industries and job types, so as to increase employment opportunities;
- (7) establishing a youth professional development fund to provide employers with salary subsidies for employees, so as to encourage employers to hire young people who are going to acquire professional qualifications by examination;
- (8) after reviewing the two previous tranches of ESS and plugging its loopholes, launching expeditiously the third tranche of ESS so as to subsidize enterprises with genuine difficulties to retain jobs;
- (9) implementing as soon as possible the mutual recognition system for health codes of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao to resume economic and personnel interactions among the three places on the premise of fulfilling infection control requirements, thereby boosting the Hong Kong economy to create employment opportunities;
- (10) exploring the development of a half-time ‘job-sharing’ culture to increase job supply in the labour market; and
- (11) strengthening the support for local residents (especially professional service personnel) in employment and entrepreneurship in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, so as to expand the room for development of the unemployed and underemployed;
- (12) introducing immediately a cash allowance for unemployment and suspension of work, subject to a ceiling of \$9,000 for a six-month payment period, and establishing an unemployment assistance scheme in the long run;
- (13) lowering the Working Family Allowance (‘WFA’) Scheme’s monthly working hour requirements, including adjusting the requirement to 72 hours or more for Higher Allowance, 54 to less than 72 hours for Medium Allowance, and 36 to less than 54 hours for Basic Allowance, so that more underemployed households will be eligible for WFA;

- (14) lowering the application threshold for the unemployment support scheme under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance, including extending the grace period for owner-occupied residential properties in the asset test and exempting the cash value of insurance policies;
- (15) adopting a welfare-to-work approach to create more employment opportunities for hiring the unemployed, including having the Government take the lead to increase the number of short-term posts, and providing more internship programmes exclusively for low-skilled workers; and encouraging public and private organizations to recruit additional staff;
- (16) reviewing the provisions on continuous contract under the Employment Ordinance to strengthen protection for the rights and benefits of part-time employees and casual workers;
- (17) substantially increasing the number of various types of vocational training courses and the number of places and amount of subsidies, such as raising the maximum amount of allowance under the existing Love Upgrading Special Scheme to HK\$9,000; and actively conducting job matching to help the underemployed and unemployed to upgrade their skills, so that they can switch to other trades when necessary; and
- (18) on the premise of perfecting various schemes for supporting low-income families, creating more jobs in their communities with flexible working hours, whereby women and carers can work to help their families make ends meet, and at the same time exploring the impact of the development of a half-time 'job-sharing' culture on the employment market and the livelihood of employees, so that more targeted support measures for the unemployed and underemployed can be formulated in the future.

新聞公報

立法會：勞工及福利局局長就「支援失業及就業不足人士」議案開場發言
（只有中文）

以下是勞工及福利局局長羅致光博士今日（三月十八日）在立法會會議上，就「支援失業及就業不足人士」議案的開場發言全文：

代主席：

我感謝陳克勤議員提出今天的動議辯論，以及提出修正案的梁美芬議員、陸頌雄議員及邵家輝議員，讓我可以代表各相關政策局簡介政府為應對2019冠狀病毒病疫情衝擊而惡化的就業環境所採取的措施。

最新的失業情況

受到疫情影響，香港的勞工市場面對巨大壓力，失業及就業不足情況惡化。剛於三月十六日公布的二〇二〇年十二月至今年二月的平均失業率，未經季節性調整為6.8%，經季節性調整為7.2%。不過，懂得統計分析的朋友，只要分析過去半年的三個月移動平均失業率的變化，便會發覺本港失業率於二〇二〇年十二月急升至高峰，到今年一月及二月已有回落趨勢。

大家或許會留意到另外兩組數字與上述分析吻合。第一組數字是：勞工處在二〇二一年二月錄得共56 227個來自私營機構的職位空缺，較一月的數字上升了28.2%，按年上升57.1%。第二組數字是：社會福利署失業類別綜合社會保障援助（綜援）的申請個案，今年二月的數字按月下跌26.4%，按年下跌約5.7%。只要我們能將今次疫情第四波「健身室餘波」控制下來，加上市民更廣泛接受疫苗注射，經濟可以逐步恢復。我們可以謹慎地持有一個偏向樂觀的期望，失業率不會持續上升。

