

OFFICIAL RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday, 5 June 2025

The Council continued to meet at Nine o'clock

MEMBERS PRESENT

THE PRESIDENT

THE HONOURABLE ANDREW LEUNG KWAN-YUEN, GBM, GBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE TOMMY CHEUNG YU-YAN, GBM, GBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE JEFFREY LAM KIN-FUNG, GBM, GBS, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE STARRY LEE WAI-KING, GBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE CHAN HAK-KAN, SBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE CHAN KIN-POR, GBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE MRS REGINA IP LAU SUK-YEE, GBM, GBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE PAUL TSE WAI-CHUN, JP

THE HONOURABLE MICHAEL TIEN PUK-SUN, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE STEVEN HO CHUN-YIN, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE MA FUNG-KWOK, GBS, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE CHAN HAN-PAN, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE KWOK WAI-KEUNG, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE ELIZABETH QUAT, SBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE MARTIN LIAO CHEUNG-KONG, GBM, GBS, JP

IR DR THE HONOURABLE LO WAI-KWOK, GBS, MH, JP

THE HONOURABLE JIMMY NG WING-KA, BBS, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE JUNIUS HO KWAN-YIU, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE HOLDEN CHOW HO-DING, JP

THE HONOURABLE SHIU KA-FAI, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE YUNG HOI-YAN, JP

THE HONOURABLE CHAN CHUN-YING, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE LUK CHUNG-HUNG, JP

THE HONOURABLE LAU KWOK-FAN, MH, JP

THE HONOURABLE KENNETH LAU IP-KEUNG, SBS, MH, JP

THE HONOURABLE VINCENT CHENG WING-SHUN, MH, JP

THE HONOURABLE TONY TSE WAI-CHUEN, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE STANLEY LI SAI-WING, MH, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE HOEY SIMON LEE, MH, JP

THE HONOURABLE ROBERT LEE WAI-WANG

THE HONOURABLE DOMINIC LEE TSZ-KING

IR THE HONOURABLE LEE CHUN-KEUNG, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE TIK CHI-YUEN, SBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE STANLEY NG CHAU-PEI, SBS, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE JOHNNY NG KIT-CHONG, MH, JP

THE HONOURABLE CHAU SIU-CHUNG

PROF THE HONOURABLE CHOW MAN-KONG, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE DAVID LAM TZIT-YUEN

THE HONOURABLE LAM CHUN-SING

THE HONOURABLE LAM SO-WAI

THE HONOURABLE NIXIE LAM LAM

DR THE HONOURABLE DENNIS LAM SHUN-CHIU, JP

THE HONOURABLE LAM SAN-KEUNG, JP

THE HONOURABLE ANDREW LAM SIU-LO, SBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE DUNCAN CHIU

THE HONOURABLE YIU PAK-LEUNG, MH, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE WENDY HONG WEN

THE HONOURABLE DENNIS LEUNG TSZ-WING, MH

THE HONOURABLE LEUNG MAN-KWONG, MH

THE HONOURABLE EDWARD LEUNG HEI

THE HONOURABLE KENNETH LEUNG YUK-WAI, JP

THE HONOURABLE ROCK CHEN CHUNG-NIN, SBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE CHAN PUI-LEUNG

THE HONOURABLE CHAN YUNG, SBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE SUNNY TAN

THE HONOURABLE JUDY CHAN KAPUI, MH, JP

THE HONOURABLE MAGGIE CHAN MAN-KI, MH, JP

IR THE HONOURABLE CHAN SIU-HUNG, JP

THE HONOURABLE CHAN HOI-YAN

THE HONOURABLE JOEPHY CHAN WING-YAN

THE HONOURABLE CHAN HOK-FUNG, MH, JP

IR THE HONOURABLE GARY ZHANG XINYU

THE HONOURABLE LILLIAN KWOK LING-LAI

THE HONOURABLE BENSON LUK HON-MAN

DR THE HONOURABLE KENNEDY WONG YING-HO, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE EDMUND WONG CHUN-SEK

THE HONOURABLE KINGSLEY WONG KWOK, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE YANG WING-KIT

REVD CANON THE HONOURABLE PETER DOUGLAS KOON HO-MING,
BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE TANG FEI, MH

THE HONOURABLE TANG KA-PIU, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE LAI TUNG-KWOK, GBS, IDSM, JP

PROF THE HONOURABLE LAU CHI-PANG, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE KENNETH FOK KAI-KONG, JP

THE HONOURABLE LOUIS LOONG HON-BIU

DR THE HONOURABLE NGAN MAN-YU

THE HONOURABLE CARMEN KAN WAI-MUN, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE TAN YUEHENG, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE SO CHEUNG-WING, SBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE ERIK YIM KONG, JP

THE HONOURABLE ADRIAN PEDRO HO KING-HONG

THE HONOURABLE SHANG HAILONG

PROF THE HONOURABLE CHAN WING-KWONG

PROF THE HONOURABLE WILLIAM WONG KAM-FAI, MH

MEMBERS ABSENT

PROF THE HONOURABLE PRISCILLA LEUNG MEI-FUN, GBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE FRANKIE YICK CHI-MING, GBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE DOREEN KONG YUK-FOON

THE HONOURABLE CHU KWOK-KEUNG

THE HONOURABLE CHAN YUET-MING, MH

PUBLIC OFFICERS ATTENDING

MR HO KAI-MING, JP

UNDER SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE, AND
SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE

DR LIBBY LEE HA-YUN, JP

UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH

DR JEFF SZE CHUN-FAI, JP

UNDER SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION

CLERKS IN ATTENDANCE

MS MIRANDA HON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL

MR MATTHEW LOO, ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL

MEMBERS' MOTIONS

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Members' motion with no legislative effect.

Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok will move a motion on “Establishing a top-level dedicated structure to devise a population policy”.

Two Members will move amendments to the motion.

This Council will proceed to a joint debate on the motion and the amendments.

Later, I will first call upon Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok to speak and move the motion. Then I will call upon Mr Kenneth LEUNG and Ms Nixie LAM to speak in sequence, but they may not move the amendments at this stage.

The joint debate now begins. Members who wish to speak please press the “Request to speak” button.

I now call upon Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok to speak and move the motion.

MOTION ON “ESTABLISHING A TOP-LEVEL DEDICATED STRUCTURE TO DEVISE A POPULATION POLICY”

IR DR LO WAI-KWOK (in Cantonese): President, I move that the motion, as printed on the Agenda, be passed. The main purpose is to urge the SAR Government to face up to the demographic changes in Hong Kong as early as possible and establish a top-level structure dedicated to devising a population policy, so as to promote short, medium and long-term population policies for the sustainable development of Hong Kong's economy and society.

President, Hong Kong is now at a critical juncture of advancing from stability to prosperity, but it is facing serious demographic challenges, with a persistently low birth rate, an increasingly ageing population and a gradually declining labour force participation rate. If these structural problems are not effectively resolved, there will be systematic manpower shortages in different industries and at different levels of the occupational hierarchy, putting immense

pressure on public services. Hong Kong's competitiveness and development momentum will also be seriously undermined. According to the Government's latest report on manpower projection, by 2028, the overall manpower shortage in Hong Kong will reach 180 000. The situation is worrying.

It is worth noting that there are currently varying degrees of manpower shortages in different industries and at different occupational levels, ranging from high-end talents and professionals, to middle-level technicians and grass-roots workers. Taking the construction industry as an example, a manpower shortage of 45 000 to 55 000 workers is anticipated by 2028. The international innovation and technology ("I&T") centre, one of the "eight centres", will face a manpower gap of 23 000. As a member of the Subcommittee to Study Population Policy and Initiatives under the House Committee, I have repeatedly emphasized to the Administration at relevant meetings that what Hong Kong lacks now is talents at all levels, not just high-end talents with an annual salary of \$2.5 million, but also those with an annual salary of \$250,000, including some grass-roots labourers and university graduates. Against such a grim backdrop, how can we implement the planning of the Northern Metropolis and promote new industrialization? How can we attract more leading enterprises to develop in Hong Kong? If there are only "generals" but no "soldiers", how can various trades and industries "win the battle"?

President, it has been nearly 10 years since the SAR Government published the report entitled "Population Policy—Strategies and Initiatives" in 2015. During this period, we have experienced the impact of various social incidents and the COVID-19 epidemic, as well as changes such as population movements. The needs of our society have become vastly different. It is time to formulate afresh a forward-looking population policy and put forward new proposals that are practicable. In my opinion, the SAR Government should set up a top-level structure dedicated to devising a population policy as early as possible. It should also improve top-level planning, prioritize population policy in governance, coordinate efforts across all sectors, and comprehensively plan for the population development and manpower resource allocation in the short, medium and long term. This should include conducting a new round of population policy review, and setting up a demographic database to dynamically track trends in labour supply and demand and talent flows and employ data-driven decision-making. Only then can we truly prepare for the future. At the same time, this dedicated structure should have the substantive power to coordinate, breaking down departmental

barriers and consolidating the resources of different Policy Bureaux, while strengthening interdepartmental coordination. For example, it could require the Development Bureau to synchronize the planning of land and population capacity, or the Education Bureau to adjust resource allocation for different disciplines according to industry needs.

President, in order to effectively address the demographic crisis in Hong Kong, the SAR Government obviously cannot just rely on piecemeal policies to “treat the head when the head aches and treat the foot when the foot hurts”. In order to make the most of this dedicated structure’s roles and functions, the authorities should introduce the following complementary policy measures as part of a multi-pronged approach.

In the short term, the authorities should continue to enhance the labour importation policy to fill the critical gap. Although the various labour importation schemes launched by the Government in recent years, including the Enhanced Supplementary Labour Scheme and the Sector-specific Labour Importation Schemes, have begun to bear fruit, they are still inadequate in scale. For example, by 2028, the construction industry is estimated to have a shortfall of around 50 000 workers, while the current quota is only 12 000; and there will be a shortfall of 60 000 skilled technical workers across all industries, while the quota under the present scheme is only 10 000. The authorities should review and expand the relevant quotas in a timely manner, while also expediting the approval process to fill the short-term gap.

At the same time, the authorities should strengthen the mechanism for nurturing and retraining the local labour force, and strive to raise the overall labour force participation rate, particularly by unleashing the potential labour force of women, young people and the silver-haired group. The Government should enable more people to enter the workforce by providing retraining, employment support, flexible work arrangements, community childcare and elderly care services, etc. For example, efforts should be made to promote a family-friendly workplace culture and improve the Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged. The Government can also take the lead in implementing a flexible retirement system that allows civil servants aged 65 and above to continue to be employed based on their abilities, and set up a silver-haired entrepreneurship fund to encourage the elderly to give full play to their strengths.

In the medium term, the authorities should align with the development of the “eight centres” and optimize the allocation of education resources. The “eight centres” are eight priority areas for development identified by the country for Hong Kong, including an international financial centre, an international I&T centre, an East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange, an international trade centre, an international shipping centre, an international aviation hub, a centre for international legal and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region, and a regional intellectual property trading centre. They represent an important direction for the future development of Hong Kong. The authorities should, in accordance with the latest manpower demand forecasts, strengthen cooperation with the University Grants Committee to formulate education and training strategies for various economic sectors, adjust the allocation of academic disciplines and places to meet the needs of industries, establish a comprehensive and hierarchical talent pool covering high-, mid- and low-end technical talents, and expand the scope of the Continuing Education Fund to include training in AI (artificial intelligence) and other emerging skills.

In the long term, the authorities should optimize policies to encourage childbirth and systematically attract young talents from the Mainland and abroad to build a sustainable population ecology. While measures such as the Newborn Baby Bonus introduced by the Government in recent years have yielded some positive effects, the intensity of the efforts remains insufficient. The authorities should further increase child allowances, provide education subsidies and increase full-pay childcare leave to create a social atmosphere that encourages childbirth. At the same time, the SAR Government should strengthen collaboration between Hong Kong Talent Engage and the overseas Economic and Trade Offices to explore ways to attract young talents from countries and regions along the Belt and Road to study and work in Hong Kong, as well as proactively provide one-stop consultation and matching services for Chinese students in Europe and America to come to Hong Kong for employment.

In conclusion, the population problem can never be resolved by piecemeal policy measures. The SAR Government must expeditiously establish a top-level dedicated structure with boldness and foresight to elevate the population policy to the highest strategic level, formulate a comprehensive, forward-looking and scientific blueprint for the development of population and manpower resources, strengthen interdepartmental coordination, and foster the cooperation of different

industries, professions and sectors of society in promoting systematic reforms. Only then will there be a steady stream of talent for the development of the “eight centres”, enabling our economy and society to truly make sustained and steady progress.

President, later on, I will express my views on the amendments proposed by Mr Kenneth LEUNG and Ms Nixie LAM.

With these remarks, I implore Honourable colleagues to support this motion.

Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok moved the following motion: (Translation)

“That according to the latest projections on Hong Kong’s future population and manpower, Hong Kong is facing challenges such as a persistently low birth rate, a continuous ageing trend in the population and a gradually declining labour force participation rate, and there will be serious manpower shortage in different industries and at different levels of the occupational hierarchy; in this connection, this Council urges the SAR Government to face up to the demographic changes in Hong Kong as early as possible and establish a top-level structure dedicated to devising a population policy, and through strengthening interdepartmental coordination and tying in with the development of the ‘eight centres’, to carry out comprehensive planning that meets the needs of different economic sectors and various public services, so as to promote short, medium and long-term population policies for the sustainable development of Hong Kong’s economy and society.”

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok be passed.

MR KENNETH LEUNG (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I would like to thank Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok for proposing today’s motion, which allows us to discuss this important topic of population policy in the Council.

Since last year, the Subcommittee to Study Population Policy and Initiatives formed under the House Committee has been conducting dedicated studies on population policy and initiatives, and more than 10 different topics have been discussed so far. When I chaired the meetings of the Subcommittee, I found that Honourable colleagues of different backgrounds unanimously requested the Government to establish a high-level, interdepartmental structure to deal with population policy. However, many officials responded that there was no need to establish a separate structure as there was already a Human Resources Planning Commission led by the Chief Secretary for Administration. Personally, I think that this view of equating population policy with human resources is not comprehensive enough. Therefore, in my amendment, I have specifically mentioned that population policy should be elevated to a strategic level and given great importance, in order to ensure high-quality development of population issues and enable society and the economy to move forward towards sustainability.

President, population policy is not only related to the well-being of individuals, but it is also a global issue that is linked to the prosperity and future of a country. According to the World Population Prospects 2024 published by the United Nations, 63 countries (including China) and areas around the world will face the crisis of population decline. In the face of such a situation, our country has also placed great importance on population development, not only treating it as an overarching, long-term and strategic issue that requires deployment, but also incorporating “population security” into the overall national security framework for planning. General Secretary XI Jinping has repeatedly made important speeches on population issues, calling for “supporting Chinese modernization with high-quality population development”. This demonstrates that population issues are not merely related to the labour force or human resources. It also has a complex impact on the overall economic and social development. For this reason, I think the authorities should establish a top-level dedicated structure for this purpose and review the overall strategy from a higher perspective.

President, another focus of my amendment is how population planning should be devised under this high-level structure. In my view, the following directions can be considered.

Firstly, population issues should be considered in the context of Hong Kong’s long-term development to ensure that, once introduced, different policies can closely tie in with the population strategy. As the Financial Secretary pointed

out in this year's Budget speech, major policies on social welfare, healthcare, education, etc. are all closely related to the demographic structure and population quality. For this reason, our economic development needs to be adjusted in line with the demographic changes. For example, given the ageing population, we should promote the silver industry and the silver economy more. As for attracting outside talents, it is not just about issuing visas to them. Efforts should also be made in areas such as living conditions, education and housing environment, so that these talents will ultimately choose to stay and become residents of Hong Kong. Only then can this be considered a success.

On the other hand, the lack of continuity in the population policy is also a problem that needs to be addressed. In the Report of the Task Force on Population Policy published as early as 2003, the Task Force already recommended that the Government should allocate resources to monitor the population policy and publish a report every two to three years. In 2007, the Government set up the Steering Committee on Population Policy, and progress reports were published at regular intervals up to 2012. However, after the Government released the report on "Population Policy—Strategies and Initiatives" in 2015, there has not been any follow-up or new research. In my view, the authorities need to address the persistence of the population problem squarely and institutionalize relevant research to keep up with the times.

Lastly, I believe it is necessary to set a total target for population policy as a precondition for the estimation of future economic development and public services. This is also very important. The neighbouring Shenzhen Municipality already announced a relevant policy in 2021, setting a permanent population target of 19 million for 2035 and configuring public services such as administrative management, healthcare, transport and municipal services according to this target. Hong Kong can follow suit by first setting a population target and then working systematically towards it.

President, population policy may seem fragmented and complicated, but it is our commitment to the next generation of Hong Kong. Therefore, I hope that the Government will give serious consideration to formulating a population development strategy. I also hope that Honourable colleagues will support my amendment. Thank you, President.

MS NIXIE LAM (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I rise to speak in support of the motion moved by Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok and to propose an amendment.

Earlier, President XI Jinping published an important article entitled “Supporting Chinese Modernization with High-Quality Population Development”, emphasizing that the declining birth rate and ageing population pose major challenges to the future development of the country, and highlighting the need to establish a “big population view”, coordinate population strategies with systematic thinking, and build up high-quality human resources. This article has profound implications for Hong Kong. Hong Kong’s latest total fertility rate of is only 0.841, which is far below the replacement rate of 2.1. With persistently low fertility rates and an increasing proportion of the elderly population, we are facing the predicament of having 50 000 deaths but only some 30 000 births per year.

In fact, many surveys in the community have repeatedly sounded the alarm for Hong Kong, but it seems we have been turning a blind eye. According to the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, 36% of young people intend to get married. Yet, they only intend to get married, not to have children. According to the Hong Kong Women Development Association Limited, 70% of the respondents have not thought about having children at all. Two other important figures have gone unnoticed: 36% of young people have no intention of working, and 35.3% think supporting their parents is not their responsibility. Come to think about it. In 30 years, will our elderly care services and social security structure be able to catch up, or will they fail to keep pace with the reality of our society at all? With a shrinking labour force and an increasing burden of dependency, what will the future hold for Hong Kong?

Hong Kong’s overall city planning is closely intertwined with its population policy. How many hospitals, schools, services and resources will be needed? If we cannot even estimate the size of our population, the number of children born to Hong Kong residents, and the number of people coming from the Mainland and overseas, how can we respond flexibly to the challenges and opportunities arising from demographic changes?

Simply calculating human resource needs is far from adequate for coping with Hong Kong’s future development. Hong Kong must catch up with the pace of our country in terms of population policy. The Department of Social Development of the National Development and Reform Commission has conducted various studies, including in-depth research on “Young People’s

Modern Marriage and Relationships” and the “Report on the Development of Child-Friendly Cities in China”, to identify the core drivers of demographic structure development. Population planning is fundamental to a city’s development. It is impossible to achieve anything if we rely solely on piecemeal policies to address problems, or only act when something has happened. The Government must set up a high-level, cross-bureaux task force dedicated to coordinating Hong Kong’s population policy, so that we can transition from a passive to a proactive approach and comprehensively plan for Hong Kong’s future.

On the day before I proposed a motion on assisted reproduction in the Legislative Council last year, the Korean Government sounded an alarm across the country, and immediately introduced a monthly parental allowance of 1 million won, reduced taxes by 30%, legislated for flexible working hours, and even went to such detail as to provide badges for pregnant women so that others could identify them as pregnant and give them priority and additional care. They understand that population investment is investment with the greatest strategic value. As a special administrative region of the country, Hong Kong should adopt the same policy vision and avoid treating family policy as a welfare burden. Instead, it should be regarded as a long-term investment for the future with a view to enhancing competitiveness.

Last year, in relation to assisted reproduction, our country introduced the “Several Measures for Accelerating Improvement of Reproduction Policy Support Systems and Promoting the Establishment of a Reproduction-friendly Society”. A number of provinces and municipalities have already incorporated assisted reproduction into their health insurance systems. Hong Kong should also take the initiative to align itself with the national policy and proactively explore the development of life sciences to foster new economic growth points for the SAR. Given the trend of late marriages in Hong Kong and the practical issue of declining sperm and egg quality worldwide, assisted reproduction can solve the “zero to one” problem and rekindle hope for many families. We hope that the Government will proactively cut the red tape. Its decision to relax the 10-year storage period for oocytes is, in my view, a very good move. This is definitely the right direction to address and face up to the population problem. However, we should also actively review how to unleash the multiple potentials of local reproductive healthcare, life technology, genetic testing, etc. to drive the life sciences and life technology industries in Hong Kong, making them an important part of the scientific research industry.

President, the population policy is interlinked. Apart from encouraging people to have more children, all the complementary measures must work together. Efforts should be made in various aspects, including the silver economy, population, manpower, healthcare, housing and education. May I ask how we can achieve this without a cross-bureaux task force?

President, even clearing rubbish in Hong Kong is the responsibility of a Deputy Secretary of Department. I do not believe that our population policy cannot be dealt with by a high-level working group with clear objectives and foresight. *(The buzzer sounded)*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Ms Nixie LAM, please stop speaking.

Secretary for Labour and Welfare, please speak.

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): President, I thank Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok for proposing the motion, and Mr Kenneth LEUNG and Ms Nixie LAM for their amendments, so that we can draw on collective wisdom and work together to address the challenges brought by demographic changes.

With a longer average life expectancy, a persistently low birth rate and the baby boomers gradually reaching retirement age, Hong Kong's population has continued to age, and this trend is likely to accelerate. Hong Kong's population was 7.53 million as at the end of 2024 and is expected to reach 8.19 million by mid-2046 according to the latest projection of the Census and Statistics Department. Excluding foreign domestic helpers, the proportion of elderly persons aged 65 and over is projected to increase to 36% of the population. The labour force participation rate is also expected to decline gradually from approximately 55% in 2024 to around 52% in 2046. According to the manpower projection report published by the Labour and Welfare Bureau in November 2024, the manpower shortage will reach 180 000 in 2028, with skilled technical workers making up more than one third of the total shortage.

