

## Chapter 14

# Labour and Welfare

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Labour and welfare is crucial to the well-being of the community and affects the livelihoods of people. The government implements targeted policy initiatives to safeguard the rights and benefits of employees and promote the welfare of the underprivileged.

The Labour and Welfare Bureau maps out strategies to develop a well-trained and adaptable workforce to meet the changing manpower demands of the economy and contribute to the overall competitiveness of Hong Kong. It is also committed to building a caring and cohesive community through helping the disadvantaged and elderly, care for children, support for needy families, as well as promoting self-reliance through suitable support measures.

The Labour Department formulates and implements labour policies, enforces labour legislation, provides free employment and recruitment services to job-seekers and employers, promotes harmonious labour relations, safeguards employees' rights and benefits, and promotes the occupational safety and health of the workforce.

The Social Welfare Department implements social welfare policies to help individuals and families in need, while the Working Family Allowance Office of the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency provides financial assistance to working households in Hong Kong.

The Social Welfare Advisory Committee, Commission on Children, Elderly Commission, Rehabilitation Advisory Committee and Commission on Poverty advise the government on welfare policies.

## **Labour Market**

The government improves the use of human resources in Hong Kong and supports economic development by upgrading workers' skills so they can be more employable and competitive, improving the business environment, introducing measures to create jobs and enhancing labour market efficiency.

In 2023, the labour force totalled 3.82 million people, of whom 50 per cent were men and 50 per cent were women. The total represented a rise of 1.2 per cent over 2022.

The majority, or 88.3 per cent, were employed in the service sectors: 29.9 per cent in public administration, and social and personal services; 25.1 per cent in the import/export, wholesale and retail trades, and accommodation and food services; 22.5 per cent in financing and insurance, real estate, and professional and business services; and 10.7 per cent in transportation, storage, postal and courier services, and information and communications. Only 2 per cent worked in manufacturing.

The overall unemployment rate decreased from 4.3 per cent in 2022 to 2.9 per cent in 2023, whereas the underemployment rate decreased from 2.3 per cent in 2022 to 1.1 per cent in 2023. Total employment rose by about 96,400 to 3,709,600.

## **Employment Earnings and Wages**

During the year, 8.9 per cent of employed people earned less than \$5,000 a month and 30 per cent earned \$30,000 and above a month. Median monthly employment earnings rose to \$20,000 from \$19,000 in 2022. The median monthly employment earnings for higher-skilled workers, comprising managers, professionals and associate professionals, were \$35,000 in 2023, while those for lower-skilled workers were \$15,000.

Wage rates as measured by the Nominal Wage Index for workers up to supervisory level increased 3.8 per cent in December 2023 over a year earlier.

## **Employment Services**

The Labour Department's 13 job centres, three recruitment centres for the catering, retail and construction industries, Telephone Employment Service Centre and Job Vacancy Processing Centre provide free employment and recruitment services to job-seekers and employers. Its Interactive Employment Service website and mobile application offer round-the-clock employment services.

The department organises large-scale, district-based and thematic job fairs. It offers targeted help through the Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged, Work Trial Scheme, Racial Diversity Employment Programme, Work Orientation and Placement Scheme for job-seekers with disabilities, Youth Employment and Training Programme, Youth Employment Start, and the Greater Bay Area Youth Employment Scheme. For major closure or retrenchment cases, it will set up a telephone hotline and special counters at job centres to provide priority job referral services for affected workers.

In 2023, the department registered 35,379 job-seekers and made over 153,000 job placements. It recorded 1,171,645 private-sector vacancies, 7.9 per cent more than in 2022.

### ***Employment Programme for Elderly and Middle-aged***

The Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged encourages employers to hire the elderly and middle-aged and provide them with on-the-job training by paying employers a training allowance. Employers engaging job-seekers aged 60 or above who are unemployed or have left the workforce are offered a monthly training allowance of up to \$5,000 per employee for six to 12 months. Those who engage unemployed job-seekers aged 40 to 59 are offered an allowance of up to \$4,000 per month per employee for three to six months. There were 3,873 placements under the programme in 2023.

### ***Work Trial Scheme***

Work trials are conducted for people with difficulties in finding jobs. Each participant who completes a one-month full-time work trial receives up to \$9,600 from the department, while the allowance for a part-time work trial is \$57 per hour, of which \$500 is contributed by the organisation in which the participant served. During the year, 211 people took part in trials.

### ***Racial Diversity Employment Programme***

The Racial Diversity Employment Programme, through two non-governmental organisations (NGOs), provides one-stop employment support services to job-seekers from ethnic minorities in a case management approach. In 2023, the programme served 255 ethnic minority job-seekers and recorded 129 placements.

### ***People with Disabilities***

The department helps people with disabilities who are fit for open employment seek jobs. It provides free employment counselling and placement services to people who are formerly

mentally ill or have hearing or visual impairment, physical disability, chronic illness, autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disability, specific learning difficulties or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. In 2023, the department registered 2,840 job-seekers with disabilities and secured 2,406 placements.

The Work Orientation and Placement Scheme improves employment opportunities for people with disabilities by paying employers an allowance to encourage them to provide jobs and employment support. An employer who hires a person with disabilities having employment difficulties is entitled to an allowance of up to \$60,000 over the nine-month on-the-job training period. In 2023, the scheme made 1,185 job placements.