失業率是否真的被低估了？勞動人口下跌是我們關注的現象。不過若大家仔細分析，約20%是由於外籍家庭傭工（外傭）數目下降，從高峰期的400 000人降至現時370 000多人；第二個離開勞動市場的大群組是年輕人：第一類是現時就學年輕人比例多了，就業年輕人比例下降，全日制學生做兼職甚至全職的比例大幅下降；小部分則是年輕婦女因沒有聘用外傭而留在家中。我們看到60歲或以上的勞動人口參與率於二〇二〇年沒有下降，反而微升，所以大家無需擔心勞動人口大幅下降。還有一類很大部分的勞動人口下降，是部分原居於香港並每日到內地工作的朋友，已經不在香港居住，所以這一部分人亦不出現在勞動市場。如果大家看看我剛才說的所有數字，就會明白實際上因為這些不計算又減少了的勞動人口，相對一年前失業率反而在數字上、統計上會上升；單是剛才談的數字，也會令失業率上升。這是分母和分子的問題，不過這是統計分析，我不想再在議會詳細解釋了。

穩定就業措施

政府採用多管齊下的策略協助勞工及基層人士走出困境，包括創造更多的就業機會、協助有需要僱員增值或建立新工作技能、增強為有需要聘用職員的僱主與有需要尋找工作的員工配對工作，以及為有經濟困難的失業人士及其家庭提供經濟援助。

具體來說，政府透過「防疫抗疫基金」下的創造職位計劃在兩年內於公營及私營機構創造約30 000個有時限的職位，涵蓋不同技能及學歷人士，特別是新畢業同學，以紓緩受疫情影響而日趨嚴峻的失業情況。此外，二〇二一至二二年度《財政預算案》已宣布額外撥款66億元，再創造

約30 000個有時限職位。

行政長官亦已在二〇二〇年《施政報告》中宣布，政府會創造更多行業為本的就業機會，給有志投身該行業的人士，特別是近年畢業的青年。計劃的行業包括綠色行業、建造行業、創科行業、物管行業、創意行業及法律專業。此外，二〇二〇年《施政報告》亦宣布推出「大灣區青年就業計劃」，以鼓勵及協助香港青年把握粵港澳大灣區的事業發展機遇。

為繼續支援受經濟不景影響的僱員，政府已邀請僱員再培訓局在第三期「特別·愛增值」計劃完成後，緊接於今年七月推出第四期計劃，為期半年至今年底，讓額外20 000名學員接受再培訓，以及在受訓期間取得津貼。再培訓局亦會持續優化計劃，包括繼續擴闊課程選擇，並增加更多網上課程，供學員在疫情期間遙距學習。

為失業人士提供財政支援

政府明白當就業情況惡化，將會有更多的家庭需要短期的經濟支援。就此，綜援計劃一直有效地發揮其安全網功能。為更針對性地協助因失業而面對即時經濟困難的人士及其家庭，政府在綜援計劃下設立限時的「援助失業人士特別計劃」，把適用於身體健全人士的資產上限暫時放寬一倍。政府亦會由二〇二一年四月至九月的六個月期間，在特別計劃下推行另一項有時限新安排，不把身體健全綜援申請人的保險計劃現金價值計算為資產，豁免期為一年。

另外，政府會於明日（三月十九日）向立法會財務委員會（財委會）尋求撥款推行另一項有時限特別援助措施，即降低在職家庭津貼（職津）計劃非單親住戶的工時要求，包括把基本工時要求由現時每月144小時大幅降低一半至每月72小時，為期一年，使更多低收入住戶在合併住戶工時減少下仍能符合資格申領職津。與此同時，政府會同步取消以個人為申請單位的鼓勵就業交通津貼計劃，以調撥所得的資源推行限時大幅降低職津計劃工時要求的安排和處理近年大幅增加的職津申請，確保較有需要的住戶可及時獲得有效的支援。