In order to address the challenges posed by demographic changes and to continuously support the development of the “eight centres” and promote Hong Kong's long-term development, comprehensive planning is required in various

policy areas, including economic development, education and training, housing supply, labour and welfare, medical services and childcare services. The relevant Policy Bureaux perform their respective duties, review the implementation and effectiveness of the initiatives under their purview from time to time, and make timely adjustments in the light of factors such as social and demographic changes.

Measures to cope with demographic changes

To address the aforesaid challenges, the Government has adjusted relevant policy measures or introduced new initiatives in response to demographic changes and social situations, covering areas such as education, cross-boundary elderly care, elderly services, foreign talent attraction, integration of new arrivals, and medical services. For example, since 2023, the Government has implemented an array of measures to encourage childbirth and create an environment conducive to childbearing. These measures include enhancing childcare support, increasing the amount of the Working Family Allowance and promoting family-friendly employment practices. Additionally, in response to the pressing challenge of manpower shortage in different sectors due to an ageing population and the post-epidemic decline in the workforce, the current-term Government has introduced decisive measures on manpower resources planning, proactively seeking talents and strengthening the local talent pool. Since the end of 2022, the Government has introduced and continued to enhance various talent admission initiatives to attract and facilitate talents from around the world to pursue development in Hong Kong. The Government has also been committed to nurturing local talents, providing significant resources to promote training and retraining to enhance the quality and productivity of our local labour force. Through employment support services, the Government also encourages and assists more people, including women and the elderly, to enter or re-enter the employment market, thereby unleashing the potential labour force.

Interdepartmental coordination

The population policy straddles a wide range of policy areas and involves the participation of a number of Policy Bureaux. In addition to the standing committees, where necessary, the Chief Executive and Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries of Departments will also provide high-level steer and coordinate relevant interdepartmental work through various channels, such as working groups and interdepartmental meetings.

The Human Resources Planning Commission (“HRPC”), chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration, is currently responsible for consolidating the resources and efforts of the Government and various sectors to examine, review and holistically coordinate policies and measures on human resources, including issues pertaining to the population policy, with a view to furthering the development of a high value-added and diversified economy in Hong Kong. HRPC is a high-level policy platform, with eight Directors of Bureaux, the Government Economist, the Commissioner for Census and Statistics and the Chairmen of three major training and qualifications-related bodies as ex officio members. Its non-official members are drawn from a diverse mix of experts and stakeholders from various fields and sectors. Since its establishment in 2018, HRPC has studied a number of issues related to addressing demographic challenges. Representatives from bureaux and departments with portfolios closely related to the development of the “eight centres” have held in-depth discussions with the non-official members of HRPC on various issues, which has facilitated the Government’s formulation and refinement of corresponding policies and measures. Currently, Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries of Departments perform leadership and cross-policy coordination roles within their respective spheres of responsibility on different platforms, including committees, working groups and interdepartmental meetings, to guide the Government in formulating measures to address the various challenges brought by demographic changes.

Population policy measures are now integrated into the work of various Policy Bureaux as part of their regular policies. The Government’s existing mechanism for overseeing and coordinating interdepartmental work is flexible and effective. There is no need to establish a dedicated structure separately for population policy work.

As the motion pointed out, the direction of economic development and the planning of public services need to be appropriately adjusted in response to demographic changes. We will first listen carefully to Members’ speeches and respond to their views in our concluding remarks later.

Thank you, President.

UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): President, I thank Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok for proposing this motion, and Mr Kenneth LEUNG and Ms Nixie LAM for their amendments. Population policy involves

interdepartmental collaboration. The Health Bureau will work closely with the relevant departments to adjust healthcare policy in response to the challenges posed by demographic changes.

Planning and development of healthcare services

Regarding the planning of healthcare services, we make projections regularly. Based on the population projections, we will adjust overall healthcare services, infrastructure and manpower deployment accordingly to ensure that our healthcare system continues to meet the developmental needs of society.

Public healthcare services in Hong Kong are planned on a cluster basis. The Hospital Authority (“HA”) regularly reviews the service provision of clusters and adjusts their delineation and distribution, comprehensively taking into account factors such as increased demand due to population growth and demographic changes, as well as chronic disease trends. HA also plans future hospital development projects and service arrangements in the light of territory-wide and regional planning and development strategies, taking into account changes in population projections and the direction of population policy.

On healthcare manpower, the Government has continued to strengthen training. The number of places on healthcare professional training programmes provided by University Grants Committee-funded and self-financing institutions has increased substantially from about 4 000 in the 2017-2018 academic year to about 6 000 in the 2023-2024 academic year. The Government has also introduced non-locally trained healthcare professionals through new pathways, and is examining the proposal for the establishment of a third medical school by local universities to meet the future demand for healthcare.

Elderly healthcare services

In addition, we are focusing on enhancing elderly healthcare services and endeavouring to prevent chronic illnesses in old age. Therefore, the Government has launched a series of measures in primary healthcare to address the relevant needs:

- (1) We will integrate elderly health services under the Department of Health into the district health network to strengthen chronic disease management and community rehabilitation support;

- (2) We have also expanded the Elderly Health Care Voucher Greater Bay Area Pilot Scheme so that eligible elderly persons will be able to use their Health Care Vouchers at 21 service points in the Greater Bay Area in the Mainland within this year; and
- (3) We actively encourage the elderly to receive vaccinations, and provide free or subsidized vaccines to eligible elderly persons through various vaccination programmes.

Support for childbearing

Regarding the support for childbearing, as Ms Nixie LAM said, there are indeed different practical considerations when making the decision on childbearing. On the healthcare front, we will actively dovetail with the Government's policy of encouraging childbirth to promote the long-term balanced development of the population.

- (1) We will revamp maternal and child health and family planning services, provide new pre-pregnancy health services to reproductive age group women at the Maternal and Child Health Centres in phases. We will also review and adjust the scope of the subsidized family planning services currently provided by non-governmental organizations, so as to promote healthy fertility;
- (2) In respect of public assisted reproduction services, HA will also gradually increase the service quota for in-vitro fertilization treatment to 1 800 treatment cycles;
- (3) The Government has introduced tax deductions for expenses on assisted reproduction services, subject to a deduction ceiling of \$100,000 per year, so as to alleviate the financial burden on the public; and
- (4) As proposed by the Council on Human Reproductive Technology, we will amend the relevant legislation within this year to lift the legal restrictions on the storage periods of gametes or embryos for own use, so as to provide greater flexibility for people who wish to have children.

We will continue our reform efforts and make proper planning in the light of demographic changes to safeguard public health and maintain the high-quality development of our health and medical system.

I so submit. Thank you, President.

MR KENNETH FOK (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. Obviously, the Government attaches great importance to today's topic, and officials from three Policy Bureaux have therefore come to listen to Members' views, which is a good thing and very important to today's discussion.

My analysis is two-fold: first, population, i.e. quantity; and second, talent, i.e. quality. Over the past few decades, there have been structural changes in the composition of Hong Kong's population. According to the Government's data, the number of births and deaths in Hong Kong already reached the so-called "population death cross" five years ago, which is a warning sign. So I very much agree with the motion proposed by Ir Dr LO Wai-kyok today. It is necessary to establish a top-level dedicated structure to maintain Hong Kong's competitive labour market. I would like to take this opportunity to share my thoughts from the perspectives of regional cooperation within the country, global development, education and cultivation, and demographic structure.

Members may recall that the Resolution of the Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China mentioned supporting Hong Kong in building itself into an international hub for high-calibre talents. Hong Kong should not just be concerned about its own needs. In my view, it should stand on a higher plane and treat talent planning as an important task in serving as a national talent pool. The development concept of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area ("GBA") is based on sharing of resources and complementarity of advantages. Under the framework of CEPA (the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement), measures for the mutual recognition of professional qualifications have been effective, facilitating the frequent flow of talent. We should therefore look at the planning direction of the entire GBA, and promote the sharing of resources and complementarity of advantages. Therefore, if a dedicated structure is established, we should work with the relevant departments in the nine Mainland cities and Macao to formulate a communication mechanism, including holding regular

meetings to explore the entire region's manpower needs and policy pain points, in order to achieve a win-win situation.

In respect of global development, given that Hong Kong is a highly externally-oriented and open economy, the dedicated structure must adopt a global vision of the macro economy. For example, the TRUMP administration in the United States has recently banned Harvard University from admitting international students. This is a case in point. It is definitely a good opportunity to attract talents, and Hong Kong's academic institutions have responded quickly. After the establishment of the dedicated structure, we should continue to monitor the international situation and opportunities, and deploy resources to support the recruitment of talents. Hong Kong also shoulders the important task of further deepening reform. During the "two sessions" this year, I put forward a proposal to the National People's Congress on nurturing regional and national talents. I believe that the SAR Government can leverage Hong Kong's strengths in education resources to meet the needs of Mainland enterprises, and jointly create an industry-education integrated platform for regional and national talents, so as to promote the interaction among various circles and at various levels, and nurture the talents that our country is seriously lacking.

As mentioned in the original motion, the population policy must "carry out comprehensive planning that meets the needs of ... economic sectors and various public services". Having learned about the needs of the Mainland and global development, we should conduct "targeted research on and deployment for Hong Kong's population development", as Mr Kenneth LEUNG pointed out in his amendment, especially with regard to specific policies on education, cultivation, etc. I therefore agree with this.

Priority attention should be given to researching the increasing demand for applied talents in the market. Compared to the traditional channels of further education in the past, vocational and professional education and training is a strategy for developing a talent hub, which is also a national policy. In the era of AI (artificial intelligence), education models really must keep up with the times, and education in technology application must be strengthened. I hope that the Alliance of Universities of Applied Sciences will play an active role in developing market-driven programmes, raising the competitiveness of the "Study in Hong Kong" brand and retaining more talents in Hong Kong.

In order to attract talents, the first thing we need is people, and that means numbers. Hong Kong's fertility rate is on the low side, but as Ms Nixie LAM has spoken about this extensively and the Bureau has just responded, I will not spend time to set off the discussion again.

All in all, talent is an important resource that drives innovation and development. I agree that a top-level dedicated structure should be established to estimate the types and number of talents needed in Hong Kong from the perspective of GBA, the country and even the world, and to develop an industry-education integrated platform by leveraging the respective strengths of the Mainland and Hong Kong, with a view to building Hong Kong into a national talent pool.

With these remarks, President, I support the original motion and the amendments.

MS MAGGIE CHAN (in Cantonese): President, I would like to express my gratitude and support for the original motion moved by Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok and the amendments proposed by other Members.

The problem of population ageing with a low fertility rate in Hong Kong has become increasingly serious, posing challenges to our society, economy, labour force and various developments. The number of babies born in Hong Kong last year was 36 700, already higher than that in 2023. In fact, it shows that the various encouragement policies rolled out by the Government in recent years, such as the Newborn Baby Bonus, are beginning to bear fruit. However, Hong Kong's total fertility rate is still far below the global average.

The childbearing decisions of Hong Kong families are affected by multiple factors, such as financial pressure, competition in the workplace, the burden of parenthood and a weakened childbearing culture. Addressing these issues through comprehensive policies is essential to enhance fertility intentions and ensure long-term demographic stability.

In May 2023, I proposed a motion on "Promoting the comprehensive development of women in Hong Kong", mentioning the need to raise the employment and fertility rates of women in Hong Kong. I thank the Government

for launching various family-friendly policies one after another, stepping up efforts to improve childcare services, and so on. I would also like to make the following suggestions to raise the fertility rate, increase the female labour force participation rate, enhance the quality and coverage of childcare services, raise the success rate and accessibility of assisted reproduction, and create a more family-friendly environment to encourage childbirth.

Firstly, the Newborn Baby Bonus Scheme should be regularized and enhanced by stratifying the bonus payment according to family income levels, so as to provide more support to low-income families while controlling financial expenditure, and continuously conveying the Government's determination to encourage childbirth. I also suggest linking the bonus to childcare services or child-rearing allowances to encourage families to use government-subsidized childcare services and facilitate better development of the childcare sector.

Secondly, we should unleash the potential labour force of women, strengthen the Women Empowerment Fund, and expand the support for women with children to rejoin the workforce. Specific measures may include vocational retraining subsidies, child-rearing allowances and entrepreneurial support. I also suggest strengthening the one-stop family and women information portal to provide guidance on full-time and part-time jobs, retraining information and job matching, so as to help women balance their work and family life, increase their employment rate, and indirectly encourage childbirth.

Thirdly, we should improve childcare services in Hong Kong. I suggest that the Government should conduct a comprehensive survey and analysis on the demand for and supply of childcare services to understand the needs of different districts and income groups. Moreover, based on the survey findings, it should allocate resources in a precise manner, increase the number of childcare places in districts with high demand, and encourage schools to expand after-school care services, especially to support dual-working families. I also suggest that the Government should adopt a flexible service approach to encourage a wide range of childcare services, such as full-day, half-day, Saturday and Sunday services, so as to meet the needs of different families. Improving childcare services can alleviate the burden of working parents, especially women, thereby increasing their willingness to have children and boosting the labour participation rate.

Fourthly, we should promote assisted reproduction as well as medical and healthcare measures. I suggest that the Government should increase its support for the development of assisted reproduction technology to help formulate more personalized plans, especially for couples who have delayed marriage and childbearing. In addition, the Government should encourage and promote the application of Chinese medicine in gynaecological health, such as the use of Chinese medicine to nurture the body, improve fertility and enhance the overall physical state. Modern science and Chinese medicine can be combined to provide more comprehensive fertility support and enhance women's confidence in childbearing.

With these remarks, President, I support the original motion and the amendments.

DR NGAN MAN-YU (in Cantonese): President, Hong Kong is faced with challenges such as a persistently low birth rate, an increasingly ageing population and an inadequate labour force participation rate. These factors have led to serious manpower shortages in various trades and industries. Although the SAR Government has introduced foreign labour to alleviate the manpower shortage problem, I must stress that this is a short-term stop-gap approach to cater for urgent needs. The most pressing task should be to unleash the local labour force and raise the birth rate. Only in this way can we increase the size of the workforce and promote the sustainable development of Hong Kong's economy.

On the subject of unleashing the local labour force, I must take this opportunity to thank the colleagues in the Research Office of the Research and Information Division of the Legislative Council Secretariat for their help in compiling a research report on "Promoting maternal and senior employment in Singapore and Japan". The report not only responds to the urgent need in society with regard to the labour participation rate, but also provides thorough information on measures for unleashing potential labour force. It also draws reference from the practices of other countries and puts forward appropriate and feasible policy recommendations.

According to the report, in 2024, the labour force participation rates of local women aged 25 to 54 and seniors aged 55 to 64 in Hong Kong lagged far behind those of the leading Asian economies. The total working population in these two age groups was close to 1 million, thus showing a significant potential labour force.

The majority of Hong Kong's prime-age women indicate that they choose not to work because of family commitments. In addition, many "young" elderly persons wish to get re-employment and take up part-time jobs, but they often encounter problems such as age discrimination and lack of up-to-date skills. Therefore, the Government needs to enhance measures for supporting local working mothers and promoting silver employment in response to their needs. On unleashing women's labour force, I have a few suggestions.

Firstly, I hope that the Government can set up a pilot scheme on infant and young children care training for foreign domestic helpers, so as to help foreign domestic helpers to better grasp the skills required for looking after and nurturing infants and young children, thereby addressing the needs of some families for childcare, and ensuring that infants and young children can receive appropriate care.

Secondly, I hope that the Government can speed up the pace of increasing the number of after-school care places, especially in the light of the actual situation in various districts, for example, by extending the service hours during long holidays, so as to help working women to rejoin the workforce, thus obviating their need to choose between work and family.

In respect of silver employment, I suggest that the Government should transform and upgrade the existing Job Centres under the Labour Department, and study the possibility of merging some of these centres with the service centres under the Employees Retraining Board, so as to pool the resources together to turn them into service, training and employment support centres for specific groups. The Government can provide the silver-haired group with employment training and job matching services for referral to workplaces, so that they can update their skills and join the labour market as soon as possible.

Lastly, with regard to raising the fertility rate, I hope the Government will optimize family-friendly protection and measures to encourage women to have children. "Q-mark" quality certification or tax concessions can be provided through public-private partnership, so as to encourage enterprises to introduce more family-friendly employment practices, including flexible working hours. In terms of hardware, I also hope that through various measures, the Government can encourage enterprises and shopping malls to provide baby care rooms, family-friendly toilets, family parking spaces, etc., so as to make the living and working environment as family-friendly as possible.

Hong Kong is now facing a dual predicament of labour shortages and a low fertility rate. This makes it all the more necessary for us to overcome the difficulties and secure the future. Unleashing the labour force and raising the fertility rate are top priorities for the sustainable development of Hong Kong in all aspects. I hope that the SAR Government will take the above suggestions into account to provide an unceasing impetus to the development of Hong Kong.

President, I so submit.

MR CHAN CHUN-YING (in Cantonese): President, I speak in support of Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok's motion. Population policy is not only about the present, but also has a substantial impact on Hong Kong's future development and long-term competitiveness. Hong Kong's population was 7.53 million as at the end of 2024 and is expected to reach 8.19 million by 2046. However, New York and London, which are leading international financial centres, have populations of 8.2 million and 9 million respectively. The labour force of these two cities accounts for more than 65% of their total populations, which is 8% higher than the 57% in Hong Kong. Furthermore, the proportion of young people in the population has reached 30%, the overall higher education participation rate exceeds 40%, and the number of international financial talents and fintech professionals is significantly higher than in Hong Kong. This indicates that Hong Kong is lagging behind.

In a previous interview, the Chief Executive also emphasized that Hong Kong needed to increase its population to 10 million in order to maintain its competitive edge, with which I strongly agree. However, the SAR Government has yet to announce a clear policy or measures to increase the population. If we mainly rely on organic growth, it will be difficult for us to keep up with the development of other international metropolitan areas, which will affect Hong Kong's long-term conditions as an international financial centre.

Top-level planning is crucial for implementing population policies, but the former Steering Committee on Population Policy was dissolved in 2017. Although the Government established the Human Resources Planning Commission in 2018, its terms of reference were mainly to fully unleash the potential of the local workforce and provide employment support, without making any significant breakthroughs in the context of the overall population policy. I suggest the Government should expeditiously review the functions of the Commission and turn it into a "long-term population policy steering committee" to coordinate the

existing resources of various Policy Bureaux and comprehensively plan a forward-looking population policy.

We should learn from other international financial cities, which generally adopt a population strategy of “supporting childbirth, nurturing talents and attracting international talents”. In terms of increasing the birth rate, the experience of other regions shows that a more inclusive, family-friendly workplace environment must be maintained to create favourable conditions for increasing the birth rate. I suggest that the Government should encourage enterprises to implement family-friendly measures such as flexible work arrangements and childcare subsidies, as well as improve parental education and childcare services, to alleviate the care pressure on working parents, especially mothers. Nowadays, young mothers generally have higher education level, and the Government should provide them with more friendly policies so that they can continue to work with peace of mind while the overall labour force participation rate increases.

In addition, the Government should integrate the resources of higher education, vocational education and on-the-job training to nurture local talents. I suggest that the Government should actively promote cooperation between tertiary institutions and enterprises in offering industry-academia collaborative programmes; improve the vocational education system; establish a mechanism for the articulation of “academic qualifications, skills and employment” in key industries such as innovation and technology and financial services; and establish a platform for online and offline vocational training led by the Government and in cooperation with higher education institutions, professional associations and enterprises. The Government should update course contents in a timely manner according to industry changes, formulate continuing education requirements linked to industry qualification certification, and assist working people in continuously improving their overall capabilities, thereby further increasing the higher education participation rate in Hong Kong.

In recent years, the Government has launched a series of measures to attract talents, which are gradually showing results. Over 270 000 applications have been approved under various talent admission schemes, which exceeded the target. However, various sectors of the community still have doubts about whether some of the approved talents will really stay in Hong Kong for development. This reflects that the Government’s talent policy still remains at the stage of “input thinking”, focusing on the introduction of policies and investment of resources but neglecting key performance indicators (“KPIs”) such as the actual talent gap filling rate in the financial industries, etc. and the stability of talent retention in Hong

Kong. I suggest that the Government should regularly review the effectiveness of its talent attraction measures and change the policy KPIs from “approval quantity” to “retention rate”, “industry contribution”, etc. The Government should also regularly conduct talent demand surveys and collect talent feedback from enterprises, dynamically adjusting the Talent List and supporting measures so that Hong Kong maintains a leading position in the global talent competition.

President, a population policy is the cornerstone of urban development. In the face of regional competition, Hong Kong should develop a forward-looking population policy framework and elevate population development issues to the strategic level of urban development, building up strength for the development of Hong Kong into a globally competitive international financial centre and metropolitan city.

President, I support the original motion and the two amendments. I so submit.

MR JEFFREY LAM (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. President, as the saying goes, “Many hands make light work”; people are not omnipotent, but nothing can be done without people. Talent is essential for social progress and economic development. There must be sufficient talents in various trades and industries; otherwise, nothing can be achieved and development cannot take place.

Hong Kong’s population will reach 8.19 million by 2046, with 36% of the population being elderly people aged 65 or above. The labour force participation rate will drop to about 52%. Population ageing, a declining birth rate and an insufficient labour force are difficulties faced by many advanced economies. In the face of competition from neighbouring regions, we must actively seek out talents and attract different talents to take root in Hong Kong.

The current-term Government has done a lot of work in attracting talents. While it is important to actively attract talents, it is even more important to retain them, so that they can more easily adapt to life in Hong Kong and pursue long-term development in Hong Kong. We often talk about attracting talents from the “Belt and Road” and ASEAN regions, many of which are predominantly Muslim economies. Has Hong Kong done enough to provide Muslim-friendly facilities and halal food? Apart from development opportunities, foreign talents also consider factors such as food, clothing, housing and transportation.