### ***Continuing Education Fund***

The fund subsidises adults with aspirations to pursue continuing education. About 50,000 reimbursement claims were approved and subsidies totalling about \$470 million were paid out in the year.

### ***Youth Employment and Training Programme***

School-leavers aged between 15 and 24 with up to sub-degree education may choose from a full range of pre-employment and on-the-job training. Government departments, employers and NGOs work together under this programme to help young people enhance their employability, improve job search skills and secure employment. Participating employers who engage eligible young people and provide them with on-the-job training may get a training allowance of up to \$5,000 per month per trainee for six to 12 months. The department has enhanced collaboration with the Employees Retraining Board since April to widen the choices of participating youths in receiving pre-employment training. In 2022-23, 3,053 school-leavers enrolled on the programme.

### ***Youth Employment Start***

People aged between 15 and 29 may make use of one-stop advisory and support services at two youth employment resource centres called Youth Employment Start to improve their chances of employment and help secure their sustainable employment or self-employment. In 2023, services were provided to young people 63,610 times.

### ***Greater Bay Area Youth Employment Scheme***

The Greater Bay Area Youth Employment Scheme encourages enterprises with businesses in both Hong Kong and the Mainland cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) to employ university graduates from Hong Kong to work in the Mainland cities of the GBA, to foster their career development and the exchange of talent in the GBA. Enterprises shall employ them in accordance with Hong Kong laws with a monthly salary of not less than \$18,000. The government provides enterprises with a monthly allowance of \$10,000 for each employed young person for up to 18 months.

As at December, the department had received 2,540 job vacancies from 278 enterprises, and 702 allowance applications from enterprises after participants had commenced employment.

### **Working Holiday Scheme**

Hong Kong has bilateral working holiday arrangements with 14 economies, namely Australia, Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy (commencement date to be confirmed), Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Through the scheme, Hong Kong youths aged 18 to 30 may experience different cultures and broaden their horizons through living and working temporarily while holidaying overseas. The scheme also allows youths from the partner economies to learn about Hong Kong.

A majority of the partner economies allow Hong Kong youths to stay for up to 12 months, and take up short-term employment to support their travel expenses and/or study short-term courses (except for Ireland) while holidaying.

As at December, more than 103,000 Hong Kong youths participated in the scheme, while about 16,200 youths from the partner economies came to Hong Kong under the scheme.

### **Employees Retraining Board**

The Employees Retraining Board is a statutory body set up under the Employees Retraining Ordinance. Through more than 80 appointed training bodies, the board provides market-driven training and support to help people aged 15 or above with up to sub-degree education that are unemployed and seeking job changes to re-enter the labour market. The board offers over 100,000 training places annually through its 700 courses across 28 industries. The training and support also cater for the needs of different social groups, including young people, new arrivals, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and people recovered from work injuries, rehabilitated drug abusers and former offenders. To encourage the unemployed and job-seekers to enrol in training and join the workforce, the daily rate of retraining allowance provided for placement-tied courses was increased by 8 per cent from \$223 to \$241 from 1 March (on a basis of two sessions a day, or \$120.50 for one half-day session); while the daily rate of retraining allowance for Youth Training Programme courses was increased to \$121.

### **Labour Advisory Board**

The Labour Advisory Board, a representative tripartite consultative body, advises the Commissioner for Labour on labour matters including legislation and International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions and recommendations. Chaired by the commissioner, it has six members representing employers and six representing employees.

### **Labour Relations**

The Labour Department provides a voluntary conciliation service to help employers and employees outside the government resolve disputes and claims. It also publicises the Employment Ordinance and promotes good human resource management practices.

The department runs nine industry-based tripartite committees to foster industry-level dialogue and cooperation among employers, employees and the government. These committees, covering catering, cement and concrete, construction, hotel and tourism, logistics,

printing, property management, retail and theatre, provide forums for members to discuss issues of common concern to their industries.

Through 18 human resources managers' clubs, the department encourages their members to maintain effective employer-employee communication and adopt good human resource management, as well as implement family-friendly employment practices, in their organisations and sectors.

In 2023, the department handled 65 trade disputes and 12,163 employment claims. In cases where the department provided a conciliation service, more than 70 per cent were settled.

### **Trade Unions**

The Registry of Trade Unions administers the Trade Unions Ordinance and promotes good and responsible trade union management. Once registered, a trade union becomes a body corporate and enjoys immunity from certain civil suits.

During the year, 26 new unions were registered. The number of registered trade unions stood at 1,452, comprising 1,377 employee unions, 12 employer associations, 47 mixed organisations of employees and employers, and 16 trade union federations. The yearly average of the declared membership of employee unions over the five years from 2018 to 2022 was about 900,000. During the same period, the trade union participation rate (the proportion of the total declared membership of employee unions to the total number of salaried employees and wage earners) was about 25 per cent.

As at December, around 26 per cent of the employee unions were affiliated to three major labour organisations: the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (194 unions), the Federation of Hong Kong and Kowloon Labour Unions (148 unions), and the Hong Kong and Kowloon Trades Union Council (18 unions).

