

Chapter 14

Labour and Welfare

Labour and welfare is crucial to the well-being of the community and affects people's livelihoods. 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 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.

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

Labour Market

The government improves the use of human resources and supports economic development by upgrading workers' skills and enhancing their employability, improving the business environment, introducing measures to create jobs and enhancing labour market efficiency.

In 2024, the labour force totalled 3.81 million people, of whom 49 per cent were men and 51 per cent were women. The total represented a decline of 0.4 per cent over 2023.

The majority, or 87.9 per cent, were employed in the service sectors: 30.5 per cent in public administration, and social and personal services; 24.2 per cent in the import/export, wholesale and retail trades, and accommodation and food services; 22.6 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 edged up from 2.9 per cent in 2023 to 3 per cent in 2024, whereas the underemployment rate increased slightly from 1.1 per cent in 2023 to 1.2 per cent in 2024. Total employment dropped by about 15,900 to 3,693,600.

Employment Earnings and Wages

During the year, the median monthly employment earnings of employed people remained at \$20,000 same as that in 2023. The median monthly employment earnings for higher-skilled workers, comprising managers, professionals and associate professionals, were \$35,900 in 2024, while those for lower-skilled workers were \$15,100.

Wage rates as measured by the Nominal Wage Index for workers up to supervisory level increased 3.5 per cent in December 2024 over a year earlier.

Employment Services

The Labour Department's 11 job centres, three recruitment centres for the catering, retail and construction industries, Telephone Employment Service Centre and Job Vacancy Processing Centre provide 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, Re-employment Allowance Pilot Scheme, 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 2024, the department registered 49,350 job-seekers and made over 121,000 job placements. It recorded 815,890 private-sector vacancies.

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 4,443 eligible placements under the programme in 2024.

Re-employment Allowance Pilot Scheme

The department launched the three-year Re-employment Allowance Pilot Scheme on 15 July to encourage people aged 40 or above who have not been in paid employment for three consecutive months or more to rejoin the employment market. Each eligible participant who works for 12 consecutive months will receive a re-employment allowance up to \$20,000. From its launch to 31 December, the scheme recorded nearly 30,000 participants and more than 9,400 placements.

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, 237 people took part in trials.

Racial Diversity Employment Programme

The Racial Diversity Employment Programme provides one-stop employment support services to job-seekers from ethnic minorities in a case management approach. In 2024, the programme served 475 ethnic minority job-seekers and recorded 138 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 2024, the department registered 3,214 job-seekers with disabilities and secured 2,300 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 2024, the scheme made 1,134 job placements.

Continuing Education Fund

The Continuing Education Fund subsidises adults with aspirations to pursue continuing education. About 51,000 reimbursement claims were approved and subsidies totalling about \$485 million were paid out in the year.

Youth Employment and Training Programme

The Youth Employment and Training Programme provides young people aged between 15 and 24 who have up to sub-degree education with a full range of pre-employment and on-the-job training to help enhance their employability, improve job search skills and secure employment. Participating employers engaging eligible young people and providing 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. In 2023-24, 2,839 young people 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 2024, services were provided to young people 63,535 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, so as 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.

In 2024, the department had received 2,186 job vacancies from 249 enterprises, and 417 allowance applications from enterprises after young persons had commenced employment.

Working Holiday Scheme

Hong Kong has implemented Working Holiday Schemes with 13 economies, namely Australia, Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, 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 end-2024, more than 105,000 Hong Kong youths participated in the scheme, while about 17,000 youths from the partner economies came to Hong Kong under the scheme.

Employees Retraining Board

The Employees Retraining Board is a statutory body that 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. It offers 700 courses across 28 industries through more than 80 appointed training bodies, providing over 100,000 training places annually.

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 38 per cent from \$241 to \$333 from 23 February (on a basis of two sessions a day, or \$166.50 for one half-day session); while the daily rate of retraining allowance for Youth Training Programme courses was increased to \$167. The government announced in October, the reform of the board to enhance its role and positioning to devising skills-based training programmes and strategies for the entire workforce.