The National 14th Five-Year Plan establishes Hong Kong's "eight centres" positioning. I agree with the original motion that we should, through strengthening interdepartmental coordination and tying in with the development of the "eight centres", carry out comprehensive planning for different economic sectors, so as to promote short-, medium- and long-term population policies.

For example, we should develop emerging markets, and Hong Kong's status as an international financial centre makes it a very attractive financial platform for Middle East countries seeking economic diversification. Does Hong Kong have sufficient talents required for the huge Islamic financial market and Islamic cultural characteristics? As Hong Kong currently lacks bachelor's and master's degree programmes in Islamic finance, it will be difficult to have locally trained talents in the related areas in the short term. The Talent List earlier updated by the Government has added new professions with a shortage of local talents, such as Islamic finance professionals, which is the right remedy for the problem.

There are views that the importation of talents is tantamount to snatching the rice bowls of local wage earners. If this mindset is not changed, it may stifle the development of emerging industries in Hong Kong. Owing to the ever-changing social environment and rapid technological advancement, if there is a shortage of local talents in Hong Kong and it takes three to five years to train talents, we must recruit overseas talents in time because opportunity does not wait for anyone.

President, we welcome talents from all over the world to Hong Kong just as we welcome enterprises and investors from all over the world, but we must proactively reach out to those talents particularly needed in our economic and industrial development. In the long term, our efforts to attract foreign talent or provide training for local talents can be made in conjunction with "attracting enterprises and investment".

Recently, a French aviation service company is planning to operate aircraft dismantling business in Hong Kong. This will be of great significance in consolidating Hong Kong's position as an international aviation hub and in establishing it as Asia's leading centre for processing and trading of aircraft parts. Therefore, in the long run, Hong Kong needs to bring in relevant talents, and we must take a proactive approach and do a good job in training related talents.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, social and economic development cannot be achieved without people. One of the main objectives of the population policy is to develop and nurture talents, promote upward mobility of young people,

actively attract talents from outside Hong Kong, and continuously build up a talent pool, so as to maintain Hong Kong's competitiveness, promote sustainable social and economic development, and consolidate Hong Kong's status as the "eight centres". I hope the Government can enhance interdepartmental coordination, do a good job in education and training, and actively attract enterprises and talents, so that local young people can work and live in peace and contentment, and that talents from all over the world will make Hong Kong their home.

President, I support the original motion and the relevant amendments. I so submit.

REVD CANON PETER DOUGLAS KOON (in Cantonese): President, Hong Kong is now at the crossroads of a population structure crisis, with the continuously low birth rate, rapid population ageing and expanding labour shortage creating interwoven and complex structural predicament. In this regard, we need to set up a top-level dedicated structure to coordinate interdepartmental resources and facilitate the formulation of comprehensive and forward-looking population policy solutions.

President, in the face of the severe population crisis, the existing policies appear somewhat fragmented and passive, and lacking in top-level design and long-term planning. Taking the Top Talent Pass Scheme ("TTPS") as an example, although TTPS has attracted a number of professionals to Hong Kong within two years, some of the applicants have only done so for their children's education or for visa convenience, with no intention of long-term residence in Hong Kong. Moreover, top talents are concentrated in areas with development potential, such as financial services, innovation and technology and healthcare. There is still a shortfall of 60 000 skilled technical personnel, demonstrating that the existing talent policy is disconnected from the development needs of the local industries. President, in addition, the functions of the population policy are also scattered among a number of departments. For example, the Labour and Welfare Bureau takes the lead in the admission of talents, but the healthcare and educational support systems have not been planned in tandem. This phenomenon is like treating the symptoms rather than getting to the root of the problem, and it can be said that Hong Kong is in a precarious situation amidst the population crisis.

President, an ageing population has also exerted heavy pressure on the healthcare and social welfare systems. The public healthcare system in Hong Kong has long emphasized a "treatment-oriented" rather than

“prevention-oriented” approach. Waiting times for specialist outpatient services can be several years, and the prevalence of chronic diseases such as hypertension and dementia continues to rise with age. This pattern is difficult to sustain in an ageing society. The situation regarding the social welfare front is equally bleak, with the average waiting time for subsidized residential care homes for the elderly exceeding three years, thus forcing many elders to spend their twilight years in environments lacking professional and proper care. Although the Government aims to increase the number of subsidized places by 6 200 by 2027, these measures are utterly inadequate when compared to the growth of the elderly population.

To effectively address these issues, Hong Kong must set up a top-level dedicated structure to formulate a long-term population strategy blueprint. Firstly, the committee should link population objectives with land planning and industrial policies, and set quantitative indicators to ensure that policies are forward-looking and coordinated. Secondly, a “population data dashboard” should be provided to track the talent retention rate and related indicators, such as the cost-effectiveness of birth policies, to ensure that the policy focuses on long-term quality. For example, when admitting talents, the focus should not only be placed on the number of people coming to Hong Kong, but also on their industrial distribution, the number of years they can stay in Hong Kong and their actual contributions to the Hong Kong economy. Thirdly, healthcare and social welfare support should be optimized. The focus of healthcare should shift from “treatment-oriented” to “prevention-oriented” approach, and community health screening should be expanded. Efforts should be made to combine smart home technology with community care teams to develop “Ageing in Place 2.0”, and explore cross-boundary resource integration with cities in the Greater Bay Area. More elderly people should be encouraged to consider Mainland nursing homes and the scope of application of Health Care Vouchers should be expanded.

President, lastly, as a sound elderly policy will not only enable the elderly to enjoy their twilight years comfortably, but is also conducive to the healthy development of society as a whole, I hope that the Government can consider arranging for the establishment of an additional Secretary or Deputy Secretary of Department in the framework, with dedicated responsibility for the development of elderly care services, and formulating a “blueprint for the development of elderly care services”, so as to make overall and long-term plans to respond to the challenges of an ageing population.

I believe that only by setting up a top-level dedicated structure for long-term population planning that transcends the political cycle can we lay a solid foundation for the future of Hong Kong.

President, I so submit.

MR MARTIN LIAO (in Cantonese): President, Hong Kong's birth rate is one of the lowest in the world. Since 2020, the number of births has been lower than the number of deaths, making it impossible to achieve a normal generational change. According to the estimation of the Health Bureau, by 2039, the number of people aged 65 and above will rise to 2.52 million, accounting for 31% of the total population. This will make Hong Kong an "super-aged society", as defined by the World Health Organization. The declining local labour force will constrain the potential for economic growth and have far-reaching implications for the future of Hong Kong. Therefore, the Government must respond to the changes in Hong Kong's population structure and devise an effective population policy to facilitate the sustainable development of Hong Kong.

As we all know, a population policy involves many issues, including economic development, education and training, housing supply, labour welfare, healthcare services and childcare support. The original motion proposes to set up a top-level structure dedicated to devising a population policy, and I support this direction. However, regardless of whether the Government can ultimately set up the relevant structure, the authorities must be far-sighted and formulate a population policy that suits Hong Kong, including a general immigration policy, which I have long emphasized.

President, a general immigration policy can assist in filling job vacancies that local residents may be less inclined to take up, thus supporting the society and the economy as a whole. In fact, many advanced countries in the world have introduced general immigration policies. For example, in Singapore, 30% of the labour force comes from abroad and is mainly employed in the construction and transportation industries, enabling local Singaporean residents to continue taking up higher-pay jobs. For many years, Canada has been actively implementing a diversified immigration policy including high-skilled immigrants, general workers and international students. Although it has announced plans to reduce immigration, Canada still has a quota of more than 300 000 immigrants per year between 2025 and 2027 to make up for the labour shortage. Even Japan, which

is very conservative country, introduced a specified skilled worker system in 2019 to address the human resource issues in small and medium enterprises, and ensure a sufficient workforce in 16 sectors, including nursing, construction, transportation, aviation, accommodation services and catering. Unlike Hong Kong's labour importation policy, under which workers must return to their place of origin once their employment contract has expired or been terminated, the Specified Skilled Worker No. 2 system allows workers to obtain residence status in Japan. To qualify, they must have gained experience in one of the 16 industries under the Specified Skilled Worker No. 1 system, passed a skills test and a Japanese language proficiency test, and lived in Japan for a certain number of years.

(THE PRESIDENT'S DEPUTY, DR STARRY LEE, took the Chair)

Apart from formulating a general immigration policy, Deputy President, in the face of an ageing population, Hong Kong should encourage childbirth and create a child-friendly social environment. As the costs of childbearing and childrearing in Hong Kong are relatively high, and many dual-income parents in Hong Kong are pursuing career development, it is difficult for them to allocate time and energy to take care of their children. Coupled with the serious shortage of baby and child care services, people are discouraged from having children. In the 2023 Policy Address, the Government has proposed a number of measures to support families with newborns, including the Newborn Baby Bonus of \$20,000, as well as the "Families with Newborns Allocation Priority Scheme" for subsidized sale flats and public rental housing. To strengthen support for working families in childbearing, the authorities will increase child care centre places and allowances in phases, extend the After-School Care Programme for Pre-primary Children to cover all districts, and strengthen the home-based child care service, which are all in the right direction. On this basis, I think the authorities can consider drawing reference from Japan and Korea to set up a "childcare leave" system, allowing parents to take longer paid leave after the birth of their children and encouraging flexible working methods such as remote working, helping parents to strike a balance between career development and child care.

Deputy President, I support the original motion and all the amendments. I so submit.

PROF CHOW MAN-KONG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I would like to express my gratitude and support for the original motion proposed by Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok, as well as the relevant amendments.

As population policy involves a number of Policy Bureaux and departments, such as the Health Bureau, the Education Bureau, the Labour and Welfare Bureau (“LWB”), the Security Bureau, and the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, I support the establishment of a top-level dedicated structure to coordinate population policy and related work.

Regarding the future direction of the population policy, especially encouraging childbirth, “trawling for talents” and the importation of manpower for specific industries, the SAR Government has made great efforts in the past two years or so, but I have the following further suggestions.

Firstly, we should encourage childbirth. We need to create an environment in which the public, especially young people, realize that despite the high cost of having children, building a happy and fulfilling family can bring immense satisfaction and sense of accomplishment.

In the 2023 Policy Address, a one-off Newborn Baby Bonus of \$20,000 was offered to eligible parents for the first time. We have seen some results as the population has at least increased by 4 200, but there is still a long way to go compared to the number of births, which was around 60 000 a decade ago. Therefore, I think the SAR Government should continue to focus on the needs of the public and dual-income families, and reduce childcare costs in order to help them reshape the concept of succession.

On tax concessions, I suggest that the authorities should consider doubling the child allowance for each child born during the year to the first three years of their life. In terms of housing, given the demand from families to move from smaller to larger flats, the authorities should swiftly implement an extension to the mortgage default guarantee period from 50 years to 60 years for Home Ownership Scheme (“HOS”) flats sold under the HOS Secondary Market Scheme (“SMS”) without payment of premium, as well as a Flat-for-Flat Scheme for HOS flats sold under the HOS SMS without payment of premium. As we all know, people currently only have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to buy HOS flats sold under the HOS SMS without payment of premium. If we can enable them to move from

smaller to larger flats, and encourage the older owners to release their larger flats, dual-income families will be able to buy larger flats (such as three-bedroom flats), and it will be easier for them to meet life's needs.

Apart from the above practical needs, conceptually, I believe that it is also necessary for the Education Bureau and the whole community to work together to shape or even reshape the concept that succession can bring an unparalleled sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.

The second aspect is “trawling for talents”. The SAR Government can start by optimizing the Top Talent Pass Scheme and relaxing the quota for non-local students admitted to tertiary institutions, so as to equip the “eight centres” with talents and build Hong Kong into an international hub for high-calibre talents.

According to the Report on Manpower Projection released by LWB earlier, there will be a widening manpower shortage of 180 000 by 2028, and a number of emerging industries will face serious manpower shortages. For example, there will be a rising demand for artificial intelligence specialists, data analysts, etc.

I believe that we can start “trawling for talents” in two ways. Firstly, we should seek out readily available talents. I suggest that we could take inspiration from the United Kingdom, Japan and Singapore by allowing graduates with a qualified university master's degree or above to apply for Category B and Category C visas. We could also implement early and pilot measures in certain industries (such as information technology and biotechnology) with talent shortages, so that talents coming to Hong Kong can really make a substantial economic contribution to Hong Kong.

Secondly, we should trawl for future talents. Currently, the number of non-local students has increased from around 40 000 before the initiative to establish Hong Kong as an international higher education hub (in 2021) to over 72 000. While we have noticed the results, we should seize the opportunity presented by the United States' suppression of academic freedom, which has caused international students around the world to lose confidence in the United States. We should further relax, or even completely abolish, the quota for admitting students from outside Hong Kong to the eight higher education institutions and self-financing institutions, so as to attract these top students to come to Hong Kong for further studies.

Lastly, while I fully support giving priority to the employment of local workers, we must acknowledge the serious ageing of the workforce in some industries (particularly construction), where construction workers aged 50 or above account for 50% of the total workforce of the industries. If we do not solve the labour shortage problem expeditiously, the construction industry and the elderly services sector in Hong Kong will not be sustainable.

The current policy on importation of workers is “project-based, not company-based”, which is impractical in terms of the efficiency and time required to take public and private projects forward. Therefore, we should relax the policy to allow workers to participate in different projects within specified periods, in order to drive forward the development of projects such as the Northern Metropolis.

Deputy President, I so submit.

DR TAN YUEHENG (in Putonghua): Thank you, Deputy President. According to the figures released by the Census and Statistics Department, the provisional figure of Hong Kong’s population at the end of last year was 7.53 million. Although the total population has increased for three consecutive years, the year-on-year growth rate was only 0.1%. Furthermore, the number of newborn babies was lower than the number of deaths, reflecting the continued deterioration of the problem of an ageing population, which, in the long term, will lead to a shortage of labour, a lack of incentives for various trades and industries to recover and a possible slowdown in the economy. It has previously been suggested that Hong Kong should have a population of around 10 million if it is to maintain long-term competitiveness. However, compared with the present situation, increasing the population by more than 2.5 million is not a one-day effort, but rather requires a long-term plan complemented by a scientific population policy and effectively dovetailed with the relevant economic and social policies. Therefore, I support the motion moved by Ir Dr LO and the amendments proposed by other Members. I believe it is crucial to set up a high-level framework for planning and reviewing population development issues.

Historically, Hong Kong’s population policy has focused primarily on “manpower resources”, emphasizing economic benefits. However, an ideal policy must recognize not only the role of human resources in driving economic development, but also the needs and well-being of the population. The Government must adopt a comprehensive population policy as its guiding principle

and take a multi-pronged approach. On the one hand, it should create a liveable environment that caters to the need of young people with regard to housing, marriage and parenthood, and step up efforts to boost the birth rate. On the other hand, it should align with development strategies, introduce and retain talents in a scientific manner to make up for the labour shortage, and plan for economic development and measures to support the elderly against the backdrop of population ageing. I would like to share a few points below.

Firstly, the population development strategy should be optimized through continuous assessment and research to accurately grasp the needs of society. Then, a population policy should be formulated taking into account Hong Kong's medium- and long-term planning, as well as people's livelihood. The Government could consider setting up a task force to comprehensively assess Hong Kong's population situation in terms of population size, quality, structure and distribution. This could then form the basis for updating the population policy. Once the population policy has been introduced, a mechanism with multi-departmental participation should be established for implementing the policy. The Government should strengthen interdepartmental and cross-sectoral coordination and conduct long-term planning and ongoing studies on the policy, making dynamic adjustments as necessary, to enable Hong Kong to respond promptly to the ever-changing demographic and market conditions.

Secondly, we should actively encourage childbearing, improve the policy system surrounding family development, and address the core issues hindering the increase of fertility rates. Childbearing is an important element of population policy, which can fundamentally address the problems of declining birth rates and ageing population. The Government should consider changing its "active non-intervention" policy regarding childbirth and do more in this area, responding actively to public demands for increased support measures for childbirth. This could include providing more incentives to encourage citizens to have children, providing support for working families with children, creating a favourable social environment for childbearing, parenting and education, and increasing opportunities and channels for upward mobility of young people.

Thirdly, we should establish a multi-level, diversified mechanism for admission of talents. Research into the demand for talents in Hong Kong and the systematic planning of talent-related work should be accelerated. The focus should be on accurately assessing the supply of and demand for talents required for the development of the three major centres of finance, trade and shipping. Precise

measures should be adopted to attract the necessary talents. At the same time, we should improve talent service support and optimize the talent service protection system to achieve the goal of attracting and retaining talents.

Fourthly, we should raise the standard of elderly care in society and build an age-friendly economy and an elderly-friendly society. This involves addressing shortcomings in elderly care services, healthcare services and retirement protection, stimulating the silver economy, increasing the overall supply of elderly care services, and encouraging the development of the elderly care industry, particularly the technology-enabled elderly care industry. In addition, we should encourage community participation among the elderly and unleash their potential labour force to alleviate labour shortages and the pressure of elderly care.

With these remarks, Deputy President, I support the motion and the amendments.

MR SHANG HAILONG (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. Deputy President, I would like to thank Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok for proposing the motion on devising a population policy, and I support it.

This motion is closely related to us. According to the latest population and manpower projections, Hong Kong is caught in a serious predicament: the birth rate is falling, the population is ageing rapidly and the labour force participation rate is declining steadily. This is not simply a statistical curve, but a serious deep-rooted crisis that threatens the survival of the city. It is projected that, in the near future, a cliff-like decline in population will affect different industries and positions at all levels. Coupled with the impact of artificial intelligence on industry replacement, our economic engine and public service systems are facing systemic risks.

More than ever in history, Hong Kong must pay more attention to the “three-person pyramid” structure, i.e. population, manpower, and talent development, which basically requires a well-planned population policy. In the face of such profound challenges of the times, our piecemeal policy remedies are no different than a drop in the bucket. The dramatic change in the population structure is a systemic issue spanning economic, social and livelihood sectors, with complexity far beyond the scope of any single department’s authority. Currently, different government policies are led by different departments, lacking

coordination and resulting in a fragmented policy landscape, akin to “nine dragons managing water”. This has led to policies being disconnected and even conflicting. For example, failing to address the education issues of new citizens’ children could turn a talent attraction boom into a sudden retreat. Talent attraction policies without corresponding career development plans could also spark social tensions between local workers and newly arrived talents working in Hong Kong.

Deputy President, I believe that every Member, the Secretary for Education and even the Chief Executive have received a lot of emails from local parents and new citizen parents expressing their concerns, and I have recently received more than 100 such emails. Therefore, I am in favour of setting up a top-level dedicated structure for comprehensive coordination and synergy, in order to clarify and accurately assess Hong Kong’s future. This structure is key to achieving a breakthrough for Hong Kong’s future.

I declare that I am the Founding President of the Hong Kong Top Talent Services Association. It can be seen that the Government’s talent attraction programmes, such as the Top Talent Pass Scheme (“TTPS”), are expected to reshape Hong Kong’s population structure. The 2024 figures recently released by the Inland Revenue Department indicate that more than 100 000 newly arrived talents, mainly arriving in Hong Kong through TTPS, have settled in Hong Kong with their dependants, bringing the total to over 200 000. Among them, one-third are children, and more than half of the applicants are under 40 years of age. Underlying these figures is a change in population structure: new citizens tend to be younger, have higher academic qualifications, and be family-oriented. These are the distinctive characteristics of the new citizens. While the new population supplementing the existing population has significant benefits, there are certain problems, such as integration difficulties and issues.

Firstly, we can see the immediate contributions of newly arrived talents to the economy. New citizens, mainly top talents, generated an additional 220 000 tax demand notes and an additional \$9 billion in salaries tax revenue in 2024. According to a government survey, the median monthly income of the top talent group is \$50,000, contributing \$34 billion to the economy each year, equivalent to 1.2% of the Gross Domestic Product. Among them, talents approved under Category A account for almost a quarter, and most of them also choose to start businesses in Hong Kong. Of the more than 9 600 new companies established in Hong Kong last year, a considerable proportion were founded by newly arrived talents.

Despite the influx of talents under the talent attraction policies, the challenges of integration for talents upon arrival are becoming increasingly evident. A government survey shows that 54% of TTPS entrants have been in employment, while the rest are still looking for jobs. It is difficult to attract a diverse range of professionals precisely because Hong Kong has a relatively homogeneous industrial structure. Six job fairs for top talents have been held, but fewer jobs have evidently been available, and there is a big difference between the number of enterprises recruiting and the number claimed by the Government.

Deputy President, they become Hong Kong people once they have arrived. Hong Kong has become an international metropolis precisely because we have always treated talents with an inclusive and open attitude. However, policies could be improved in areas such as children's education, job hunting, and the \$20,000 Newborn Baby Bonus. Some people have sought my assistance, for example a couple who have worked and paid taxes in Hong Kong for six years, but were not eligible for the \$20,000 Newborn Baby Bonus. Could we provide new citizens with a similar one-off bonus, on a par with that for permanent residents? This should also be considered by the Government.

Deputy President, the current population structure is afflicted with serious problems. The Government must conduct an in-depth study and formulate a comprehensive population policy to bring positive effects to our population structure.

With these remarks, Deputy President, I support Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok's motion.

MR STANLEY NG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I support Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok's motion on "Establishing a top-level dedicated structure to devise a population policy" and the two amendments.

Deputy President, challenges such as a low birth rate, an ageing population and a declining labour force participation rate are becoming increasingly serious in Hong Kong. However, the existing dedicated system and framework for implementing population policy measures lack a long-term perspective. The establishment of a top-level dedicated structure would enable us to shift from tactical responses to strategic planning and help us to achieve our goal of facilitating sustainable economic and social development in Hong Kong.