### **Labour Tribunal**

The Labour Tribunal is part of the Judiciary. It is a quick, simple and inexpensive channel for adjudicating labour disputes that are not within the exclusive jurisdiction of the Minor Employment Claims Adjudication Board. During the year, 4,348 cases were filed with the tribunal, of which 4,310 were initiated by employees and 38 by employers.

### **Minor Employment Claims Adjudication Board**

This board adjudicates claims arising from disputes of statutory or contractual rights of employment involving not more than 10 claimants in each case with the claim amount for each claimant not exceeding \$15,000. In 2023, it dealt with 1,066 claims and granted awards amounting to \$3.68 million.

### **Employees' Rights and Benefits**

Labour legislation, supplemented by administrative measures, provides the statutory basis for employers' and employees' obligations and rights, and enables Hong Kong to meet internationally accepted labour standards. In 2023, the Labour Department secured 5,464 convictions, resulting in fines totalling more than \$21.93 million.

The Employment Ordinance provides for employment-related benefits and entitlements to employees. The government aims to improve employees' benefits and protection at a pace commensurate with Hong Kong's overall socio-economic development, taking into account both employees' interests and employers' ability to afford the benefits. Apart from the statutory requirements, employers and employees are free to negotiate the terms and conditions of employment.

### **Legal Protection**

In general, children under 15 are prohibited by law from taking up employment. Children aged 13 and 14 may work in non-industrial establishments under strict rules, while young people aged 15 to 17 may work in industrial establishments, subject to restrictions on their working hours.

Labour inspectors ensure employers comply with laws that safeguard workers' rights and benefits. The inspectors also check employees' proof of identity and work with the police and Immigration Department to combat illegal employment. In 2023, the three departments carried out 40 joint operations.

### **Enforcement against Wage Offences**

The Labour Department takes active steps to prevent wage defaults. It also pursues vigorous enforcement action against employers who fail to pay wages due to their employees, and against employers who wilfully and without reasonable excuse fail to pay sums awarded by the Labour Tribunal or Minor Employment Claims Adjudication Board.

In 2023, the department secured 819 convictions for wage offences and 204 convictions for failure to pay sums awarded by the tribunal or the board.

### **Protection of Wages on Insolvency Fund**

The fund provides relief in the form of ex gratia payments covering outstanding wages, wages in lieu of notice, severance payment, pay for untaken annual leave and pay for untaken statutory holidays to employees affected by their insolvent employers. It is financed mainly by a levy on business registration. In 2023, the fund made payments totalling about \$155 million to 3,545 applicants and recorded a surplus of \$338 million.

### **Employees' Compensation**

The employees' compensation regime follows the 'no-fault' compensation principle, whereby compensation is payable regardless of whether the injury, prescribed occupational disease or death is due to the employee's fault. The Employees' Compensation Ordinance covers injury or death caused by accidents arising out of and in the course of employment, or by prescribed occupational diseases. An employer must have a valid employees' compensation insurance policy to cover liabilities under the laws, including the common law. Labour inspectors conduct workplace inspections to ensure employers have taken out such insurance.

The department helps injured employees and the families of deceased employees get compensation from their employers under the ordinance. It helps employees and employers better understand their rights and obligations under the ordinance through talks and publicity.

The Employees Compensation Assistance Fund provides assistance payment to injured employees or family members of deceased employees who fail to receive the entitled compensation after exhausting all legally and financially viable means of recovery. The Occupational Deafness Compensation Fund provides compensation for persons employed in specified noisy occupations who suffer hearing loss as a result of prolonged exposure to excessive noise at work, and financial assistance for hearing assistive devices. Both funds are financed mainly by a levy imposed on all employees' compensation insurance policies taken out by employers.

Pneumoconiosis and/or mesothelioma sufferers are eligible for compensation administered by the Pneumoconiosis Compensation Fund Board under the Pneumoconiosis and Mesothelioma (Compensation) Ordinance. The fund is financed by a levy imposed on the construction and quarrying industries.

The Employees' Compensation Ordinance, the Pneumoconiosis and Mesothelioma (Compensation) Ordinance and the Occupational Deafness (Compensation) Ordinance were amended with effect from 13 April to increase the amounts of 18 compensation items payable in cases involving work accidents or prescribed occupational diseases.

### **Statutory Minimum Wage**

The statutory minimum wage rate increased by 6.7 per cent to \$40 per hour from 1 May. The department publicises the Minimum Wage Ordinance widely and labour inspectors visit businesses to ensure employers' compliance with the law.

The Minimum Wage Commission, an independent statutory body established under the ordinance, submitted a study in October on enhancing the review mechanism of the statutory minimum wage to the government.

### **Regulation of Employment Agencies**

The Labour Department enforces Part XII of the Employment Ordinance, the Employment Agency Regulations and the Code of Practice for Employment Agencies through issuing licences, conducting inspections, investigating complaints and prosecuting offenders. In 2023, the department conducted 2,010 inspections of employment agencies, prosecuted four non-compliant agencies successfully, issued or renewed 3,833 licences, and revoked or refused to issue/renew five licences.

### **Retirement Protection**

All employees, except those who are not required by law to join a local retirement scheme, receive retirement protection under the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) Schemes Ordinance, Occupational Retirement Schemes Ordinance or other statutory pension plans.