政府亦將會另行向財委會建議暫時放寬短期食物援助服務計劃的資產限額12個月，與職津計劃的資產限額看齊，以進一步支援有經濟困難的人士及家庭。如獲財委會批准，上述安排最早可於二〇二一年六月起實施。

透過積極推行上述各項涵蓋面廣闊的措施，加上在二〇二一至二二年度《財政預算案》建議設立的「百分百擔保個人特惠貸款計劃」，希望可在疫情和經濟下行時，協助失業人士及其家庭渡過短暫經濟難關。

總結

代主席，我會細心聆聽各位議員就如何加強支援失業及就業不足人士的意見。當聽取大家的發言後，我會再作綜合回應。

本人謹此陳辭。

完

2021年3月18日（星期四）
香港時間13時29分

立法會：勞工及福利局局長就「支援失業及就業不足人士」議案總結發言
(只有中文)

以下是勞工及福利局局長羅致光博士今日(三月十八日)在立法會會議上，就「支援失業及就業不足人士」議案的總結發言全文：

代主席：

我再次感謝提出原議案的陳克勤議員，以及提出修正案的梁美芬議員、陸頌雄議員及邵家輝議員。另外，亦有多位議員就相關議題發言。事實上，支援失業及就業不足人士涉及多個政策範疇。現在，請容許我代表政府作綜合回應。

香港現有的失業援助制度

有不少評論認為香港缺乏一個失業援助制度，這與事實不符，在概念上亦有所混淆。

香港自從一九七一年政府成立公共援助計劃(Public Assistance Scheme)以來，已為有經濟需要——包括失業——的家庭提供現金援助。在一九七四年，在《僱傭條例》中加入遣散費，再於一九八六年加入長期服務金。政府在一九九二年成立僱員再培訓局，為需要轉業的員工提供培訓，期間亦提供培訓津貼。經過歷年的調整及改善，織成今天香港的三層失業援助制度。

第一層是遣散費／長期服務金，第二層是於再培訓或在職培訓過程中提供津貼，第三層便是在現時綜合社會保障援助(綜援)計劃所提供的安全網，為因失業而令收入不足以應付基本生活水平的家庭提供經濟援助。

立法會秘書處資料研究組為人力事務委員會轄下研究在港設立失業援助制度小組委員會，提交了「選定地方的失業保險制度」資料摘要的報告(立法會秘書處研究報告)。我高度推介給各位議員，希望大家細心閱讀；若沒有時間，都請大家閱讀其相關的簡報。

當中引述國際勞工組織二〇一九年研究指出，在已發展國家的遣散費中位數不足月薪的10%，而香港則是月薪的三分之二，即是這些國家遣散費中位數的六倍半以上。這資料告訴我們兩個明顯的事實：一是不少已發展國家既有失業保險亦有遣散費的制度，香港只有遣散費／長期服務金的制度；二是香港遣散費／長期服務金的水平遠遠高過其他國家。若大家再仔細分析不同國家的制度，就會發現香港遣散費／長期服務金的水平，比不少既有失業保險亦有遣散費的已發展國家的總水平還要高，所以認為香港的失業援助比這些國家差，是與事實不符。

當然，香港作為一個低稅區，社會保障的制度比上不足，比下有餘，勞工及福利局(勞福局)亦會不斷努力作出改善。相對二〇一七至一八年度實際經常開支，二〇二一至二二年度的社會福利經常開支預算增加了61.7%，總額超過千億元，佔眾政策經常開支的首位。這亦反映了我們在過往幾年的努力。