Population policy involves a number of policy areas, including economic development, labour and welfare, immigration and emigration, education and training, land use planning and housing supply. Therefore, the SAR Government set up the Human Resources Planning Commission (“HRPC”) in 2018 for cross-departmental supervision and coordination. The current terms of reference of HRPC are to explore, devise and coordinate strategies and measures; to monitor, review and examine the regimes of training and employment support and services; to follow up and refine the Government’s overall population policy; and to engage stakeholders and experts from outside the Government in furthering the work of HRPC.

Whilst HRPC can play a supervisory and coordinating role, there are limitations compared to establishing a top-level dedicated structure. These limitations include: Firstly, it has weak executive authority, with its terms of reference focusing on research, recommendation and supervision, rather than mandatory enforcement by a department, which is equivalent to the general staff of the armed forces and does not serve to establish as a top-level dedicated structure to break down departmental barriers or facilitate horizontal coordination. Secondly, its terms of reference focus only on labour issues, rather than strategies related to the population structure, such as immigration policy and encouraging childbirth. This means it remains at the tactical level. Third, the working method is more focused on discussions than data-driven policies. Fourth, there is limited capacity for social mobilization, although the non-official members of HRPC include experts and stakeholders from various sectors, and the Government will consult them on certain issues, they will just provide channels for expression, with limited influence on the final decision-making. As a non-official member of HRPC, I have a better understanding of its shortcomings and its weaker role in relation to trade unions.

It is essential to establish a top-level dedicated structure. I suggest that this dedicated structure should fulfil the following functions:

Firstly, it should switch from passive consultation to active decision-making. It should have the power to allocate resources, as well as an accountability mechanism.

Secondly, its terms of reference should be more extensive, covering more than just manpower issues, and its tactical solutions to problems should be upgraded to strategic solutions.

Thirdly, it should break through the “data silos” of various departments, integrating cross-domain data to promote data-driven decision-making and achieve population planning that combines practicality and beneficial development.

Fourthly, the participation of trade unions should be strengthened. Trade unions can provide representative insights into policy formulation, and increasing their participation and space for discourse in policy-making is a measure to strengthen policy implementation and promote social equity.

In addition, when setting up this top-level structure, the Government must pay attention to preventing structural expansion and wasting public funds. It should consider upgrading and empowering the existing committee to streamline operations and achieve effective coordination.

Deputy President, population policy is a major and fundamental task that concerns the rise and fall of a society and its sustainable development. It cannot be rushed or delayed, but must be pursued over the long term, and the Government must be aware of this.

I so submit.

MR JIMMY NG (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. Hong Kong is experiencing a trend of population ageing. What will the impact be? Let us take a look at the figures.

In 2021, there were more than 1.45 million elderly people aged 65 or above in Hong Kong, accounting for about 20% of the total population. According to the Government’s latest projection, the number of elderly people will increase to 2.74 million by 2046, i.e. it will nearly double in 25 years. By that time, one in every three people in Hong Kong will be elderly. Putting it in another way, at that time, only two in every three people in Hong Kong will not be elderly, and these people may be housewives or students. The future labour market in Hong Kong is a bit worrying indeed.

Last month, the Working Group on Promoting Silver Economy announced that work would be carried out in five areas, including unleashing silver productivity. This is a very good suggestion, as Hong Kong people are known for their love of work, and many want to continue working even after reaching retirement age. But reality is sometimes cruel. I have a friend who retired as

soon as he could use a JoyYou Card. This was not because he did not want to work, but because he comes from a small family and he had to retire to care for his almost 90-year-old parents. Many families in Hong Kong face the reality of the elderly caring for the elderly.

The above examples tell us that, in the face of an ageing population, it is not enough to only introduce measures to support the elderly, and there must be a population policy that covers the elderly, middle-aged, young people and children.

Since Hong Kong's return to the motherland, the Government and various sectors of the community have been discussing the population policy. Since 2003, the Government has published at least four special reports, the latest of which was published in 2015. That report set out five strategies: creating employment markets for women and the elderly; improving education and training; attracting more talents to settle in Hong Kong; assisting citizens in establishing families and raising children; and building elderly-friendly environments and facilities. These five strategies are still applicable today. The 2023 Policy Address also pointed out that the Government had reviewed the latest situation. The current population structure elements and trends in Hong Kong have not fundamentally changed significantly from the general direction mentioned in the Policy Address. However, the Chief Executive also added that the Government has set a firm policy direction to encourage childbirth amidst our persistently low birth rate. Increasing the birth rate is indeed the most direct way to solve the population problem, but what incentives could encourage people to have children?

In fact, the Business and Professionals Alliance for Hong Kong has proposed a number of measures that can be considered, including regularizing the Newborn Baby Bonus scheme; introducing a special tax deduction for parents with children under the age of three, offering tax deductions for employing foreign domestic helpers to care for young children; and increasing the existing child allowance. These measures are all very practical. But I suggest that we should be bolder and make further breakthroughs. First, we could introduce "discount incentives". We could take inspiration from South Korea's experience and issue "happiness cards" to families with more than two children, offering benefits including concessionary fares and even discounts for the purchase of baby products. Secondly, we could introduce "home purchase incentives". At present, we have the Families with Newborns Allocation Priority Scheme for the sale of Home Ownership Scheme Flats, and we can consider extending this scheme. Could a small family buying a private property for the first time enjoy extra tax deductions for a few years if they have a newborn baby?

That said, even if we can encourage people to have children, it takes a long time for children to grow into adults. Therefore, apart from encouraging childbirth, we should also proactively seek out talents. We should further improve the supporting facilities of the Top Talent Pass Scheme, especially by providing greater convenience in home ownership. After all, talents will only settle in Hong Kong with peace of mind if they can buy cosy homes.

Devising a population policy involves a number of areas, so we must not rely on one Policy Bureau to take responsibility. Instead, we must establish a top-level structure to coordinate and formulate specific measures, and then assign different Policy Bureaux to implement them in order to achieve the desired results.

With these remarks, Deputy President, I support the motion and the amendments.

MS YUNG HOI-YAN (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I speak in support of the original motion of Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok and the amendments of Mr Kenneth LEUNG and Ms Nixie LAM.

I believe that now is the critical moment to take forward the population policy at a high level and in the most pragmatic, coordinated and organized manner. In the past, Mr Kenneth LEUNG and I jointly put forward “the proposal on Hong Kong’s population policy and measures” and advocated the establishment of the Subcommittee to Study Population Policy and Initiatives in the Legislative Council (“LegCo”). Thanks to the efforts of the Government and LegCo, a solid foundation has been laid through discussions. However, in the face of the realistic challenges arising from a persistently low birth rate, an increasingly ageing population, and a declining labour force participation rate, I am more concerned about what can and should be done by the Government to encourage and stimulate population growth more effectively.

Mr Jimmy NG has just put forward a number of ways to encourage childbirth. If these measures are adopted, I will be very supportive, and I noticed the officials of the Bureau smiling in agreement. Implementing such measures would be a virtuous policy that could alleviate the major concerns of the public or parents with children, making them feel more secure about having more children. I would also encourage Mr Jimmy NG to keep it up, as there are still chances.

Hong Kong's population profile has undergone historic changes. Recently, I learnt that Japan has issued an alert that its population is decreasing year on year and has hit a record low this year. Of course, Hong Kong's fertility rate is similar. Earlier, under the Year of the Dragon effect, the situation might have got better. Coupled with the promotional efforts of the Government, the fertility rate has somewhat gone up. Yet, I do not know what it will be in the next few years. Without the \$20,000 bonus and other related policies, the Government may not be able to sustain the public's sense of security. Therefore, I think there will still be uncertainties.

The Chief Executive once said that, in order to maintain its competitiveness, Hong Kong must substantially boost its population. The Government has even set a target population of 10 million. However, population growth is not just about reaching a certain figure. It also requires scientific planning and ancillary facilities. The Government is now attracting talents and encouraging childbirth. I think it also needs to consider Hong Kong's carrying capacity in various aspects such as housing, healthcare, education, child care and elderly care, as well as how to increase ancillary facilities.

I know that the "lucky draw" results for the Primary One Admission System were released yesterday, and my child was one of the participants. Many parents are worried because fewer than 80% of children are allocated to one of their top three school choices. It turns out that many of my friends are quite aggressive. Given that some people have left Hong Kong and the fertility rate is low, they think that they can afford to be more aggressive by putting more prestigious schools in their top three choices. However, this is not the case in reality. I believe that Honourable Members have also received different views. For example, I think the definition of "local students" is a false proposition in an education context. This is because whoever we welcome are certainly the people of Hong Kong. Whoever we give birth to are the children of Hong Kong. Whoever attracted by us to come here are the young people of Hong Kong. We hope that they will stay in Hong Kong and settle down. Therefore, whether we are dealing with local students or encouraging childbirth, we must provide comprehensive ancillary facilities and a variety of school places, including private, public and international schools, for them to choose from. I often go to Tseung Kwan O, where people often say that there are insufficient places at international school in the area, as these schools primarily admit non-local students rather than local ones.

Therefore, even if we stimulate childbirth now, it will be very difficult to succeed without adequate ancillary measures, particularly if our goal is to become a metropolis of 10 million people. Therefore, in terms of schools ... we have heard many views from schools. Some have expressed fear of being “killed” due to under-enrolment. It is clear that an overall balance should be maintained. Everyone has their own needs. Despite the increase in births, some schools are still plagued by under-enrolment and the threat of closure. I think the Secretary has heard about this issue many times, and our districts have also relayed this issue many times. Different districts, be it Tai Po or Tseung Kwan O, are all facing the same problem.

Therefore, I hope that the Government will properly devise an overall population policy. I hope it will really consider the matter at a high level, which is also what Mr Kenneth LEUNG and I strongly advocated in our previous proposal. If individual bureaux continue to work within their own purviews as is the case now, we know it is effective, but not highly effective. I hope the Government can do a better job in high-level planning.

Thank you, Deputy President.

MR LAM CHUN-SING (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. I would like to thank Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok for moving the motion on the establishment of a top-level structure dedicated to devising a population policy.

Looking back, the Government set up the Task Force on Population Policy, chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration, as early as 2002. Subsequently, in 2007, the Government set up the Steering Committee on Population Policy (“SCPP”) to take over the work of the Task Force. In 2012, SCPP was reorganized to include industry experts.

In 2017, SCPP was disbanded. Since then, there has been no committee dedicated to population policy. In its place, the Government established the Human Resources Planning Commission (“HRPC”) in 2018. HRPC, which is also chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration, comprises eight policy secretaries, experts and stakeholders from different sectors. It is undoubtedly a high-level policy platform.

However, devising a population policy involves a wide range of areas beyond human resources, including childbirth, migration, elderly care, healthcare, ageing population, education, employment, residential population distribution planning, and policy formulation and review of policy implementation effectiveness. Hence, this extensive coverage and heavy workload should be handled by a dedicated committee.

At present, some bureaux, such as the Transport and Logistics Bureau (“TLB”) and the Development Bureau (“DEVB”), are not ex-officio members of HRPC. Of the eight skilled trades recently added to the “Technical Professional List”, two are related to TLB and three to DEVB. This arrangement provides an overall quota of 10 000, with a limit of 3 000 for each skilled trade. If the quota for some skilled trades is only 3 000, will this be insufficient? For some other skilled trades, will the immediate admission of 3 000 professionals affect the prospects of local technicians? How should the number of professionals to be admitted and the number of local talents to be trained be apportioned? All these require holistic and high-level planning by various Policy Bureaux.

In addition, I agree with Mr Kenneth LEUNG’s amendment that the Government should set a total population target. Taking the Top Talent Pass Scheme (“TTPS”) as an example, it is actually a population policy in the long term. Some of the top talents may work and live in Hong Kong for a long time, eventually becoming permanent residents of Hong Kong. Therefore, given that the implementation of TTPS is still at the initial stage, it is too soon to know whether it is effective from the perspective of a population policy, even though over 100 000 people have been approved under the scheme. After all, we are still waiting for the data upon the renewal of their passes two years later. How many of these top talents are able to practise their expertise and give full play to their strengths? Does TTPS meet the demands of the industries with talent shortages? If it transpires that many top talents do not renew their passes or they are under-utilized and unable to give full play to their capabilities, then the policy should be adjusted. For example, the Government should work with enterprises to identify suitable talents and facilitate their direct employment in Hong Kong, thereby reducing mismatches between talents and jobs. How many top talents will become permanent residents of Hong Kong and settle here in 10 years’ time? The Government should make a projection and realize it through policies and resources.

Lastly, while we are bringing in people and talents from the Mainland, China's birth rate has also been dropping over the last decade. The natural growth rate of its population has even recorded a negative figure. Therefore, encouraging childbirth is equally important alongside bringing in people. Although the Government provides a Newborn Baby Bonus of \$20,000, those who do not plan to have children will not choose to have children for \$20,000, whereas those who plan to have children will still have children even without the \$20,000 bonus. Although we do not expect this \$20,000 bonus to push up the fertility rate, it is still a positive step by the Government. In the future, the Government should set up a higher-level structure to study more aggressive policies to encourage childbirth, including tax deduction for home purchases, salaries tax deduction, parental leave, flexible work arrangements, and so on.

With these remarks, Deputy President, I support the motion.

IR CHAN SIU-HUNG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I speak in support of Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok's motion on "Establishing a top-level dedicated structure to devise a population policy" and the amendments proposed by the two Members.

The SAR Government last reviewed its population policy 10 years ago. At that time, it published a report titled "Population Policy—Strategies and Initiatives" ("the Report") which set out more than 50 initiatives as part of an action agenda. Since then, the Government's work on the population policy has focused on taking forward and implementing the initiatives set out in the Report. In recent years, the authorities have stated that all of these initiatives have been fully implemented and integrated into the work of various Policy Bureaux.

However, Hong Kong's overall social structure and future development direction have changed remarkably in the last 10 years. Nowadays, more people go north to spend money. The interconnectivity of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area ("GBA") has accelerated in recent years. The "one-hour living circle" in GBA is gradually taking shape, bringing significant changes to the living pattern of many Hong Kong residents. With the widespread application of artificial intelligence and the development of a new economy, many environmental factors have changed considerably compared to the past. In the face of challenges such as an ageing population, a declining fertility rate and a shrinking labour force, I believe that the Government should make targeted plans to address the demographic changes in Hong Kong in a timely manner.

Deputy President, according to the statistics of the Census and Statistics Department, the proportion of persons aged 65 or above in Hong Kong rose to 24% in 2024, meaning there was nearly one elderly person for every four persons. Hong Kong has entered a “super-aged society”. On the other hand, the number of births in Hong Kong has declined year on year, dropping from over 60 000 in 2016 to a record low of just over 33 000 in 2022. In the 2023 Policy Address, the SAR Government launched a series of measures to promote fertility and create a pro-childbearing environment, including providing a cash bonus for newborns, priority arrangements for buying subsidized sale flats and for the allocation of public rental housing flats, and so on. As a result, the number of newborns in Hong Kong increased slightly, reaching over 33 000 and over 36 000 in 2023 and 2024 respectively.

In the face of demographic changes, the Government has to make corresponding adjustments to its policies. For example, the Secretary for Housing recently mentioned in an interview that, in view of the demand of small families for living space, the Government would consider adopting simple designs, such as open kitchens, for small subsidized sale flats in the future. I hope that the Government will draw up complementary measures under its other policies.

Deputy President, social changes and technological advancement will change the quality and quantity of our population and manpower demand, and such changes could happen very quickly. In a media interview last year, the Chief Executive emphasized that Hong Kong must attract talents. He cited a research report stating that Hong Kong should have a population of 10 million in order to maintain its competitiveness. Despite launching various measures to attract talents, such as the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme and the Top Talent Pass Scheme, Hong Kong’s current population of around 7.5 million remains far from reaching 10 million. In my opinion, a population policy must be both precise and all-encompassing because it is equally important to consider the demographic structure, human resources and the quality of life of the people.

Population policy is closely related to a number of policy areas, including economic development, housing, education, labour and immigration, and involves many Policy Bureaux. Therefore, interdepartmental coordination is essential.

Currently, the Human Resources Planning Commission (“HRPC”), established in 2018 and chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration, is responsible for population policy. One of its terms of reference is to follow up and improve the Government’s overall population policy. The then Chief

Secretary for Administration also explicitly pointed out at the outset that HRPC was responsible for consolidating the resources and efforts of the Government and various sectors to examine, review and holistically coordinate policies and measures on human resources.

Deputy President, the Subcommittee to Study Population Policy and Initiatives formed by this Council has reviewed and discussed in detail different areas and initiatives under the population policy. However, we all felt that we could not see the whole picture. By “the whole picture”, I mean a comprehensive population development policy and top-down efforts jointly made by government departments and public organizations. I suggest that when the Government is implementing some major policies or public services, the relevant departments and organizations must consider the population policy as well. For example, in developing the Northern Metropolis or taking forward urban renewal, it is necessary for the Government to include elements that are in line with the population policy.

In view of the various social and environmental changes mentioned just now, I believe that HRPC should not only follow up and improve the existing population policy, but also make forward-looking and systematic plans for the future direction of population policy, and review and update them regularly, say once every five years, to ensure that the short-, medium-, and long-term measures can meet the future challenges arising from the new economy and facilitate the sustainable development of Hong Kong in the future.

I so submit. Thank you, Deputy President.

MR CHAN PUI-LEUNG (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. Deputy President, population is important in maintaining international competitiveness and driving economic and social development. It is also closely related to the well-being of the people. However, Hong Kong has been facing problems such as accelerated population ageing, low birth rate, manpower shortage, skills mismatch, which have posed significant challenges to our long-term sustainable development. Population policy involves a wide range of areas. I would like to thank Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok for proposing this motion, which allows us to discuss how to continuously review and improve our population policy, so that the relevant strategies can keep abreast of the times in the light of the actual situation as well as better meet the population needs of the Hong Kong community.

The SAR Government set up different structures at different times to cope with demographic changes, including the Task Force on Population Policy in 2002, the Steering Committee on Population Policy in 2007, and the Human Resources Planning Commission (“HRPC”) in 2018. These structures are all led by the Chief Secretary for Administration. According to the records, since the establishment of HRPC, most of the discussions have been on vocational training, employment support, nurturing talents, attracting talents, etc. The words “human resources” in the name of HRPC as well as its composition, which includes the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, the Government Economist and the Chairmen of three major organizations related to training and qualifications, reflect that HRPC emphasizes converting human resources into economic benefits, so as to tie in with the objective of “furthering the development of a high value-added and diversified economy in Hong Kong”.

Although population policy is also included in HRPC’s terms of reference, its role is merely to follow up and improve it. From publicly available information, issues related to population policy, such as an ageing population, demographic changes and encouraging childbirth, have been less discussed by HRPC. In my opinion, apart from focusing on human resource planning, HRPC should expand its terms of reference with regard to population policy, enabling it to coordinate population policy planning and formulate a more comprehensive policy at a macro level. It should also incorporate different policy perspectives, such as those of the Housing Bureau and the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau, to ensure that population policy more closely follows the trends of demographic changes and population needs.

Mr Kenneth LEUNG proposes in his amendment that the Government should conduct ongoing and targeted research on and deployment for Hong Kong’s population development. I very much agree with this. Since the publication of the report titled “Population Policy—Strategies and Initiatives” in 2015, the Government has gradually implemented the relevant measures. However, these measures were announced 10 years ago and, during this time, Hong Kong’s population has undergone significant changes. Apart from the persistent ageing population and low birth rate, many Hong Kong people have opted to live and work abroad in recent years. We have also introduced different policies to proactively attract talents to Hong Kong, resulting in changes to the composition and backgrounds of our population and to the demand for housing, healthcare, elderly care, etc. In addition, in order to cope with economic restructuring and industrial development, we need different types of talents and workers, meaning that our

population policy must keep up to date. Although population policy involves a wide range of policy areas, the timely collection and analyses of accurate data can provide a more scientific and reliable basis for policy formulation.

Apart from the population census conducted by the Census and Statistics Department, the report on manpower projection published by the Labour and Welfare Bureau last year projected the manpower balance for the “eight centres” and nine significant sectors in 2028. With the introduction of various policies on importation of workers and talent attraction by the Government, the manpower balance may gradually narrow down. I think it is necessary to set monitoring indicators to dynamically review the changes in demographic structures and demands. Moreover, we should make good use of AI (artificial intelligence) and big data to dynamically monitor these indicators. If the indicators are found to have achieved their targets or reached a certain level of abnormality, the Policy Bureaux can make timely adjustments to the relevant policies in response to the actual situations and changes, making the policies more flexible.

With these remarks, I support Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok’s original motion and the amendments proposed by the other Members.

MR CHAN KIN-POR (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. In the face of the challenges posed by an ageing population and labour shortage, we need to adopt strategic thinking to formulate a long-term population policy which can both increase the population and lower the age of Hong Kong’s population. I would like to thank Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok for proposing the original motion and the other Members for their amendments, which enable us to have in-depth discussions and put forward proposals to resolve the current population crisis and inject new impetus into Hong Kong’s economy in the future.

First of all, we have to face up to the pressing problem of an ageing population in Hong Kong. As at the end of 2024, the total number of people aged 60 or above was about 2.4 million, accounting for more than 31% of the total population. As at the end of March 2024, there were nearly 200 000 households with all members aged 60 or above, accounting for 25% of the total number of public rental housing (“PRH”) households under the Hong Kong Housing Authority. The rising proportion of elderly people in the population has led to manpower shortages in various industries, increased the burden on the healthcare system, and directly affected the vitality of the labour market and consumption. Economist Prof Richard WONG has pointed out that Hong Kong needs not only to

increase its population to 10 million, but also optimize the age structure of its population. In the long run, the only way out for Hong Kong is to attract talents to settle in the city to increase the labour force and economic momentum.

