

立法會 *Legislative Council*

LC Paper No. CB(2)859/15-16(04)

Ref : CB2/PL/MP

Panel on Manpower

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 16 February 2016

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 statistics (excluding foreign domestic helpers) published by the Census and Statistics Department ("C&SD") in July 2015, Hong Kong had a labour force of 3 598 100 in 2014 and 1 612 900 of them were females. In the same year, the labour force participation rate for women was 50.7%, which was lower than the labour force participate rate of 68.7% for men.

3. In 2014, Hong Kong had 3 470 900 employed persons and 1 556 600 of them were females. There were 56 300 unemployed females and the unemployment rate of females was 3.5%, which was same as the overall unemployment rate. In the same year, there were 1 569 700 females aged 15 and above who were economically inactive in Hong Kong.

4. On 24 October 2013, the Steering Committee on Population Policy ("SCPP") released a consultation paper on population policy and launched a four-month public engagement exercise which ran until 23 February 2014. SCPP identified five policy strategies, which included, among others, unleashing the potential of local labour force with the focus on promoting women employment. The Administration formulated, according to the five strategic directions, a series of policy measures to encourage more women to join the workforce, including enhancing support for child care services and

creating family-friendly environment that enabled women to work. Such measures were included in the population policy action agenda which was announced by the Chief Executive in the 2015 Policy Address.

Members' deliberations

Employment services for female job seekers

5. 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 13 Job Centres, three industry-based recruitment centres, the Job Vacancy Processing Centre and the Telephone Employment Service Centre, the Labour Department ("LD") 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

Provision of child care services

6. Members were strongly of the view that provision of comprehensive child care support services and adequate trained child carers was crucial to releasing female home-makers to join the labour market. The Administration should give due consideration to strengthening the 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 expressed grave concern about the mismatch problem of the provision of child care services and the service needs in some districts, such as Sham Shui Po and Tsuen Wan/Kwai Tsing, where the utilisation rate of child care services had reached 100%. Some members also suggested 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.

7. The Administration advised that 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 organisations ("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. 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. While noting the actual service needs varied at district level, the Administration advised that a working group on child care services ("the Working Group) under the Special Needs Groups Task Force of the Commission on Poverty was conducting a comprehensive review on the provision of child care services and SWD would continue to closely monitor the demand of various child care services. The Administration would consider adjusting resource allocation and increasing the provision of service places and relevant subsidy when the needs arose. As a short-term measure, consideration would be given to examining the feasibility of in-situ service expansion in existing CCCs subject to the relevant requirements under the Child Care Services Ordinance (Cap. 243). In the long run, the provision of child care services in specific districts would be drawn up having regard to the circumstantial changes, including the demographic profile and service needs in different districts.

9. On the suggestion of implementing ASCP in all primary schools across the territory, the Administration advised that ASCP sought to provide after-school care services for needy children aged six to 12, so that they could receive care as appropriate. As various after-school care and learning programmes were run by schools and NGOs, subsidised by SWD or the Education Bureau ("EDB"), the suggestion of extending ASCP to all primary schools would need to be studied further. The Administration added that the Working Group, comprising representatives of SWD, EDB, the stakeholders and special needs groups, was undertaking a review on the child care services, including the After-school Care Pilot Scheme under the Community Care Fund. The review results would be made available in due course.

10. 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 newly arrived 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.

Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project

11. Members noted that 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 child care services, and at the same time promote community participation and mutual assistance in the neighbourhood. Some members expressed concern about the limited child care places under NSCCP, and considered that the Administration should allocate more resources for providing additional child care places under NSCCP to meet the actual service demand. According to the Administration, SWD had only set the minimum number of places to be provided by the service operators of NSCCP. The service operators would be given extra resources to provide additional child care places on top of the minimum requirement set by SWD to meet the actual service demand. There was an increase in the service usage with increasing number of child beneficiaries from some 7 000 in the financial year of 2010-2011 to 10 333 in 2012-2013.

12. Members held the view that the volunteer child carers of NSCCP 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. The Administration explained 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. As at early December 2013, a total number of 1 650 child carers who had received proper training were registered under NSCCP. The Administration advised that the Working Group was studying ways to enhance the child care services, including NSCCP. Members' views on the subject would be taken into consideration in the review.

Adoption of family-friendly employment practices

13. Some members considered that there should be specific measures to foster a family-friendly culture in employment so as to encourage women to join the workforce. There was a view that the Administration should develop more home-based job opportunities to facilitate women to work at home while undertaking household duties.

14. The Administration advised that it had all along encouraged employers to adopt family-friendly employment practices ("FFEP") and to allow flexible work arrangements. In the past few years, various Government bureaux/departments and the Family Council had strived to encourage employers to adopt employee-oriented management measures and implement FFEP. It was evident that there was an increasing number of employers granting their employees benefits that exceeded the statutory requirements under the Employment Ordinance (Cap. 57) ("EO") and provided them with flexible and varied work arrangements and support, such as granting compassionate leave and special casual leave, and implementing flexitime. Moreover, an increasing number of employers participating in the "Family-Friendly Employers Award Scheme" organised by the Family Council and the "Caring Company Scheme" organised by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service also showed the increasing recognition of FFEP by employers. Through LD's promotional efforts to showcase exemplary examples in implementing FFEP by enterprises of different sizes, employers were enlightened on the business cases of adopting such measures which would be beneficial to business development and staff recruitment and retention. The nine industry-based tripartite committees and the 18 Human Resources Managers Clubs also reflected that more employers were willing to implement FFEP with increasing resources allocation for the purpose of staff retention.

Proposed measures to further promote women employment

15. Some members suggested that the Administration should promote the development of labour intensive industries, such as environmental protection and waste recycling industries, which would create ample job opportunities for low-skilled and low-educated employees so as to address the problem of taking up fragmented jobs and casual work by female employees.

16. The Administration advised that the Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Women's Commission were conducting a time-use survey in collaboration with C&SD to examine why Hong Kong women withdrew from the labour market as well as the factors that would attract them to join or re-join the workforce. The survey was expected to complete by the end of 2014 and the findings would help the Administration consider measures that further promote women employment.

Employment benefits of part-time female employees

17. Some members noted with concern that women outnumbered men in entering employment contracts with short duration or working hours. Some members were of the view that the Administration should enhance the protection and benefits of those female employees who were not engaged under a continuous contract as they were not entitled to certain employment benefits

under EO. The Administration advised that it was reviewing the continuous contract requirements under EO, and several approaches had been put forward for deliberation by the Labour Advisory Board ("LAB"). The Administration would revert to the Panel on Manpower after LAB's deliberation on the results of its consultation with employers' associations and employees' unions.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
12 February 2016

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>
Panel on Manpower and Panel on Welfare Services	9 December 2013 (Item II)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
House Committee	24 April 2015 (Special meeting)	<u>Agenda</u>
House Committee	4 December 2015 (Special meeting)	<u>Agenda</u>