

Press Releases

LCQ5: Registration of construction workers

Following is a question by the Hon Li Fung-ying and a reply by the Secretary for Development, Mrs Carrie Lam, in the Legislative Council today (January 7):

Question:

At present, all construction workers carrying out construction works on construction sites must be registered workers. When the relevant provisions of the Construction Workers Registration Ordinance are implemented in future, certain works may be carried out only by registered skilled workers for the relevant designated trades. To facilitate the implementation of the Ordinance, the Construction Workers Registration Authority (CWRA) has been registering construction workers since the end of 2005. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council whether it knows:

(a) the causes for the situation that among the 230,000 registered workers as at the end of March last year, only about 80,000 (i.e, about one-third of them) were registered skilled workers;

(b) what measures are in place to assist registered general workers and registered semi-skilled workers in acquiring the required qualifications in order to be registered as skilled workers; and

(c) given that the registration cards of construction workers have been expiring one after another since the beginning of this month, and that quite a number of workers have indicated that they are unaware of the renewal procedure for their registration cards, whether CWRA will step up relevant publicity to remind the workers to renew their registration cards before expiry; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Before answering Hon Li Fung-ying's question, I would like to provide some latest figures on the registration of construction workers.

Under the Construction Workers Registration Ordinance (the Ordinance), registered construction workers are divided into five categories, that are, skilled worker, provisional skilled worker, semi-skilled worker, provisional semi-skilled worker and general worker. Since December 29, 2005, the Construction Workers Registration Authority (CWRA) has been handling the applications for registration of construction workers. As at late December 2008, more than 260,000 workers, including about 87,000 registered skilled workers, 7,800 provisional registered skilled workers, 14,000 registered semi-skilled workers, 1,800 provisional registered semi-skilled workers and 153,000 registered general workers, have been registered.

My reply to the three-part question is as follows:

(a) In accordance with the requirements of the Ordinance and the implementation of the prohibition provisions in phases after deliberation with the industry, any registered construction worker can carry out on a construction site construction work at present. The requirement for specific types of construction work to be carried out only by particular types of registered

construction workers, that is, the so called "designated workers for designated trades", will be implemented in the next phase. As such, there is no urgency for workers to strive for being registered as skilled workers in accordance with their skills. According to the workers' responses to CWRA's survey, this is also attributable to the facts that workers may consider themselves not yet attained the skill level required for registration in specific trades; or workers still hold a wait-and-see attitude; or some workers are approaching their retirement age.

(b) We believe that among the registered general workers, some may have already possessed the technical skills for meeting the qualification requirements for registration in more specialised trades. In this light, the CWRA has been promoting and introducing various categories of registration among registered general workers and how they can be registered as skilled workers or semi-skilled workers. To assist registered workers in acquiring the required qualifications in order to be registered in more specialised trades, we have taken the following measures:

(i) The Construction Industry Council Training Academy conducts full-time adult short courses for general workers and semi-skilled workers who newly join or are currently working in the construction industry, and with the aim of upgrading their technical skills to the required levels of registered skilled workers or registered semi-skilled workers. These are condensed courses so that trainees can grasp a specific operative and craft skill within a short period of time. Over the past three years, some 1,800 persons have completed the full-time adult short courses and successfully acquired the qualifications of registered skilled workers or registered semi-skilled workers.

(ii) Seasoned workers who do not have the qualifications specified by the Ordinance but possess more than six years of relevant working experience may first register as provisional skilled workers for designated trades, and by completing specified training courses arranged by the CWRA in accordance with the Ordinance and passing practical assessments of these courses within three years from the date of their provisional registrations, they can apply for registration as registered skilled workers for designated trades. The duration of specified training courses ranges from half day to two days, covering both theoretical and practical parts. Some courses are held in the evening for the convenience of workers who have to work in daytime. As at December 2008, the CWRA has organised over 500 training courses, turning approximately 2,400 provisional registered skilled workers into registered skilled workers.

(iii) Workers who do not have the qualifications specified by the Ordinance but possess more than two years of relevant working experience may also register as provisional semi-skilled workers for related designated trades.

The CWRA will from time to time review the qualification requirements for different designated trades listed in Schedule 1 of the Ordinance so as to meet with the practical needs of the industry and ensure the smooth registration of workers with relevant skills.

(c) The registrations of construction workers are generally valid for three years. Under the Ordinance, workers may apply for renewal with the Registrar three months before the expiry date of their registrations. There were about 130,000, 95,000 and 35,000 workers successfully registered as construction workers in 2006, 2007 and 2008 respectively. We expect most of these registered workers will apply to the Registrar for the renewal of their registrations. In fact, the Registrar has been receiving applications for renewal from workers.

The CWRA has made corresponding arrangements to cope with the anticipated upsurge in applications for renewal and assist workers in applying for renewing their registrations. Since October 2008, the CWRA has been undertaking a series of promotional and publicity efforts to enable the industry understand the renewal procedures and encourage workers to early submit their applications for renewal. These efforts include sending SMS reminders to workers' mobile phones; issuing promotional emails and letters to contractors; distributing promotional banners and posters to responsible persons of construction sites, trade unions, trade associations and government departments for display on construction sites and in public housing estates; disseminating detailed information regarding registration renewal on CWRA website; as well as promoting via radio broadcasts as well as MTR station and train compartment advertisements. To reach out to the ethnic minority workers, the CWRA has also advertised in newspapers, publications and radio stations (AM567) serving the South Asian audience. Moreover, on construction sites befitted with card reading device, workers will also be alerted of the impending expiry of their registrations by the system.

Apart from submitting renewal application in person at the four Workers Registration Offices (WROs) situated in Aberdeen, Kowloon Bay, Kwai Chung and Sheung Shui, the CWRA also accepts submissions by post to facilitate workers to renew their registrations. Workers are only required to send in a duly completed application form for registration renewal, together with copies of supporting documents and a crossed cheque. The application forms are available at all WROs and for download on CWRA website. We have also secured the assistance of trade unions and trade associations in distributing the application forms.

The CWRA has arranged additional counters and manpower for the WROs to cope with the demand for registration renewal during the peak period in 2009. The WROs also accept block renewal applications so that contractors can renew the registrations of their employees collectively. Moreover, the CWRA has set up a hotline to answer enquiries on registration renewal application from workers. The CWRA will continue to closely monitor the registration renewal exercise and make proper arrangements whenever necessary.

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