政府應對失業上升的整體策略

在今次辯論開始時的發言，我已指出，政府應對失業率上升的整體策略亦有三個層面。第一是創造就業機會，提供前後超過60 000個臨時職位，再加2 000個名額的「大灣區青年就業計劃」；第二是增加再培訓及在

職培訓名額及訓練津貼；第三是有時限地放寬綜援申領條件。再加上有時限地調低在職家庭津貼（職津）申領所需每月工作時數，以及財政司司長提出為失業人士而設的「百分百擔保個人特惠貸款計劃」。

就成立緊急／臨時失業援助金建議

就成立緊急或臨時失業援助金建議，在立法會內早於二〇一九年下半年已有議員提出。最初有意見提出的是每月5,000元，最多三個月。隨後，有意見加至6,000、7,000、8,000、9,000、15,000、16,000元，最高「升」至17,500元，最多六個月。

不過，在這個討論中，有一點是明顯的概念混淆，就是何謂「臨時」失業援助金的臨時時限，是指每一個領取的人所獲得的援助是有時限，抑或是指這個基金設有時限？若基金設有時限六個月，領取援助的人士便不一定可領取最多六個月。例如一個失業人士在基金成立後第六個月才領取，他便只可以最多領取一個月援助。上述的問題亦充分顯示，設立所謂有時限的「臨時」失業援助金不切實際，在政策上完全不合理。為甚麼第一個月失業的最多可以領取六個月援助，而遲兩、三個月失業所領取最高月數便要減少？最難向公眾解釋的是，為甚麼第七個月才失業的人士得不到與早幾個月失業的人士獲得的援助？設立一個有時限的「臨時失業援助基金」，是否想鼓勵大家失業要趁早，否則不會領取到援助金？若所謂「臨時」是指每一個領取失業援助的人只可領取最多六個月，這便是一個「永續」的臨時失業援助基金。

第二類的「臨時」建議，是當失業率下降至某一個水平，失業援助便可結束。當然，我們沒有水晶球預測未來失業率的走勢，但我們可以參考過往的經驗。二〇〇三年沙士（嚴重急性呼吸系統綜合症），三個月經季節調整的失業率最高升至8.5%，即是二〇〇三年四至六月的數字，這數字要至二〇〇六年三至五月才回落至4.9%，即低於5%，花了兩年十一個月；要至二〇〇七年九至十一月才跌破4%，即3.7%，花了四年五個月；到二〇〇八年的金融海嘯，失業率也未回落至理論上「全民就業」的3%，而失業率升至二〇〇九年六至八月的5.5%；要達至這所謂「全民就業」的3%失業率，要到二〇一七年九至十一月，前後一共花了十四年五個月。這些都是過往的事實，以今次疫情長時間對全球的影響而言，終點仍未在望。香港能否可以如沙士之後，在三年之內看見失業率降至低於5%，我們難以樂觀。

第三類意見是就開支「封頂」，譬如150億元。這建議所面對的問題與基金設一時限大致相同，我不重複了。

不少意見指由於疫情影響，導致失業率上升，所以政府應特事特辦，就如其他不少國家皆由於疫情而就其失業援助制度作出調整，以面對這個非常時期。

如果大家有閱讀上述我提到的立法會秘書處研究報告，便知道這些國家在疫情下所提供的臨時措施，都是建基於現有的失業援助制度。這些國家採用的措施，主要有時限地放寬申領失業保險的條件、可申領失業保險的最長月數或周數，或最高可領取的失業保險金水平。

香港特別行政區政府所採取的策略與其他國家無分別，都是建基於現有失業援助制度，就如在再培訓局的「特別·愛增值」計劃中，放寬參加的資格至包括擁有學士甚至博士學位的人士、將訓練津貼延伸至兼讀課程，以及調高每月最高津貼金額；在綜援制度中，有時限地放寬健全人士申領的資產上限，以及豁免計算保險現金價值作為資產的一部分；及調低職津計劃的基本津貼及中額津貼的工作時數要求，讓因要放取部分無薪假的低收入人士仍可符合申領職津的資格。