Labour Advisory Board

The Labour Advisory Board, a representative tripartite consultative body, advises the Commissioner for Labour on matters including legislation and International Labour Organization (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 2024, the department handled 89 trade disputes and 12,940 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, seven new unions were registered. The number of registered trade unions stood at 1,429, comprising 1,353 employee unions, 11 employer associations, 48 mixed organisations of employees and employers, and 17 trade union federations. The yearly average of the declared membership of employee unions over the five years from 2019 to 2023 was about 890,000. 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 two major labour organisations: the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (194 unions) and the Federation of Hong Kong and Kowloon Labour Unions (152 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, 4,879 cases were filed with the tribunal, of which 4,831 were initiated by employees and 48 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 2024, it dealt with 986 claims and granted awards amounting to \$3.88 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 2024, the Labour Department secured 5,296 convictions, resulting in fines totalling more than \$28.77 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 2024, the three departments carried out 41 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 2024, the department secured 996 convictions for wage offences and 150 convictions for failure to pay sums awarded by the tribunal or the board.

Protection of Wages on Insolvency Fund

The Protection of Wages on Insolvency 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 2024, the fund paid about \$247 million to 4,671 applicants and recorded a surplus of \$70 million.

Employees' Compensation

The employees' compensation regime follows the 'no-fault' compensation principle, meaning compensation is paid even if the injury, occupational disease or death is 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. Employers

must have a valid employees' compensation insurance policy to cover liabilities and labour inspectors conduct workplace inspections to ensure employers are complying.

The department helps injured employees and the families of deceased employees get compensation and 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 payments 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 people 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.

Statutory Minimum Wage

The statutory minimum wage rate in 2024 was \$40 per hour. The department publicises the Minimum Wage Ordinance widely and labour inspectors visit businesses to ensure employers' compliance with the law.

After accepting the Minimum Wage Commission's recommendations in April – which included a formula to review the statutory minimum wage rate annually – the government announced in October that it will implement a new review mechanism under which the first statutory minimum wage rate is expected to take effect on 1 May 2026.

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 2024, the department promulgated the revised Code of Practice for Employment Agencies to introduce additional standards, further enhancing the professionalism and service quality of employment agencies while strengthening the protection of rights and benefits of job-seekers and employers. During the year, the department conducted 2,006 inspections of employment agencies, prosecuted 11 non-compliant agencies successfully, issued or renewed 3,778 licences, and revoked three 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 the 25-year Subsidy Scheme for Abolition of MPF Offsetting Arrangement to share out employers' severance payment and long-service payment expenses after the abolition.

Reimbursement of Maternity Leave Pay Scheme

The Reimbursement of Maternity Leave Pay 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 2024, the scheme received 7,600 applications and disbursed reimbursement of \$183 million.

Entry of Non-locals for Employment

Talent Admission Schemes

Global talent is welcomed to Hong Kong through various admission schemes. In 2024, about 208,000 applications were received under various schemes, with about 139,000 approved. Around 91,000 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 targets high-income talent and full-time bachelor's degree graduates from the world's top universities. A successful applicant is issued a two or three-year pass to explore opportunities in Hong Kong without being required to secure a local employment offer. In 2024, about 41,000 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 assessment criteria and arrangements of the General Points Test under the scheme were enhanced from 1 November. During the year, around 12,000 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, more than 60,000 professionals and entrepreneurs were admitted.

Enhanced Supplementary Labour Scheme

The Enhanced Supplementary Labour Scheme, launched in 2023, enhances 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 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, 15,826 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 367,971 foreign domestic helpers, with Filipino and Indonesian helpers accounting for 55 per cent and 42 per cent respectively.

Support for Incoming Talent

Since its establishment in 2023, Hong Kong Talent Engage has been promoting the city's dual roles as an international talent hub and the country's gateway for talent; and providing comprehensive one-stop support services for incoming talent. In 2024, this support included 42 themed seminars, Cantonese classes, and eight job fairs organised or co-organised by Hong Kong Talent Engage with the participation of more than 1,400 employers and attendance of over 280,000.