The abolition of using the accrued benefits of employers' mandatory MPF contributions and vested benefits of other retirement fund contributions to offset employees' severance and long-service payments will be implemented on 1 May 2025. To assist employers, especially micro, small and medium enterprises, to adapt to the policy change, the government will



implement a 25-year subsidy scheme to share out employers' severance payment and long-service payment expenses after the abolition.

### ***Reimbursement of Maternity Leave Pay Scheme***

The scheme fully reimburses employers for the additional four weeks' statutory maternity leave pay, following the extension of statutory maternity leave from 10 weeks to 14 weeks, subject to a cap of \$80,000 per employee.

In 2023, the scheme received 7,367 applications and disbursed reimbursement of \$166 million.

## **Entry of Non-locals for Employment**

### ***Talent Admission Schemes***

Global talent is welcomed to Hong Kong through various admission schemes. In 2023, over 220,000 applications were received under various schemes, with more than 130,000 approved. Around 90,000 talented people came to the city, far exceeding the government's target of attracting at least 35,000 per year.

The Top Talent Pass Scheme, targeting high-income talent and full-time bachelor's degree graduates from the world's top universities, was launched at the end of 2022. A successful applicant is issued a two-year pass to explore opportunities in Hong Kong without being required to secure a local employment offer. By end-2023, 50,612 applications had been approved.

Under the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme, highly skilled or talented people are encouraged to settle in Hong Kong to enhance the city's economic competitiveness. Successful applicants need not secure an offer of local employment before relocating. The scheme's annual quota was suspended for two years with effect from January. During the year, 12,969 applications were approved.

Under the General Employment Policy and the Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals, people with special skills, knowledge or experience of value to and not readily available in Hong Kong may apply to take up employment. Entrepreneurs who can contribute substantially to the economy are also welcome to apply to come to establish or join a business. During the year, 46,336 professionals and entrepreneurs were admitted.

### ***Enhanced Supplementary Labour Scheme***

The Enhanced Supplementary Labour Scheme was launched on 4 September to enhance the coverage and operation of the Supplementary Labour Scheme, including suspending the general exclusion of 26 job categories, as well as unskilled/low-skilled posts, for two years.

Employers may apply to import workers to fill vacancies at the technician level or below. All applications are considered on a case-by-case basis. To ensure employment priority for local workers, employers must undertake a four-week open recruitment for each application. As at December, 7,827 imported workers were working in Hong Kong under these schemes.

### ***Foreign Domestic Helpers***

Foreign domestic helpers may be admitted to work in Hong Kong if they and their employers satisfy the eligibility criteria, subject to immigration control. Employers must offer their helpers the terms of employment stipulated in the government-prescribed standard employment contract, including free and suitable accommodation with reasonable privacy at the employer's residence, free food or food allowance in lieu, wages not lower than the minimum allowable wage set by the government, free passage from and to the helper's place of origin, and free medical treatment.

As at December, Hong Kong had 356,231 foreign domestic helpers, with Filipino and Indonesian helpers accounting for 56 per cent and 41 per cent respectively.

### ***Support for Incoming Talent***

Hong Kong Talent Engage established its physical office on 30 October, following its online launch in 2022, to provide support for incoming talent, formulate talent attraction strategies, follow up with talents' development and needs after arrival, and collaborate with organisations and stakeholders in various sectors to attract global talent with diverse backgrounds to settle in Hong Kong.

### ***Occupational Safety and Health***

The Labour Department strives to improve occupational safety and health standards in workplaces through inspection and enforcement, publicity and promotion, and education and training.

The Occupational Safety and Occupational Health Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Ordinance 2023 took effect on 28 April to increase the overall maximum penalties for occupational safety and health offences.

In 2023, there were 29,456 occupational injuries, a drop of 21.5 per cent from the 37,523 cases a decade ago. Over the same period, the number of industrial accidents fell 30.3 per cent from 11,677 to 8,134. There were 383 cases of occupational diseases and gas poisoning confirmed in the year.

### ***Inspection and Enforcement***

The department monitors the occupational safety and health risk levels of various industries, and adopts a risk-based approach to inspect workplaces to ensure compliance with occupational safety and health laws, targeting high-risk activities, such as working at height, and organisations with poor safety records.

The department launches special enforcement operations on workplaces and trades that are more risk-prone, such as new works projects; repair, maintenance and alteration works sites; and work sites involving confined spaces. Inspection with respect to heat stress control is strengthened in the summer.

In 2023, the department served 5,225 improvement notices on companies and other organisations, urging them to improve safety conditions promptly, and 351 suspension notices to stop work activities or the use of plant or substances that posed imminent risks of death or serious bodily injury to employees. The department secured 2,561 convictions, resulting in penalties totalling \$21.1 million.

### ***Promotion and Education***

The Labour Department organises promotional activities and training courses to raise awareness of occupational safety and health and relevant laws among employers and employees in different industries. It produces animated videos to help the industry understand how some accidents happened and the work safety measures that can be taken to prevent recurrence. In 2023, the department held 2,235 courses, lectures and talks for 115,890 employees.