此外，亦有意見指，為甚麼「保就業」計劃可以做六個月便叫停，而不可以做六個月的「臨時失業援助金」？為甚麼失業援助金不能夠「臨

時」，我已經在上述詳細解釋，在此不重複了；而為甚麼「保就業」計劃做六個月便要停，我在昨日（三月十七日）的口頭質詢中第一題亦已清楚回應，亦不再重複。

國際經驗的其他啓示

我希望大家看看國際經驗的其他啓示。由二〇一九年開始，當有立法會議員建議政府成立失業援助金，我已不斷指出，據我所知，世界上並沒有一個國家會設立一個無須供款及無須經濟審查的公共失業援助制度，立法會秘書處研究報告亦印證這一點。我們要留意的，並非沒有國家做這件事這一事實，而是要明白為何沒有一個國家做這件事。

立法會秘書處研究報告也引述一些研究顯示，美國三成失業個案是由於失業保險金所致。大家若有留意美國在疫情中失業率的變化，便會注意到美國在二〇二〇年四月的失業率由三月的4.4%，一個月便急升至14.7%。若留意有關新聞，大家或會留意到，當時不少失業的美國員工，花了個多月都未能接觸到有關部門申領失業保險。這是由於失業人士急增，故此工作量不勝負荷。美國的制度是供款式的失業保險制度，在有供款的制度下，道德風險也是一個很受關注的問題。大家可以想像，一個無須供款及無須經濟審查的制度，它的道德風險會有多高。若我們今天有一個如此的制度，從國際研究的結果推算，我們最新的失業率便不會是7.2%，大有可能是超過雙位數。

在國際有關失業保險制度討論的關注點，就如立法會秘書處研究報告所指，是防詐騙的行政開支甚高。勞福局及勞工處曾作內部討論，若失業援助金是每月3,000元，行政費便要約1,000元。有美國研究估算，若失業保險金增加10%，裁員便增加18%。大家可以想像，若失業援助金是9,000元甚至17,500元，裁員的情況會是如何，相關防騙的行政費會是多少。

為甚麼上述勞福局及勞工處的內部分析是每月3,000元？這是現時英國的失業保險金水平，這只是大約相等於香港綜援個人標準金額。亦是由於如此基本的水平，這個英國稱之為Jobseeker's Allowance的失業保險金的道德風險十分低。除要供款外，領取的人士仍要定期見福利官，確保有尋找工作及不會無理拒絕新工作。我手上沒有這制度的行政成本資料，但仍可想像其所費不菲。如果我們借用這一套制度，可以想像如要處理每月20萬宗個案，每位個案管理人員可以處理100宗個案，我們便要聘用2,000人，租用6,000平方米的辦公室。當然，這更似是一個創造就業的項目。我相信以同樣的資源，在公營及私營機構創造更多有建設性的職位，成本及社會經濟效益會更高。

我非常歡迎議員和政黨提出的政策建議，不過，我亦希望大家可以參考外國經驗的利弊，如何在香港設立適合香港情況及有利香港長遠社會經濟發展的制度。

就陳克勤議員原議案的其他部分

就優化職津計劃的建議，我們將會向立法會財務委員會提出建議，有時限地大幅度調低工時要求，以協助開工不足的在職家庭。就創造更多臨時職位，財政司司長已作出回應，建議再增加30,000個名額。就「保就業」計劃的意見，我已在昨日的口頭質詢第一題作出回應，在此我不再重複了。

就盡快實施粵港澳健康碼互認制度，政府會努力，創新及科技局亦已作好有關係統的準備。只要香港的疫情受控及疫苗接種成功推廣，與粵、澳商討便能水到渠成。

就陳克勤議員的議案中提及發展「職位共享」半職文化的建議，我在昨日口頭質詢第一題的回應中，已指出香港的勞工市場靈活，飽受到勞工界批評的無薪假安排正是「職位共享」的文化。大家可以想想，一間企業