Hong Kong Talent Engage organised the Global Talent Summit • Hong Kong on 7 and 8 May, with more than 13,000 in attendance and 130,000 views online. It conducted 30 outreach visits to the Mainland, including to Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou and Guangzhou, and overseas regions, including Canada, Germany, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore and the United Kingdom, to promote Hong Kong's advantages and talent admission schemes and attract more talent to the city.

Occupational Safety and Health

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

In 2024, there were 28,612 occupational injuries, a drop of 20.2 per cent from the 35,852 cases a decade ago. Over the same period, the number of industrial accidents fell 35.9 per cent from 11,497 to 7,371. There were 289 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, particularly targeting high-risk activities such as work-at-height and organisations with poor safety records, to ensure compliance with occupational safety and health laws across various industries and organisations.

The department launches special enforcement operations on workplaces and industries that are more risk-prone, such as construction sites and public cargo working areas. Inspection with respect to heat stress control is strengthened in the summer.

In 2024, the department served 5,355 improvement notices on companies and other organisations, urging them to improve safety conditions promptly, and 376 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 2,308 convictions, resulting in penalties totalling \$21.03 million.

Promotion and Education

The 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 2024, the department held 2,379 courses, lectures and talks for 137,644 employees.

The department and the Occupational Safety and Health Council co-organised the first Occupational Safety and Health Innovation and Technology Expo in March, showcasing the latest innovations and products, promoting development and enhancing the standard of occupational safety and health in the city. In the same month, the revamped mobile application OSH 2.0 was launched with an enhanced user interface, providing the latest occupational safety and health information.

In May, the department launched the revised Guidance Notes on Prevention of Heat Stroke at Work and introduced the optimised Heat Stress at Work Warning system to help employers take appropriate measures to safeguard employees against heat stroke.

The department also revised two codes of practice to enhance safety and health standards for bamboo scaffolding and confined spaces work. The revised Code of Practice for Bamboo Scaffolding Safety took effect on 19 October and the revised Code of Practice for Safety and Health at Work in Confined Spaces came into effect in November.

Occupational Health Clinics

The department provides occupational health services for workers at its occupational health clinics in Kwun Tong and Fanling. The two clinics held 13,551 clinical consultations with workers in 2024.

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. From 9 May, the programme's coverage was extended to include the catering and hotel industry and the transportation and logistics industry. As at December, 1,648 injured employees had participated in the programme.

Occupational Safety and Health Council

The Occupational Safety and Health Council promotes workplace safety and health awareness among employers, employees and the public through training, promotional activities, consultancy, research and information services.

In 2024, the council conducted nearly 2,600 online and physical courses and seminars, reaching over 140,000 participants. In collaboration with government departments, the council launched the Joyful@Healthy Workplace and Heart Caring Campaign to promote physical and mental health awareness among the working population.

The council also helps small and medium enterprises of high-risk operations to enhance their safety performance through various funding schemes, providing support for safety training, consultancy services, and the purchase of safety equipment, including the new Telescopic Scaffold Tower Sponsorship Scheme.

International Labour Affairs

Hong Kong applies 31 International Labour Conventions and takes part in ILO activities to keep abreast of international labour issues. In 2024, representatives of employers, employees and the government, as part of the People's Republic of China delegation, attended the 112th Session of the International Labour Conference.

Social Welfare Services

In 2023-24, the Social Welfare Department's total recurrent expenditure was \$104.1 billion, of which \$68.6 billion, or 65.9 per cent, went towards financial assistance payments, \$24.7 billion (23.7 per cent) went into recurrent subventions to NGOs and \$5.4 billion (5.2 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. The department also subsidises 50 social work teams to provide services for 752 eligible pre-primary institutions to help with early identification of welfare needs and to support pre-primary children and families in need.

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 4,106 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 temporarily cannot take care of their children, 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 service places available at child care centres, of which 9,000 were government-subsidised. The department also funded another 459 occasional child care service places and 2,358 extended-hours service places at these centres. In addition, it subsidises the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project, providing 2,116 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. The re-engineering of all mutual help child care centres has been completed, providing 672 after-school care services places for pre-primary children.

The Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Ordinance was passed in July and will come into operation in January 2026. It specifies that professionals in the social welfare, education and healthcare sectors must report serious child abuse cases, creating a wide and effective protection web for children. During the transitional period, the government will provide training for mandated reporters, formulate guidelines materials, increase emergency places for residential child care, and enhance professional support for child abuse victims and their families.

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 2024, a total of 918 school social workers were provided for 459 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 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.

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

The government's policy direction in elderly services is 'ageing in place as the core, with institutional care as backup'. Elderly people are encouraged to lead active and healthy lives, and the government provides subsidised community care and support services to help frail elderly continue living in their homes. The government also 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 1.56 million cardholders as at end-2024.

Community Care and Support

The department subsidises 92 home care services teams and 100 day care centres/units for the elderly, and there are 297 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 needing care or support to live in their homes each year.

Residential Care

There are about 79,300 residential care service places, of which about 37,600 are subsidised by the government, including 5,000 available to voucher users under the Residential Care Service Voucher Scheme for the Elderly. The Residential Care Homes Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Ordinance has been implemented in phases since June to enhance the quality of residential care homes. The government has also expanded the number of residential care homes for the elderly participating in the Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong from two to 11 to provide an option for eligible elderly people who choose to receive subsidised residential care services on the Mainland.

Services for Persons with Disabilities

The department provides subventions to NGOs to operate rehabilitation services 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 2,516 places in special child care centres, including 122 residential places; 4,605 places in early education and training centres; and 1,974 integrated programme places in kindergarten-cum-child care centres.

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 2024.

On-site pre-school rehabilitation services cover about 900 kindergartens and kindergarten-cum-child care centres, providing comprehensive and timely support to pre-school children with different levels of special needs through a school-based approach. Since 2024-25, children who need these services can access them with no waiting time.

Small group homes provide 128 places for children with mild intellectual disabilities who cannot receive adequate care from their families.

Day Training and Vocational Rehabilitation

In 2024, day activity centres provided 6,351 training places for persons with intellectual disabilities. The department also provided 2,376 supported employment training places for persons with disabilities to work in a supportive environment with assistance. For those who are not yet ready for open employment, the department provided 5,429 places in sheltered workshops, 5,858 places in integrated vocational rehabilitation services centres and 453 places in integrated vocational training centres.

At the year end, the Enhancing Employment of People with Disabilities through Small Enterprise Project had allocated more than \$170 million to over 35 NGOs for setting up more than 140 small businesses, providing nearly 1,000 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 2024, the department provided 15,378 subvented residential care service places to persons with disabilities. Another 1,448 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, serving about 4,000 residents of private residential care homes for persons with disabilities.

Community Support

The department provides support services for people with disabilities living in the community, including those in mental recovery, and their families and carers.

These services include district support centres, day and residential respite services, and social and recreational centres for persons with disabilities; occasional child care services for children with disabilities; parents/relatives resource centres; home care services, integrated support services and day care services for people 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 people with autism; and community rehabilitation networks providing support services for people with chronic illnesses. The Special Needs Trust Scheme provides reliable and affordable trust services for managing the assets of deceased parents to meet the long-term daily needs of their children with special needs.

In December, the department launched a pilot project, with support from the Lotteries Fund, to establish two integrated community rehabilitation centres for people with severe disabilities. These centres integrate the services of community rehabilitation day centres and home care services, and use advanced rehabilitation equipment and technology.

In March, the District Services and Community Care Teams – Scheme on Supporting Elderly and Carers was piloted in Tsuen Wan and Southern districts to provide support to elderly people and carers of elderly people or persons with disabilities. In addition, the government set up 21 designated teams in each of the District Support Centres for Persons with Disabilities in April to support special school-leavers and their carers, to help create a smooth transition from school to community living.

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 2024, the department helped 2,213 offenders through probation services and arranged for 2,574 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 942 discharged prisoners rehabilitate and reintegrate into society in 2024. The Social Welfare Department also funds an NGO to provide hostel and support services for former offenders.

