

For information on
19 October 2021

Legislative Council Panel on Manpower

Unleashing Female Labour Force

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the Government's measures on unleashing the potential of the female labour Force.

Employment Situation of Females

2. According to the statistics¹ published by the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD), Hong Kong had a labour force of 3 532 300, including 1 626 900 females (46.1%), in Q2 2021. During the same period, the labour force participation rate (LFPR) (i.e. the proportion of the labour force in the population aged 15 and over) for females was 50.0%, which represented an increase of 2.7% points over the corresponding figure of 47.3% in Q2 2001. The male and female LFPRs by age group are provided at Annex 1.

3. In Q2 2021, Hong Kong had 3 319 300 employed persons including 1 540 800 females (46.4%). Over the same period, there were 213 100 unemployed persons including 86 100 females (40.4%). In Q2 2021, there were 1 625 600 females aged 15 or above who were economically inactive in Hong Kong for reasons provided at Annex 2.

Measures on Unleashing Female Labour Force

4. The Government strives to create a conducive environment that would attract more women to join the labour force, such as enhancing child care support, employment assistance, etc., to remove barriers for women to enter or stay in employment, and help them keep a balance between work and personal life.

¹ The statistics are compiled based on the data collected in the General Household Survey (GHS) of C&SD. The GHS covers the land-based non-institutional population only. Foreign domestic helpers are excluded from the statistics.

Strengthening child care and after-school care services

5. To assist parents who cannot take care of their young children because of work or other reasons, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) subsidises non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to provide a variety of child care services, to meet the different needs of the parents and their young children. Since 2015-16, the Government has provided additional resources in enhancing the manpower of Child Care Centres (CCCs) including the enhancement of the manning ratio of qualified Care Centre Workers in day and residential CCCs in the 2019/20 school year. The Government introduced the “Child Care Centre Parent Subsidy” in February 2020 to partially subsidise the CCC service fees afforded by parents directly in order to alleviate their financial burden. To enhance the long-term planning of child care services, the Government formulated an appropriate population-based planning ratio for aided CCC places with a view to reserving suitable premises in housing development projects for CCC operations so as to better meet the service demands in the new community.

6. The After School Care Programme (ASCP) aims at providing supportive care services for primary school children whose parents are unable to give proper care to them during after-school hours because of work, job search or other reasons. SWD also implements the Fee-waiving Subsidy Scheme (FWSS) to provide financial assistance for children of low income families to attend ASCP. Since October 2020, SWD has implemented a host of enhancement measures, including adding 2 500 full fee-waiving subsidy places, relaxing the application eligibility and streamlining the means-test procedures of FWSS, increasing the subsidy level, providing extra subsidy for children with special educational needs, regularising the Pilot Scheme on ASCP under the Community Care Fund, etc. Furthermore, Mutual Help Child Care Centres (MHCCCs) are currently run by NGOs on a fee-charging and self-financing basis, providing a flexible form of child care service for children under three years old (children under six years old may also use the service if needed). To cope with community’s needs and optimise the use of resources, SWD has commenced re-engineering the 19 MHCCCs across the territory from 2021-22 to provide ASCP for pre-primary children, and increase the number of social workers and supporting staff so as to better meet the child care needs in the community. Besides, the Women’s Commission also strives to promote the interests and well-being of women in Hong Kong and advises the Government on the development of appropriate policies and initiatives, including introducing the Funding Scheme for Women’s Development to support local women’s groups and non-governmental organisations offering services for women. Under the three main themes of "Enhancing women’s employability and empowering them to live a splendid life", "Promoting women’s health and enabling them to live a happy life" and "Empowering women and bringing their strengths into full play", the Funding Scheme aims to encourage the community to organise more programmes and

activities to promote women's employment, women's health and women's empowerment.

Services by the Employees Retraining Board (ERB)

7. ERB provides eligible trainees (including females) with training courses that are market-driven and employment-oriented, assisting them to join or re-join the labour market. ERB offers over 700 training courses straddling 28 industries and generic skills. Females can enroll in these courses having regard to their aspirations, interests and training needs. Currently more than 75% of the trainees enrolled in ERB courses are females.

8. In considering the specific needs of women trainees with family commitments, ERB provides flexible arrangements and services, such as "Modular Certificates Accumulation Scheme" and "First-Hire-Then-Train" Scheme, for trainees to arrange their study and work flexibly. Under the "Modular Certificates Accumulation Scheme", trainees on completion of specified half-day or evening courses may apply for a certificate recognised under the "Qualifications Framework" (QF) bearing a qualification equivalent to the corresponding full-time courses, covering foundation certificates in training of post-natal care worker, elderly care worker, infant and child care worker, occupational therapist assistant and physiotherapist assistant. Under the "First-Hire-Then-Train" Scheme, participating employers suitably adjusted the working hours and leave arrangements to cater for the family commitments of trainees and provided on-the-job training and other related support measures to encourage trainees to stay in employment. The "First-Hire-Then-Train" Scheme covers industries with persistent shortage in manpower and assists trainees to land on jobs such as care workers and cleaning workers of residential care homes for the elderly, hotel room attendants, cleaning assistants, dish washing workers, tunnel traffic control officers (trainee), waiters / waitresses, recreation clubhouse assistants, etc.