### ***Occupational Health Clinics***

The department provides occupational health services to workers at its occupational health clinics in Kwun Tong and Fanling. The two clinics held 13,043 clinical consultations with workers in 2023.

### ***Pilot Rehabilitation Programme for Employees Injured at Work***

The Pilot Rehabilitation Programme for Employees Injured at Work provides timely and coordinated private outpatient rehabilitation treatment services for injured construction employees, to facilitate their early recovery and return to work. As at December, 655 injured employees had participated in the programme.

### ***Occupational Safety and Health Council***

The Occupational Safety and Health Council fosters the awareness of safety and health at work and promotes safety culture among employers, employees as well as the general public through training, promotional activities, consultancy, research and information services.

In 2023, the council organised over 2,400 online or physical courses and seminars for more than 130,000 participants. It launched a number of occupational safety and health sponsorship schemes for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), including the newly introduced Safety Equipment for the Electric Vehicle Repair and Maintenance Industry and the Safe Work at Confined Space 2.0 schemes. The council enhances safety training and provides funding for SMEs to purchase safety equipment, as well as to obtain safety consultancy services.

### ***International Labour Affairs***

Hong Kong applies 31 international labour conventions of the ILO through comprehensive legislative and administrative measures. Hong Kong takes part in ILO activities to keep abreast of international labour issues. In 2023, representatives of employers, employees and the government, as part of the People's Republic of China delegation, attended the 111th Session of the International Labour Conference.

## Social Welfare Services

In 2022-23, the Social Welfare Department's total recurrent expenditure was \$99 billion, of which \$64.7 billion, or 65.4 per cent, went towards financial assistance payments, \$22.6 billion (22.8 per cent) went into recurrent subventions to NGOs and \$4.3 billion (4.3 per cent) was spent on other payments for welfare services.

### Services for Families

Family services help preserve and strengthen the family as a unit, improve relationships among family members, enable individuals to prevent and handle personal and family problems, and assist families by providing suitable services to meet their needs.

Services for families in need are provided by the Social Welfare Department at three levels. At the primary level, the prevention of family problems is promoted through early identification, public education and publicity. A departmental hotline provides service information, brief counselling and service referrals.

At the secondary level, 65 integrated family service centres and two integrated services centres, operated by the department and subsidised NGOs, offer preventive, supportive and remedial family services.

At the tertiary level, 11 family and child protective services units provide specialised services for cases of domestic violence and child abuse, as well as child custody and guardianship disputes.

### Services for Children

At the year end, the department provided 4,049 places in residential child care services for children and young people in need of out-of-home care owing to family, behavioural or emotional problems. It also works with three NGOs accredited under the Adoption Ordinance to arrange local or intercountry adoption for children whose parents have abandoned or are unable to maintain them.

The department provides day child care services for parents who cannot take care of their children temporarily, and subsidises some standalone child care centres and child care centres attached to kindergartens to provide full-day child care services. At the year end, there were about 38,000 places available at child care centres, of which 8,800 were government-subsidised. The department also funded another 455 occasional child care service places and 2,329 extended-hours service places at these centres. In addition, it subsidises the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project, providing 954 places for families to receive flexible day child care services from volunteers. The department also provides fee-waiving or fee-reduction subsidies for primary school students from low-income families to attend after-school care services. Mutual help child care centres were also re-engineered to provide after-school care services for pre-primary children.

In the 2023-24 school year, the department subsidised 73 social work teams to provide services for 753 eligible pre-primary institutions to provide early identification of and assistance to pre-primary children and families with welfare needs.

### ***Services for Young People***

The department subsidises NGOs to provide people aged between six and 24 with preventive, developmental, supportive and remedial services. These services include 139 integrated children and youth services centres providing centre-based, outreach and school social work services to address young people's developmental needs. Eighteen of these centres offer outreach services at night to those who loiter at neighbourhood black spots to prevent them from going astray, and 19 youth outreach teams serve youths at risk and deal with juvenile gang issues. Five cyber youth support teams provide professional social work intervention, such as online and offline counselling, and form partnerships with other community stakeholders to foster cross-sectoral collaboration, to address the needs of at-risk and hidden youths.

In 2023, a total of 924 school social workers were provided for 462 secondary schools to help students with academic, social and emotional problems.

### ***Juvenile Delinquents***

Five NGO-operated Community Support Service Scheme teams help young people who are put under the Police Superintendent's Discretion Scheme (PSDS), arrested youths and their peers with delinquent behaviour.

The Family Conference Scheme, run by the department and the police, helps juveniles who have been cautioned under the PSDS for a second time or are in need of the services of three or more parties. Social workers, police officers, and the teachers and parents of juveniles under the PSDS work together to assist the juveniles in rectifying deviant and unlawful behaviours and rejoining schools or work.

### ***Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation***

The department subsidises 13 residential drug treatment and rehabilitation centres and halfway houses, 11 counselling centres for psychotropic substance abusers and two centres for drug counselling. It regulates the treatment and rehabilitation centres and provides practical guidelines and professional advice on licensing requirements to safeguard the well-being of the drug-dependent residents.

### ***District Support for Children and Youth***

The department provides financial assistance via the District Support Scheme for Children and Youth Development to address the developmental needs of disadvantaged children and people aged 24 or below.