要求員工每星期放一天或兩天無薪假，假設是一星期五天工作，這個安排正是五人分享四個職位或五人分享三個職位，否則這企業便要裁減兩成或四成員工。政府沒有計劃推廣「職位共享」的文化。

就梁美芬議員的其他建議

就協助失業人士轉行、轉型為自僱或創業，這都是現時再培訓局的工作，大家看看再培訓局的網頁便知一二。就有關再培訓局的其他建議，如擴大「先聘用、後培訓」計劃，正是再培訓局現時努力中的重點之一。勞工處亦已提高各個相關就業計劃下僱主可獲發放的在職培訓津貼金額上限，在此我不再詳細講有關項目了，這些計劃亦均以試點方式提供額外留任津貼。

大家不要誤會再培訓局只提供基層工作的訓練，再培訓局亦有不少創科的課程，譬如區塊鏈的課程。

就為僱主提供僱員薪金津貼，以鼓勵僱主聘用準備投考專業資格的青年，這正是透過職業訓練局與香港工程師學會合作，為工程學畢業生所提供的「工科畢業生訓練計劃」。發展局也在「防疫抗疫基金」下為年輕建築師、測量師等提供同類計劃。若其他專業有具體的計劃，大家可以向相關政策局提出，聯絡勞福局或公務員事務局亦可，我們十分歡迎。

就支援本地居民到大灣區就業和創業的建議，正與政府在大灣區的工作計劃完全一致，最近推出的「大灣區青年就業計劃」便是其中一個例子。粵港澳大灣區建設領導小組亦已在二〇一九年的兩次全體會議中推出共24項政策措施，便利香港居民到大灣區內地城市發展、就業和居住，並加強大灣區內人流、物流等方面的便捷流通，其中包括支持專業界別到大灣區發展的措施，涵蓋的專業包括律師、建築業等。

就建議失業人士可獨立申請綜援計劃，我在過往的回應已指出，這是萬萬不能的。這個先例不但可能動搖所有香港的福利制度，包括社會保障、教育、醫療及公共房屋政策，更有可能動搖香港社會家庭成員互相扶持的家庭功能。這項社會政策方向，可能會對未來香港社會基礎建構的家庭系統，造成不可逆轉的破壞。我們不可不三思。

就陸頌雄議員的其他建議

陸頌雄議員建議將職津的高額工時要求由192小時降低至72小時，政府無法接受這個建議。職津的基本設計是多勞多得，每月192小時，平均計算為每星期約44小時。將高額工時要求調低至72小時，將破壞職津計劃的基本設計原意。

就建議檢討《僱傭條例》有關4-18連續性合約（連續受僱同一僱主四星期或以上而每星期最少工作18小時）的規定，雖然幾年前勞工顧問委員會曾作出討論但未能獲得共識，勞工處現正進行調查研究工作，在完成後會再提出討論。

就將再培訓局的再培訓津貼法定上限提升至每月9,000元的建議，我想指出有關津貼的目的是幫補學員為參加再培訓局課程時所花費的交通及膳食開支，以鼓勵他們接受再培訓。將津貼提升至9,000元只是變相「派錢」，偏離了再培訓政策的原意，亦可致再培訓政策變質，政府決定不會採納。

就邵家輝議員的建議

就邵家輝議員提出運用關愛基金的資源協助失業及就業不足人士，一是關愛基金同時會面對前述所講的所謂臨時失業援助金的同樣問題，與（剛才所說）政府的考慮一樣；二是關愛基金可動用資金少於80億元，不足以滿足各黨派（建議）中最低的失業基金水平。

總結

2019冠狀病毒病疫情為香港的經濟和市民的生計帶來前所未有的挑戰。政府會加倍努力嚴控疫情，重振經濟，繼續循開創就業機會、增加培訓及再培訓機會和提供適切的財政支援等多方面支援基層市民。本人謹此陳辭。

完

2021年3月18日（星期四）

香港時間17時37分