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 handled about 231,142 cases in 2024.

Clinical Psychological Services

During the year, 45 clinical psychologists from the department provided 2,439 psychological assessments and 16,627 treatment sessions, while eight clinical psychologists of the Central Psychological Support Service (Pre-school Service) made 947 consultation visits to pre-school rehabilitation centres and six clinical psychologists of the Central Psychological Support Service (Adult) made 842 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 2024, around 101,700 applications were approved, granting allowances of about \$1.78 billion to more than 57,200 households or over 192,700 individuals, including about 78,500 children or youths. Payment rates under the scheme increased by 15 per cent across the board from April.

Social Security

The Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme and Social Security Allowance (SSA) Scheme form the mainstay of Hong Kong's non-contributory social security system.

Comprehensive Social Security Assistance

The 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-2024, there were 195,696 CSSA cases involving 263,952 recipients. Total expenditure in 2024 was about \$22.8 billion, an increase of 1 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 province may join the Portable CSSA Scheme and continue to receive CSSA.

Social Security Allowance

The 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 means-tested 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 province respectively.

The SSA Scheme recorded 1,323,220 recipients as at end-2024. Total expenditure was about \$51.7 billion during the year, a 9 per cent increase from the previous year.

Relief Measures

As proposed in the 2024-25 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 \$5.58 million in 2024.

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 \$455.47 million in 2024.

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 297 victims of nine disasters in 2024.

Social Security Appeal Board

The Social Security Appeal Board considers appeals against the department's decisions on CSSA, SSA and Traffic Accident Victims Assistance. It ruled on 268 appeals in 2024.

Funding

Subventions

As at end-2024, the Social Welfare Department provided recurrent subventions to 179 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 the Disadvantaged

The Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged 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 2024, about \$26 million was allocated for 44 welfare NGOs and schools to implement 56 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 2024, there were 64 ongoing NGO-led projects and 34 school-based projects

Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care

The Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care 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. On top of the initial \$1 billion funding, an additional \$1 billion was injected into the fund in 2024-25 and its scope has been expanded to cover gerontechnology products suitable for household use. By end-2024, grants totalling over \$750 million had been approved for about 2,000 service units to procure and rent over 21,000 technology products.

Arts Development Fund for Persons with Disabilities

The Arts Development Fund for Persons with Disabilities subsidises eligible organisations to organise arts activities and training programmes to enhance the arts knowledge of persons with disabilities, cultivate their interest in the arts and develop their potential. As at 2024-25, grants totalling about \$95 million had been approved for 47 organisations to implement 168 arts projects.

Dedicated Fund

The government set up a dedicated fund of \$500 million in May to help NGOs operating subvented welfare services meet their development needs for staff training and system enhancement, particularly in enhancing professional knowledge of their staff and strengthening awareness of inter-disciplinary collaboration, as well as encouraging and promoting the application of information technology. By end-2024, 18 projects were approved, with a total funding allocation of about \$3.5 million.

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 2024, the committee advised the government on social welfare initiatives announced in the Policy Address and on suggestions about 2025-26 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 2024, the commission organised a variety of engagement sessions under the Walk with Kids thematic campaign to canvass the views of children and stakeholders on the themes of child protection, mental health of children, positive parenting and family bonding. In 2024-25, 23 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 2024-25, 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. 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

Commission on Children: www.coc.gov.hk

Commission on Poverty: www.commissiononpoverty.gov.hk

Continuing Education Fund: www.wfsfaa.gov.hk/en/ce/cef/overview.php

Elderly Commission: www.elderlycommission.gov.hk

Employees Retraining Board: www.erb.org

Interactive Employment Service: www.jobs.gov.hk

Labour and Welfare Bureau: www.lwb.gov.hk

Labour Department: www.labour.gov.hk

Occupational Safety and Health Council: www.oshc.org.hk

Social Welfare Department: www.swd.gov.hk

Working Family Allowance Scheme: www.wfa.gov.hk