### ***Services for Elderly***

Ageing in place as the core, with institutional care as backup is the government's policy direction for elderly services. The government encourages elderly people to lead active and healthy lives, and offers community care and support services to help them continue living in their homes. The department provides subsidised residential care services for those who have long-term care needs but cannot receive adequate care at home.

The Opportunities for the Elderly Project encourages active ageing. It subsidised 599 programmes with government grants totalling around \$22 million in the 2022-24 phase.

Senior Citizen Cards allow holders to enjoy concessions, discounts and priority services provided by public and private organisations and government departments. There were about 1.49 million cardholders as at end-2023.

### *Community Care and Support*

The department subsidises 92 home care services teams and 99 day care centres/units for the elderly, and there are 258 recognised service providers of home-based services and/or centre-based services under the Community Care Service Voucher Scheme for the Elderly. These subsidised services help over 60,000 elderly people each year.

### *Residential Care*

There are about 79,000 residential care places, of which about 36,500 are subsidised by the government, including about 4,000 places available to voucher users under Residential Care Service Voucher Scheme for the Elderly. In June, the government gazetted the Residential Care Homes Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Ordinance 2023 to enhance the quality of residential care homes and launched a scheme to allow residential care homes to import non-local care workers with greater flexibility and streamlined procedures.

### *Services for Persons with Disabilities*

Rehabilitation services are provided by government departments and NGOs to meet the different needs of persons with disabilities, and to help them develop their capabilities and integrate into society.

### *Pre-school Children with Special Needs*

At the year end, the department provided 1,980 integrated programme places in kindergarten-cum-child care centres; 2,456 places in special child care centres, including 122 residential places; 4,393 places in early education and training centres; and 10,124 places for on-site pre-school rehabilitation services (OPRS) for children with special needs. Small group homes for mildly mentally handicapped children and integrated small group homes provided 128 places for children with mild intellectual disabilities who were not receiving adequate care from their families.

Children on the waiting list of subvented pre-school rehabilitation services may apply for subsidised training provided by NGOs under the Training Subsidy Programme, which provided about 3,100 training places in 2023.

The Tier 1 Support Services project, launched as pilot in the 2020-21 school year, was regularised and integrated with OPRS on 1 September. It provides support services for children awaiting assessment by the Department of Health's Child Assessment Centres and children assessed as having borderline developmental problems at about 900 participating kindergartens and kindergarten-cum-child care centres. It also offers consultation services to teachers and parents and provides comprehensive and timely assistance to pre-school children with different levels of special needs through a school-based approach.

### *Day Training and Vocational Rehabilitation*

In 2023, day activity centres provided 5,876 day training places for persons with intellectual disabilities. The Social Welfare Department also provided 1,633 supported employment places for persons with disabilities to work in open settings under assistance, 432 places in the On the Job Training Programme for People with Disabilities, and 311 places for young people with disabilities or early signs of mental illness under the Sunnyway – On the Job Training Programme for Young People with Disabilities. For those not yet ready for open employment, the department provided 5,399 places in sheltered workshops and 5,808 places in integrated vocational rehabilitation services centres. Integrated vocational training centres provided another 453 places.

At the year end, the Enhancing Employment of People with Disabilities through Small Enterprise Project had allocated more than \$160 million to more than 30 NGOs for setting up nearly 140 small businesses, providing over 970 job opportunities for persons with disabilities.

The Support Programme for Employees with Disabilities provides employers with up to \$40,000 per employee with disabilities to procure assistive devices and modify the workplace.

### *Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities*

In 2023, the department provided 14,688 subvented residential places to persons with disabilities who were unable to live independently in the community, or whose families could not offer them adequate care. Another 1,320 residential places were provided under the Bought Place Scheme for Private Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities.

The Professional Outreaching Team for Private Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities scheme provides continuous multi-disciplinary outreach services, including clinical psychological services, social work services, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy and nursing support services, for about 4,000 residents of private residential care homes for persons with disabilities.

### *Community Support*

The Social Welfare Department provides support services for persons with disabilities living in the community, including persons in mental recovery, and their families and carers. These services include district support centres for persons with disabilities, day and residential respite services for persons with disabilities, occasional child care services for children with disabilities, parents/relatives resource centres, home care services for persons with severe disabilities, integrated support services for persons with severe physical disabilities, day care services for persons with severe disabilities, a transitional care and support centre for tetraplegic patients, community rehabilitation day centres, integrated community centres for mental wellness, support centres for persons with autism, social and recreational centres for the disabled, and community rehabilitation networks providing support services for people with chronic illnesses. The Special Needs Trust Office provides reliable and affordable trust services for parents with sufficient assets to meet the long-term daily needs of their children with special needs.

The government launched several initiatives in 2023 to support carers of elderly and persons with disabilities. These included enhancing the vacancy enquiry system for residential respite service places to cover day services in June; launching the Care the Carers Campaign on 25 September to spread messages of support for carers across the territory; launching the 24-hour Designated Hotline for Carer Support on 26 September; regularising the four financial assistance programmes<sup>1</sup> under the Community Care Fund from October and increasing the monthly allowance for low-income carers from \$2,400 to \$3,000; expanding the Support for Carers Project to cover persons with disabilities and their carers and extending the project for three years; and launching the one-stop Information Gateway for Carers on 30 November and expanding the network of respite services in the fourth quarter.