It is suggested that the Government should adopt a two-pronged strategy to continue to optimize the Greater Bay Area (“GBA”) retirement scheme, introduce measures to encourage elderly people aged 65 or above to retire voluntarily in GBA cities, and even explore and pilot more proactive approaches, such as subsidizing elderly people who are willing to surrender their PRH units to purchase properties in the Mainland. At present, PRH units must be surrendered upon death of the tenants. However, subsidizing elderly people to purchase properties in GBA will enable them to own assets which can be passed on to their next generation. This will definitely attract more elderly people to move to GBA. A large number of elderly people surrendering their flats will expedite the circulation of PRH units and even enable the redevelopment of old housing estates or their conversion into talent apartments. Hence, the public funds saved will definitely outweigh the subsidies paid, which is “a smart move”.

In regard to increasing the young population, I suggest that the Government should continuously optimize the Top Talent Pass Scheme in the short term to specifically attract professionals aged 30 or above, as they are at the prime of their careers. This will not only inject vitality into Hong Kong’s economy, but also boost household consumption and education needs.

On the other hand, consideration can be given to redeveloping old districts or amending legislation to allow buildings on existing commercial sites to be converted into talent apartments or hostels with supporting facilities to facilitate their integration into society as soon as possible, thereby creating a liveable environment for internationally competitive talents and attracting talents aged 30 or above to come to Hong Kong to work and settle here.

Population directly impacts Hong Kong’s long-term competitiveness. We must study and formulate a population policy framework as soon as possible, in order to enhance Hong Kong’s attractiveness in regional competition for talents and build a solid talent base for future economic transformation. Effective population planning will enable Hong Kong to maintain stronger consumption power and more vibrant innovation capabilities.

I so submit.

MR TANG FEI (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I speak in support of Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok's motion and the other amendments. I agree that a topmost-level dedicated structure should be established to devise a population policy, and that the relevant work should be carried out properly through interdepartmental coordination and liaison.

When setting up a topmost-level structure, the focus should be on overcoming three major difficulties. If these three major difficulties are not addressed, many issues will remain unresolved.

The first difficulty is that we need to study the effectiveness and outcomes of the policies of other successful countries and regions (especially developed economies) in promoting childbirth and increasing the young population, because there have generally been more failures than successes. Recently, a Mainland think tank released a detailed report comparing the childbirth policies of 10 European, American and Asian countries. I have broadly summarized the findings into three conclusions. Firstly, which place has the most effective childbirth policy? The answer is that Europe has been far more effective than East Asia in encouraging childbirth. Secondly, what kind of policy is the most effective? It is found that providing financial subsidies, including transfer payments, holiday systems and child care services, can eliminate people's worries. What insights does this give the Chinese community as a whole? The above policies must be implemented as a package. Do not expect a single action to solve the problem. My main point is not that we must adopt this report, but that if we really want to set up a top-level structure, we must study the successful experiences of and lessons learnt by other developed societies and economies. Frankly speaking, our neighbouring countries and regions are all facing the problem of an ageing population. Although many solutions are available, there are few successful examples in our neighbourhood.

Secondly, artificial intelligence ("AI") has impacted all trades and industries. Its impact on job demand in the market is particularly significant. A few days ago, the International Labour Organization released a global index report on generative AI and jobs. Arguably the most detailed study to date, the report explores how generative AI is reshaping the labour world and conducts a precise and targeted research on each and every industry. It concludes that a quarter of jobs globally are likely to be severely impacted by generative AI. Notably, the proportion of jobs being impacted may be higher in more developed economies, countries and regions. Globally, 25% of jobs are likely to be impacted. In

developed economies, this proportion is as high as 34%. Hong Kong is undoubtedly a developed economy. What is more interesting, however, is that not only traditional jobs, but also some AI-related jobs, will be impacted.

As of this year (2025) and including last year (2024), over 300 000 people have been laid off across Silicon Valley. The number of layoffs at the beginning of this year was overwhelming. Microsoft's profits have increased by 18%, but how many employees have they laid off? Six thousand in one go. Other companies have done the same. Amazon cut 14 000 jobs in the first half of this year, and Intel laid off 15 000 employees worldwide. In other words, AI-related posts have also been cut. There is a catchphrase: As an AI worker or programmer, I spent three years training and developing an AI assistant, only to be replaced by the AI robot in the end. This is so true. Those who do not know AI are not the only ones being laid off; even those who know AI and have developed and trained AI robots or AI agents may eventually be replaced by the AI agents they created. Therefore, a major difficulty arises: when the interdepartmental or high-level structure wants to study the employment situation in the future, it will be difficult to accurately calculate the impact of AI on traditional jobs and AI-related jobs. This is a major difficulty.

The last point concerns interdepartmental issues. Let us not go too far. Last year, the Chief Executive's Policy Address proposed setting up four interdepartmental working groups. I am not going to repeat them, as we all know which four they are. It is fine to set up an additional group, as population is an important issue after all. However, the workload will be very heavy. Given the current structural fiscal deficit, how will the SAR Government "get the numbers right"? Besides, the interdepartmental group in question may involve many departments. Once a research report has been published through the joint efforts of various departments, how will they coordinate to implement the policy in order to genuinely rejuvenate the local population and benefit our city? This is a big issue.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MR MA FUNG-KWOK (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I speak in support of Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok's motion and the other amendments.

Hong Kong's population has shown significant fluctuations in the past few years. In 2022, the population fell to 7.346 million. Although the figure rebounded to 7.498 million in 2023, the overall trend is still full of uncertainties. Meanwhile, our population is ageing rapidly and the labour force ratio is declining. According to the projections of the Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong's population is expected to reach 8.19 million by 2046, while the labour force participation rate will decrease from 56.9% in 2023 to about 52%. This implies that relying on imported labour or talent attraction policies alone will not be sufficient to cope with the far-reaching impact of an ageing population on the economy and society. The SAR Government must start devising a long-term plan, review the effectiveness of existing policies, refine the approach to devising population policy, and formulate a comprehensive strategy to encourage childbirth, in order to maintain a stable labour market and ensure the sustainable development of Hong Kong's economy.

In retrospect, Hong Kong's population policy has often been passive. Over the past few years, in order to address population-related issues, the Government has been expanding various kinds of talent trawling policies. It has also permitted the importation of labour for high- and low-skilled trades and offered \$20,000 in cash to encourage childbirth. Although the Government has invested a lot of resources in these measures, it has not systematically considered whether the talents coming to Hong Kong really suit the needs of Hong Kong's industrial development, or whether they are willing to stay in Hong Kong for long-term development. Without complementary measures to support current policies aimed at boosting childbirth, it will be difficult to reverse the low fertility rate fundamentally.

In 2017, the Government merged the Manpower Development Committee and the Steering Committee on Population Policy into the Human Resources Planning Commission led by the Chief Secretary for Administration, with the aim of upgrading and optimizing Hong Kong's manpower resources. However, there are voices in the community that Hong Kong's population policy is overly inclined towards meeting economic needs. Against this background, the Commission should adjust its policy planning direction, act as the "brain" behind Hong Kong's population policy, and propose a forward-looking and practical population policy.

Regarding the Commission's responsibilities, I agree with Mr Kenneth LEUNG's proposal in his amendment on accurately setting a total population target. By scientifically setting a total population target, we can take the initiative

in optimizing the age distribution structure, such as increasing the proportion of students, talents and young families admitted, thereby effectively alleviating the problem of an ageing population. The formulation of this target requires not only a comprehensive assessment of Hong Kong's economic structure, level of development, land carrying capacity and infrastructure capacity, but also an emphasis on rejuvenating the demographic structure. Specifically, strategies such as expanding the enrolment of Mainland and overseas students and optimizing various admission schemes for young talents can be adopted to attract young people to come to and stay in Hong Kong for development. In practice, given Hong Kong's positioning as the "eight centres", we can make a scientific projection of future talent demand in various industries and, in particular, set age structure ratios and a total population target to cater for the need for young manpower in areas such as innovation and technology.

As for local population growth, it is necessary to adopt a dual-track strategy of "encouraging childbirth" and "providing for the elderly". Young people nowadays often choose not to get married or have children mainly due to the fast pace of life, high pressure, high costs of rearing children, and difficulties in balancing work and family life. A greater incentive effect can only be achieved if the Government can provide appropriate and specific supportive policies in this regard. For instance, we can draw reference from Singapore's practice of strengthening support for child care centre construction and assistance to alleviate the burden on parents. The Australian government provides child care allowances and takes a more aggressive approach than Singapore by focusing on assisting low-income families. Families that meet the requirements of the law only have to pay 15% of the fees for child care services, and the remainder will be paid by the Australian authorities, while the subsidies for the better off medium- and high-income families are relatively lower. The above measures can make young families dare to and to be willing to have children. In addition, we should be more proactive in developing "silver human resources" and encouraging healthy retirees to rejoin the workforce to continue to contribute to the community by working on a part-time basis or as professional consultants. This will alleviate the shortage of labour as well as enable elderly people to maintain their social participation, and give them a sense of worth in old age.

In conclusion, population policy affects Hong Kong's long-term competitiveness and social stability. We must look beyond short-term thinking and formulate policies with a holistic vision, so that Hong Kong can achieve economic prosperity and social harmony with the support of a healthy population structure. Deputy President, I so submit.

DR WENDY HONG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I support the motion moved by Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok.

In fact, Hong Kong has never lacked a high-level structure for population policy. In 2002, the Government set up the Task Force on Population Policy, chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration. In 2007, the Task Force became the Steering Committee on Population Policy, which was also chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration. In 2018, the Government set up the Human Resources Planning Commission, which is also chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration and has been in operation ever since. The 2024 Policy Address further proposed the establishment of a Committee on Education, Technology and Talents, also chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration, to coordinate the integrated development of education, technology and talents. It can be seen that Hong Kong does have a structure responsible for population policy. However, in my opinion, this structure has not found a key and effective direction of work over the years.

Firstly, Hong Kong's labour force participation rate is significantly lower than that of our neighbouring economies, and has been declining for 40 years. We have never really paid much attention to this issue, simply attributing it to our ageing population. However, our labour force participation rate remains six percentage points lower than Japan's, a super-ageing country. Our labour force participation rate in every age group is also lower than that of our neighbouring economies. Clearly, ageing is not a convincing reason.

Why is Hong Kong's labour force participation rate so low? In my opinion, it is related to our housing and welfare policies. In Hong Kong, the lower a person's income, the more assistance they receive. Conversely, if they join the labour force and earn a higher income, they will lose their welfare benefits. Sometimes, sandwich class people who work hard may be worse off than those grass roots who rely on welfare benefits. Hence, many people choose not to work.

Many people have suggested that Hong Kong's population should be expanded to 10 million. Theoretically, a larger population would boost economic vitality. However, if the labour force participation rate continues to drop while the total population grows, society will face an even heavier burden. Therefore, I do not support the sheer expansion of the population base. Instead, we should adopt various means to increase the labour force participation rate and find more

economic resources. When attracting migrants, we should focus on the “active population” who can participate in the labour market, rather than indiscriminately absorbing the “passive population” who do not participate in the labour market.

Secondly, Hong Kong’s fertility rate is too low. In my opinion, this is closely related to the slowing down, or even stagnation, of social mobility. Our industry structure is becoming increasingly homogeneous. There are few types of employment offering long-term potential for upward mobility, and the number of such vacancies is insufficient. The housing and welfare systems focus solely on the safety net function of “guarding the bottom line”, almost completely neglecting their role in enabling people to move up the social ladder. People will not have children just to receive \$20,000. However, if they have confidence in climbing up the social ladder and trust that their next generation will lead better lives than they do, I believe more people will be willing to get married and have children. Therefore, providing housing and employment ladders to promote upward social mobility is the key to encouraging childbirth, as it gives people hope for the future.

(THE PRESIDENT resumed the Chair)

Thirdly, our population policy should align with the vision of urban development. Without a vision for the future development of Hong Kong, how will we know how to deploy our manpower resources to fulfil it? Hong Kong has always been an exemplar of a free economy, and its development has been driven by market demand. This approach was very successful in the past. However, due to a lack of long-term development vision and corresponding top-level design, the industry structure has become homogeneous and hollow. Land and housing policies have also been passive. Hong Kong needs to initiate a paradigm shift. We need to be driven not only by the market, but also by a vision. We must put forward a long-term vision for development, an inspiring “big dream”, and formulate a top-level design to make this dream come true. Population policy is precisely an integral component of this top-level design.

Therefore, we should not only talk about population. We need to reform the housing policy and the welfare system, create a ladder to promote upward social mobility, formulate a long-term development vision and devise a top-level design

to realize the vision. All these are deep-rooted problems of Hong Kong that need to be solved at the highest level. Piecemeal policies can only achieve limited effectiveness.

I so submit.

MR CHAN YUNG (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I would also like to thank the Under Secretaries. I am very grateful to Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok for his original motion and to Mr Kenneth LEUNG and Ms Nixie LAM for their amendments.

I would like to discuss the idea that a top-level population policy should aim to further enhance the support measures for women, families and childbearing. President XI has said at the highest level of the country that population development is crucial to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. We can imagine how President XI has prioritized population development and population policy. For the present topic, which is of vital concern to us and crucial for Hong Kong's long-term development, I believe that the aforesaid high hierarchical top-level design and guidance is more forward-looking and more likely to be successfully implemented. The emphasis is on how to practically help or incentivize local people, especially women, young couples and families, so that everyone will be more willing to have children. In this regard, Chief Executive John LEE has also emphasized that in order to remain competitive, Hong Kong needs a larger population.

In fact, relevant figures from Honourable colleagues, the Government and the Bureau show that Hong Kong's ageing population is obvious to all. By 2039, there will be 1 million more people aged 65 or above than there are now. However, the birth rate of Hong Kong is one of the lowest in the world. In this regard, Members may have noticed from the news that even Hong Kong's giant panda, a national treasure, has become pregnant at an older age. It is encouraging that such an old panda has had children: a baby boy and a baby girl. I think the panda could act as a spokesperson. Secretaries, please consider this. The downside is that we are really worried that in the future, the women of Hong Kong—Ms Nixie LAM is so great—we do not want women in Hong Kong to become protected animals like pandas in that they will not be willing to have children unless they are provided with care to the same standard as at Ocean Park. This is where our pain and crisis lie.

Therefore, in order to avoid this, we should follow the example of the National Giant Panda Conservation and Research Center in changing the giant panda's status from endangered to stable. This will require many government policies. We can see that the policies of various Policy Bureaux are effective in attracting a lot of high-quality talents to Hong Kong, including the Top Talent Pass Scheme, and some other award schemes, such as the \$20,000 bonus. However, these measures are implemented separately. We hope that all Policy Bureaux would be brought together under high-level, top-level leadership to consolidate their work systematically, enabling members of the public (especially young couples who want to have children) to understand that, as long as they are willing to have children, they will be supported by the relevant policies in areas such as education, labour and welfare, housing and transport, thereby making them willing to have children in all circumstances.

In addition, we in the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong have done a lot of work, including setting up talent hubs and childbearing programmes or platforms, as well as working on several other aspects. We are ready to assist the Government in stepping up the relevant initiatives. We have also put forward some suggestions to gather views from different sectors for the consideration of the highest-level officials in various bureaux and the Government—the Chief Executive, the Secretaries of Departments and the Directors of Bureaux—which include friendly measures that reward private housing owners, expansion of child care services, work relating to family-friendly practices, and enhancing healthcare services for women. The key is institutional reform. We have many good suggestions to share with you. One of these is to upgrade the interdepartmental coordination mechanism. Should the formulation of these population policies be led directly by the Chief Executive? Another suggestion is disseminating information transparently so that various trades and industries can access relevant information and obtain support. Moreover, resources should be reallocated. We believe that some of these suggestions are worthy of consideration. For example, the expenditure related to “bogus refugees” amounts to \$1 billion per year. Could this money be saved and transferred directly to childbearing funds and child care subsidies? Some countries encourage their people to go “dating” and provide subsidies for blind dates. I think it may not be necessary for us to implement such measures, but Hong Kong should consider providing more incentives, similar to those introduced by Singapore. We must design a comprehensive approach under top-level leadership to “achieve greater, faster and better results”.

I so submit. Thank you, President.

PROF WILLIAM WONG (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. An ageing society will lead to a decline in market demand and a shrinking economic scale. A declining labour force will also result in a shortage of manpower to support various kinds of economic activities, and thus directly affecting the prosperous development in society. According to the 2021 Population Census conducted by the Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong's elderly population aged 65 and above accounted for 19.6% of the total population, implying that we have already entered the stage of an ageing society. The population aged 65 and above is expected to increase to 30% by 2039, and Hong Kong will even become a "super-aged society". There are a number of proposals for promoting population growth in an ageing society, mainly including encouraging childbirth and attracting migrants.

However, low birth rate is a common issue faced by all advanced countries and society. For example, Korea's birth rate is only 0.75, which is still well below the replacement fertility rate of 2.1 and has thus triggered a population crisis. Hong Kong's birth rate is not any better since it also stood at 0.75 in 2023. It is essential to introducing fertility promotion initiatives, but it is by no means easy to sway the younger generation as they prefer to remain unmarried and childless. This is especially the case in Hong Kong because long working hours have made it difficult for people to take care of their children, while the exorbitant cost of raising a child is also a major obstacle to childrearing.

The importation of talents is another channel for achieving population growth. Hong Kong enjoys the unique advantages since it is easier to import high-calibre talents from the Mainland. Coupled with the emerging ostracism against highly educated Chinese in the United States, it has presented an opportunity for Hong Kong to absorb the relevant talents. In this regard, the motion on "Establishing a top-level dedicated structure to devise a population policy" proposed by Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok today has come at the best timing, and I support it.

As early as in 2015, the Government published the report on "Population Policy—Strategies and Initiatives". The Government advised that all the strategies and initiatives had been implemented and the Steering Committee on Population Policy was disbanded in June 2017. To date, however, we have not yet resolved the issue of unbalanced population structure, and thus formulating a new population policy to address new opportunities and challenges will be very helpful in today's context.

The formulation of population policy for this generation must be linked to population quality. We should formulate policies from the perspective of integrating education, technology and talents, so as to sustain the population required for meeting the needs of economic development in the future. In 2024, the Report on 2023 Manpower Projection released by the Labour and Welfare Bureau projected the manpower demand for the development of “eight centres” in Hong Kong, with a manpower shortfall of 18 000 to 23 000 in the innovation and technology sector alone. Under such circumstances, it is worthwhile for the Government to compile a report on the “Population Policy—Strategies and Initiatives” again and formulate a longer-term population planning.

With the rapid development of artificial intelligence (“AI”) nowadays, in addition to considering promoting population growth through childbirth, we should consider how to make the best use of robots to make up for the manpower shortage. We need to seriously identify highly repetitive work procedures that can be handled by robots, as well as high-quality and creative jobs that can be left in the capable hands of real people. We should also provide sufficient incentives to attract young people to enrol in the relevant programmes or encourage people with more working experience to receive retraining, so as to nurture new blood for the development of the “eight centres” and make up for the manpower shortage.

As the saying goes, “wherever there is danger, there lurks opportunity”. The trend of low birth rate is more conducive to implementing small class teaching and incorporating AI into learning. We can transform the dilemma arising from a declining student population into the advantage of teaching students according to their varied abilities, meticulously nurture the next generation of high quality talents in the new era, and apply innovative technologies flexibly, so as to support the objective of the development of “eight centres” in Hong Kong.

With these remarks, President, I support the original motion and the amendments.

MR YIU PAK-LEUNG (in Cantonese): President, I speak in support of the original motion moved by Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok and the amendments proposed by the two Members.

I believe Members are familiar with the discussion on population policies. Two years ago, Mr Kenneth LEUNG moved a motion on “Formulating a comprehensive population policy”. Today, Ir Dr LO Wai-kyok continues the previous discussion and highlights the systematic manpower shortage in various trades and industries. Just now, the Under Secretary has cited the statistics of the 2023 Manpower Projection, and the overall manpower shortage in Hong Kong is expected to reach 180 000 by 2028, of which one-third are “skilled technical workers”. I believe the tourism industry has gained a first-hand understanding of this issue.

President, in order to address the shortage of “skilled technical workers”, in addition to importing labour in an appropriate scale to resolve the short- and medium-term problems, we should attach importance to vocational and professional education and training (“VPET”) and step up efforts to nurture local talents in the long run, which are the first and foremost tasks. Hong Kong’s tertiary education has all along focused on academic studies and acquiring degree programme qualifications. According to the “Report on the comparative study on the income of different generations of university graduates in Hong Kong” published by the New Youth Forum, 10.6% of the population aged between 25 and 29 were degree holders in 1993, and it reached 61.8% in 2023. Although the degree-holding labour force has continued to grow, there is a widening shortfall of technical professionals. The education sector has apparently failed to meet the actual needs of the labour market.

To alleviate the shortage of technical workers, the answer does not necessarily lie in nurturing more academically-focused university students, but rather we need to double down on VPET development and nurture more VPET talents. Taking the tourism industry as an example. We should place more emphasis on the frontline experience, adaptability and communication skills of industry practitioners, instead of purely focusing on academic training. In order to cultivate such kinds of talents, tailor-made career-oriented training can better suit the needs of the industry.

In this regard, while promoting the development of tertiary education, the Government should take into account the important role played by VPET in meeting the demand for skilled talents in various trades and industries. Although the Education Bureau has set up the Task Force on Promotion of Vocational and Professional Education and Training and provided a number of recommendations on promoting VPET in a report submitted in 2020, parents still have little

knowledge about VPET and do not quite understand the career prospects of VPET. We should further step up publicity and help the community understand that VPET is a better alternative for young people with different expertise and interests other than the traditional academic education pathway.

In addition, I think currently there is still room for VPET to increase the interaction between industries and education. In recent years, the country has vigorously promoted cooperation between industries and education, i.e. turning schools into industrial business entities with the integrated functions of talent cultivation, scientific research and provision of technical services. Enterprises can proactively participate in designing the curriculum, devise training contents and set the qualification requirements for teaching staff, provide internship opportunities or even recruit students. Such kind of in-depth collaboration between enterprises and education institutions has provided essential support for VPET.