9. ERB's "Smart Living" and "Smart Baby Care" Schemes provide free job matching and referral services in the areas of domestic cleaning, elderly care as well as healthcare massage and post-natal care services respectively for graduates (including females) of related courses to enhance their employment opportunities.

Services by the Labour Department (LD)

10. LD's 13 job centres, three recruitment centres for the catering, retail and construction industries, telephone employment service centre, the Interactive Employment Service (iES) website and its mobile application, etc., provide comprehensive and free employment services to job seekers (including females).

In 2020, out of the 41 180 job seekers registered for LD's employment services, 21 186 (51.4%) were females. In the first three quarters of 2021, 18 895 (52.1%) of the 36 275 registered job seekers were females.

11. Apart from general employment services, job seekers in need may obtain personalised employment advisory services at job centres. Employment officers will help job seekers match and find suitable jobs by providing them with job search advice, information on the job market, training/retraining information, conducting career aptitude assessment, etc. in accordance with their individual needs and preferences.

12. LD liaises with employers in various industries to canvass vacancies for job seekers with different educational background and working experience, and organises large-scale job fairs in various locations as well as industry-based and district-based job fairs at its recruitment centres and job centres to expedite the dissemination of employment information, striving its best to help job seekers with different backgrounds (including females) secure employment.

13. To meet the wishes of some job seekers (especially women) to work part-time to release time to take care of their family or other commitments, LD also organises district-based job fairs on part-time jobs and has set up a dedicated webpage on part-time vacancies at the iES website. LD will continue its promotional effort in encouraging employers to provide more part-time vacancies of which the working hours and arrangement are more flexible.

14. LD also implements and introduces timely enhancements to its employment programmes, such as the Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged (EPEM)², the Work Trial Scheme (WTS)³, etc., so as to raise the employability of job seekers who have special employment needs or difficulties, and to encourage employers to hire them. In view that some women are unable to work full-time due to various reasons such as taking care of family members, EPEM and WTS, which originally covered only full-time employment, have been extended to cover part-time jobs. LD's employment officers will assist job seekers in joining employment programmes which cater to their needs.

² LD implements EPEM to encourage employers to hire the elderly and middle-aged and provide them with on-the-job training through the provision of an allowance.

³ LD implements WTS to enhance the employability of job seekers who have difficulties in finding jobs by providing them with work trial opportunities. Scheme participants will be arranged to work in real jobs for one month (30 days) offered by participating organisations.

15. With a view to further encouraging employers to hire the elderly and middle-aged, young people and persons with disabilities (including females) and to provide them with on-the-job training (OJT), LD raised the ceiling of OJT allowance payable to employers under EPEM, Youth Employment and Training Programme, and Work Orientation and Placement Scheme in September 2020. LD also launched in the same month a pilot programme to encourage eligible employees who have participated in these employment programmes to undergo and complete OJT through the provision of a retention allowance, thereby stabilising employment. Depending on the length of OJT, the maximum amount of retention allowance that a full-time employee may receive is \$12,000.

Promoting family-friendly employment practices

16. The Government proactively encourages employers to adopt “employee-oriented” good human resource management measures, including the implementation of family-friendly employment practices to help employees balance their work and family lives. Such practices may include flexible work arrangements (e.g. flexible working hours and five-day work week), additional leave benefit to cater for family needs (e.g. parental leave), offering living support for employees (e.g. child care services, providing suitable facilities and work arrangements for lactating employees), etc. Since 11 December 2020, the statutory maternity leave under the Employment Ordinance has been extended from 10 weeks to 14 weeks, facilitating female employees to have more time to accompany and take care of their new born babies.

17. Members are invited to note the information in this paper.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
October 2021

**Labour force participation rates by age group and sex, Q2 2021
(excluding foreign domestic helpers)**

Age group	Labour force participation rate (%)	
	Male	Female
15 – 19	6.3	7.2
20 – 24	55.6	55.5
25 – 29	91.4	87.2
30 – 34	95.1	78.3
35 – 39	96.0	69.2
40 – 44	94.1	68.0
45 – 49	92.1	70.1
50 – 54	90.2	66.8
55 – 59	81.6	58.0
60 – 64	60.3	37.3
65 and above	17.9	7.5
Overall	65.7	50.0

Source: General Household Survey, Census and Statistics Department

Annex 2

**Number of economically inactive females aged 15 and above
by reason for being economically inactive, Q2 2021**

Reason for being economically inactive	Economically inactive females aged 15 and above	
	Number	Percentage (%)
Retirement/ Old age	716 900	44.1
Engagement in household duties	609 400	37.5
Attending educational institutions	189 300	11.6
Permanently sick/ Disablement	47 900	2.9
Other reasons	62 000	3.8
Total	1 625 600	100.0

Note: Number of persons may not add up to the total due to rounding

Source: General Household Survey, Census and Statistics Department