In 2023, the department launched a pilot project, with funding support from the Lotteries Fund, to establish two integrated community rehabilitation centres for persons with severe disabilities. These centres integrate the services of day care centres and home care services, while applying the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health framework and using advanced rehabilitation equipment and technology.

### **Services for Offenders**

The department helps offenders reintegrate into the community and become law-abiding citizens through community-based and residential services. Probation officers assess and report to the courts the offenders' suitability for probation orders and/or community service orders, and supervise those under these orders. They also prepare reports on long-term prisoners and petitioners being considered for early release.

In 2023, the department helped 2,497 offenders through the probation service and arranged for 2,829 offenders placed on community service orders to perform unpaid community work under supervision.

The Enhanced Probation Service adopts a more focused, structured and intensive approach to help convicted young drug offenders aged 25 or below. Tuen Mun Children and Juvenile Home, with 388 places, offers educational, vocational and character training for juvenile offenders and for children and young people with behavioural and family problems.

The Social Welfare Department and Correctional Services Department jointly run the Young Offender Assessment Panel, providing the courts with professional views on sentencing options for offenders aged 14 to 25, and the Post-Release Supervision of Prisoners Scheme, which helped 933 discharged prisoners rehabilitate and reintegrate into society in 2023. The Social Welfare Department also funds an NGO to provide hostel and support services for former offenders.

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<sup>1</sup> The four programmes are the Scheme on Living Allowance for Carers of Elderly Persons from Low-income Families; Scheme on Living Allowance for Low-income Carers of Persons with Disabilities; Special Care Subsidy Scheme for Persons with Severe Disabilities; and Scheme on Providing Subsidy for Higher Disability Allowance Recipients in Paid Employment to Hire Carers.



### **Medical Social Services**

Medical social workers stationed in public hospitals and some specialist clinics provide support to patients and their families with welfare needs, to facilitate their recovery and reintegration into society. The department's medical social workers dealt with about 218,020 cases in 2023.

### **Clinical Psychological Services**

During the year, 45 clinical psychologists from the department provided 2,716 psychological assessments and 14,325 treatment sessions, while seven clinical psychologists of the Central Psychological Support Service (Pre-school Service) made 974 consultation visits to pre-school rehabilitation centres and four clinical psychologists of the Central Psychological Support Service (Adult) made 750 consultation visits to adult rehabilitation centres.

### **Social Welfare Financial Assistance**

#### **Working Family Allowance Scheme**

The Working Family Allowance Scheme aims to alleviate the financial burden of grassroots working households, especially those with children. In 2023, around 108,300 applications were approved, granting allowances of about \$1.77 billion to more than 60,900 households or over 203,600 individuals, including about 81,800 children or youths.

#### **Social Security**

The Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme and Social Security Allowance (SSA) Scheme form the mainstay of Hong Kong's social security system, supplemented by three accident compensation schemes: the Criminal and Law Enforcement Injuries Compensation Scheme, Traffic Accident Victims Assistance Scheme and Emergency Relief Fund. These schemes are administered by 42 social security field units and two centralised offices.

The department prevents and combats fraud and abuse of social security to preserve the system's integrity and ensure the proper use of public funds. In 2023, 23 abusers were jailed, bound over, ordered to perform community service, fined or given warnings.

#### **Comprehensive Social Security Assistance**

The non-contributory CSSA Scheme gives cash assistance to people in financial hardship to meet their basic needs. It is means-tested and applicants must satisfy residence requirements. As at end-2023, there were 200,400 CSSA cases involving 273,941 recipients. Total expenditure in 2023 was about \$23 billion, an increase of 4 per cent from the previous year.

Elderly recipients who have been on CSSA continuously for at least one year in Hong Kong and choose to retire in Guangdong or Fujian provinces may join the Portable CSSA Scheme and continue to receive CSSA.

#### **Social Security Allowance**

The non-contributory SSA Scheme comprises Old Age Living Allowance (OALA); Old Age Allowance (OAA); Disability Allowance (DA), consisting of Normal and Higher DA; and the Guangdong Scheme and the Fujian Scheme.

The OALA aims to supplement the living expenses of elderly people aged 65 or above who have financial needs. The non-means-tested OAA and DA provide cash allowances to elderly people aged 70 or above and people with severe disabilities respectively. The Guangdong and Fujian schemes provide monthly OAA and OALA to eligible elderly people who choose to retire in Guangdong or Fujian provinces respectively.

The SSA Scheme recorded 1,261,721 recipients as at end-2023. Total expenditure was about \$47.6 billion during the year, a 13 per cent increase from 2022.

### *Relief Measures*

As proposed in the 2023-24 Budget, the government provided an additional half-month payment of the standard rate to eligible CSSA recipients and an additional half-month allowance to eligible recipients of SSA and Working Family Allowance.

### *Accident Compensation*

The non-means-tested Criminal and Law Enforcement Injuries Compensation Scheme offers financial help to those injured, or to their dependants in the case of death, as a result of a crime of violence or by a law enforcement officer using a weapon in the execution of his duty. It paid out \$6.47 million in 2023.