The industries in Hong Kong are dominated by small and medium enterprises and they mainly belong to the services sector, and thus a direct comparison with the Mainland may not be entirely appropriate. However, I strongly support the direction of strengthening the collaboration between industries and education. In fact, we have not done enough in respect of promoting communication between industries and education for the time being, let alone the cooperation between industries and education. Take internship as an example. At present, many VPET institutions are offering tourism and hospitality programmes and many fellow industry practitioners are very willing to offer internship opportunities, but they have no idea how to approach the institutions. I hope that the Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Education Bureau will discuss with the industry and allocate resources to launch more internship programmes for the tourism industry, while setting up a regular communication mechanism to facilitate more frequent interaction between enterprises and institutions. By doing so, we can devise training programmes which better suit the needs of enterprises, offer more opportunities for students to apply what they have learnt, make VPET programmes more popular, and cultivate more skilled talents in Hong Kong.

President, manpower is inextricably intertwined with population policies. Although the SAR Government disbanded the Steering Committee on Population Policy chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration in 2017, it had set up the Human Resources Planning Commission (“HRPC”) led by the Chief Secretary for

Administration in 2018. In my opinion, the Government can consider and explore whether the functions of HRPC can be expanded by taking into account the needs of population planning and formulating comprehensive plans on Hong Kong's population and manpower policies, thereby driving forward the sustainable development of the Hong Kong economy.

President, I so submit.

MRS REGINA IP (in Cantonese): I would like to thank Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok for moving the motion on “Establishing a top-level dedicated structure to devise a population policy”. I also support the amendments proposed by Mr Kenneth LEUNG and Ms Nixie LAM.

I remember that shortly after Hong Kong returned to normalcy, the United Kingdom (“UK”) violated the memorandum on nationality exchanged with China in 1984 by forcibly providing a channel for Hong Kong residents holding BNO (British National (Overseas)) passports to acquire the right of abode in UK, thus resulting in a large number of Hong Kong people emigrating to UK. Nevertheless, it has now shifted the rhetoric and stated that it may change the requirements and only those who have resided locally for 10 years will be granted the right of abode. Hong Kong people have been mucked around by the said policies. At that time, many countries had also lowered their immigration thresholds, resulting in a significant decrease in the Hong Kong population.

I recall that I had previously asked a government official in the Legislative Council whether the authorities had put in place a population policy. In view of the low birth rate, I asked the official whether the authorities had put in place any policy or initiative to encourage childbirth. The official advised that family planning was a personal affair and childbearing was also a personal affair, and thus the Government should adopt a hands-off approach. In fact, many governments around the world, including the Mainland government, have introduced a number of fertility promotion initiatives because population size will affect the total economic output of society. A smaller population will translate into weaker consumption and a smaller labour force. Hong Kong understands this logic since people no longer spend money in Hong Kong and have shifted to go north for spending, which has a huge impact on the local economic growth. In the light of

this, all governments should formulate population policies and it is crucial to encourage childbirth. Therefore, my first suggestion is that we must introduce specific measures to encourage childbirth.

Recently, I visited Dubai and talked to many Mainland friends. They told me that many Mainland cities have introduced fertility promotion initiatives. Some cities have offered families a monthly allowance of RMB1,500 until their children reach the age of three, while others have offered a one-off subsidy of RMB100,000 to families with three children, so as to encourage people to raise more children. Such measures may be far from sufficient. It is especially the case for urban residents because childrearing incurs huge cost and they have to ensure that their children can enrol in reputable schools and secure decent jobs. Despite this, many governments have made efforts in this regard.

As part of the monetary incentives, we have offered a “red packet” worth \$20,000. It was said that the birth rate was satisfactory last year, probably because it was the Year of the Dragon. Of course, this comes with many supporting measures. For example, we have recently passed the amendments to the Employment Ordinance, under which part-time workers are entitled to labour benefits by working flexibly for an aggregate of 68 hours in four weeks, which is a useful measure. Certainly, the Government should consider providing more child care centres, including activity centres with the provision of care services for children and infants. Yesterday, we held a debate on the topic of markets. Many markets with vacant space are situated in prime locations. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department should expeditiously coordinate with other departments to handle the relevant vacant spaces. Whether such spaces are reassigned for use as elderly service centres or child care centres, this can help encourage childbirth.

Furthermore, in respect of population policy, I think the Government should take the lead in extending the retirement age. For civil servants who joined the civil service after June 2000, the retirement age has been extended. However, there is still a large number of civil servants who have joined the civil service before June 2000 and they are still subject to a lower retirement age. The retirement age of disciplined services directorate officers is 57 while the retirement age of civil servants is 60. In view of the population health status nowadays, the above retirement ages are too low. We can see that taxi drivers who have reached the age of 70 or 80 are still driving for a living. Watchmen and security guards can

also work until the age of 70, while judges can also work until the age of 70 or above. The Government should therefore consider taking the lead in extending the retirement age of civil servants, so that the entire society will follow suit and we can better tap into the contributions of the healthy labour force.

Last but not least, I support one of the suggestions made by Ms Nixie LAM, namely promoting the provision of more assisted reproductive technology and services. I have recently learnt that the wife of an artist has got pregnant even though she is already 58 years old, and she gave birth to a baby at the age of 52. We can keep an eye on this and see if her womb is healthy enough and whether she can really give birth to a healthy baby. In any case, although it involves health risks and women need to make a choice, I hope that the Government (*The buzzer sounded*) ... will introduce more lenient measures.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mrs Regina IP, please stop speaking.

Mr LAI Tung-kwok, please speak.

MR LAI TUNG-KWOK (in Cantonese): President, I support the passage of the original motion moved by Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok and the amendments proposed by Mr Kenneth LEUNG and Ms Nixie LAM. According to the United Nations' World Population Prospects 2024, the global population is expected to be around 700 million fewer by the end of this century than anticipated a decade ago. This is mainly attributed to the decline in global fertility rate. Population decline will have far-reaching impacts on the global economy, labour supply and social stability.

As we all know, the demographic challenges faced by Hong Kong include a persistently low birth rate, an ageing population structure and a gradually declining labour force participation rate. According to the statistics of the Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong's population has started to experience a natural decrease since 2020 as the number of births is less than the number of deaths. In 2022, the total fertility rate fell to a record low of 0.701, meaning 701 births per 1 000 women aged 15 to 49 over their lifetime. Although the number of births rebounded to 36 700 in 2024 and the total fertility rate rose to 0.841, both figures remain well below the replacement level of 2.1.

The high cost of living in Hong Kong, exorbitant housing, education and healthcare expenditure, as well as heavy work pressure, have discouraged young people from getting married and having children. Job instability, deficiency in the implementation of flexible working system and severe shortage of child care services have made it increasingly difficult for females to balance work and family life.

President, population policy covers various aspects and birth policy is one of the key aspects. The New People's Party has long proposed to provide more subsidies for women who use assisted reproductive technologies such as egg freezing, so as to encourage young people to devise flexible family plans. The SAR Government also announced in the Policy Address the year before last that the annual service quota for in-vitro fertilization treatment in the public healthcare system would be increased from 1 100 to 1 800, and tax deduction for expenses on assisted reproductive services would be provided. The launch of the relevant policies is certainly worthy of recognition. However, compared to the neighbouring regions, there is still much room for improvement. Let us look at the case in Japan. Infertility treatment has been covered by medical insurance and patients can reimburse up to 70% of the treatment costs and receive subsidies for up to six round of assisted reproductive treatments. Korea has offered large amounts of subsidies such as children allowance, parental allowance, allowance for newborn babies. For example, it introduced a measure in 2023 to provide a monthly allowance of 1 million won, or HK\$5,500, for each infant in the first 11 months after birth.

President, our Honourable colleagues have already covered many aspects relating to the provision of maternity benefits and fertility promotion policies in their speeches. However, the population issue is a complicated subject covering a wide range of key areas, such as childbearing, education, employment, housing, and attracting high-calibre overseas talents, professionals and quality talents to settle in Hong Kong. All of these areas involve the coordination of various Policy Bureaux and departments. Currently, Hong Kong lacks a dedicated structure to oversee the situation as a whole. The absence of this structure has rendered us unable to formulate a comprehensive plan, resulting in fragmented policy promotion and a lack of coordination.

President, population issues will affect Hong Kong's long-term prosperity and stability. If the SAR Government still adopts the current approach that allows Policy Bureaux to handle policy issues under their purview respectively, they will examine the issues over and over again before coming up with a preliminary

blueprint and strive to implement the projects one after another in the light of the fiscal position. This approach is often time-consuming and unproductive.

I have noticed that a newspaper discussed this issue in a Sunday report under the headline reading: “Population policy is the same old cliché; we are always defeated by others due to lack of courage and laziness in making innovation”. I hope that the SAR Government will put words into action and expeditiously set up a top-level structure to formulate a comprehensive plan and coordinate the population policy, as well as introduce short, medium and long-term measures to deal with this issue.

President, I so submit.

MR SHIU KA-FAI (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I would like to thank Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok for moving the motion on “Establishing a top-level dedicated structure to devise a population policy” today. Regarding Hong Kong’s population policy, I think we should discuss the short-term and long-term approach, as well as the manpower and talent issues separately.

Many Honourable colleagues have already talked about the current situation of low birth rate and ageing population in Hong Kong. I am not going to repeat them here because the statistics have already reflected the situation of low birth rate and ageing population. What should we do in the short and long term? In the short term, I have heard many friends discussing ways to encourage childbearing and provide support for women. Certainly, we should engage in the relevant work because it involves locally born babies. However, I believe that encouraging childbearing would do little to increase the supply of talents and manpower in Hong Kong in the short term because it takes a long time for babies to reach adulthood, which is a long-term task. I hope that the Government will continue to step up efforts in providing child care services and support for women, etc. I hope that this could help increase the local birth rate.

In recent years, the Government has introduced a \$20,000 incentive scheme. As Mrs IP has said, it has been helpful to some extent. However, I believe this is not necessarily the key factor motivating people to have children, because the most important factor for consideration behind childbearing is the suitability of the living environment. In terms of housing and education policies, I hope that the Government will step up efforts and resort to every possible means to accomplish the relevant work.

In the short term, of course, we have to attract expatriates and other individuals to come here. Referring to the local statistics I have just mentioned, the figures have shown that the birth rate is decreasing. The business sector can also provide some statistics for the Government's reference.

We all know what had happened in 2019. Hong Kong was plagued by riots and the pandemic. We all know how the economic environment in Hong Kong looked like in the past few years. Two days ago, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department submitted a paper to the Public Accounts Committee, the content of which revolved around the average wages of outsourced street cleansing workers. In 2019-2020, their monthly salary was about \$10,798, and their monthly salary rose to \$15,128 in 2023-2024, representing a 40% increase in just five years. What do these figures reflect? Despite the sluggish economic environment, the salaries of grass-roots workers have continually increased, with the rate of increase reaching 40%, which is basically due to the manpower shortage.

In 2024, the Government had started to import workers from the Greater Bay Area to Hong Kong. I thank the Government for moving toward this direction because it can help alleviate manpower shortage. For this reason, the wages of the above street cleansing workers have slightly reduced by more than \$200 to \$14,994 in 2024-2025. However, amid the current sluggish economic environment and a substantial increase in wages, how can enterprises sustain operation? In terms of manpower supply, it is necessary to continually and vigorously implement the labour importation initiatives. Regarding the median wages of the industry, I have repeatedly pointed out that this is one of the existing obstacles hindering the enhancement of our competitiveness.

Furthermore, with regard to talents, the SAR Government has been working diligently in this aspect. Over the past one or two years, it had introduced new schemes to seek out talents and attract professionals to come to Hong Kong. In fact, there are currently 430 000 talent admission applications, of which over 270 000 applications have been approved and 180 000 applicants have arrived in Hong Kong. These talents will definitely be of great help to us upon their arrival in Hong Kong. Over 100 000 of their dependants age below 18. After they become Hong Kong residents, they will be a valuable asset to the next generation.

However, how can we help these talents find suitable jobs after their arrival in Hong Kong? The Government needs to consider the relevant matching arrangements. Regarding the children of talents coming to study in Hong Kong,

there is a recent controversy about whether they can enrol in universities after sitting DSE (Diploma of Secondary Education Examination). The Government should strike a balance between the demand of local residents for university enrolment and the expectations of Mainland students coming to Hong Kong. Otherwise, they will feel disappointed, and thus hindering the smooth operation of the relevant schemes.

Recently, outside talents can come to Hong Kong under a short-term admission scheme for skilled talents covering eight industries, and these skilled talents will provide tremendous support to Hong Kong. I hope that the Government will relax the 10 000 quotas in due course. These talents will become Hong Kong residents in the future and inject strong impetus into Hong Kong. I hope that the Government will continue to step up efforts in devising talent admission plans since Hong Kong is a precious land. Thank you.

MR ERIK YIM (in Cantonese): President, population policy is one of the key drivers for Hong Kong's sustainable and high-quality development. I support the motion moved by Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok, which has urged the Government to attach great importance to and allocate more resources in conducting forward-looking studies and formulating population policy.

Hong Kong is facing the dual dilemma of an ageing population and a shortage of talents. The number of elderly people aged 65 or above will reach 2.52 million in 2039. At the same time, the working-age labour force will continue to shrink, and it is expected that there will be a manpower shortfall of at least 200 000 by then. Over the past year, Hong Kong has imported a total of about 30 000 foreign workers for 26 job categories, but it still cannot make up for the manpower shortfall in the construction, transport, catering, elderly care and related industries. In the light of the siphon effect brought by Singapore's population adjustment and competition for talents in the Greater Bay Area city cluster, there is a pressing need for Hong Kong to establish a forward-looking population policy system that can meet the demand of sustainable development.

Since there is currently no statutory retirement age in Hong Kong, many enterprises, including China-capital enterprises in Hong Kong, have set the retirement age at 60 for their employees, and even 55 for female employees. Given that the country will incrementally extend the retirement age beyond 60 in the years to come, I suggest that the SAR Government could explore gradually

extending the retirement age to 65 or above through legislative means. This should be an effective means to resolve the issue of serious labour shortage in Hong Kong in the short run.

In the light of the innovation and technology development in the era of big data, the Government should set up a talent early alert system to analyse the changing dynamics of the shortage of professional manpower and update the talent demand index in a timely manner. For the construction, catering, elderly care and other industries with a manpower shortfall exceeding 15%, the authorities can establish a coordination mechanism to facilitate closer interaction with the Mainland and set up a fast-track vetting and approval mechanism.

In addition, by referencing Singapore's talent admission approval procedures, we can import greater numbers of talents engaged in key technical occupations that are crucial to sustainable development and urgently needed, while balancing the interests of different sectors.

At the same time, I suggest that the Government should review the requirements that the wages of imported workers should be determined by the median wages in the relevant industries. In the long run, on the premise of the provision of minimum income guarantee for imported workers, we can follow free market wages so as to ensure a reasonable room for competition in the labour market, while at the same time reducing the cost of Hong Kong enterprises to participate in international competition.

Population can create huge benefits for the future social development. At present, the median age of Hong Kong population is 46. In contrast, the median ages in other countries and regions are lower: 38 in the United States, 37 in Singapore, and just 28 in India. Given that an ageing population is something inevitable and that the development of the Northern Metropolis will commence in Hong Kong, it is essential for us to build a younger population structure. In addition to the Government's policy that encourages the elderly to retire in the Mainland, we should create the conditions for bringing in new blood and strive to achieve the target of Hong Kong's population reaching over 9 million by 2050. Hong Kong can become more energetic and enhance its competitiveness more effectively by improving population quality and promoting a younger population.

President, "preparedness ensures success and unpreparedness spells failure". I suggest that the Government should elevate the population policy to the level of strategic development, publish an index report on demographic competitiveness

periodically, formulate a forward-looking population policy which is in line with the medium- to long-term sustainable development of the SAR, and establish an industry population ecosystem that strikes a balance between market demand and supply.

With these remarks, I support the original motion and all the amendments.

DR JUNIUS HO (in Cantonese): President, I think the establishment of a top-level dedicated structure is not a very important issue, but of course I strongly support the call for setting up a so-called “dedicated team”.

In fact, the power is already in our hands. As long as we amend the Immigration Ordinance and adjust related policies, we can get the job done. We now have 6 departments and more than 10 Policy Bureaux, all of which are elite. Why do we still need to duplicate our efforts and think about this and that? As I said, we already have the talents; the question is who will be the one to make the final decision. What does that mean? It is decision. Decisions are the most important thing. Just as with the eight new rules, what are the objectives of the eight major rules? We should hold short meetings, keep our speeches brief, and avoid convening large numbers of meetings. What will you achieve by mobilizing so many people? It would be like “a hunchback man grounding rice”—the work is done, but there are no tangible results from the seemingly hard work.

If we want to get the job done, we only need to accomplish two things. We should adjust our labour policies. At present, there are 220 000 Filipino foreign domestic helpers (“FDHs”) and 190 000 Indonesian FDHs in Hong Kong, in addition to more than 400 000 workers of other nationalities. The average wage for each worker is \$4,500. As 4 multiplied by 4 equals to 16, the monthly sum is \$2 billion and there is an annual outflow of over \$20 billion. To what extent have we benefited from it? I cannot see any. Domestic helpers can certainly help unleash the female labour force at home and enhance the work effectiveness. It is absolutely correct. But what do I mean? We only need to slightly adjust the number of Filipino and Indonesian FDHs by 15% to 25% from the current level of 400 000, and instead import domestic helpers from the Mainland. We should not underestimate Filipino FDHs because many of them are university graduates. It is only because their wages in the home country are much lower than that of

working as domestic helpers in Hong Kong, and thus they are willing to come to Hong Kong to work as domestic helpers even though they are bachelor's degree graduates.

By the same token, many young people in the third or fourth-tiered cities in the Mainland yearn for coming to Hong Kong and serving Hong Kong. We should target these talents because many of them are university students. There are nearly 10 million university graduates in the Mainland every year, but the unemployment rate has been on the rise in recent years. In view of this, how can we let the fertile water flow into other's fields? Over the years, we have been our own masters, but we have practised reverse discrimination by regarding the Mainland compatriots as the "god of plague" and rejecting their entry.

Since we now have high-calibre talents, and professionals are allowed to come to Hong Kong, why is it a problem to import grass-roots workers as well? Are we afraid of them stirring up troubles in Hong Kong? I do not think so. If we want to set up a top-level dedicated structure, the Secretary can actually get it done. There are nearly 30 Executive Council members. There are so many people and they can make the decision. There is only one question: "To import or not to import?" If we give the green light, we can start to import workers tonight; if not, it is useless to set up 10 high-level structures or a 1 000-level superstructure. Which is the most important level? It is the decision-making level. We can resolve the problem if we dare to make decisions and shoulder commitment.

I so submit.

DR DAVID LAM (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I speak in support of the original motion proposed by Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok and all the amendments.

The world is witnessing an ageing population, declining birth rate and shrinking population, and the same applies to Hong Kong. With an increasing number of elderly people, diabetes, hypertension and complications such as stroke, heart disease and heart failure will become more prevalent. A stroke can render a person—who was still working yesterday—suddenly unable to go to work and leave him incapacitated and incapable of taking care of himself, and he is subject to life-threatening situation. Stroke is not a personal issue because the whole family have to take care of the patient. They have lost the breadwinner who has

now become a dependant they need to take care of. Family members have to serve as carers on top of their regular jobs. The society has not only lost the workforce of the patient, but also the original workforce of the carers.

Two years ago, I attended an academic seminar, during which the speaker talked about a concept: “How long does it take from the moment a person has completely lost the ability to take care of himself till his death?” In some developed countries, it takes two years, while it takes seven years in China. What does seven years represent? It represents that one needs to spend three times more time to take care of the person in need, implying that carers will lose up to five years of workforce. What is the difference? The major difference lies in rehabilitation treatment and whether we have put in place a comprehensive rehabilitation treatment policy.

Stroke patients have to receive years of rehabilitation treatment. With the rehabilitation technologies nowadays, it is entirely possible for stroke patients to achieve the goals of regaining the abilities to walk and speak again, taking care of themselves and even returning to work. However, for patients who have been discharged from hospital and returned home after completing the initial intensive rehabilitation treatment, they are immediately confronted by the questions of the place to receive rehabilitation treatment in the next stage, the frequency of the treatment, and the persons who will accompany him to receive the treatment. It turns out that most patients have returned to public hospitals to continue their rehabilitation treatment once or twice a week, but they do not receive the treatment as frequent as what they used to be. The carers who accompany the patients to visit hospitals also need to go to work. If they take the patients to receive rehabilitation treatment targeting mobility, they cannot afford the time to take the patients to receive speech therapy. Is it possible to receive treatment in the community? In fact, many people do not know the support services available in the community. Should they visit the Community Rehabilitation Day Centres under the Social Welfare Department, the District Health Centres (“DHCs”) under the Primary Healthcare Commission or the general outpatient clinics of the Hospital Authority? The Supplementary Medical Professions (Amendment) Bill 2025 may be passed very soon. Is it possible to provide rehabilitation treatment services in the community through public-private partnership?

Can DHCs arrange nurses to serve as case managers for discharged patients and formulate specific treatment plans for patients based on their post-discharge treatment plans, so that patients can receive services from the nearest location or

physiotherapists? If there is no speech therapist in the community, should DHCs fill the service gaps and recruit their own staff to provide the relevant services? If patients are unable to take care of themselves, should the authorities set up sufficient number of day centres in each district that provide nursing-cum-rehabilitation services, so as to release the labour force of carers and allow family members to pick up the patients back home after work, thereby obviating the need for the patients to admit into residential care homes for the elderly (“RCHEs”)? Otherwise, if all patients are admitted into RCHEs at a time when we are saying that there is a shortage of care workers and health workers, what is the point of separating patients from their family members?