The non-means-tested Traffic Accident Victims Assistance Scheme provides financial assistance to people injured in road traffic accidents, or to their dependants in the case of death, regardless of who is responsible for the accident. It paid out \$473.05 million in 2023.

### *Emergency Relief*

Food or a cash grant in lieu of food and other necessities are given to victims of natural or other disasters. Grants from the Emergency Relief Fund are paid to eligible victims, or in the case of death to their dependants. Emergency relief was given to 613 victims of 27 disasters in 2023.

### *Social Security Appeal Board*

The board considers appeals against the department's decisions on CSSA, SSA and Traffic Accident Victims Assistance. It ruled on 289 appeals in 2023.

## **Funding**

### *Subventions*

As at end-2023, the Social Welfare Department provided recurrent subventions to 177 NGOs for operating social welfare services as stipulated in the Funding and Service Agreements. NGOs may also seek grants from the Lotteries Fund to meet their non-recurrent commitments.

### *Partnership Fund for Disadvantaged*

The fund promotes cross-sectoral collaboration in social welfare projects by providing grants that match donations made by businesses. A portion of the fund is dedicated to providing matching grants to implement more after-school learning and support programmes for primary and secondary students from grassroots families. In 2023, about \$77 million was allocated for 125 welfare NGOs and schools to implement 146 welfare projects.

### ***Child Development Fund***

The Child Development Fund provides children from disadvantaged backgrounds with personal development opportunities. Through the fund's projects, participating children draw up and implement their own development plans under guidance, learn to accumulate savings and cultivate intangible assets, such as a positive attitude, personal resilience and social networks, thus helping their long-term development. In 2023, there were 58 ongoing NGO-led projects and 53 school-based projects

### ***Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care***

This \$1 billion fund subsidises eligible elderly and rehabilitation service units to procure, rent and trial technology products to improve the quality of life of service users, and reduce the burden and pressure on care staff and carers. By end-2023, grants totalling over \$670 million had been approved for about 1,900 service units to procure and rent over 17,000 technology products.

### ***Arts Development Fund for Persons with Disabilities***

This fund subsidises eligible organisations to organise arts activities and training programmes to enhance the arts knowledge of persons with disabilities, foster their interest in the arts and develop their potential. As at 2022-23, grants totalling about \$76 million had been approved for 45 organisations to implement 130 arts projects.

## **Advisory Bodies**

### ***Social Welfare Advisory Committee***

The Social Welfare Advisory Committee reviews social welfare services and advises the government on all matters of social welfare policy. In 2023, the committee advised the government on social welfare initiatives announced in the Policy Address and on suggestions about 2024-25 welfare priorities offered by the social welfare sector and other advisory bodies.

### ***Commission on Children***

The Commission on Children provides overall steer on children initiatives; sets policy directions, strategies and priorities related to the development and advancement of children; and oversees their implementation. In 2023, the commission launched the Walk with Kids campaign to raise public awareness of child protection and enhance understanding of the commission's work. Four engagement sessions were conducted with around 330 participating children and stakeholders. In 2023-24, 25 projects were approved under the commission's Funding Scheme for Children's Well-being and Development.

### ***Elderly Commission***

The Elderly Commission advises the government on policies for the elderly. Its recommendations, set out in the Elderly Services Programme Plan, are being implemented by the government. In 2023-24, about 200 elder academies in primary and secondary schools and post-secondary institutions were operating under the Elder Academy Scheme, jointly launched by the commission and government.

### **Rehabilitation Advisory Committee**

The Rehabilitation Advisory Committee is the principal government advisory body on the well-being of persons with disabilities and rehabilitation policies and services. The committee helps the government promote and monitor the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Hong Kong. It also collaborates with different sectors in promoting an inclusive culture.

### **Commission on Poverty**

The Commission on Poverty advises the government on matters of targeted poverty alleviation and promotes cross-sector collaboration to address poverty in a targeted manner. It oversees the operation of the Community Care Fund and the Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Fund to plug the gaps in the existing system and promote social innovation to tackle poverty.

### **Websites**

Child Development Fund: [www.cdf.gov.hk](http://www.cdf.gov.hk)

Commission on Children: [www.coc.gov.hk](http://www.coc.gov.hk)

Commission on Poverty: [www.commissiononpoverty.gov.hk](http://www.commissiononpoverty.gov.hk)

Continuing Education Fund: [www.wfsfaa.gov.hk/en/ce/cef/overview.php](http://www.wfsfaa.gov.hk/en/ce/cef/overview.php)

Elderly Commission: [www.elderlycommission.gov.hk](http://www.elderlycommission.gov.hk)

Employees Retraining Board: [www.erb.org](http://www.erb.org)

Interactive Employment Service: [www.jobs.gov.hk](http://www.jobs.gov.hk)

Labour and Welfare Bureau: [www.lwb.gov.hk](http://www.lwb.gov.hk)

Labour Department: [www.labour.gov.hk](http://www.labour.gov.hk)

Occupational Safety and Health Council: [www.oshc.org.hk](http://www.oshc.org.hk)

Social Welfare Department: [www.swd.gov.hk](http://www.swd.gov.hk)

Working Family Allowance Scheme: [www.wfa.gov.hk](http://www.wfa.gov.hk)