It is not that we do not have rehabilitation therapists today. We have excellent physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, etc. The problem lies in the absence of a comprehensive rehabilitation policy. Our rehabilitation services are fragmented and it is unclear which is the one responsible for the relevant work between two Policy Bureaux.

Population policy should not leave out the elderly, patients and carers. I urge the Government to formulate a comprehensive rehabilitation policy.

I so submit.

MR SUNNY TAN (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. Regarding the population policy, the Secretary for Labour and Welfare replied to a Member’s question in the Legislative Council in January this year that comprehensive planning was required across various policy areas, including economic development, infrastructure development, education and training, youth development, housing supply, labour and welfare, and healthcare services, in order to address the challenges brought by changes in the population structure.

According to the statistics of the Census and Statistics Department, the post-war baby boom had provided Hong Kong with abundant productivity forces for several decades. In 1964, the proportion of school children aged 14 or below in the total population was 41%, but it dropped to 10% in 2024. According to population projections, the proportion of school children in the labour force will continue to decline in the next 20 years. In contrast, the proportion of elderly people has significantly increased from 5.7% in the 1960s to 31.5%, compared with 27% in Singapore in the same period and 5.36% in neighbouring Shenzhen in 2021.

Given the persistently low birth rate and rapidly ageing population in Hong Kong, local population alone cannot sustain the productive forces required by our society in the coming decades, and it will even be unable to afford the provision of welfare benefits to the elderly in the future. It is worth noting that the proportion of population aged 15 to 59 in Singapore is comparable to that of Hong Kong. However, the statistics of the Singaporean government showed that the non-resident population stood at 1.86 million in 2024, accounting for 23% of the total population, which could supplement the productive forces.

I would like to share with you a real-life example. During the inaugural Hong Kong Fashion Fest held last year, a participating brand from Cambodia sold its product collection successfully and the brand founder decided to relocate to Hong Kong and expand his business. The brand is founded by a small and medium enterprise (“SME”), and establishing presence in Hong Kong means that it has to recruit staff in Hong Kong, do business with the local producer service industries, and collaborate with other SMEs. As the brand founder has moved to Hong Kong, it means that he will spend on clothing, food, accommodation and transportation in Hong Kong, and he will spend what he earns in Hong Kong. Bringing in the right talents and enterprises will not take away our rice bowls, but rather it can bring us more rice bowls. In this regard, I would like to make three suggestions.

First of all, we should attract diversified and young talents to complement the development of the “eight centres”. Take the textiles and clothing industry as an example. The “eight centres” have linked up the upstream, midstream and downstream operations of the industry chain and supply chain, from funding, research and development, production to sales, etc. Young new blood is required to fill different job positions so as to meet the future demand. As far as I know, various talent admission schemes have not set a target on the age of applicants. I suggest that the Government should recruit more overseas young talents to pursue career development, establish families and settle down in Hong Kong, with a view to addressing the issue of low birth rate in the medium and long run.

Second, the Government should expeditiously conduct in-depth studies and accurately grasp the manpower demand of various industries in Hong Kong. The number of talents and professions required by society varies at different development stages. I have suggested at the Legislative Council meeting that after fully grasping the statistics on the local labour force, we should, on the premise of not affecting local employment, adopt a targeted approach to import

more overseas professionals, while at the same time gradually adjusting local education and training, aligning with the needs of the community, making better and more forward-looking preparation for the next few decades, thereby consolidating the foundation of the “eight centres”.

Third, we should consolidate and enhance Hong Kong’s internationalized environment and advantages. Hong Kong, which is known as part of “Nylonkong” and one of the world’s three major financial centres, has been striving to enhance its internationalized advantages, such as encouraging restaurants to obtain halal-related certification. I notice that over 90% of the talents admitted under the Top Talent Pass Scheme and the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme come from the Mainland, while other talent admission schemes mainly target Mainland workers. To further the development as an international hub for high-calibre talents, in addition to the biliterate and trilingual environment and professional services that meet international standards, Hong Kong society needs to adopt a more open attitude and embrace cultural diversity so as to attract more talents from the West as well as countries and regions along the Belt and Road. We should develop Hong Kong into a world-class metropolis through aspects covering from infrastructure to service provision, and give confidence to high-calibre talents from overseas to settle down in Hong Kong. I look forward to having a thorough discussion today and forging a consensus on the objectives and direction of Hong Kong’s population policy so that we can expeditiously move forward with the development.

I so submit.

MR BENSON LUK (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. President, I thank Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok, Chairman of the Business and Professionals Alliance for Hong Kong (“BPA”), for moving the Member’s motion on “Establishing a top-level dedicated structure to devise a population policy”. I would also like to thank other Members for proposing the amendments.

At the end of last year, President XI Jinping published an important article entitled “Supporting Chinese modernization with high-quality population development” in the *Qiushi Journal*, pointing out that we should improve the population development strategy in the new era, focus on enhancing the overall quality of the population, strive to maintain an appropriate fertility level and population size, and expeditiously cultivate an abundant supply of well-structured modern human resources.

Looking back at the situation in Hong Kong, we are now facing the challenges arising from having the lowest birth rate in the world and a declining birth rate, the impacts of which have gradually reflected in the under-enrolment of students in kindergartens and primary schools. Earlier on, I have pointed out in this Council if the situation persists, the overall labour force in Hong Kong society will decrease in 10 years or so, and an ageing population will also affect the overall productivity and growth momentum. The economic, livelihood, and development momentum will also slow down and the consequences can be very serious.

Subsequently, the SAR Government has readily accepted the advice and taken on board the suggestions made by me and BPA by introducing an allowance of \$20,000 for each newborn baby and increasing certain tax allowances. As a matter of fact, the total number of newborn babies successfully rebounded to almost 37 000 last year. In fact, population growth is closely linked to the development momentum. Therefore, I hope that the SAR Government will take the demographic challenges seriously and formulate a long-term population strategy. In this connection, I would like to put forward three suggestions for your reference.

First of all, since the release of the report on “Population Policy—Strategies and Initiatives” in 2015, the authorities have not issued any new research studies relating to the population policy. However, the structures of the local population, labour force and even consumption have undergone conspicuous and dramatic changes in the past few years after the COVID-19 epidemic. In addition to the ageing population and persistently low birth rate, a large influx of new migrant talents and their dependants have settled down in Hong Kong, which have brought varying changes in the supply of and demand in fields such as local population, employment, housing, education and healthcare services. Therefore, I believe that in addition to the previous manpower projections, the authorities must take a step forward by formulating comprehensive and permanent population and labour force strategies and setting up a high-level population planning agency to devise strategies for the future development of Hong Kong.

Second, the authorities must holistically review the details and thresholds of various talent admission schemes, conduct a comprehensive review on the effectiveness of each scheme, and step up efforts to track cases, so as to ensure that the talent admission schemes can truly generate actual economic benefits such as income, tax revenue, consumer spending to Hong Kong. In addition to Mainland talents, I think the authorities can consider relaxing the visa requirements for overseas talents to visit the Mainland; review and expand the “multiple-entry visa”

arrangement for employees of companies incorporated overseas to visit the Mainland in due course; and in the long run, consider discussing with the Mainland about the issuance of “permits for foreign talents in the Greater Bay Area” by the Mainland immigration authorities to facilitate overseas talents who are non-local residents to settle down in Hong Kong, while participating in scientific research, business activities and exchanges in the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area, thereby truly developing Hong Kong into an international hub for high-calibre talents.

Third, in respect of childrearing, the cost of raising a child has increased from \$4 million in the past to \$6 million. How can we motivate young couples to have children? I believe financial support is definitely one of the elements to boost the birth rate. I suggest that the authorities should regularize the newborn baby incentive scheme and increase the tax allowances for families with children aged zero to six, while the wages of foreign domestic helpers can also be counted as an item for tax deduction. The authorities should also introduce a tiered and progressive arrangement in respect of tax allowances for multiple children and draw reference from the practices of other places such as Korea. For example, Korean families with more than two children are awarded “multi-child happiness cards”, which provide benefits such as the use of public facilities free of charge, public transportation discounts or concessions.

In short, we should strive to maintain an appropriate fertility level and population size. Only in this way can we expeditiously cultivate excellent and abundant modern human resources.

President, I so submit.

DR SO CHEUNG-WING (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. Hong Kong is facing unprecedented challenges arising from its demographic structure, which has even shown a transition from quantitative changes to qualitative changes. Not only is the ultra-low fertility rate of 0.8 causing worries, but it is also accompanied by the resultant predicament of an ageing population and a shrinking labour force. The proportion of elderly people aged 65 or above has exceeded 24%, and the proportion of working population has even dropped to a record low of 57%. To reshape and optimize the reasonable demographic structure of Hong Kong society is a matter of the utmost urgency, so I agree with Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok’s original motion and the other Members’ amendments.

According to a recent survey conducted by the Hong Kong Women Development Association, as many as 72% of the respondents were unwilling to bear children, and they pointed out that raising a child up to the age of 18 would cost more than \$6 million. At the same time, 80% of the respondents considered the Government's support as insufficient. Therefore, seeking ways to enhance Hong Kong people's aspirations for childbearing should be the source of the Government's work in resolving the demographic problems. The Government has previously introduced quite a lot of measures to encourage childbearing, including the Newborn Baby Bonus of \$20,000, priority in allocation or purchase of public housing flats, tax deduction for reproductive technology, and the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project, etc. Yet, I think these measures are too fragmented, and they rely only on financial incentives. Should the public's aspirations and professional advice be more widely collected for consolidating a consensus? Planning with short, medium and long-term effects can then be realized through the top-level design, thereby rendering the relevant fertility policy more targeted at the root of the problem to enable coordination in respect of the needs in the immediate and long term. I believe this is the genuine meaning of today's motion debate. To this end, I would like put forward some suggestions as follows:

First of all, a "population and industrial strategy committee" under the direct leadership of the Chief Executive should be set up to formulate a clear vision of policy objectives for the planning of coherent and effective countermeasures on population by integrating population changes, industry planning, regional development trends and evolution of public services, etc. We should also break down the barriers among different departments to unify and refine the measures in housing, education, healthcare, labour and finance, etc., so as to ensure that the functions of different aspects can create synergy to promote fertility.

Secondly, the policy must be comprehensive in eliminating the concerns of the public and addressing their needs with respect to childbearing. Apart from providing appropriate financial, medical, taxation and housing support, the Government should take the lead in the systematic development of the chain of childbearing services. For example, to cater for the needs of working parents for child care services, to provide adequate healthcare support for childbearing, and to address parents' concerns about their children's academic burden, etc. It is particularly important for the public to continuously feel the full commitment of the Government's efforts in these systematic and appropriate services as well as the convenience of obtaining assistance.

Thirdly, the Government should formulate a population policy that is in line with the overall dynamic trend of society. For example, the demand for talents arising from the future synergistic development of the Greater Bay Area, people moving north to live, and possible changes in population flow resulting from the integration of the two places should be consolidated. Far-sighted planning is the only way to ensure that the policy will be effective in the long run. At the same time, the ageing population and depletion of labour force will have a substantial impact on the quality of the demographic structure and economic development. The Government must step up efforts to admit professionals, especially young talents, and continue to optimize the labour importation policy, so as to fill the manpower gap required for Hong Kong's development.

President, I so submit.

MR KENNETH LAU (in Cantonese): President, Hong Kong is facing serious demographic challenges, including a low birth rate, an ageing population and a declining labour force participation rate. It is estimated that Hong Kong will have a population of 8.19 million by 2046. However, the proportion of elderly people aged 65 and above is expected to reach 36%, while the labour force participation rate will drop from about 55% in 2023 to 52%. What is even more worrying is the forecast that there will be a manpower shortage of 180 000 in 2028, especially “skilled technical workers” who will account for over one-third of the total shortage. Therefore, I support the motion proposed by Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok urging the Government to introduce short, medium and long-term population policies.

According to the report on the 2023 Manpower Projection released by the Government in November last year, among the “eight centres” of Hong Kong, the areas of innovation and technology (“I&T”), international aviation hub, international trade centre and international maritime centre will face a manpower gap of over 10 000 by 2028, and the manpower shortage in the area of I&T will even reach 20 000. For Hong Kong to proactively integrate into the overall development of the country and serve as a bridge connecting the Mainland with the rest of the world, we must not be dragged down by the manpower shortage problem. Therefore, the Government needs to carry out comprehensive planning for the needs of different economic sectors and various public services.

The SAR Government has carried out some planning on the population policy over the years. The Task Force on Population Policy and the Steering Committee on Population Policy led by the Chief Secretary for Administration

were established in 2002 and 2007 respectively. The 2017 Policy Address proposed that a higher-level committee be established for assisting the Government in human resources planning and promoting the diversified development of Hong Kong's economy. The Human Resources Planning Commission ("HRPC") led by the Chief Secretary for Administration was then established in the following year.

While HRPC has explored a number of issues to tackle the demographic challenges, there are also views that HRPC has focused too much on manpower training and employment support rather than a population policy. Take the first meeting of the fourth-term HRPC convened in March this year as an example, the Office of the Government Economist reported Hong Kong's economic performance and labour market situation at the meeting, which had little to do with the population policy. A genuine population policy should cover a wide range of long-term areas such as education, housing and attracting outside talents, and interdepartmental collaboration is required.

President, since Hong Kong is facing an imminent crisis of population shortage, I propose to establish a dedicated structure led by the Chief Executive, and create the post of "commissioner for population policy", so as to undertake comprehensive planning for the population policy, set a total population target, as well as coordinate and supervise the implementation of measures by various Policy Bureaux. The new dedicated structure should be of a larger scale than the existing HRPC, with regular members and a research team to collect public opinion for formulating a population policy that meets the needs of society.

Apart from short-term measures such as trawling for talents, retaining talents and providing more retraining services, I believe that in the medium to long term, we should encourage childbearing in a bid to resolve the problem of a low birth rate at root. The Government has already introduced a series of policies on encouraging childbirth, including the Newborn Baby Bonus, strengthening child care support and increasing tax incentives. However, before encouraging childbearing, it is more necessary to improve the living environment of young people. Hong Kong has been the most unaffordable city in the world to buy a home for 14 consecutive years. It takes 16.7 years to go without food and drink for young people to buy a home, making it difficult to form a family. The property market should also be stable. People cannot afford to buy if property prices rise sharply, but if the prices fall rapidly, people would be fearful of entering the market. If they cannot live and work in peace and contentment, how would they want to

have children? Therefore, I suggest that the Government should reintroduce the subsidies or down payment loans for first-time home buyers to help young people to achieve home ownership. The construction of public rental housing should also be expedited, so that grass-roots families can be allocated a flat as quickly as possible.

The rise and fall of a society depends on its demographic structure and population scale, as population has a direct impact on social development, economic prosperity and political stability. At present, Hong Kong indeed needs to establish a top-level dedicated structure to carry out planning for a long-term population policy through short, medium and long-term measures, instead of merely adopting stopgap measures.

With these remarks, I support the passage of the motion.

DR DENNIS LAM (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I would like to thank Ir Dr LO Wai-ki for proposing this motion. The average fertility rate is only 0.8 in Hong Kong, which is the lowest around the globe, but we are one of the cities with the longest life expectancy in the world. The problem of population ageing is hence serious. Hong Kong needs to actively study and plan for population growth, so as to rejuvenate our population. At the end of last year, Chief Executive John LEE suggested that Hong Kong needs to have a population of 10 million to maintain its competitiveness as a leading city.

As early as two years ago, I have already put forward my proposal to the National People's Congress and suggested at the consultation session for the policy address that Hong Kong's population needs to be increased to 10 million. I am grateful to the Chief Executive for taking on board the relevant proposal. In 2000, the population of Singapore was only 4 million, and it is now 6 million, representing a population growth of 2 million. Yet, Hong Kong's population grew by only 900 000 during the same period, lagging far behind the growth in Singapore. It is difficult to realize demographic dividend with an insufficient population scale. We can draw reference from the population of first-tier cities in the Mainland, namely Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, which is also at the level of 20 million. In order to maintain its competitiveness as an international financial centre, Hong Kong needs to devise long-term demographic planning to promote population growth to 10 million, so as to help boost economic development and consolidate its status as an international metropolis.

The SAR Government is now making every effort to develop Hong Kong into an international hub for high-calibre talent, and is actively admitting innovation and technology professionals, as well as top talents from various disciplines and sectors. Mr Kenneth LEUNG's amendment has mentioned conducting ongoing and targeted research on and deployment for Hong Kong's population development, and setting a total population target; whereas Ms Nixie LAM's amendment has mentioned the need to complement with the policy on encouraging childbirth. I strongly agree with them. In order to strive for Hong Kong's population to increase to 10 million, it is necessary to make advance planning in various aspects such as housing, transport, healthcare and education, as well as to carry out relevant planning taking into account the trend of population growth. We should not only safeguard the welfare of the general public, but also enable incoming talents to serve Hong Kong and take root here without any worries, thereby enhancing Hong Kong's competitiveness for sustainable socio-economic development.

The sharp decline in land sales revenue is one of the main causes leading to Hong Kong's fiscal deficit at present. Property developers have a weak incentive to bid for land owing to the decline in property sales and prices. Figures show that Hong Kong recorded more than 11 000 cases of property purchases with buyers' names in Putonghua pinyin in 2024, involving a transaction value of over HK\$130 billion, both of which are record-breaking figures. The Government has introduced an array of policies to trawl for talents and enhance immigration, and has withdrawn all the harsh measures for the property market. These moves have been instrumental in increasing the number of Mainland buyers purchasing properties in Hong Kong. If Hong Kong's population rises to 10 million, the increased population will push up the demand for private housing, which will then help to stabilize the property market and property prices, as well as increase the Government's land sales revenue and that of property-related sectors.

The increase in population will expand Hong Kong's consumption market in various areas such as retail, property, transport, entertainment and education, thereby boosting the local economic growth. A sizeable population will enable Hong Kong to become a more attractive market and internationalized platform, which is conducive to Hong Kong's development into a regional headquarters, research and development ("R&D") centre and innovation centre for enterprises worldwide, thereby further enhancing its global competitiveness. Bringing in more R&D talents, entrepreneurs and experts will inject vitality into Hong Kong's innovation and startup ecosystems, and assist Hong Kong in developing into a

global innovation hub, especially in frontier technological fields such as artificial intelligence, healthcare technology and financial technology. With an increase in population, the Government's sources of tax revenue will also increase, such that a fiscal balance or even a surplus can hopefully be achieved.

With these remarks, I support the original motion and the amendments.

MS LILLIAN KWOK (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. Here, I would like to thank Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok for proposing the original motion on “Establishing a top-level dedicated structure to devise a population policy” and the other Members for their amendments.

We often talk about population policy, but what is the objective of a population policy? In fact, the objective of a population policy is to enable the Government to make use of different policies to promote the population of a society to reach a desirable scale. That is, to achieve an optimal balance between the population and the utilization of resources in a place, so as to maintain the quality and standard of living that the people wish to attain. In other words, the effectiveness of the population policy actually has a direct bearing on the sense of fulfilment and sense of happiness of the Hong Kong people.

Hong Kong is now facing the problems of a low birth rate, an ageing population and manpower shortages. The Hong Kong Government has all along been deeply concerned about the population policy over the years. As far back as the 1970s and 1980s, “two is enough” was adopted as the publicity slogan. I think all of us are very familiar with it because the birth rate was relatively high at that time, and some of my friends have already given birth to seven, eight or nine children.

As times change, however, we are now facing the problem of a low birth rate. In response, the Government has introduced a number of policies on childbearing, based on the suggestions put forward by Ms Nixie LAM and a number of Members, in the hope of encouraging members of the public to have children. Nevertheless, the issue of childbearing is a longer-term one. What can we do if we need to resolve the labour shortage problem immediately?

I have a few ideas of my own. Firstly, I hope that we can make good use of local talents, including unleashing the potential of the female labour force. Secondly, while promoting the silver economy, will we accord priority in considering the specialization, expertise and professionalism of this group of elderly people, and make use of their professionalism to contribute to social development and serve the community? Instead of considering to help them to change their jobs, we should make good use of their expertise. Thirdly, how we should nurture professionals, for example, how to provide a dual-track academic and vocational education policy under the existing education system, all these are very important.

I am more concerned about vocational education, and I can see that at present, vocational education is still far from reaching the level of a dual-track academic and vocational education system, and Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (“DSE”) still remains as the mainstream. But in the future population policy, do we need to consider the changes in the era of artificial intelligence (“AI”)? I have mentioned in the Legislative Council that in the face of the AI era, there will certainly be changes in some of the existing administrative work and job types in the secondary, tertiary and quaternary industries. In respect of a population policy, we also need to consider the needs of future career types, economic restructuring and the overall development of society. How should we nurture specialized talents and “lopsided talents” of various jobs? If we still adopt DSE as the mainstream track, can we allow students who are relatively weak in arts subjects, for example, to find a prominent position in AI development? Do we need to carry out overall planning and thinking afresh?

Attracting talents is the fastest way to resolve the problem. While attracting talents, we can see that there are a lot of complementary policy measures on education, resources and housing, have we given holistic consideration to them? Regarding such a broad scope, I am very grateful to Ir Dr LO for proposing this Member’s motion, so that we can have the opportunity to discuss it here. A population policy covers a wide range of areas including, as Members have seen just now, healthcare, education, housing, economy, labour and training, etc., and it involves different Policy Bureaux.

The Steering Committee on Population Policy is already led by the Chief Secretary for Administration (“CS”), and the newly established Committee on Education, Technology and Talents is also chaired by CS. We are extremely grateful to CS for his contribution. I believe that the two committees can

complement each other and be linked together. They can also coordinate a number of Policy Bureaux effectively and continue to introduce more forward-looking and systematic policies, thereby maintaining Hong Kong's international competitiveness and promoting social improvement.

I so submit. Thank you, President.

MR PAUL TSE (in Cantonese): President, this topic seems to be familiar somehow. The Government has put forward relevant proposals for many years. As many Honourable colleagues have said, the Steering Committee on Population Policy already put forward the policy in Hong Kong in 2015. Looking through the report, which is not long, I can see that the views expressed by the vast majority of colleagues today have basically been mentioned in it; the issues are just the same old cliché. Apart from the rehabilitation policy mentioned by Dr David LAM and Dr Junius HO's relatively innovative idea of introducing Mainland workers to work as domestic helpers in Hong Kong, many other issues have already been touched upon before.

In fact, as Mrs Carrie LAM, the then Chief Secretary for Administration, has said, this is a task that requires ongoing effort, and each Policy Bureau should take the objectives of the population policy into account when formulating its own policies. We need to work on this in the long run. We all agree with this, but the question is how to work on it in the long run. For example, the Audit Commission has been conducting audits on each and every area, and it would constantly upgrade or update its work.

However, I would like to highlight two key points that were omitted back then and are no longer applicable nowadays. Firstly, the economic situation at that time was not as severe as it is now, and the fiscal deficit was not as serious as it is at present. This is the first point. Secondly, in fact, while Hong Kong has experienced emigration problems for a number of times before, with people moving in and out of the city like the flow of water, the problem of people emigrating abroad is relatively more serious now.

Of course, these two issues were not covered in the policy study back then, so I would like to focus my discussion on them. Many colleagues have talked about the need to create population, enhance training, etc., and I totally agree with them. I also agree with the ideas of admitting new high-calibre talents and implementing the Top Talent Pass Scheme, but it seems that all these suggestions

will incur expenditure and require waiting time, such that the problems cannot be resolved immediately. How can the problems in the short term be resolved? One of the simplest and most direct ways is to attract emigrants who have already left to return to Hong Kong. Or for those people who have not yet left or who intend to leave, is it possible to “hold” them, so that they will not leave? It seems that there is not much discussion on this today.

All the other suggestions require the input of money, but this one can create wealth, and it is not just related to the workforce. Over the years, many middle-class people and creative Hong Kong people have worked hard and contributed to Hong Kong’s reserves which amount to more than a trillion dollars, and they have the so-called “track record”. They have made these achievements on the record, so why do we not consider this suggestion carefully? In particular, a moment ago, Mrs Regina IP has criticized the United Kingdom (“UK”) for violating the principles. Of course, she is not wrong in saying so, but politics is just like that. The question is, how should we deal with this issue pragmatically? It happens that UK is planning to change from “5+1” to “10+1”, while other countries ... various Western countries, be it Europe or the United States, have been relatively “xenophobic” towards foreign immigrants. Under this major trend, and coupled with the so-called “Harvard refugee” problem, it is now a good timing, and we should study how to attract the emigrants to return to Hong Kong as far as possible.

Of course, I have noticed that some political issues are involved, including Mr Ronny TONG, a Member of the Executive Council, who has expressed concerns that these people would stir up troubles and that we should stay vigilant against them. In fact, Mr Ronny TONG himself is the best example of this: he switched from being a founding member of the Civic Party to becoming a Member of the Executive Council. I believe that there are many similar examples among Hong Kong people who would “renounce the dark and join the light” once they have a clear understanding of the overall situation. Therefore, I do not think there is any cause for concerns, and the main issue is how we can encourage them to return to Hong Kong. In this regard, on the policy front, we do not need to make any investment, but only need to make some slight relaxation. Recognizing the contribution this group of Hong Kong people has made to Hong Kong in the past and accepting them to return to Hong Kong would already be a very good direction. We need to make use of their abilities, financial strength and efforts to help Hong Kong continue to pursue economic growth. This way, there is no need to milk the ram. Rather than attracting foreign immigrants, we should draw on local resources and encourage our own people to return. There is a saying in Cantonese

that “a man away from his native place is worthless”, but some people really do not realize how good Hong Kong is unless they have left. If we can relax our policies slightly and ease restrictions in various areas, it will encourage those who have left Hong Kong to return, which would be greatly beneficial to the instant creation of wealth for Hong Kong’s economy.

Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Does any other Member wish to speak?

(No Member indicated a wish to speak)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok, you may now speak on the amendments.

IR DR LO WAI-KWOK (in Cantonese): President, the amendments proposed by Mr Kenneth LEUNG and Ms Nixie LAM have further enriched the content of the original motion from different perspectives, and I would like to express my gratitude again.

Mr Kenneth LEUNG’s amendment has pointed out that high-quality development of population will enhance the city’s scale and vibrancy, which is not only closely related to the long-term prosperity and stability of Hong Kong, but also related to national rejuvenation. I strongly agree with this. Mr LEUNG has proposed that the SAR Government should improve the strategy and policy system on population development, including establishing a top-level structure dedicated to devising a population policy as I have mentioned, so as to conduct ongoing and targeted research on and deployment for Hong Kong’s population development.

Mr LEUNG has stressed that the authorities should set a total population target. In my opinion, the SAR Government and various sectors of the community can explore this issue further in-depth and seek ways to reach a consensus. As I have said in my main speech, we should share the same goal and that is, striving to formulate a comprehensive, forward-looking and scientific development blueprint in respect of our population and human resources.

Ms Nixie LAM's amendment has, on the other hand, emphasized that in order to promote the long-term balanced development of Hong Kong's population, the SAR Government should introduce practicable and more targeted support measures having regard to the practical concerns and other influencing factors currently faced by Hong Kong people in making decisions on childbearing. I have also mentioned in my main speech that the authorities should optimize the policy on encouraging childbirth and strive to develop a sustainable population ecology. Ms LAM has opined that the authorities should facilitate the development of assisted reproductive technology and services, and I also agree with this. Nevertheless, as I pointed out to the authorities when speaking at the meeting of the Subcommittee to Study Population Policy and Initiatives held on 16 May, about 30 000 babies are born in Hong Kong each year nowadays, the figure was still 50 000 to 60 000 a decade ago, and of course it was even higher before that. In the face of an ageing population and such a low birth rate, our various measures to support families hope to achieve one of the important objectives, that is, not only to enable them to live happily and harmoniously, but also to truly encourage young couples to dare to have one or two babies. Regarding the issues such as promoting family-friendliness, children's education, etc., we should ease their worries and enable young couples to nurture their next generation boldly through various complementary policy measures. This should be the goal that we strive to achieve.

President, in conclusion, the amendments proposed by Mr Kenneth LEUNG and Ms Nixie LAM as well as the original motion are complementary to one another, and they are mutually reinforcing. I hope Honourable colleagues will support them.

President, I so submit.

UNDER SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION (in Cantonese): President, I would like to thank Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok for proposing the motion, Mr Kenneth LEUNG and Ms Nixie LAM for proposing the amendments, and the 39 Members who have actively offered advice and suggestions on the population policy a moment ago. Much of the advice offered related to the education policy and was very valuable. Education is the key to nurturing talents, whereas cultivating values and nurturing people is the core mission of education. In driving the integrated development of education, technology and talents, the Government will continue

to plan the development of education in the light of the macro perspective and long-term needs, develop an international education hub, nurture and attract outstanding talents, as well as provide strong impetus for Hong Kong's growth.

To dovetail with the Outline of the National 14th Five-Year Plan in promoting the development of Hong Kong as an international innovation and technology ("I&T") centre and developing new quality productive forces, so as to promote sustainable economic development, Hong Kong needs to cultivate sufficient I&T talents. The Government has continued to vigorously promote STEAM (i.e. Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) education in primary and secondary schools. It has been optimizing and updating the curricula of foundation academic subjects, such as Mathematics, Information Technology and Science, at the primary and secondary level, as well as actively motivating students to develop their aspirations in science and I&T, thereby enlarging the scientific research and I&T talent pools. With regard to post-secondary education, the Government has set the target that by the 2026-2027 academic year, 35% of students of the University Grants Committee ("UGC")-funded universities will be enrolled in STEAM subjects. Overall speaking, 60% of students will be enrolled in programmes relevant to the "eight centres" under the National 14th Five-Year Plan. The Government has already given clear instructions to UGC-funded universities in the triennial planning exercise for 2025-2028, and the universities will offer more relevant programmes to implement the national strategy of high-quality development of education.

On the other hand, with a view to nurturing more high-quality talents with applied skills to meet the keen demand for manpower with applied knowledge and skills in Hong Kong and the country, and to provide quality and diversified education pathways with multiple entry and exit points for young people with different aspirations and abilities, the Government has all along been promoting vocational and professional education and training ("VPET") at different levels through the strategy of fostering industry-institution collaboration and diversified development under a multi-pronged approach.

Among others, in order to enhance the VPET articulation pathway and achieve the goal of "every trade has its masters", the Government has been actively promoting the development of universities of applied sciences ("UAS") in Hong Kong, as well as strengthening the status of VPET at degree level. Besides, we have regularized applied degree programmes and, together with the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications, promulgated the Guidelines on Developing Applied Degree Programmes in

mid-2024 to facilitate UAS and other post-secondary institutions to develop applied degree programmes with an applied focus blending theory and practice. With a view to encouraging post-secondary institutions to develop more applied degree programmes, including those related to the “eight centres”, in accordance with the relevant Guidelines, the Government has subsidized students pursuing designated self-financing undergraduate and sub-degree programmes that can meet Hong Kong’s social and economic needs through the Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors (“SSSDP”). Apart from that, the Government also provides additional subsidies to students enrolling in applied degree programmes under SSSDP, so as to promote the further development of applied degrees.

At the same time, the Education Bureau (“EDB”) attaches great importance to life planning education, and has strengthened its support for schools through various measures, so as to enable students to identify their interests, abilities and orientations at an earlier stage through relevant learning activities, as well as to make better preparation for further studies and career pursuits by equipping them with information on the workplace.

We have launched the Business-School Partnership Programme (“BSPP”) with the aim of promoting cooperation between schools and industrial and commercial entities, so as to lead students out of the classroom and provide students with diversified career exploration activities, thereby preparing them for employment in the future. In the 2022-2023 school year, EDB further promoted cooperation between the business sector and schools through launching the BSPP 2.0 with more business partners, covering more industries (including emerging industries) for widening students’ exposure to the working world and enhancing life planning.

President, EDB has all along been committed to enhancing the quality of education, providing students with diversified learning opportunities to facilitate their whole-person development. Once again, we would like to thank Ir Dr LO for proposing the motion and the Members for their valuable views. To complement the national strategy of invigorating the country through science and education and the modernization of education, we look forward to joining hands with all of you to give full play to the distinctive advantages of Hong Kong’s education under “one country, two systems”, so as to provide talent for enhancing the overall competitiveness of Hong Kong.

I so submit. Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. President, I would like to thank Honourable Members for putting forward their valuable views on the motion. On behalf of the Government, I would give a response on the overall population policy and introduce the relevant planning work of the Labour and Welfare Bureau (“LWB”) in respect of human resources development and elderly services.

Interdepartmental collaboration and high-level steering

Summing up the overall views of Members, a population policy is all about properly dealing with the work on population, whereas boosting the birth rate, bringing in more talents and retaining them are exactly the several key points during the discussion this morning. A population policy involves a wide range of aspects, and requires the collaboration of different departments, followed by the input of more resources, including cash and land, depending on the circumstances. Interdepartmental steering and coordination are indispensable. As I have pointed out in my opening remarks, the Chief Executive, Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries of Departments are now providing high-level steering through various standing committees. These include the Steering Group on Integration into National Development chaired by the Chief Executive, with three Secretaries of Departments as deputies, to oversee Hong Kong’s development into the “eight centres” as outlined in the 14th Five-Year Plan. Many Members have mentioned the Human Resources Planning Commission and the Committee on Education, Technology and Talents (“CETT”) chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration (“CS”), which are precisely targeting at Hong Kong’s positioning and needs in respect of talent and manpower, so as to flexibly introduce specialized talents of various sectors. Here, I also wish to respond to the flow of talents among the “9+2” cities in the Greater Bay Area mentioned by Mr Kenneth FOK just now. CS, together with the Human Resources and Social Security Department of Guangdong Province and the Macao authorities, are working on the overall planning in this regard. Therefore, a standing mechanism has already been put in place to coordinate the relevant development in the Bay Area.

Besides, the Government has also coordinated interdepartmental efforts through other channels, including the Working Group on Promoting Silver Economy chaired by the Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration (“DCS”), which announced a series of measures at the end of last month, with DCS taking the lead in coordinating an array of measures to encourage childbearing. These

include arrangements such as giving priority on flat selection and allocation, enhancing child care support, increasing tax concessions and providing the Newborn Baby Bonus, so as to create a conducive environment for childbearing.

The aforesaid are merely some examples of the high-level steering and coordination mechanism of the Government. We consider the existing practice as flexible and effective, and there is no need to set up a separate structure for the work on the population policy.

Human resources planning

In the face of the challenges arising from an ageing population and manpower shortage, we need to promote population growth so as to continue to expand the local talent pool for the long-term development of Hong Kong. LWB is responsible for the work related to development of local human resources under the population policy, including retraining and labour protection policies, etc., as well as attracting outside talents and supporting their development in Hong Kong.

With the sustained growth of the local economy after the epidemic, the overall labour market remains tight despite a slight increase in the latest unemployment rate which was released recently. The Government is committed to nurturing local talents and unleashing local workforce. For example, the Re-employment Allowance Pilot Scheme is being implemented to encourage elderly and middle-aged people aged 40 or above, including women, to engage in employment. This is precisely a response to Ms Maggie CHAN's remarks that the Government should further unleash the potential of the female labour force and enable women to take up more job positions. I would also like to respond to Mr SHIU Ka-fai that the increase in wages of government outsourced workers does not necessarily result from the overall manpower shortage, because the previous-term Government has made changes to the tender marking scheme by increasing the weighting of wage rates in the overall score. For this reason, the increase in overall wages is resulted from the previous-term Government's hope to enhance labour protection.

However, given a lower labour force participation rate for the elderly persons, it will be inevitable for the overall labour force participation rate to drop consequentially. Dr Wendy HONG has mentioned the high labour force participation rate for the middle-aged and elderly persons in foreign countries. This is due to the fact that, for example, Japan has a very strong primary industry,

but Hong Kong does not have development in the primary industry, i.e. the agricultural industry, and therefore cannot have a high labour force participation rate for the middle-aged and elderly persons as that of foreign countries. Therefore, attracting outside talent is the work that we have accorded higher priority. We have implemented a series of talent attraction measures since end-2022. As at end-April this year, a total of 470 000 applications were received under the various talent admission schemes, of which more than 310 000 were approved. About 208 000 people of talent arrived in Hong Kong through various talent admission schemes, with some of them bringing along their families to Hong Kong, thereby reversing the decline in the local labour force during the epidemic and effectively replenishing the shortfall in local population.

The median age of successful applicants of the Top Talent Pass Scheme (“TTPS”) is 35. Rightly as Mr CHAN Kin-por has mentioned, we should attract more young people, and 35 years of age is young and they can also have more children. A moment ago, some Members have mentioned that people at the age of 58 are still able to bear children, so 35 years of age is definitely the suitable age. Among these successful applicants, 60% of them are married. Most of them would bring along their family members to Hong Kong for development and they will continue to bear children, which will optimize our demographic structure. Mr CHAN Chun-ying has mentioned the rate of granting an extension of stay just now, we are still collecting more data on the extension of stay under TTPS, and will announce the way forward after collecting more data up to the middle of this year. Here, I also wish to emphasize that the relevant key performance indicator (“KPI”) has been modified since last year’s Policy Address. Instead of adopting the number of talents attracted to Hong Kong as the KPI, we have adopted the number of visa extension applications approved as the KPI, and the KPI set last year was to approve at least 50 000 visa extension applications. Therefore, this issue has already been dealt with.

LWB has also announced a number of reform measures of the talent admission schemes in a bid to attract more high-calibre talents from industries related to the “eight centres” to come to Hong Kong. Apart from high-calibre talents, regarding middle-level talents, Mr Martin LIAO has mentioned the general immigration policy in foreign countries just now. We have also announced the introduction of a new channel under the General Employment Policy and the Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals from 30 June onwards to allow non-degree professionals (i.e. technical professionals who have not completed their university studies) meeting the relevant qualifications as specified

in the Technical Professional List and aged between 18 and 40 to apply for entry into Hong Kong to join eight skilled trades facing acute manpower shortage. We will continue to follow the macro policy directions for education, technology and talent formulated by CETT under the chairmanship of CS, and work with the relevant Policy Bureaux to build Hong Kong into an international hub for high-calibre talent, thereby leading the future development of Hong Kong.

Care services for the elderly

Population ageing is a problem that must be addressed. We will continue to follow the principle of “ageing in place as the core, institutional care as back-up”, which is complemented by support in the Bay Area, including enhancing the Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong, so as to enable more elderly people to choose to retire in the Bay Area or Hong Kong in accordance with their individual preferences. Regarding the case mentioned by Mr Jimmy NG just now, I suggest that they should actively consider participating in the Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong, under which a high-quality triple room will be available for the two elderly persons and their child to live together, and this can hardly be provided in Hong Kong. Of course, we will also continue to make good use of gerontechnology to provide more options for the elderly people to choose to spend their twilight years in Hong Kong.

Conclusion

To address the challenges brought by changes in the population structure, the concerted efforts of the entire Government and society as a whole are required. Under the leadership of the Chief Executive and the Secretaries of Departments, various Policy Bureaux will continue to closely monitor changes in the local demography and manpower situation in different industries, review and enhance the relevant policies in a timely manner, so as to meet Hong Kong’s economic and social development needs. On behalf of the Government, I would like to thank Members again for putting forward their views on the planning of a population policy.

Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now call upon Mr Kenneth LEUNG to move an amendment.

MR KENNETH LEUNG (in Cantonese): President, I move my amendment.

The amendment moved by Mr Kenneth LEUNG (See the marked-up version at Appendix 5)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the amendment moved by Mr Kenneth LEUNG be passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you as stated. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, that is, those returned by the Election Committee and those returned by functional constituencies and geographical constituencies.

I declare the amendment passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Ms Nixie LAM, as the previous amendment has been passed, you may move your further amendment.

MS NIXIE LAM (in Cantonese): President, I move my further amendment.

The further amendment moved by Ms Nixie LAM (See the marked-up version at Appendix 6)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the further amendment moved by Ms Nixie LAM be passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you as stated. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, that is, those returned by the Election Committee and those returned by functional constituencies and geographical constituencies.

I declare the amendment passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok, you still have 1 minute 2 seconds to reply. Then, the debate will come to a close.

IR DR LO WAI-KWOK (in Cantonese): President, a total of 38 Honourable colleagues, including Mr Kenneth LEUNG and Ms Nixie LAM who have proposed the amendments, have spoken on my motion today to express their insights on the population policy. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to them.

I must point out that while the SAR Government has not left a blank in respect of the population policy and measures to address the problems, these are not comprehensive or forward-looking enough. Furthermore, a strong and robust top-level dedicated structure for planning and coordination is absent. I hope that my motion will raise further concerns among the HKSAR Government and various

sectors of the community regarding the population policy, so that planning and coordination can be enhanced to enable the sustainable development of Hong Kong's economy and society.

I implore Honourable colleagues to support the motion.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok, as amended by Mr Kenneth LEUNG and Ms Nixie LAM, be passed. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, that is, those returned by the Election Committee and those returned by functional constituencies and geographical constituencies.

I declare the motion as amended passed.

NEXT MEETING

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now adjourn the Council until 11:00 am on Wednesday, 11 June 2025.

Adjourned accordingly at 12:36 pm.

**The marked-up version of the amendment moved by Mr Kenneth LEUNG
(Translation)**

That *population development is not only related to national rejuvenation, but also closely related to the long-term prosperity and stability of Hong Kong*; according to the latest projections on Hong Kong's future population and manpower, Hong Kong is facing challenges such as a persistently low birth rate, a continuous ageing trend in the population and a gradually declining labour force participation rate, and there will be serious manpower shortage in different industries and at different levels of the occupational hierarchy; in this connection, this Council urges the SAR Government to face up to the demographic changes in Hong Kong as early as possible and ~~establish~~ *improve the strategy and policy system on population development, including establishing a top-level structure dedicated to devising a population policy, conducting ongoing and targeted research on and deployment for Hong Kong's population development, and setting a total population target*, and through strengthening interdepartmental coordination and tying in with the development of the 'eight centres', to carry out comprehensive planning that meets the needs of different economic sectors and various public services, so as to promote short, medium and long-term population policies for *the high-quality development of Hong Kong's population, and the enhancement of the city's scale and vibrancy, thereby allowing* the sustainable development of Hong Kong's economy and society.

Note: Mr Kenneth LEUNG's amendment is marked in *bold and italic type* or with deletion line.

**The marked-up version of the further amendment moved by Ms Nixie LAM
(Translation)**

That population development is not only related to national rejuvenation, but also closely related to the long-term prosperity and stability of Hong Kong; according to the latest projections on Hong Kong's future population and manpower, Hong Kong is facing challenges such as a persistently low birth rate, a continuous ageing trend in the population and a gradually declining labour force participation rate, and there will be serious manpower shortage in different industries and at different levels of the occupational hierarchy; in this connection, this Council urges the SAR Government to face up to the demographic changes in Hong Kong as early as possible and improve the strategy and policy system on population development, including establishing a top-level structure dedicated to devising a population policy, conducting ongoing and targeted research on and deployment for Hong Kong's population development, and setting a total population target, and through strengthening interdepartmental coordination and tying in with the development of the 'eight centres', to carry out comprehensive planning that meets the needs of different economic sectors and various public services, so as to promote short, medium and long-term population policies for the high-quality development of Hong Kong's population, and the enhancement of the city's scale and vibrancy, thereby allowing the sustainable development of Hong Kong's economy and society; ***this Council also urges the SAR Government to, having regard to the practical concerns and other influencing factors currently faced by Hong Kong people in making decisions on childbearing, introduce practicable and more targeted support measures, and facilitate the development of assisted reproductive technology and services, so as to promote the long-term balanced development of population.***

Note: Ms Nixie LAM's amendment is marked in ***bold and italic type***.